

Comments and Preliminary Recommendations on The UN Secretary-General's Report "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All"

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I. Introduction

The UN has been a vital and galvanizing forum for women since the United Nations First World Conference on Women in 1975. Over the following two decades women from across the globe built an international movement and defined a far-reaching global agenda that resulted in significant government commitments to a comprehensive agenda for peace and human rights; gender equality and women's empowerment; poverty eradication and sustainable development. These commitments at the global level would not have been possible without women's active and informed participation. Yet there continues to be a large gap between government commitments at the UN and implementation at national level.

The Secretary-General's Report "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All" was said to be aimed at realigning world leaders at the UN to achieve critical goals including halving poverty in the next decade; reducing the threat of war, terrorism and deadly weapons; and advancing human dignity in every country. In this light women worldwide anticipated that it would seek to galvanize all stakeholders to fully engage in the UN, effectively address the barriers to implementation, and thereby put governments in a position to meet their commitments. In this we have been sorely disappointed.

One of the Report's greatest strengths is its emphasis on the **interlinkages between development, security, and human rights** and the potential for greater impact of combined efforts in those areas. The title of the Report—"In Larger Freedom"—recalls the breadth of UN Charter's vision for the organization to not only promote and protect human rights and advance justice and the rule of law, but to also "promote social progress and better standards of life" (para 13). In this vision, development, freedom, and human rights are all essential and mutually reinforcing components of a just and peaceful world. The organization of the report, into three substantive sections, Freedom from Want (development), Freedom from Fear (security), and Freedom to Live in Dignity (human rights and the rule of law), reiterates this notion. On a practical level, the Report recognizes that the causes and the solutions for development, security, and human rights problems are inextricably connected. For example, human rights abuses contribute to violence and instability, which contribute to poverty, and so on (para 16).

The Report's **action-oriented approach** is commendable, although the sense of urgency conveyed throughout can often appear inapposite or misguided, and is not without risk. Unfortunately the Secretary-General limits himself to those issues that are perceived to be actionable rather than addressing the broader array of concerns that need to be addressed (para 5). In the Introduction to the Report he argues for immediate, decisive action in order to achieve the promises of the Millennium Declaration by 2015 (para 23) and in Section II suggests that there is not a moment to waste (paras 29, 31, 32). In virtually every sub-section of the Report, there are specific recommendations or calls to action in bold-faced type utilizing urgent language such as "without

delay” (para 92), “the time is ripe” (para 112), and “at the earliest possible moment” (121). Furthermore, the language of the recommendations is bold and forceful, with the Secretary General often “urging” Member States to take action, or in many cases, demanding such action by stating unequivocally that they “should” or “must” do so immediately.

But this approach is risky for without sufficient time to reflect and build consensus, Member States and civil society could either be railroaded into taking precipitous action or take little or no action at all. Furthermore, many of the specific recommendations call for action by September 2005 yet it is unclear whether sufficient resources would be forthcoming to enable the most marginalized members of civil society to participate. The proposal that the recommendations be taken as a package rather than individually is unrealistic, as governments with strong objections to certain recommendations will seek to impede progress on others.

The Report’s firm stance in favor of **multilateralism** is welcomed. “Larger Freedom” can only be guaranteed by global cooperation, and the Report urges Member States to view a multilateralist approach as a way to strengthen their individual capacities to address problems at the national level as well as to mobilize collective action (paras 19, 21, 22). In what could be a veiled critique of the U.S. position that multilateralism impinges upon national sovereignty, the Report states that “no State, however powerful, can protect itself on its own,” and implies that without collective action, we are doomed to failure (para 24). Further, in its section on security, the Report presents a “vision of collective security” that both defines global threats and calls for multilateral solutions (paras 76-86).

One of the weakest aspects of the Report is the glaring **lack of gender analysis and perspectives**, with references to gender or women concentrated only in the development section (II). It completely fails to acknowledge that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s rights, despite widespread recognition of this very point, including in the Millennium Project report. Furthermore, the report reduces commitments made to women in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action and Cairo Program of Action to one single recommendation—that governments take action on the strategic priorities identified by the Millennium Campaign Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (5(j)). In recent remarks at the opening of the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Secretary General stated, “(T)here is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.” We had hoped this understanding would be better reflected throughout the entire report.

