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Advancing the Human Development Agenda

A Shared Responsibility

Third Forum on Human Development

Cultural Identity, Democracy and Global Equity

Paris, January 17-19, 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the organizers of this forum for inviting me. I would especially like to salute the work, vision and leadership of Sakiko Fukuda Parr during her ten years of heading the Human Development Report Office, and to wish Kevin Watkins well in filling her shoes.

Today's session, the final one in this well-organized and timely forum, is entitled "2005-2015: the Decisive Decade for the Millennium Development Goals." In the programme, the organizers have asked, and I quote at some length:

How can we promote the agenda for human development as embodied in the Millennium Declaration, including political and cultural freedom, human rights, and equitable economic and social development? How can we better use resources to this end? How can we increase cooperation and coherence among all development actors in the North and South, rich and poor? How can we effect positive change?

To begin to answer these questions, let me return to Amartya Sen's essential question, "What is it like to be a human being?" and reflect on two of the points he made on the first day of this Forum.

Indeed, it is worth recollecting, in the context of this Human Development Forum, that the point of departure of what may be called the human development approach is to see human beings in terms of their well-being and freedom, and this differs sharply from an approach to development that concentrates on people's incomes, wealth and commodity possessions.

Social choice theory is a technical discipline, but underlying it is the motivation for exploring how a society of many human beings can live together and decide together. This broadly speaking is also the challenge of human development. And that interactive life need not be one of economic, social or cultural poverty if we give reason its due in the interactions we choose. This is the big challenge in front of us.

As I listened to Amartya, I thought how well the answer to his question is captured in the normative framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The “dignity” that comes before “rights” incorporates all the potential for wellbeing and freedom—including freedom in cultural spheres—of which he spoke.

The UDHR then sets out both the civil and political rights and the economic, social and cultural rights which are part of the birthright of human beings since 10 December 1948 when the Declaration was adopted.

There is a further article which is deeply relevant to the issues at the Human Development Forum.

Article 29(1): “Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.”

This is an often overlooked provision, which nowadays we would want to rephrase, with more gender sensitivity, as follows:

“Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his or her personality is possible.”

You might want to note that this concept of community and solidarity, while universal, is actually stronger in African and Asian cultures than in the West.

In a sense the response to the tsunami disaster could be framed in terms of “duties to the community”—with a much more global sense of what “the community” may now be. People felt they had to do something: send money, contribute as an artist to a telethon; wrap up and help pack boxes to send to those in desperate need.

From this human rights perspective, let us ask the question again: what is it like to be a human being?

What is it like if you are among the billion plus people still living in extreme poverty, the poverty that kills?

If you are a newborn baby whose mother has died during childbirth, as over 500,000 women die needlessly each year?

If you die before reaching the age of 5, because there was no malaria net or no safe water, as millions of children do each year?

If you are trafficked at the age of 8 into a brothel, and become one of the millions of modern sex slaves, until you contract AIDS and die?

In this forum we have noted the overwhelming response to the tsunami disaster. We have noted that people were ahead of their governments in the generosity and urgency of their response. We have asked whether this is a defining moment of new urgency and awareness.

It could be. But only if we can create a real empathy with the hundreds of silent tsunamis that happen each year to the billion plus people who live in extreme poverty.

We need a more values-led world, where governments are pressed by their civil societies, by faith-based groups and by business to live up to the normative frameworks of rights which they have ratified: human rights, labor rights, and environmental rights.

We need a more rights-based approach to development, with stronger dialogue and understanding between development experts and rights activists.

Happily, a growing number of credible initiatives and projects—such as the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, and the North-South Helsinki Process on Globalization and Democracy—are now underway that are aimed at providing constructive agendas for reform of international policies and organizations, and at ensuring greater involvement in decision-making by relevant stakeholders. I would also like to mention here the Global Commission on International Migration, as another fine example of a North-South initiative for achieving international cooperation in resolving a global problem with complex economic, social and human dimensions. The challenge for the human rights and development community is to actively contribute to and enrich such initiatives.

Civil society has become steadily more effective in demanding that political leaders make principled decisions and organize national and international relations with a greater sense of shared responsibility for the fate of those who have been most excluded from the potential benefits of open markets and societies. We saw important signs of this change in the UN Millennium Declaration, which affirmed at the highest political level that “the central challenge today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all of the world’s people.”

