

**For International Human Solidarity Day, Tuesday 20
December 2011**

2011: testing to the limit the capacity for international solidarity

*Message by the United Nations Independent Expert on Human Rights and International
Solidarity, Virginia Dandan,
to mark the International Human Solidarity Day, 20 December 2011.*

GENEVA (20 November 2011) – This year, we witnessed staggering events in various parts of the world, the likes of which we have never seen before. Extreme weather patterns caused unprecedented devastation, from widespread floods in Central and South America and the South and Southeast Asian countries, to droughts and famine in the Horn of Africa, and the tsunami and nuclear crisis in Japan. These events—together with the social unrest and political upheavals that continue to spread worldwide, and the financial turmoil within the Eurozone and other rich countries—have all tested the capacity of the international community to come together to help one another.

We have witnessed how disasters—natural or man-made—affect the poor and the rich alike. And we have also witnessed how solidarity has brought people together, across nationalities, and social and cultural differences, to address the threats they must face, and to respond with a sense of oneness, drawing strength from each other to express their common humanity. This belies the criticism that solidarity is mere rhetoric and demonstrates that solidarity is not about charity.

International Human Solidarity Day this year resounds with an urgent call for everyone of us to work together as members of the international community to confront the realities and dangers of the present, so that we can shape a future, founded upon the same fundamental common human values which created the United Nations—peace and security, human rights and development.

Our common future is at risk and our common present is under grave threat and yet, world leaders continue the illusion that the crowds and their loud clamor for justice and fair distribution of resources, will eventually tire and go away in due time. Their level of indifference leads them to believe that poverty, inequality, the disempowerment of women, and youth unemployment will be miraculously solved by sheer economic growth. Their shortsightedness comes with the

inability to see the chain that links together climate change, food crises, water scarcity, energy shortages, population pressure and displacement.

Global challenges require multilateral global responses. Efforts undertaken in isolation no longer work in the enormity and expanse of the problems involved. These challenges also require a change of mindset in the way decisions are made, and how actions are taken, to recover and rediscover the time-honoured common values of humanity such as solidarity, which are the vanguards in the boundary between order and chaos. Solidarity should, and must be a positive force in the lives of people and of nations, and must therefore be protected from exploitation and corruption.

On the eve of the Durban Climate Change Conference I called for 'preventive solidarity' on the part of the international community, and for action to be taken together, in unison, and as one, in order to make progress in the negotiations and to prepare the world to better respond to the greatest challenge of humankind. The adoption of the Global Green Fund is welcome and is indeed a shining example of solidarity among nations. However, an even stronger solidarity is required to translate this decision into meaningful action to help the nations that are the most vulnerable and hardest hit by the impacts of climate change. These nations are already overburdened, and many of them are also conflict-prone.

The upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development is an opportunity for reason, sense and cooperation to prevail, bearing in mind that climate change is an urgent problem for today, and not just for the future. After two decades of debating and intellectualizing, we have now reached a point where we must finally give practical meaning to, and implementation of, the sustainable development agenda. We must strive for a socially resilient, more equal and more inclusive world community, and the vehicle that will bring us towards that goal is international solidarity.

Virginia Dandan was appointed Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity in June 2011 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. She is independent from any government or organisation.

Learn more about the mandate and work of the Independent Expert, visit:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Solidarity/Pages/IESolidarityIndex.aspx>

For further information and media requests, please contact: Xabier Celaya (+ 41 22 917 9383 / xcelaya@ohchr.org).

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