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Youth With A Mission England's Commentary on "In Greater Freedom"

Youth With A Mission, an international NGO representing 14,000 people in over 160 countries, would like to congratulate the Secretary General on his bold and comprehensive report on recommended UN reforms for consideration by the General Assembly at its high-level meeting in September 2005. In particular we appreciated the holistic approach that he has taken in the report by giving equal weight to security, development and human rights concerns. We also appreciated that the threat analysis incorporated disease, poverty and natural disasters into its definition of what constitutes a security threat.

We affirm:

- That the conditions, including increasing political will, and abundant resources exist to dramatically reduce the massive divides that persist between the rich and the poor. (Para. 2)
- That in order to address this division between rich and poor, reform to the United Nations must be fundamental not incremental if the UN is able to advance its agenda for global peace and security, development and human rights in the 21st century. (Para. 11) UN reform is long overdue and it needs to occur if the UN is to be relevant to the new global conditions it faces in the 21st century.
- That global peace and security, development and human rights are all imperative and that they are interdependent and reinforce one another. We especially want to commend the Secretary General (S.G.) for his insistence that human rights be elevated to the same priority level as security and development. (Para. 16) In our mind these three freedoms, the freedom to live in human dignity, the freedom from want and the freedom from fear are inseparable and form the core components needed for human flourishing.
- The emphasis the report places on the dignity and value of all human beings and that there is a huge range of international law which does amount to an international Bill of Rights. (Paras. 127-129, 135, 144)
- The need to strengthen UN structures by eliminating redundant organs (Para. 165), by reforming the Security Council (Paras. 167-170), by increasing the effectiveness of the Secretariat (Paras. 184-192) and by establishing a Human Rights Council. Human Rights must be mainstreamed throughout the UN. (Paras. 144, 166)
- The emphasis on sustainable development and the environment. (Paras. 57-61)
- The need to address the digital divide. (Para. 68)
- Zero tolerance for U.N. peacekeepers who sexually exploit the women and children they are sent to protect. (Para. 113)

We are gravely concerned by:

A. The lack of emphasis on mainstreaming gender equality throughout this document.

- Gender equality is only mentioned specifically once, in Para. 40, under the heading of national strategies for development. Here gender equality is portrayed in utilitarian terms rather than as a fundamental human right. Furthermore, there is only one MDG that specifically mentions gender equality. We recommend that the UN and Member States pay particular attention to mainstreaming gender throughout their action plans for implementing the MDGs.

- The outcomes from the most recent Commission on the Status of Women and its Ten Year Review of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) have not been considered as part of the discussions of UN reform in September.
- Given that human development indicators demonstrate that women suffer disproportionately in achieving the human freedoms cited in this report, we recommend that the twelve priority areas for promoting gender equality in the BPfA be mainstreamed throughout the S.G.'s recommendations so that that women's freedom to live in dignity, women's freedom from want, and women's freedom from fear are highlighted.
- We fully agree with the concerns raised in the March 31, 2005 letter sent to the S.G. on gender mainstreaming and the MDGs from significant numbers of NGOs and we add our voice to the request that you urgently arrange for a meeting with NGOs to discuss them.

B. By the recent ECOSOC election of certain nations to the UN High Commission on Human Rights who have a reputation for significant human rights violations

- We share the S.G.'s concern that certain States seek membership to the Commission in order to protect themselves against human rights violations and that this casts a shadow on the reputation of the entire UN system. (Para. 182)
- Therefore, setting up a Human Rights Council where states are elected on the basis of their human rights records and commitment to strengthen human rights has to be one of the most urgent priorities of UN reform if the UN is to remain a credible and viable institution in the 21st Century.

We support the Secretary General's recommendations and we particularly recommend:

A. With respect to freedom from want:

- That the UN not lose sight of broader issues of development such as increasing inequality and wider dimensions of human development raised by the conferences of the 1990's in its pursuit of the MDG's. (Paras. 29-30) Therefore we would encourage the UN to foster other initiatives similar to the MDGs that would capture these concerns and provide frameworks for developing strategies to address them.
- That while normative frameworks have been developed since the foundation of the UN that recognize the dignity and value of human beings, significant work still needs to be done by religious and other civil society institutions to create a true culture of life where human rights become intrinsic to the values of individual societies worldwide and not just remain a matter of jurisprudence. (Para. 28) Therefore, we would encourage the UN to commission these institutions to participate in dialogues with the UN system and Member States at every level to discuss how to promote the transformation of cultures so that human rights genuinely reflect cultural norms and values.
- That while we appreciate existing efforts to address pandemics like SARS, polio, and HIV/AIDS, more resources and political will needs to be extended towards ending malaria and tuberculosis. Therefore we recommend that the UN hold nations more accountable for eradicating malaria and for the prevention and treatment of T.B. (Paras. 62-71)
- That while efforts have been made to increase the representation of developing nations in the Bretton Woods institutions, not enough has been done. Therefore we recommend that their representation is increased and that greater attention be paid by these institutions to the specific needs and dilemmas of the borrower nations and not primarily those of the creditors. (Para. 70)
- That migration is a major emerging issue. We recommend the development of safe and well-managed immigration policies. (Para. 71)

