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Financial crisis must not lessen obligation to fight poverty, warns UN expert

The UN Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty, Ms. Magdalena Sepúlveda, released the following statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty:

Now more than ever, the obligation to eradicate poverty must not be forgotten. As we face a major financial crisis and probably head towards an economic recession at global scale, everyone feels the impact of the crisis, but as usual, this will have acute and dire consequences for those already living in poverty.

In the course of the last weeks over a trillion dollars was committed to rescue the financial system. Last month, the summit to renew commitments to achieving the Millennium Development Goals ended with pledges from donors of roughly US\$16 billion. But the current financial turmoil is raising fears that even these promises may not be kept. These choices must be carefully evaluated.

Now more than ever, it must be understood that the protection of the fundamental rights of the poor is not a luxury that can be dismissed in times of economic hardship - it is a fundamental legal obligation that can never be ignored no matter what the circumstances are.

Now more than ever, we must be clear that this is not a question of charity. Fighting poverty is about the protection of fundamental civil, economic, social, cultural and political human rights. If we truly want to fulfill our promises to eradicate poverty, no concessions can be made in the protection and promotion of human rights.

Those living in poverty routinely suffer violations of basic human rights such as the right to housing, food, water, health and to an adequate standard of living – they are stripped of their human dignity and regularly experience discrimination and violence, and they are also denied access to justice. In addition, many groups, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, and those living in counties torn apart by war and natural disasters, suffer disproportionately.

Today, even by the most conservative estimates -and without taking into consideration the recent sharp rise in food prices- there are 1.4 billion people around the globe living in extreme poverty. One in every five persons lives a life of hardship lacking basic resources to ensure human dignity.

Now more than ever, on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we must remind world leaders of the commitments that they have made to reducing and eliminating poverty and of their obligations under human rights law to protect the rights of the poor. It is crucial that the eradication of poverty remains high on the agenda and immediate action is taken to alleviate suffering and prevent many more people being pushed into a life of deprivation and

misery.

Every single country can take steps to reduce poverty and protect rights. Even the ones with limited resources can formulate measures that work towards the reduction of poverty – there are many examples from around the globe. However, to be effective, every initiative must be founded upon the core human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability. Above all, they must empower and give a voice to those people living in extreme poverty.

Now more than ever, it is time to understand that fighting poverty is not a choice but an obligation.