

17 October 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
on the Occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and as part of
the global campaign “Stand Up Against Poverty”**

Excellencies,
Brothers and sisters,
Dear friends,

We have gathered today to commemorate the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. As this year also marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this is a fitting opportunity to think about the scandal of global poverty from a human rights perspective.

The poverty in which half of the Earth's inhabitants are living prevents them from enjoying the rights to health, education, decent housing, sanitary conditions, gainful employment, and so forth. This poverty is inexcusable, since it is a man-made problem caused by the dominant culture's perverse logic of selfishness and is within our power to eradicate. The persistence of poverty represents a flagrant violation of the human rights of most of the world's people.

In other words, unfettered capitalism and the culture it engenders clash with and contradict the values and principles of all our religious and ethical-philosophical traditions. To perpetuate this culture of individualism is to continue to betray our most sacred values and principles, and this can only lead to the most terrible consequences.

Heads of State and Government, meeting in Copenhagen in 1995, affirmed that for the first time in human history the eradication of poverty had become possible and attainable because we had the resources, knowledge and technology to achieve it. Yet poverty is not subsiding; in fact, in many cases it is increasing.

This situation is an outrage in the modern world. It attests to the maniacal selfishness of the dominant culture of individualism and indifference to the welfare of others. The crumbs that fall from the plentiful tables of the rich, it is said, can meet the needs of the dispossessed – the half of humanity that struggles to survive in hunger and destitution.

The converging crises that are now further complicated by the financial cataclysm, which is also a product of the unbridled greed and social irresponsibility of the world economic system, do not necessarily have to result in a great human tragedy. To prevent that from happening, we must overcome the moral mediocrity that keeps us from making the great sacrifices which the magnitude of the problem of global poverty requires of us. Realism, if not our conscience, should tell us that all of humanity is in the same boat and that we will all sink or swim together.

On this International Day for the Eradication of Poverty it is fitting to recall the words of Gandhi, who told us not to forget that poverty is the worst human rights violation and the principal cause of human rights violations.

Some 44 million more people will be malnourished this year due to the combination of high food and energy prices, in addition to the slump in economic growth as a result of the crisis in advanced countries' financial systems.

The number of people added to the ranks of the hungry is in the tens of millions, while hundreds of millions more have limited access to food and, in consequence, to other vital goods and services.

As President of the sixty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly, I call on all parties not to reduce aid in these trying times; instead, we should triple it. Let us not wait until the poor and excluded take to the streets to demand it.

The current economic crisis should serve to convince us, once and for all, that profound and unavoidable changes must be made in the global economic system and in the values or, rather, anti-values driving it. It is time to raise the flag of international solidarity and to leave behind forever systems based on individualism and greed. Only then will we succeed in eradicating poverty and hunger from this Earth and in reaching the peace that we all long to achieve.

Thank you.