A second shortcoming of the Report is its **failure to challenge** the dominant **macroeconomic paradigm** that prioritizes ‘growth’ over equality, rights, and sustainable development. While economic growth is critical, economic policies that seek to meet the needs of poor people must start with a social justice, human rights-based framework with specific attention to the rights of women and children. Recent decades have shown that economic policies lack their social context at their core have been failing, both socially and economically. Growth-based policies, within a market-based rather than social context, have been disastrous for women: paid work for women is increasingly insecure and without social protection, formal sector jobs are decreasing, pushing women further and further into informal and often precarious work, and increasing burdens on women’s unpaid work is evident as social safety nets are weakened and/or eliminated. The MDGs, including its goals on poverty reduction and gender equality, cannot be achieved within this current

neoliberal framework that pushes growth as the primary objective of economic policies. Social policies must be the central component of economic policies, followed by growth.

In this regard, this Report represents a step-back from the Monterrey Consensus, which, despite its major flaws and contradictions did address the need for “people-centered, gender-sensitive sustainable development.” Furthermore the inconsistency in promoting growth in the absence of equity in the chapter “Freedom from want” while addressing a rights-based approach in the chapter “Freedom to live in dignity” serves only to undermine the effectiveness of the Report’s proposals.

Regarding **global governance**, strong reforms of the UN, and specifically ECOSOC, are imperative to address the democracy deficit, but these are inadequately addressed in the SG Report. The power of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization remain unchecked, lacking accountability, transparency, and democracy. The Report offers no specific proposals to more systematically align the World Bank and IMF mandates with the development mandate of the UN, and also bring the WTO into the UN system. Further the Report lacks any reference to corporate accountability, or even responsibility, despite being crucial to global governance reforms, as transnational corporations operate without adequate systems of regulation, oversight, or accountability and can disregard global development and human rights norms. The Cardoso Report acknowledged “through the assertive use of the moral leadership and convening power of the Secretary-General, the UN could champion a new vision of global governance throughout the international system, based on the principles of inclusion, participation, responsiveness, transparency and equity” and that if the UN “were to foster wide debate about such reforms...it could make a welcome contribution to shaping the framework of global governance needed in the twenty-first century” (p. 70). The Secretary-General fails to advance such a vision in this report.

II. Development section

The Report identifies several priority areas for action including:

B. National strategies

We applaud the Secretary-General’s inclusion of **gender equality** as the first of seven critical clusters to consider in national strategies as well as for endorsing the strategic priorities identified by the Millennium Project Taskforce on Education and Gender Equality (pares. 40 and 5(j) in annexed document). In a statement at Beijing+10 (February 28-March 11, 2005), the SG highlighted all seven strategic priorities and affirmed the critical importance of taking focused action on: a) Expanding efforts to combat violence against girls and women; b) guaranteeing sexual and reproductive health and rights; c) Guaranteeing women’s and girls’ property, land and inheritance rights; d) Eliminating gender inequality in employment, such as eliminating the earnings gap; e) Increasing the number of women in national and local governments; f) Investing in the infrastructure necessary to reduce women’s and girls’ time; burdens, so that, for example, the amount of time women spend on gathering fuel, water, and other basic necessities is drastically reduced and g) Expanding girls’ access to education, secondary as well as primary. These strategic priorities are a subset of priorities outlined in previous international agreements including the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Program of Action as well as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. They are not exhaustive, but a minimum necessary to the achievement of the gender equality and women’s empowerment goal.

We are pleased that these priorities are recognized in paragraphs 40 and 5(j). We support the reference to increased primary school completion as opposed to primary school access for girls. We also

welcome the reference to increased access to secondary school for girls. This is a significant advance beyond the limited targets and indicators of MDG 3. However, the Secretary-General's report omits several key elements of these minimum recommendations such as reference to "Investing in the infrastructure necessary to reduce women's and girls' time burdens, so that, for example, the amount of time women spend on gathering fuel, water, and other basic necessities is drastically reduced" is completely eliminated. Also, we are pleased that paragraph 40 includes a reference to access to sexual and reproductive health services but the notion of right to sexual and reproductive health has been totally diluted. Similarly, women and girls' access to secure land tenure should be ensured but their rights to inherit land has been omitted.