In the Declaration, world leaders solemnly recognized their “collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level” and “their duty therefore to all of the world’s people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.” They vowed “to spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty” and committed to “making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want.”

Governments around the world, including—notably—the United States, also declared that they would spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. They resolved therefore to:

- Respect fully and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Strengthen the capacity of all countries to implement the practices of democracy and human rights
- Implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Ensure respect and protection for the rights of migrant workers and their families
- Work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all countries
- Ensure the freedom of the media and public access to information.

However, when the MDGs were first extrapolated they lacked a language and grounding in this framework of human rights. Did this matter? After all they were development goals.

I believe it mattered more than many development experts were prepared to recognize. The MDGs were seen as top-down, as one size fits all. Where were the participatory tools for civil society groups working on women's rights, child rights, combating poverty, to hold their own governments accountable?

One value of the UN Millennium Project, involving 250 experts from around the world in 10 task forces is that a stronger human rights and gender perspective has been re-inserted into the implementation of the MDGs.

The Quick Wins include expressly:¹

- Reforming and enforcing legislation guaranteeing women and girls property and inheritance rights
- Launching national campaigns to reduce violence against women
- Empowering women to play a central role in formulating and monitoring MDG-based poverty reduction strategies and other critical policy reform processes, particularly at the local level.

In other words, those parts of the Beijing Platform which were absent from the targets and indicators themselves have been re-inserted prominently in the implementation strategies.

As we all know, the events of 9/11 and their aftermath clearly took the collective attention of the international community off the Millennium commitments to human development and human rights. As a human rights activist, I am enormously relieved to see that, in 2005, the international community finally appears ready to refocus its attention on the human rights and human development agenda. There is urgency in this shift, which we might characterize as a shift from national security to human security, and which was first brought on the international agenda by the Commission

¹ UN Millennium Project 2005. *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Overview*, at 26

on Human Security. There is urgency because, as we all know, the statistics are daunting. At the current rate, many of the Goals simply will not be met by 2015.

Freedom from want is an empty promise today for more than two billion people who survive on less than two dollars a day, for more than 800 million people who suffer from under nourishment,² for the 30,000 children around the world who die each day of preventable causes,³ for the 1,600 women who die each day in pregnancy or childbirth, for the thousand million people still without access to clean water supplies or the 2.6 billion who lack access to basic sanitation⁴.

These statistics are shameful enough, but they fail to convey the humiliation, the hopelessness, the lack of dignity involved. Listening to a family living in absolute poverty it is this lack they speak of: the lack of self respect, the indignity and humiliation of a refugee camp, the invisibility of being homeless, the helplessness in the face of violence, including violence caused by those in uniform who should protect.

For women, in many regions of the world, gender is itself a risk factor threatening human security: the secret violence of household abuse, the private oppressions of lack of property or inheritance rights, the lifelong deprivations that go with lack of schooling and the structural problem of political exclusion.

How do we effect positive change? My message as a human rights activist is that we will not achieve human security for all without taking our shared commitments to human rights and human development more seriously.

First, we must be more rigorous in holding governments accountable for the commitments that they made in a wealth of widely-ratified international human rights treaties, and that they reiterated most recently in the Millennium Declaration. For rich countries, this means, for starters, a commitment to financing the Millennium Goals, as agreed most recently at the Monterrey Conference.

² World Food Programme. "Fighting the Global War on Hunger From the Frontline". <http://www.wfp.org/index.asp?section=1>. Accessed 23 September 2004.

³ United Nations Children's Fund. "Facts on Children: Early Childhood". http://www.unicef.org/media/media_9475.html. Accessed 23 September 2004.

⁴ World Health Organization. "World facing 'silent emergency' as billions struggle without clean water or basic sanitation, say WHO and UNICEF". <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2004/pr58/en/>. Accessed 23 September 2004.

Unless rich countries make a determined effort to meet their commitments of .7 per cent of GNP in development assistance, many of the Goals cannot be met by 2015.

A recent report ⁵by Oxfam International, of which I am proud to be Honorary Chair, shows that development aid, in terms of percentage of national income, is at rock bottom in many of the rich countries.

Only a handful of countries—Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg or Sweden—meet or exceed the .7 per cent mark. For many of the biggest donors, meeting the .7 per cent target is not even on the agenda. According to the Oxfam report, only half of OECD countries even have a timetable for meeting the .7 per cent mark.

