

UN Development Cooperation Forum/ High Level Symposium Vienna (Nov. 12th 2009):

Introductory Remarks

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“Ladies and gentlemen. I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak to you today at the opening of the first DCF high-level symposium.

The Development Cooperation Forum does have a specific feature that makes it one of a rare and valuable kind: it builds on a mandate of openness to all stakeholders, including civil society organisations.

It is in this capacity that I speak to you now, as representative of global civil society and more specifically, of Austrian NGOs working in the field of development and humanitarian aid.

“Global Responsibility” is the name of our association, and global responsibility is what is urgently needed today by multiple actors, including those that are present right now: government and UN representatives, financial and trade institutions, private sector representatives, members of parliament and civil society organisations.

We meet in a time of multiple crises: the global (and local!) imbalances in terms of distribution of riches and deprivation, of benefits and costs have reached an unbearable extent. Economic and environmental crisis demonstrate that we urgently need to change our ways.

The DCF has an important role to play in the midst of this culmination of crises: as a global forum to discuss these global issues. It is particularly apt to do so because of its democratic legitimacy - its roots are firmly planted in the UN system.

The Development Cooperation Forum has been mandated to review progress in development cooperation and to give policy guidance with the ultimate goal to realize internationally agreed development goals.

This concerns first and foremost the Millennium Development Goals that still provide the most powerful framework, unifying those that work for the eradication of poverty and for the realization of civil, political, social, economic and cultural human rights.

However, the MDGs are under pressure, as are aid quantity and quality. It is a shame that governments cut aid budgets despite growing demand or use them contrary to their purpose. I am sorry to have to say that Austria is no exception in this regard. It is a tragedy for those who are in need, and it is irresponsible considering global peace and stability.

In this situation, it is more important than ever to talk about mutual accountability, transparency and policy coherence for development.

What does mutual accountability mean?

It means taking the issues at stake, your partner, and yourself seriously, by accounting for your actions. In short: mutual accountability means “WE ARE BEING SERIOUS” about our commitments as stakeholders.

Mutual accountability needs a strong civil society that – together with parliaments! - contributes to the checks and balances needed for a healthy democracy, and that may give a voice to those, who are not sufficiently heard in the political process.

To fulfil these important tasks, CSOs need

- An enabling environment and policy space to contribute to the formulation of policies, including national development strategies
- transparency about all relevant information, including aid and budget flows
- the capacities necessary to work with this information.

Neither donor strategies nor single policy measures can serve as point of origin for national development strategies. Economic and social development need to be based on human rights, and vice versa. Decision makers need to depart from and arrive at the “right to development” for all individuals.

Finally: We need a democratic system of aid cooperation that truly observes the equality of people and peoples. This is an added value that the DCF can provide.

We need this new aid architecture just as we need a new financial architecture, with regard to the International Financial Institutions and to the global financial markets.

This is a matter of policy coherence: developing countries lose an estimated 900 billion US\$ each year in illicit financial flows.

We need to reintroduce the regulations needed to curb the speculations of a few at the expense of many. This can be done by imposing a tax on financial transactions, and by closing tax havens, that so effectively absorb finance flows from South and North, depriving states of the resources urgently needed to mend the harm done by the economic and environmental crisis.

Last but not least, I would like to say a few words about gender.

Mutual accountability mechanisms need to observe gender equality concerns. This is a very practical issue. Let me quote from the final declaration of the follow-up conference on Financing for Development in Doha (a year ago):

“We reaffirm our commitment to eliminate gender-based discrimination in all its forms”

This means: we need gender-responsive development strategies, gender-sensitive statistics and monitoring, and gender-budgeting. In order to achieve this, we need the full inclusion of women’s organisations in the corresponding political processes.

We cannot afford to lose the knowledge, ingenuity, strength and resilience of women to solve these global problems.

The Development Cooperation Forum is about being serious: about aid quantity, aid quality, effectiveness and the coherence of political decisions. It stands for not putting aside development commitments in times of crises.

Why should we abide by our promises when domestic budgets are under pressure?
– Because we are all stakeholders in this one world’s wellbeing. This is also what mutual accountability means.

There is a gap between documents and actions. It is high time to bridge this gap and to move from “docs” to “do”. Let’s move on.”