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Centre for Human Rights

Global Consultation on the Realization of the
Right to Development as a Human Right

Geneva, 8 - 12 January 1990

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(Edith Ballantyne)

A few weeks ago, in this building, NGOs met on the theme of the people and the debt crisis. On the podium, in front of the presiding officers was a dish with paper cakes. It intended to illustrate a quotation from a book by Susan George in which she relates the experience of a social worker in Peru, found children whose mother was so poor that she had to make cakes from old newspapers and water to keep her children's stomachs filled. How many children have their hunger pacified in this and similar ways until they inevitably die from starvation and disease? I am not recounting this to raise emotions, although, I think, emotion and compassion would be in order when speaking of the right to development.

I am telling this because to me it dramatizes the challenge the implementation of the Declaration on the Right to Development poses for the international institutions, for governments and for all people. The Declaration is indeed a welcome and needed instrument. Its implementation poses a tremendous challenge to all actors because it has to take into account the dominating world economic order which influences, if it does not set, the terms of world economic, social, political and I would say also military relations.

It seems to me that the implementation of the Declaration on the Right to Development requires the working out of a blueprint, based at least on minimum standards, that can be universally applied as a base on which to build. There is already a considerable body of international instruments and considerable experience and Knowledge in the field. I am thinking of the Specialized Agencies and UN programmes and, of course, the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and its working groups and studies (and the study being undertaken by Professor Turk on the realization of economic, social and cultural rights), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Working Group on the Right to Development. All these should be brought together. Ways also must be found to associate the people, who are after all central to the right of development, especially those whose rights are most violated. If all the available experience were brought

together, a powerful tool for implementing the Declaration on the Right to Development could result. This means that the international institutions have to co-operate meaningfully with one another and also with national development and human rights actors. A number of non-governmental organizations have jointly prepared a written paper in which a few recommendations in that sense are put forward. The paper is available to the Consultation and I will not go into details here.

Clarence Dias, who, I see, will contribute to this Consultation later in the week, wrote on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that of the group of collective rights constituting the third generation of human rights, the right to development is the most important. He sees the Declaration as a first important step; the international community is still in the process of articulating and elaborating a human right to development. Human rights scholars and activists have an important contribution to make to this process. It would be important also to provide an opportunity for those who have first-hand knowledge to bring their information to the UN. Can the Centre for Human Rights envisage a mechanism by which development and human rights activists and those whose right to development is denied can meet on a regular basis to give information and evaluate progress made in articulating and implementing the right to development? Might it be a working group of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities? Might it be Consultations or Seminars? Might it be possible to widen NGO access to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights?

Among the challenges there are a few that to me to deserve particular attention: One, already mentioned, is how to genuinely associate the people in realizing the right to development. Another is how to resolve seeming contradictions in implementing the right to development. For example, how to implement the fundamental rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities to live and develop by their values and concepts of community within a dominating value system different from theirs (and often very exploitative) without tearing nations apart? Or the right of each State to determine its road to development and its economic and political system in a world that becomes

increasingly interrelated, requires transnational and international co-operation , and one in which international norms must be respected, in which sharing all resources is no longer a kind voluntary gesture but an imperative? There is the question of the waste of resources on the arms buildup. In a time when international tensions are decreasing and disarmament measures are being taken, military budgets should be reduced quickly. The funds saved by these measures should be used for development, particularly in developing countries. It has been said that the link between disarmament and development is not automatic and must be made. This should be taken into account in articulating and realizing the right to development;

Last, but not least, I would like to stress that in developing indicators for measuring progress made in the realization of the right to development, one must be the progress made in advancing the status of women. Women are more than half of the world's population, and the vast majority of them are engaged in work that contributes vastly to the life and wealth of nations. Particularly in developing countries, women, and that of children also, put in a hard day's work in and around the home and in the field. Yet, in the statistics only the head of the family, usually the male, is counted. If all contributors were counted, a more realistic picture would be given of the productivity of the nation. This may show how low productivity per capital is, how poor the families are and where, therefore, investment should be made. Women should be the major beneficiaries from such investment because they are the important but neglected contributors. The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and follow-up work since they were adopted in 1985 should be taken into account in the process of articulating the right to development and in the evaluation of progress made in implementation. The UN Department for the Advancement of Women should be drawn into the co-operative efforts within the UN system.