As Oxfam reminds us, making this aid available is” not simply an act of charity: it is both a moral obligation and a matter of justice.” It is also, I would add, a human rights obligation.

Providing more generous development assistance, however, is not the only obligation that rich countries undertook. It is worth recalling that Goal 8, entitled “Developing a Global Partnership for Development”, refers to

- an open trading and financial system that is rule-based and includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction
- addressing least developed countries’ special needs including tariff and quota-free access for exports
- enhanced debt relief and cancellation of bilateral debt;
- national and international measures to make debt sustainable;
- more generous development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction;
- working with pharmaceutical companies to provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries

⁵ , Oxfam International, *Paying the Price: Why Rich Countries Must Invest in a War on Poverty*, 2004, available at www.oxfam.org/eng

- making available the benefits of new technologies in cooperation with the private sector

While time does not permit me to elaborate more on Goal 8—and I trust, in any event, that Adrian Lovett of Oxfam will cover these issues—I must say that I agree very much with those who emphasize the need to link aid and fairer trade.

If we want to see real movement on agricultural subsidies as part of the Doha Round, we need to create constituencies for change, in both the United States and Europe. I will give you two examples of constituency building activities. In Mali in early December, I led a delegation organized by Oxfam America to make an assessment of the cotton sector in the context of U.S. cotton subsidies. The delegation met with leaders of cotton producer organizations, government of Mali officials, the U.S. Ambassador and diplomatic officials from donor countries. This is likely to result in an important political opening when Senators Grassley and Hagel introduce legislation in the U.S. Congress proposing ceilings on U.S. cotton subsidies. A critical component of our effort is raising awareness of the effects of U.S. and E.U. subsidies on the lives of African farmers. I plan other trips this year, to Mali, Ghana and Mozambique, including a policy briefing with AWEPA (European Parliamentarians for Africa) which will seek to inform European Parliamentarians on the impact of E.U. sugar subsidies.

While governments have the primary responsibility for achieving the MDGs and, generally speaking, for upholding human rights, other actors have responsibilities too. Indeed, let us recall that, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “all organs of society” have responsibilities to promote greater respect for human rights.

Allow me quote at some length from the first annual report by the Global Governance Initiative of the World Economic Forum:

The Millennium Declaration Goals are too large and too complex for governments to achieve alone. Governments may bear primary responsibility, but a broader response will be required for the international community to have any prospect of realizing the Declaration’s ambitious expression of the global public interest. So the initiative has also attempted to assess what role the private sector, civil society and international organizations can be expected to play in achieving common objectives. Even after accounting for the efforts

of such diverse actors towards a common purpose, the warning is clear: the world community is devoting less than half of the effort necessary to meet any of the goals. Yet, the positive results of many innovative programs from all sectors also give reason to be cautiously optimistic about our ability to solve these “solvable problems.”

As an example of an innovative effort towards the MDGs, let me describe a recent initiative which I am particularly proud of. We have named it the Business Women Leaders’ Initiative on HIV/AIDS. As you know, AIDS is a women’s issue; it is an economic issue; and it is a human rights issue. As we enter the third decade of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, women and girls throughout the world are being infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in alarming numbers, yet access to prevention, treatment and care remains severely limited.

My initiative, Realizing Rights- the Ethical Globalization Initiative, has thus partnered with the UNAIDS Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, The Female Health Company and the Female Health Foundation to create a group of senior women business leaders from around the world committed to addressing key challenges women face in attempting to access health products and services in the developing world. Called “The Business Women’s Initiative against HIV/AIDS” (BWI), the steering committee met for the first time on October 29, 2004 in New York City. At this meeting twenty five leading women from the corporate, international agency, and nonprofit sector committed to launch a focused and unprecedented effort to mobilize the private sector to increase women’s access to prevention and treatment against HIV/AIDS worldwide. Working groups were formed in the areas of communications, advocacy and policy reform, education, corporate and financing and administration to carry the work of the BWI forward. Integral to this effort is attention to the state of the art of women’s prevention technologies including the female condom and microbicides.

As a rights activist, I am proud to see civil society taking action and pulling its weight behind the MDGs. I have given you the example of an unusual group of business women, but it is common knowledge that women and children’s rights groups were among the first civil society groups to see the relationship between human rights and

the Millennium Goals as interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and among the first to “bring the MDGs home.”

