



**OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS**



Human rights and extreme poverty

Commission on Human Rights Resolution: 2004/23

The Commission on Human Rights,

Recalling that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights recognize that the ideal of free human beings enjoying freedom from fear and want can be achieved only if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his or her economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his or her civil and political rights,

Recalling in particular that article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his or her family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his/her control,

Recalling also that the eradication of widespread poverty, including its most persistent forms, and the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights remain interrelated goals,

Reaffirming that the promotion of all human rights, including the right to development, and the elimination of extreme poverty can contribute substantially to the promotion and consolidation of democracy,

Deeply concerned that extreme poverty persists in all countries of the world, regardless of their economic, social and cultural situation, and that its extent and manifestations, such as hunger, trafficking in human beings, disease, lack of adequate shelter, illiteracy and hopelessness, are particularly severe in developing countries, though acknowledging the significant progress made in several parts of the world in combating extreme poverty,

Bearing in mind the relevant provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/CONF.157/23), adopted in June 1993 by the World Conference on Human Rights,

Recalling in particular that the World Conference reaffirmed that least developed countries committed to the process of democratization and economic reforms, many of which are in Africa, should be supported by the international community in order to succeed in their transition to democracy and economic development,

Bearing in mind the commitments reaffirmed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, particularly to spare no effort to fight against extreme poverty, including the commitment to halve by 2015 the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one United States dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger,

Welcoming the new impetus given at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002, to global action against extreme poverty and to advancing and strengthening the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development - economic development, social development and environmental protection - at the local, regional and global levels,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 50/107 of 20 December 1995, in which the Assembly proclaimed the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), and taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Decade (A/58/179),

Bearing in mind the resolutions of the General Assembly on human rights and extreme poverty, and the importance they attach to giving men and women living in extreme poverty the wherewithal to organize and participate in all aspects of political, economic and social life,

Stressing that, in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development held in March 1995 (A/CONF.166/9), Governments committed themselves to endeavouring to ensure that all men and women, especially those living in poverty, could exercise the rights, utilize the resources and share the responsibilities that would enable them to lead satisfying lives and to contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and humankind and committed themselves to the goal of eradicating poverty throughout the world through national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind,

Expressing its gratitude to the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty for the important work accomplished during her mandate and recognizing the necessity of continuing the ongoing study,

Welcoming the observation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in his report (E/CN.4/2004/12 and Add.1-3) that the struggle against poverty must remain at the forefront of the human rights agenda,

Recalling the report of the Secretary-General on women's real enjoyment of their human rights, in particular those relating to the elimination of poverty, economic development and economic resources (E/CN.4/1998/22-E/CN.6/1998/11),

Recalling also its resolution 2003/22 of 22 April 2003 on women's equal ownership of, access to and control over land and the equal rights to own property and to adequate housing, which recognizes that restrictions on women's equal access to credit and loans and factors preventing them from owning and inheriting land may contribute to the feminization of poverty,

Recalling with interest the statement on poverty and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in May 2001, aimed at encouraging the integration of human rights into poverty eradication policies by outlining how human rights generally, and the Covenant in particular, can empower the poor and enhance anti-poverty strategies,

Stressing the necessity of better understanding the causes and consequences of extreme poverty,

Noting that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has chosen the eradication of poverty as a cross-cutting theme of its strategy for 2002-2007,

1. *Reaffirms* that:

(a) Extreme poverty and exclusion from society constitute a violation of human dignity and that urgent national and international action is therefore required to eliminate them;

(b) The right to life encompasses existence in human dignity with the minimum necessities of life;

(c) The existence of widespread absolute poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights and makes democracy and popular participation fragile;

(d) Concerted efforts to strengthen and consolidate national democratic institutions and governance are required in order to address the most pressing social needs of people living in poverty and to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

(e) For peace and stability to prevail, national action and international action and cooperation are required for the promotion of a better life for all in larger freedom, a critical element of which is the eradication of poverty;

(f) Political commitment, social justice and equal access to social services are conditions sine qua non for the eradication of poverty, and welcomes in this connection the fact that States and international organizations have never been so aware of the urgency of winning the battle against extreme poverty;

(g) It is essential for States to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision-making process in the societies in which they live and in the realization of human rights, and for people living in poverty and vulnerable groups to be empowered to help plan, implement and evaluate policies that affect them, thus enabling them to become genuine partners in development;

(h) Special attention must be given to the plight of women, particularly older women and women alone at home, and children, who often bear the greatest burden of extreme poverty;

2. *Recalls*:

(a) The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development;

