

## **Discrimination and inequality jeopardize the Millennium Development Goals, says High Commissioner for Human Rights**

*The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, issued the following statement today on the mid-point of the Millennium Development Goals:*

**Geneva, 7 July 2007-** "The global snapshot at the half-way point\* of the MDGs does not make for happy reading. Despite progress in some areas and in some parts of the world, it appears that governments are not honouring the commitments they have made.

The latest data reveals that over half a million women still die each year from treatable and preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Child mortality rates remain deeply troubling in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and the number of people dying of HIV/AIDS worldwide increased to 2.9 million in 2006, with prevention measures failing to keep pace with the growth of the epidemic. Alarming, sub-Saharan Africa is presently not on track to achieve any of the goals.

While high economic growth rates drive overall gains in some regions, the rising tide doesn't lift all boats- not everyone is benefiting. We are not talking merely about "pockets of exclusion," or so-called "vulnerable groups": in many cases entire communities and populations are sidelined. Gross inequalities can not only fuel violent conflict and frustrate the prospects for sustainable development, as research and experience show, but frequently constitute a violation of the fundamental human rights that are the birthright of all human beings.

As we reach the halfway mark of the period to reach the Millennium Development Goals, we must reflect on the critical questions:

- Who is winning and who is losing in the efforts to achieve the goals?
- Who will be held accountable if these efforts fail?

The MDGs do not, on their face, help us get to the heart of the real problems. Poverty is frequently a cause, as well as consequence, of human rights violations. A focus on global average progress glosses over entrenched patterns of discrimination and inequality that can sentence communities to generations of poverty. Indeed, progress towards the MDG targets can easily be achieved at the expense of, rather than in the name of, the poorest and hardest to reach.

On the mid-point of the MDGs, the U.N. Secretary-General stated: "The world wants no new promises." What then can we do?

Firstly, all countries are bound by international human rights standards, legally encoded in treaties that embody the minimal requirements for a life in dignity. The mobilising potential of human rights must be harnessed towards locally defined goals and targets that fully reflect the needs and aspirations of the poorest. Civil and political rights, including the freedom of expression and assembly and right to participate in public affairs, are indispensable for strategies to achieve socio-economic rights. Data must be

disaggregated to capture disparities and patterns of discrimination, and there must be effective redress - through political, judicial, administrative or other means- for those whose rights are ignored or violated.

More must also be done at the international level. Notwithstanding past pledges, Overseas Development Assistance declined between 2005 and 2006 and is expected to continue to fall slightly in 2007 as debt relief declines. Quality and predictability of aid remain problematic, as do distortions in international trade. Strengthened development partnerships are essential to address these shortcomings. Citizens in developed countries must understand that global injustices are cause for common concern, that development, security and human rights are indeed inextricably linked, and they must pressure their politicians to respond.

The disturbing mid-point snapshot must serve as a call to action on behalf of us all, and a reminder that strategies to achieve the MDGs must be grounded in the internationally recognised human rights to which all countries have subscribed.

We are all responsible. But if nobody at the end of the day will be held accountable, the MDGs may well end up further debasing the currency of global promises."

[\\*](#) United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals Report 2007*.