As these priorities are also interdependent and mutually reinforcing, the consideration of some to the exclusion of others will be insufficient to meet the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment as well as all the MDGs. While we commend the effort to link actions with time-specific targets throughout the report, there is a failure to set benchmarks and timetables with gender equality-related actions.

We support the Report's endorsement of the **elimination of user fees** to ensure universal access to essential health services as well as access to primary education (Para 44, 45 and 52). User fees are a roadblock to meeting universal access to health services and education and have entrenched and widened gender inequalities by forcing households to choose between a son and daughter for schooling or healthcare, and deepened inequalities in communities and countries at large. The failure to provide free basic education and health services in many low-income countries means that the economic opportunities associated with good health and literacy are confined to a privileged few.

The Report briefly addresses **civil society participation**. Today civil society is at a critical juncture in its engagement with the UN. While the UN remains the most hospitable to civil society of the global governance institutions, its modalities and mechanisms of participation have to be improved to ensure a more meaningful engagement and sustained impact in global policy dialogues, which are critical to the successful outcomes of UN processes and its system. The Report emphasizes "civil society organizations have a critical role to play in driving this implementation process forward to 'make poverty history'" (para. 38). Along with developing a concrete mechanism for follow-up to this recommendation, governments should consider the Cardoso Report and civil society critiques, and agree upon a concrete process to improve civil society access and participation at the UN and its agencies.

Despite some positive aspects in this sub-section, the Report promotes "dynamic, **growth-oriented economic policies**" (para. 37) instead of the need for a human rights-based framework that would be required for economic policies to be people-centered and socially and environmentally just. Efforts to achieve the MDGs, BPFA and other commitments would need to challenge the dominant global economic model that is perpetuating poverty, inequality, environmental degradation and violations of human rights. The direction the Secretary-General's Report takes in this regard is both inconsistent and problematic.

C. Making goal 8 work: trade and financing for development

In the Financing for Development process, the critical issues of mobilizing domestic and international resources, trade, aid and international cooperation, external debt, global governance and other systemic issues were addressed as necessary components to creating economic and social conditions conducive to advancing development commitments and goals. While the majority of civil

society was profoundly disappointed with the specific outcomes in these issue areas in the Monterrey Consensus, we agree that all of these issues are critical to addressing resource and macroeconomic problems and advancing solutions.

However, since the Monterrey Consensus, as evident in both the Sachs and Secretary-General reports, the focus has shifted away from this comprehensive approach to focusing on aid and investment (i.e. mobilizing financial resources) over trade, debt, governance and other systemic issues (i.e. structural reform). This creates conditions where government aid and private sector investment become the chief means to achieve development goals, while leaving untouched the very structural and systemic barriers that weaken developing and transition countries control to determine their own development.

In the Secretary-General's Report, there are six paragraphs on Aid, while only two on Trade and one on Debt. While we support the call for developed countries to "establish timetables to achieve the 0.7 percent target of gross national income for ODA by 2015," and are pleased that several countries have now committed to a specific timetable, we find troubling the overemphasis on aid, as the macroeconomic centerpiece in achieving the MDGs and other global commitments.

While referring to the issue of external debt, the Report does not adequately recognize the importance of debt burdens as significant barriers to the implementation of government commitments. It is well documented that debt servicing continues to drain public sectors in developing and middle-income countries of resources necessary to meet the BPFA, MDGs and other commitments. In the one paragraph on debt, the Report recommends "we should redefine debt sustainability as the level of debt that allows a country to achieve the MDGs and reach 2015 without an increase in debt ratios" (para. 54). As aid and other flows coming into indebted countries are minute compared to flows leaving to service debt, calling for no increase in debt ratios does not adequately address this problem, or lead to debt ration decreases. Also, focusing strictly in the context of achieving the MDGs is too limiting, as meeting other international commitments and implementing national development strategies must also be the basis for addressing debt. Further, while calling for debt cancellation for most HIPC countries is positive, the discourse has shifted from a focus on cancellation and reduction to 'sustainability' and does not recognize the illegitimacy of debt burdens in many developing countries. Civil society has long been fighting for cancellation of all illegitimate debts.

