



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



Human rights and extreme poverty

Commission on Human Rights resolution 2003/24

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/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 continues to spread in all countries of the world, regardless of their economic, social and cultural situation, and that its extent and manifestations, such as hunger, 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 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 the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Decade (A/55/407),

Recalling also the resolutions of the General Assembly on human rights and extreme poverty, in particular resolution 57/211 of 18 December 2002, 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, chap. I, resolution 1), 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,

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 2002/49 of 23 April 2002 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 further the Declaration of the Microcredit Summit, held in Washington, D.C., in February 1997, which launched a global campaign to reach 100 million of the world's poorest families, especially women, with credit for self-employment by the year 2005,

Noting 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 on 4 May 2001, aimed at encouraging the integration of human rights into poverty eradication policies by outlining how human rights generally, and the International Covenant in particular, can empower the poor and enhance anti-poverty strategies,

Noting with interest also the report submitted by the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty pursuant to Commission resolution 2002/30 of 22 April 2002 (E/CN.4/2003/52 and Add.1) and the recommendations the expert makes, inter alia on establishing civil registry services where necessary to provide better safeguards for the legal rights of those living in extreme poverty, including their right to be

recognized as persons before the law, to own property and to inherit, and on giving them better access to the justice system,

Noting that the ad hoc working group established pursuant to resolution 2001/8 of the Sub-Commission on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights of 15 August 2001 has produced a programme of work (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2002/15),

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 includes, within it, 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* that:

(a) The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, reaffirmed during the twenty-fourth

special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the World Summit, held in Geneva in June 2000, provide the substantive framework for eradicating poverty by setting specific targets, drawing up plans and implementing programmes;

(b) 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;

(c) In its resolution 1997/11 of 3 April 1997, it requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to give high priority to the question of human rights and extreme poverty, to ensure better cooperation between the institutions and bodies involved, regularly to inform the General Assembly of the evolution of the question and to submit specific information on this question at events such as the evaluation, at the halfway point in 2002 and the end-point in 2007, of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty;

(d) In her report to the General Assembly of 11 September 1998 on the mid-term evaluation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/53/372, annex), the High Commissioner proposed that the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly should work jointly to implement the right to development by focusing on the elimination of poverty, with particular emphasis placed on basic security, which is necessary to enable individuals and families to enjoy fundamental rights and assume basic responsibilities;

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;

(d) For the priority that the independent expert continues to give to enabling men and women living in extreme poverty to express themselves, and the emphasis in her report (E/CN.4/2003/52 and Add.1) on the need for States to take account of their demands in shaping State policies;

(e) For the many responses from Governments to the questionnaires sent out by the independent expert to gather views and experiences in the field of human rights and the eradication of extreme poverty;

6. *Calls upon:*

(a) 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;

(b) 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;

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

7. *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;

8. *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;

9. *Encourages* the ad hoc working group of the Sub-Commission to adopt an approach to human rights and extreme poverty based on the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights, and recalls that freedom from want and fear can only be achieved 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;

10. *Decides* to consider this question at its sixtieth session under the same agenda item.

56th meeting

22 April 2003

[Adopted without a vote.]

See chap. X. E/CN.4/2003/L.11/Add.3]