



**THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE
THE FORUM OF ACTION**

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**THE RIGHTS OF THE
INDIVIDUAL IN THE NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE**

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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am particularly honoured to be addressing this Forum for I know that I am among friends and distinguished participants who share an earnest desire to work for an effective North-South dialogue, world interdependence and solidarity, justice and human and individual rights for the world's peoples.

This Forum, in my view, is one of the most pertinent and successful initiatives undertaken by the North-South Centre. I am confident that the thoughtful contributions made at this gathering together with the on-going assessments at the Centre will help shape a viable framework for a common agenda for human rights. The Forum will particularly provide new impetus to the process of North-South interdependence and solidarity by proposing a strategy for addressing effectively human rights issues. One cannot agree more with the objectives of the Forum, in particular the sensitization of international public opinion on the need for alternative ways and means geared towards improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all societies of the world.

The universality of human rights and the inherent dignity of man are embodied in the **Charter of the United Nations** and the **Universal Bill of Human Rights**. Over the years, the United Nations has striven to promote these laudable values by setting standards covering every aspect of human existence.

The world conference on Human Rights, which was held in Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993, was yet a new landmark on the United Nations quest for the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Indeed, the Vienna conference reaffirmed the universality and indivisibility of fundamental human rights. To this end, the conference also called for effective action to secure the human rights of every individual on a universal basis. It also recognized the right to development as well as the mutually reinforcing interrelationship between democracy and development as integral components of human rights. Indeed, the United

Nations does recognize how central and crucial human rights and related humanitarian and social factors have been in reshaping the structures of a more equitable world order.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND WORLD ORDER

The relationship between human rights and world order was highlighted by the Secretary-General in his Report on the work of the Organization in 1992. He asserted that:

Respect for human rights is clearly important in order to maintain international peace and security and to achieve social and economic development. In turn, without development, long-term enjoyment of human rights and democracy will prove illusory, and war, of course, is the antithesis of both. Good governance, democracy, participation, and independence of the judiciary, the rule of law and civil peace create conditions necessary to economic progress. Increasingly, each area of our Organization sees the relevance of human rights in its own objectives and programmes.

The interrelationship between human rights and world order can further be seen in simple terms by recognizing that the degree to which individuals are treated with genuine human dignity affects all their responses, predisposing them either to the cause of human rights and peace or to war and violence. Understanding such an interrelationship involves an analysis of the interests and power of the main actors involved in the decision-making process concerning international and more particularly economic relations. Failure to comprehend these operational interests partially explains the rather modest achievements of North-South dialogue. For example, despite the apparent consensus on the need for policy reforms hardly any measurable progress has been made regarding the reciprocal measures (e.g., more resource flows to the South, better access for trade etc.) that are needed to underpin the development process. Hence the urgency of integrating human rights with economic and social policies and needs.

The importance of economic, social and cultural rights and their indivisible and interdependent relationship with civil and political rights have been repeatedly affirmed by the United Nations organs. The United Nations commitment

notwithstanding, governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as individuals share the responsibility of fostering a common human rights effort focusing on the individual at par with society. This responsibility should find full expression at the grass-roots level of society where basic rights and basic development objectives have their concrete meaning.

People everywhere are certainly demanding much greater access to political, economic and social opportunities. There is, therefore, a need to ensure that people fully and actively participate in the development process. People can participate as individuals or as groups. This will require increased empowerment in economic, social and political terms, accompanied by pluralism and more democratic forms of governance.

I earnestly hope that this present Forum will contribute to the better integration of the economic, social and human rights factors in the development process and will lead to a truly unified approach to international development and cooperation in which respect for and protection of human rights will be the fundamental point of departure.

It should be emphasized that the right to development is not only confined to the poorer countries of the South but also extendable to the richer ones in the North. Indeed, development should have as its central preoccupation the ascertainment of the right to a reasonable standard of living globally. However, the fact that hundreds of millions of people in the South live clearly below that level calls for urgent action. Surely, the poorer people of the South have a right to development which the international community is yet to fully recognize. But it is self-evident that basic rights are not currently being met on a large scale. It is also clear that there is an immense and widening gap between rich and poor countries, between rich individuals and poor individuals which is morally unacceptable. Individuals, then, do have a right to development and one that calls for international commitment to realizing it.