Related to trade, among the SG Report's main recommendations is that "the (WTO) Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations should fulfill its development promise and be completed no later than 2006" (para 55). Women continue to argue that the Doha 'development' round that pushes governments to further liberalize and privatize natural resources and public services, reduce tariffs on industrial products, among many other things, is in actuality adverse to development. Further, fair trade models and policies are antithetical to liberalization, which is the nature of WTO policy and thus must be rejected when seeking to advance implementation of the BPFA, MDGs and other commitments.

D. Ensuring environment sustainability

The Report takes an incomplete approach to environmental sustainability by only addressing a handful of environmental issues (desertification, biodiversity, climate change). A comprehensive model of sustainability acknowledges the essential connections between a healthy planet, economic and social justice, peace, human rights, and gender equality. While the Report acknowledges that a

healthy environment is necessary for poverty eradication (para 57), when it addresses global solutions to sustainability, it looks only to purely environmental measures. The Report does not make the link between a macroeconomic paradigm that privileges free trade over environmental, labor, and human rights protections and the challenges of sustainable development. While the Report calls on countries to make “structural changes required for environmental sustainability” (para 57), it completely ignores the structures that need to be changed, particularly the macroeconomic structures that contribute to environmental degradation and resource depletion.

Preliminary Recommendations

Recommendations on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

1. **Guaranteeing women's and girls' property, land and inheritance rights;**
 - Governments must prioritize legal reforms that give women property and inheritance rights that contain effective enforcement mechanisms. Land reforms, resettlement schemes, and other such interventions must incorporate specific provisions that give women equal land rights, protect and provide information that safeguards their interests, and prevent their exclusion from access to and use of land.
2. **Eliminating gender inequality in employment, such as eliminating the earnings gap;**
 - National laws and their enforcement must ensure protection against employment discrimination, hazardous working conditions, violence, sexual harassment and exploitation.
 - Governments should conduct evaluations of gender-specific development impacts of foreign direct investment, including on employment, income, working conditions and unpaid work.
 - Develop and implement measures to create conditions of equity in sharing family welfare responsibilities and decision-making within the household, as an imperative step towards gender equality in productive work and other areas.
3. **Increasing the number of women in national and local governments;**
 - Adopt temporary special measures including quotas
 - Review electoral system laws and policies that discriminate against women
 - Review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and consider, where appropriate, the adjustment or reform of those systems; (BPFA, G1, paragraph 190, d)
 - Review campaign finance systems that favors women's participation
 - Provide leadership training to women candidates
4. **Investing in the infrastructure necessary to reduce women's and girls' time; burdens, so that, for example, the amount of time women spend on gathering fuel, water, and other basic necessities is drastically reduced**
 - Public expenditures must be targeted to assure women's access to health services, education, adequate shelter, sanitation, and natural resources such as water, land and food.

Recommendations on Macro Economic Issues

Trade

- Governments must conduct gender reviews and impact assessments of bilateral, regional and international trade agreements in order to identify gender biases in earning levels, job security, labor standards, unpaid work burdens and access to productive and natural resources.

- ECOSOC should commission a comprehensive social and gender sensitive review of the current process of trade liberalization, trade expansion and trade intensification and their utility and efficacy for development, paying particular attention to the concerns of the poor and women.
- Ensure trade rules are dedicated to poverty eradication and bound by existing international agreements that promote and protect human rights, the environment and the dignity of life.

Debt

- Ensure unconditional debt cancellation of all illegitimate debts, such as those that cannot be serviced without causing harm to people and communities, those incurred by corruption and fraud and those incurred by exorbitant interest rates. Any 'debt sustainability' analysis must include an audit of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of all previous debts.
- Establish an independent, transparent arbitration process for debt cancellation and an ethical lending and borrowing mechanism to prevent further recurrence of the debt crisis.
- Eliminate all conditionalities attached to new loans and debt relief.

Aid

- Donor countries should commit to a timetable to reach the agreed target for ODA of 0.7% on GNI by 2015.
- Donor countries should increase the flexibility with which resources are made available and eliminate conditionality attached to development assistance, particularly when conditionalities imply further economic restructuring.
- Recipient countries should ensure that a necessary amount of the assistance received, agreed to in consultation with women's groups, is earmarked towards implementation of commitments related to achieving gender equality, including the Beijing Platform for Action, ICPD Programme of Action, and Action Agenda 21.