(b) That, as stated in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002 (A/CONF.199/20 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2, annex) good governance within each country and at the international level is essential for sustainable development; and that at the domestic level, sound environmental, social and economic policies, democratic institutions responsive to the needs of the people, the rule of law, anti-corruption measures, gender

equality and an enabling environment for investment are the basis for sustainable development;

(c) That to ensure the protection of the rights of all individuals, non-discrimination towards the poorest and the full exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, a better understanding is needed of what is endured by people living in poverty, including women and children, and that thought must be given to the subject, drawing on the experience and ideas communicated by the poorest themselves and by those committed to working alongside them;

3. *Recognizes* the efforts of developing countries, in particular the commitment and determination of the African leaders, to seriously address the challenges of poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, economic disparities, instability and insecurity, through initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development and other innovative mechanisms such as the World Solidarity Fund for the Eradication of Poverty, and calls upon developed countries, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as the international financial institutions, to provide, through their operational programmes, new and additional financial resources, as appropriate, to support these initiatives;

4. *Welcomes* the increasing number of events associated with the celebration, on 17 October of each year, of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and the opportunity which these events provide to people and populations living in extreme poverty to make their voices heard;

5. *Expresses its appreciation:*

(a) That an integrated approach is being followed by the United Nations system in addressing the question of extreme poverty, particularly through the adoption and the implementation of the United Nations action strategy for halving extreme poverty by 2015;

(b) That the international financial institutions have developed new policies strengthening the human and social dimension of their action, and encourages them to continue to do so;

(c) For the initiatives taken in many countries by national education authorities to raise awareness among all children and young people of the existence of extreme poverty and the urgent need for united action to enable the poorest people to regain their rights;

6. *Takes note* of the report of the independent expert on extreme poverty (E/CN.4/2004/43 and Add.1) and the recommendations contained therein;

7. *Calls upon:*

(a) The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to give high priority to the question of the relationship between extreme poverty and human rights and invites it to pursue further work in this area, notably with regard to the draft guidelines on the integration of human rights into poverty reduction strategies;

(b) The General Assembly, specialized agencies, United Nations bodies and intergovernmental organizations to take into account the contradiction between the existence

of situations of extreme poverty and exclusion from society, which must be overcome, and the duty to guarantee full enjoyment of human rights;

(c) States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to continue to take into account, in the activities to be undertaken within the framework of the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the links between human rights and extreme poverty, as well as efforts to empower people living in poverty to participate in decision-making processes on policies that affect them, and notes in this context the global Microcredit Summit Campaign;

(d) The United Nations to strengthen poverty eradication as a priority throughout the United Nations system;

8. *Urges* States and encourages the private sector and international financial and development institutions, such as the World Bank and regional development banks, to promote participation of individuals and groups of individuals who are victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in economic, cultural and social decision-making at all stages, particularly in the development and implementation of poverty-alleviation strategies, development projects, and trade and market assistance programmes;

9. *Invites* the treaty bodies monitoring the application of human rights instruments, especially the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to take into account, when considering the reports of States parties, the question of extreme poverty and human rights;

10. *Decides* to extend for a period of two years the mandate of the independent expert on extreme poverty in accordance with resolution 1998/25 of 17 April 1998, within the framework of which the independent expert will, inter alia, pay particular attention to:

(a) The relationship between the enjoyment of human rights and extreme poverty;

(b) Identifying, including in cooperation with international financial organizations, the most efficient measures taken at the national and international levels to promote the full enjoyment of human rights of persons living in extreme poverty;

(c) The contribution that people living in extreme poverty can make to the definition of measures to promote the full enjoyment of their human rights;

(d) Developing cooperation with other United Nations bodies dealing with human rights which are also active in the area of the fight against extreme poverty;

(e) The assessment of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, the internationally agreed goals contained in the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus (A/CONF. 198/11, chap. I, resolution 1, annex) adopted by the International Conference on Financing for Development in March 2002, and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development;

(f) The impact of discrimination on extreme poverty, bearing in mind the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action adopted in September 2001 by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance;

(g) The situation and empowerment of women in extreme poverty, applying a gender perspective in his/her work;

11. *Requests* the independent expert to report to the Commission at its sixty-first session;

12. *Decides* to consider this question at its sixty-first session under the same agenda item;

13. *Recommends* the following draft decision to the Economic and Social Council for adoption:

[For the text, see chap. I, draft decision 9.]

*51st meeting
16 April 2004*

[Adopted without a vote. See chap. XSee chap. III.- E/2004/23 – E/CN.4/2004/127]