The scope of the individual right to development, according to the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development includes, inter alia, the following rights:

- the right to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized;
- the right to promote and protect an appropriate political, social and economic order for development;
- the right to expect resolute steps taken to eliminate obstacles to development resulting from failure to observe civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights;
- the right of women to have an active role in the development process; and
- the right to appropriate economic and social reforms with a view to eradicating all social injustices (Article 8, para 1).

As can be seen, therefore, the scope of the individual dimension of the right to development is a synthesis of all rights granted to the individual by the international society in various legal instruments. Thus it is a principle confirming the existence of a system of civil, political, economic and cultural rights necessary for the development of individuals, nations, societies and States.

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTION OF THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

However, in the African region, a brief review of the economic and social conditions shows that the realization of the right to development will be difficult to achieve, unless the following prevailing economic and social concerns are adequately addressed not only by African governments, but also by the international community through the machinery set up in the North-South Dialogue. During my recent End-of-Year assessment of the economic and social conditions in Africa which I delivered in December 1993 at the Headquarters of the

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, I drew the attention of African governments and the international community to the need to build and effectively utilize critical capacities encompassing the human and social infrastructural and institutional dimensions and the role of international cooperation therein.

We strongly believe at the UNECA that a vital missing ingredient that has been responsible for Africa's poor economic and social performance is the lack of adequate indigenous capacity and infrastructural development. Capacity-building is a solid platform from which Africa can be launched on to the path of sustained recovery, accelerated growth, environmentally sustainable development, equitable distribution of socio-economic opportunities and steady reduction of poverty.

The economic potential of Africa can only be maximized through the creation of new capacity of the right type and, indeed because of the low capital base of the continent, this process should permeate all aspects of society. Also, as an organized set of activities targeted at expanding African economies, increasing their competitiveness in the world economy, and boosting their potential for long-term growth and sustained development, the capacity building exercise can reestablish a self-sustaining development and work culture presently sorely lacking.

Within the North-South Dialogue, this calls for greater commitment to a continuing and evolving approach to development co-operation, which would clearly go beyond the immediate needs of economic interdependence to strengthening the capacity of countries of the South especially African countries to participate more equitably and effectively within the world economic order. In the difficult period ahead, special attention needs to be given to the problems and needs of African countries. While these countries contribute only a small fraction of world trade, they are particularly constrained by the prevailing world economic environment through their terms of trade and aid flows. As you also know, Africa is presently saddled with an unmanageable external debt, civil conflicts and political strife and natural disasters, especially recurrent droughts. The economic decline has also been accompanied by a sharp deterioration, even reversal of earlier gains, in human welfare and well-being.

Indeed, Africa is very much a region in transition - struggling to cope simultaneously with three very demanding transitions; from conflicts and environmental disasters to peace, stability and resumption of economic activity; from one-party rule to democracy; from planned economy to markets. The international community should stand ready to support Africa's economic restructuring and recovery programmes with adequate resources, comparable to those that are being extended to the transitional economies of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

While African countries will benefit from world economic recovery and from improved management of world interdependence through the North-South Dialogue, there is a recognized need for positive international action, both from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to help them overcome the fundamental problems of under-development and poverty and to participate more beneficially in the international economy. In short, there is a need to ensure that the right to development of African countries and their peoples is fully realised. Such an achievement will offer opportunities for real gains for all development partners.

I wish to pay a special tribute to the role of non-governmental organizations. Their contributions, as well as of private groups and individuals to the promotion of the right to development has become indispensable. Their role in awakening the conscience of the public and their action at the national level has become highly significant. These organizations have particularly been instrumental in underlining the close link between development issues and human rights. Indeed, NGOs have been at the forefront in identifying these issues and in taking concrete actions to promote human rights of individuals through a genuine development process. It would therefore be fitting if your Forum could consider ways and means of enhancing the role of non-governmental organizations and other people's organizations in the fields of human rights and economic and social development. It is through this and similar approaches and actions that we could come closer to giving practical meaning and anchorage to the rights of the individuals and groups.

I thank you for your kind attention.