



Communiqué

Human Rights – a Foundation for Progress on the Millennium Development Goals Conference held 10 June 2010, at The Ford Foundation, New York.

Amnesty International and Realizing Rights: the Ethical Globalization Initiative have been working together for more than a year to see human rights concerns better integrated into efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We have engaged governments, UN entities and civil society. We have heard widespread support for the view – long insisted upon by activists worldwide – that the struggle to end poverty is also a struggle for human rights.

In September 2010, UN Member States will meet to agree an action plan to ensure the realization of the MDGs by 2015. Putting human rights at the centre of this plan will considerably increase its prospects for success.

Ensuring respect for human rights is central to achieving the MDG targets. Continuing discrimination against women and girls, indigenous people, minority groups, people with disabilities, and others, has undermined equitable progress towards meeting the MDGs. People living in poverty are denied access to information and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Often, they are not provided equal protection under the law and are unable to hold governments accountable for implementing their human rights obligations. All of these factors act as barriers to meaningful progress on the MDGs and must be addressed. Recognizing and protecting through law, people's economic and social rights including to health, education, housing, food, water and sanitation, increases their ability to hold governments accountable for meeting their MDG commitments.

UN Member States have repeatedly committed themselves to respect, protect and fulfill fundamental human rights and freedoms. Principles must be put into practice. An action plan to achieve the MDGs and end poverty must include specific actions to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

This is not about pointing fingers but about pointing to solutions. Practical actions to protect the human rights of those living in poverty will accelerate progress in meeting MDG targets. Experience in countries across the world, and documented in UN reports prepared for the September meeting, shows that where human rights principles and obligations are prioritized, MDG progress is achievable. This means ensuring:

- policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all efforts to meet the MDGs;
- the prioritization of marginalized groups and renewed efforts to end discrimination;
- the effective participation of people living in poverty and their representatives in decision-making,
- social protection programs that enable people to access at least minimum essential level of health care, housing, water and sanitation, food and education

- maternal health care that recognizes women's rights to sexual and reproductive health and ensures access to effective health services; and
- legal recognition and enforcement of economic, social and cultural rights and increasing access to justice to ensure the law works equally for all.

Action on human rights is not separate from action to end poverty – it is central to that effort. Putting human rights at the centre of the effort to accelerate progress on the MDGs will assist governments to put in place programs that work for those living in poverty. It will mobilize civil society. It will also mobilize those living in poverty because it makes clear that the MDG framework is directed at their empowerment, without which progress may be illusory or unsustainable.

It is time for action. In addition to strategies aimed at specific MDG targets, the following cross-cutting actions to respect, protect and fulfill human rights should be included in the action plan agreed in September.

1. Efforts to meet all the MDGs must be inclusive, aimed at ending discrimination, guaranteeing gender equality, and prioritizing the most disadvantaged groups. This requires identification of particular groups facing discrimination and the proper collection and analysis of disaggregated data to monitor progress. Governments should also adopt effective measures to end discrimination and to remove barriers faced by particular groups in realizing their rights.
2. People living in poverty must be able to participate meaningfully in development efforts. Governments must ensure there is an enabling environment in place to encourage such participation, including through recognizing and upholding people's right to information, freedom of expression, assembly and association. Governments must ensure the equal participation of women. They should adopt strategies that aim to empower people living in poverty through increasing their legal rights, and to strengthen their knowledge of and ability to use the law to realise their human rights.
3. States should increase efforts to ensure accountability in regards to international human rights standards. Efforts to achieve the MDGs should be consistent with international human rights standards. States should set and implement national targets to realise economic, social and cultural rights, surpassing the MDG targets where possible. People should be able to use the law to enforce their rights and to have access to effective remedies, including for failures to respect, protect and fulfil economic, social and cultural rights. Parliaments should have a role in overseeing MDG programs, as should international human rights mechanisms.
4. Developed countries should provide assistance to support the realization of minimum essential levels of economic, social and cultural rights for all. Aid should prioritize those who are most marginalized and excluded. Development policies and programs should be designed and implemented in ways consistent with agreed international commitments on gender equality and human rights.

We believe this is an agenda that can and must attract the support of all governments, and indeed all those committed to the goal of eradicating poverty.