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**Panel Discussion on “Legal Empowerment of the Poor and Poverty Eradication”**

**Friday, 16 October 2009  
UN Headquarters New York  
Conference Room 2  
10:00am – 1:00pm**

**Concept Note**

Pursuant to resolution A/RES/63/142, the Second Committee will hold a debate on “Legal Empowerment of the Poor and Eradication of Poverty” as part of its agenda during the 64th session of the General Assembly. UNDP, in collaboration with UN-DESA will sponsor a panel discussion on 16 October 2009, to complement the Second Committee’s debate.

**Background**

Legal empowerment of the poor approaches development from the bottom up, empowering people to demand and exercise their rights while at the same time strengthening institutions so that they can better respond to the needs of people. It focuses on the real life challenges that poor people face in securing livelihoods, being the starting point for, and the foundation of, development efforts. Strengthening legal identity, voice and standing of the poor to ensure an inclusive development process is the very first step. With its focus on the livelihood of the poor, legal empowerment of the poor suggests that stronger and enforceable property and land rights and tenure security as well as other rights related to livelihood and entrepreneurship can help communities and societies reap large development dividends, including more equitable and robust economic growth, improved food security, more sustainable land management.

The legal empowerment agenda underscores a renewed emphasis on affordability and accessibility in the delivery of services, especially in justice delivery, to the poor, which can play a critical role to promote inclusive development and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. To defend their economic and livelihood rights, the poor must have access to justice that is not only fair and equitable, but also cost-effective and efficient. This will require substantive investment in capacity development of state institutions, including the justice system, as well as that of grassroots level organizations that represent the voice and interests of the poor.

Legal empowerment of the poor is not a substitute for other important development interventions. It can, however, be a necessary condition for creating an enabling environment for providing sustainable livelihoods and eradicating poverty. Legal empowerment can also be critical for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and making and sustaining gains in Human Development. More importantly, legal empowerment can protect the poor against income and livelihood shocks induced, for example, by food or economic crises or climate change.

**Objectives**

The Special Event aims to inform the Second Committee debate under agenda item 57 “Eradication of poverty and other development issues” as it relates to legal empowerment of the poor. More specifically, the special event will

- help member states recognize the linkages between empowerment, livelihoods and the Millennium Development Goals, especially as to how empowerment can reduce poverty and hunger (MDG-1), promote gender equality (MDG-3) and environmental sustainability (MDG-7).

- discuss how strengthened focus on property and land rights and tenure security can contribute to enhance food security and prevent marginalization, displacement and conflict.
- highlight concrete efforts and initiatives at the national level that improve the access of the poor to the law and justice systems,
- discuss how the United Nations system can support national efforts to strengthen relevant capacities in the area of legal empowerment of the poor.

## **Speakers**

Mr. Thomas McInerney, Director Research Policy & Strategic Initiatives  
International Development Law Organization, Rome, Italy

Dr. Hamid Rashid, Senior Adviser and Coordinator  
Initiative for Legal Empowerment of the Poor  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New York

Prof. Lucie White,  
Louis A. Horvitz Professor of Law  
Harvard Law School, Harvard University

Civil society representative (tbc)

## **Questions**

- How can legal empowerment of the poor support the achievement of MDGs?
- How can property and land rights and tenure security as well as labour rights and rights to entrepreneurship play a critical role in securing the livelihoods of the poor?
- What factors and strategies will determine the success of legal empowerment initiatives and reforms on the ground?
- What are some of the approaches taken in implementing legal empowerment initiatives around the world and what are the lessons learnt?
- How can a stronger partnership among the national government, NGOs, CSOs and CBOs and the private sector be developed to foster legal empowerment of the poor?
- How best the international community can mobilize and channel resources to support national and sub-national level efforts for legal empowerment of the poor?
- What specific role the UN can play in promoting legal empowerment of the poor?