

expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.”

This is an example of how the text lifts up Baptism as a basis of our unity: “Baptism bestows upon the churches both the freedom and the responsibility to journey toward common proclamation of the Word, confession of the one faith, celebration of one eucharist, and full sharing of one ministry.”

The statement concludes: “Noting the progress made in the ecumenical movement, we encourage churches to continue this arduous yet joyous path, trusting in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose grace transforms our struggles for unity into the fruits of communion ... *Let us listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!*”

It would be impossible in this brief report to do justice to the eloquent pre-

sentations, the far-reaching pronouncements on everything from AIDS to war and a “just peace,” and the sense of fellowship in the Body of Christ that was felt during our time together.

In the title above I mention “a scenic experience of Christian unity.” Reference has been made to Iguazu Falls as an illustration of how the World Council of Churches can be depicted as a river fed by a confluence of various streams. But there was another scenic high point on our tour of Argentina and Brazil that made me think of this assembly in Porto Alegre.

Soon after we landed in Rio de Janeiro, our guide took us up to Sugar Loaf by a gondola suspended from a cable, and then up another mountain by train where we viewed the famous Christ the Redeemer statue. The figure

of Christ has his arms outstretched, as if to bless the *oikoumene*. That’s Greek for “the whole inhabited world,” from which we get the word “ecumenical.”

In those outstretched arms I saw the incarnation of God’s cross-shaped *agape* love. This is the love that enables us to transform the world. Martin Luther once said that we should become “little Christs.” Perhaps this is the ultimate answer to the prayer and the theme of the assembly, “God, in your grace, transform the world.” Perhaps as little Christs we could also transform the church.

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Thorsten NILGES

Poverty Reduction and Human Rights

Today world-wide more than one billion people have to live on less than 1 US Dollar per day. They are regarded as living in extreme poverty. Eight hundred million people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. We think of development as the movement towards a better and more just society. But what does that mean?

THE BEGINNING OF POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES

Development politics are known as measures to increase the (economic) wealth of countries to improve the welfare of their inhabitants. Traditionally economic development has been seen as the growth of the gross national product. The key aim of development, the increased welfare of inhabitants, has been seen as the logical result of economic growth.

At the beginning of development politics the impact of measures on the poor were seldom

investigated, while today aid efficiency is becoming a more and more discussed and investigated field of development politics. Factors like sustainability, especially ecological sustainability, have been discovered only later in the ‘80s, while the first UN Development Decade was announced by UN General Assembly resolution 1710 in 1961.

The foreseeable industrialisation and mechanisation of agriculture should “trickle down” to the rest of the developing society. Economists like ROSTOW thought about a “take-off into self-sustained growth.”

At the beginning of the second UN Development Decade in 1970, nearly all Western industrialised countries committed themselves by the UN General Assembly resolution 2626 to spend 0.7 percent of their gross national product for official development assistance, but they never did, except for The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Luxembourg.

In the ‘80s, the third UN Development Decade, the aim of the UN was an economic growth of 7 percent, but growth decreased because of the falling terms of trade. This means that prices of the raw materials which were exported by

the poor countries fell, while the prices of industrial products increased.

The UN world conferences of the ‘90s: The UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and its Agenda 21 put the idea of sustainable development on the world’s cultural map. Further conferences have been realized, like the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna 1993, as well as the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and others. While the protection of the environment was the focus of Rio, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 moved the problem of poverty into the centre of the discussion on sustainability.

In September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit, UN member states committed themselves to halve the proportion of the extreme poor by 2015. Following the Millennium Declaration and the goals laid down in it, eight measurable goals with 18 sub-goals and 48 indicators have been announced by the General Secretary of the UN in his Road Map for the Implementation of the Millennium Declaration.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS 2015

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1 Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Target 2 Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 3 Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4 Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 5 Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6 Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Target 7 Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Target 8 Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9 Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 10 Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Target 11 By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Target 12 Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.

[Includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction – both nationally and internationally.]

Target 13 Address the Special Needs of the Least Developed Countries. [Includes tariff and quota-free access for LDC exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for HIPC and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction.]

Target 14 Address the Special Needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states (through the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the outcome of the 22nd special session of the General Assembly.)

Target 15 Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.

Target 16 In co-operation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

Target 17 In co-operation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries.

Target 18 In co-operation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

DEFINING HUMAN RIGHTS

Different cultural specifics for human rights may exist, but the dominant understanding of human rights is enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The ICCPR and the ICESCR were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 and entered into force in 1976. These three documents form the so-called Bill of Human Rights. Both have been ratified by 153 states.

Other important Human Rights declarations or conventions are, above all, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (entered into force 1981) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (entered into force 1990).

The state carries the responsibility for the protection of human rights. Three levels of duties exist for the state:

States have to respect human rights;

States have to protect human rights from being violated by third parties, e.g. by private sector enterprises; and

States have to take short and long-term measures to fulfil human rights.