Indeed, this is hardly surprising, as women’s rights groups have long understood the power of translating their demands into rights. As a fine example of such mobilization, I would cite the African Women’s Millennium Initiative for Fighting Poverty through Gender Equality. Crucially, the initiative views women not just as a vulnerable population but, equally important, as agents of change. The initiative also notes “the enormous efforts of the Millennium Project Team and its Taskforce on gender equality in expanding the targets and indicators initially set and presenting a framework more responsive to engendered human development and Beijing recommendations, including reproductive health challenges ...and violence against women.” Among other priorities, the initiative will set up annual MDG gender responsive budget monitoring, and will develop advocacy programs and create a “Grassroots Women’s Bridge” to allow information-sharing and networking between poor women themselves, as well as with national and global women’s organizations, and global anti-poverty coalitions.

Just like the women of AWOWI, I must say that I have been impressed by the efforts of the Millennium Project team to inject a human rights perspective in the MDG process. A few months ago, Jeffrey Sachs asked me and my colleagues at Realizing Rights- the Ethical Globalization Initiative, for our comments on several of the Millennium Project Task Forces Interim Reports. This request, which we enlarged to other human rights organizations, originated in earlier discussions we had at a very valuable conference on “Human Rights Perspectives on the Millennium Development Goals”, organized by Philip Alston, Special Advisor on the MDGs to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The conference brought together members of the Millennium Project Taskforces, the Director of the Millennium Campaign, Salil Shetty, and representatives from a wide range of human rights organizations. We shared perspectives on the Millennium Goals, and agreed on the interdependence and mutually reinforcing relationship between the MDGs and the broad human rights agenda. We also suggested that the Millennium Project might benefit from solidly embedding strategies for the Goals in the human rights framework. Among other things, we reminded the representatives of the Millennium Project that some of the Goals are not just goals: they are rights, and should be named as such. For instance,

access to HIV/AIDS medicines should not just be described as a goal or a target or an indicator, but as a right. The same is true of gender equality, or access to education which, again, are acknowledged rights, whose infringement constitutes a clear violation of what governments are legally obligated to do.

Recognizing that the targets expressed in the Goals are not just development aspirations but also claimable rights has important implications. It means that taking action is not a form of charity, but an obligation. This approach creates a framework for holding various actors accountable, including governments but also international organizations and, possibly, other actors.

Indeed, one of the main values of the human rights approach is its focus on accountability, thanks to a wealth of monitoring mechanisms. But the MDGs too are a powerful tool for increasing accountability, both at the national and global level. At the global level, the MDGs can be used to sharpen the accountability of the donor community—to hold them to the commitments they made in the Declaration and at the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development. They also provide a common framework that is recognized by the UN and the international financial institutions—the World Bank and the IMF. They reinforce and sharpen the broader commitments to international assistance and cooperation made in the UN Charter and human rights treaties. In rich countries, civil society is able to use the MDGs to put pressure on its government to increase development aid—as Oxfam and a whole coalition of civil society organizations are doing, beautifully, in the UK.

At the national level, the MDG process requires states to submit “Country Reports” detailing the efforts undertaken and progress made toward achieving the MDG targets. In developing countries, citizens and civil society should use this opportunity to work together and put pressure on their national governments, reminding them of their commitments and demanding full civil society participation in the design, drafting and monitoring of the Reports.

International and regional human rights mechanisms should also be actively looked too in this process. Through the monitoring mechanisms created under the human rights treaties, UN expert committees, notably the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the CEDAW Committee, review how individual countries are implementing their treaty

commitments, and what steps they take towards the realization of rights. MDG Country Reports can play a critical role in monitoring country performance.

My message to all the development experts in this room is that the rights and development communities need to work much more closely together in order to continue exploring how the skills and experience of these two communities can be integrated into the strategies, institutions and practices focused on the achievement of the MDGs.

My final comment is that we need greater acceptance internationally that security and prosperity can only be achieved through actions that take account of the rights of others. This is what I call an ethical globalization. This realization is needed at all levels: individual, local, national and global.

Let us recall the words of the Universal Declaration: Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his or her personality is possible. In this day and age, the community is our entire globe, and human rights, which embody the fundamental values of all human civilizations⁶, are our common language.

Thank you.

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⁶ See HDR 2004, special contribution by Shirin Ebadi, at 23