

## It's About Fairness In Our Troubled World

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Thank you, Mr. President, for this chance to share my views.

Freedom from want, the theme I'm going to speak to, in my view, is basically about fairness/justice in our distressed planet. This is what I think runs through most of the messages coming out from NGO coalitions and social movements, like Social Watch, the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, Sustainability Watch, and many other groups I'm associated with.

It's true 2005 offers a an opportunity for us to be the first generation who could make poverty history. But there had been such opportunities much earlier, in 1992 in Rio, marked as a defining moment, in 1995 in Copenhagen and Beijing. They were missed opportunities.

It's now a parent-lifetime since then and we still cannot say with confidence that we're much better off now.

I agree with the Secretary-General's Report that we have seen the most dramatic reduction in poverty in the last three decades, and that happened in my region, Asia. Without making light of such achievement, I think the jury is still out as to whether we have a more a more just, a more equal Asia now than before this happened.

More, the world community has failed to arrest the decline of the natural systems on which all of us depend for our survival. And for all we care, humanity might perish not because of cataclysmic terrorism or world revolution but because of climate change.

To illustrate what I see as being at the core of our present predicament, allow me to recall a 1990 baseline assessment. That time an interagency panel of scientists suggested that if we are to

succeed in stabilizing the global climate system each individual then living would be entitled to only 1,500 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> emission, our right to shit the environment, if you like. Around then an American was already doing 20,000 while a poor Afghan or Zairean about 100 or so. More, the 1,500 kg-norm assumed (1) no further cutting of existing forest stands and (2) no more addition to the then 5.3 billion inhabitants of this planet.

You may also take this as a metaphor of inequality in this world. One obvious implication is, an American must give up so much to enable an Afghan or Zairean to live with dignity.

Now, you and I can see why we are in this present mess. None of the two assumptions worked, to begin with. While 200 million Asians were lifted out of poverty there has been little progress in closing the rich-poor divide. There has been virtually no change in the per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emission level of the US, for example. It's so amazing how so little has changed.

What went wrong? Back then we thought we had the answer--- sustainable development. We defined it basically as justice and fairness between and within nations, women and men, across generations, and payback to our degraded environment. We also had a global plan, some kind of 'global deal'.

The 'deal', Mr. President, is about human survival. It's not about the rich and powerful setting conditions for sharing, especially ones that are burdensome and humiliating to the poor and less powerful. We had all agreed rich and poor alike stand to lose in a global system collapse.

What each side is expected to do, under the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, is but a just and fair share based on differing accountability for what happened and continues to happen. Nobody's a beggar here. If poor peasants shifted to organic farming or if municipal fishers manage their coastal resources right, they're doing it not only for their own sake, but for all of us. If a poor country takes care of biodiversity, it's doing a great service for humanity.

Their efforts deserve to be reciprocated somehow, through untied ODA, unconditional debt relief, fairer trade terms, and other forms of resource transfer.

And we know, real net transfers from the rich to the poor imply deep cuts and possible only if the rich themselves begin to dramatically change in the way they see the world, in how they produce and consume things.

I see some resonance of this message in the Secretary-General's In Larger Freedom. I very much appreciate the many concrete targeted proposals set forth in the document and even in the way these are interlinked and sequenced. The 'quick wins' are particularly grabbing for me, as they suggest immediate redistribution.

If indeed only one of six of us is absolutely poor and if the non-poor really lend a hand then ending poverty even then and now is indeed possible. It looks a bit too simple but it speaks so much about justice and fairness.

But I have two reservations on the Report though, to say nothing about what I fear as a weak document likely to come out of the Millenium+5 summit in September.

First, I sense a minimalist response to what to me is a monumental problem needing urgent and basic solution. It's all so well to propose something viable, what would work given stubborn realities. I just hope the need to be bold and visionary is not sacrificed in the name of pragmatism. The MDGs are less about targets but more about rights which cannot wait to be honored in 2015.

Second, the Report suggests continuing the liberal policy regime that in the view of many, including myself, has caused the poor so much trouble. Delivery on recommended lines of action will remain captive to the dominant thinking that economic growth, especially if led by the private sector, is the key to poverty eradication. This cannot continue.

Finally, I agree absolutely that poverty is a moral aberration and an assault on our common humanity. And that it can be ended soonest. There's more than enough to feed, house, educate, save and lengthen lives, permit wider freedom of movement and leisure for every woman, man and child now living, even those yet to be born. We only need a fundamental change of mindset and firm resolve to make a more just and fair world happen.

Thank you.