A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO POVERTY REDUCTION

The advantage of a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction is that it links poverty reduction to the questions of obligation, rather than welfare or charity. Furthermore it gives a definitive statement to the question of whether or not societies need a certain level of economic development before a democracy can be realized.

The capability approach to poverty refers to Amartya SEN's approach. He regards poverty as the denial of a comprehensive formation and development of personal abilities. These can only emerge if basic freedoms like freedom from hunger, disease and illiteracy, but also a reasonable degree of civil and political freedom, are guaranteed. His pioneering analysis of famines pointed to the empirical regularity that famines never occur in a functioning democracy, especially with a relatively free media.

In practice the so-called civil and political rights of the aforementioned ICCPR are very important for poverty reduction. History has shown that concepts of development which took care of special vulnerable groups, for example by asking for their participation and ownership, had a better impact on developing societies than industrialisation projects where nothing trickled down to the poor. Empowerment of the poor, freedom of speech, peaceful assembly and association help to promote good governance and accountability of governments.

Looking at the aforementioned ICESCR, it is obvious that the Millennium Development Goals for the year 2000 and human rights are interrelated.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Reaching goal 1 of the Millennium goals would be a fulfilment of the individual human right to food. In Article 11 of the ICESCR, "the States Parties recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for him-



self and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.” Of course the responsibility for concrete realisation is held by the individuals themselves in principle, but further human rights are required for realisation, such as the rights to education and non-discrimination.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

In the ICESCR not only the right of every person to education is recognized; the full development of the human personality is aimed at, as well as the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the enabling of participation.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

The need for equal rights for women and men is already stated in the preamble of the Human Rights Declaration of 1948, as in Article 3 of the ICCPR and the ICESCR. Furthermore, the CEDAW convention for the promotion of gender equality has not yet been realized in any country of the world.

Goals 4 through 7 (Reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and ensure environmental sustainability)

Basically goals 4-7 are all mentioned in Article 12 of the ICESCR: “The States’ Parties...recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” Already in 1966 the international community declared it would take steps to reduce the stillbirth-rate and infant mortality, to improve all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene, and to prevent, treat and control epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases. The big innovation of the Millennium goals is that measurable results are foreseen.

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

The development of a global partnership expresses the responsibility of all countries for the reduction of poverty. Whilst the aforementioned seven goals are criticized for being only the responsibility of the developing countries, goal eight explicitly states that a non-discriminatory trading and

financial system is needed and asks also for debt relief. Furthermore, the private sector is mentioned especially the pharmaceutical industry should contribute to access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries.

Politics of the developed countries, e.g. the Group of Seven (G7: U.S.A., UK, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Italy) as well as the United States and the European Union themselves, have an enormous impact on the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals as well as on the respect of human rights, their protection and fulfilment.

The export of weapons, especially of small arms, is a violation of the human right to life. The small arms report for the year 2003 is called “Development Denied” to express how terrible the influence of small arms is on developing countries like Congo and Yemen.

Other factors are, of course, the subsidies for the agricultural sector. Cheap exports of frozen chicken meat from Europe are destroying local markets, especially in West African countries. The right to food is violated and the first Millennium goal is negated because possibilities of income generation are destroyed by European and U.S. trade policies.

Another fact is that the trade-related intellectual property rights of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are the reason for the expensive HIV/AIDS drugs in the developing world. The right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is stated in Article 12 of the ICESCR. But the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications is also explicitly recognized by the States’ Parties in Article 15 of the Covenant. International trade law should be aligned to international human rights, not the other way around.

HOW CAN I PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS?

Human Rights are violated in many countries of the world, including some in Europe. Sometimes a so-called government, with or without democratic legitima-

tion, is too repressive for citizens to influence its policy. But as soon as the right of freedom of expression is made possible, it’s up to us to use it!

Mahatma GANDHI said: “All the world would be Christian, were not all Christians so unlike their Christ.” To reclaim the Christ and protect human dignity, our first challenge is to respect the difference of everybody else and to act without discrimination against any religion, race, ethnicity or gender. Church aid agencies and other civil society organisations across the world, as well as governmental development agencies like the UK Department for International Development, have launched initiatives to support human rights-based approaches to development.

Practical actions for individuals and movements are possible: on the one hand everybody is a consumer and has a personal impact on fair working conditions and ecological sustainability in developing countries and in her or his home country. And on the other hand, we can promote human rights education and raise awareness. Especially SCMerS could use their networks and cooperate with big human rights organisations like Amnesty International or Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), as well as small regional or local movements, to expose human rights violations all around the world.

Suggested Reading

HAMM Brigitte, *How Can the Poor Gain Their Rights?*

Poverty Reduction and Human Rights. Bonn, 2004.

SEN Amartya, *Development as Freedom.* New York, 1999.

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