B. With respect to freedom from fear:

- We affirm the need for the UN and Member States to develop a more comprehensive concept of collective security. We affirm the emphasis in Paras. 76-86 that threats to security are not just that of war or terrorism, but of poverty, deadly infectious disease and environmental degradation.
- We affirm that whatever threatens one nation threatens all nations (Para. 79-81) and that this interdependence needs to be taken into greater account by all Member States.
- While we whole-heartedly support the need for a definition of terrorism and for a comprehensive convention on terrorism and while we endorse the dropping the endless debates concerning state terrorism, we are disappointed that this report does not seem to recognize the importance of identifying the root causes of terrorism. Therefore, we recommend that any definition of terrorism and any convention on terrorism discuss and fully elaborate the causes of terrorism and how these might be ameliorated as part of any strategy to end terrorism. (Para. 88)
- We support the appointment of a special rapporteur that would report to the Commission on Human Rights on the compatibility of counter-terrorism measures with international human rights laws. (Para. 94)
- We support the emphasis the report places on reducing the risk of war and its emphasis on prevention. We affirm the definitions in Para. 106 of what it means to prevent war, i.e. combating poverty, promoting sustainable development and human rights promotion. Addressing these would also reduce the risk of terrorism; therefore, we recommend that any convention on terrorism also focus on prevention according to this definition.
- While we affirm the development of an intergovernmental Peace Building Commission and Peace Building support office within the U.N. secretariat, we strongly recommend that it not only report to the Security Council and ECOSOC, but that it also report to the new proposed Human Rights Council. (Para. 116)
- We strongly support integrating Bretton Woods institutions into the peace-building process. For too long, these institutions have often posed a hindrance to rebuilding war-torn nations. Peace-building must be mainstreamed within these institutes and resources given to developing institutional capacity in this area. (Para. 118)

C. With respect to the freedom to live in dignity:

- We affirm that the norm, the responsibility to protect, requires that states no longer be permitted to hide human rights abuses behind state sovereignty. We recommend the intervention of the international community, force being the last resort, in situations where States are unwilling or unable to protect the rights of its citizens. (Paras. 129, 134, 135)
- While the normative framework of human rights law must be strengthened, we see it as an iterative process of the application of human rights law and an education process on the part of civil society, including religious institutions, that would encourage and inspire the development of human rights values in nations where these values do not currently exist or have been suppressed (Para. 131).
- Along with the S.G., we strongly urge member states to cooperate fully with the ICC and other international or hybrid war crime tribunals and to surrender accused persons on their request. We also encourage countries that have not signed the Rome Statute to do so, and failing that to at least recognize the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court in certain situations. In this regard, we were very encouraged by precedent set by the Security Council's decision to refer Darfur to the ICC, despite the fact not all Security Council members have signed the Rome Statute.

- That the harmonizing of guidelines on human rights reporting be a priority. Infrequency of reporting or the inability of the requisite treaty bodies to review Member States reports reduces the incentive for compliance. The U.K. government's report on CEDAW has been recently postponed for several years because CEDAW does not have the capacity to review the reports submitted. The result is that pressure on the U.K. government to comply with CEDAW is diminished. (Para. 147)

D. With respect to strengthening UN structures:

- We support Option A for reforming the Security Council (Para. 170). New permanent members must be created if this body is going to be more representative of the security concerns of all Member States. We think that Option B would create a second class category of states and would not promote the equality, the broad nature, or the interdependence of security concerns that this report seeks to define and address.
- We affirm the increased participation of developing countries. (Para.169 b.)
- We recommend that an Arab-Muslim nation have a permanent seat, perhaps Egypt, as the Muslim/Arab voice provides a strong nonwestern alternative world view that needs to be included in discussions of development, security and human rights (Para. 170). The predominant voices in the Security Council are still far too Western.
- Although we support the criteria for choosing new members of the Security Council, we do not want to see military or economic power become the main criteria by which they are chosen. (Para. 169 a) Some states should be chosen for their ability to present an alternative voice that reflects the new broad definition of security elaborated in this report.
- We recommend that the proposed Human Rights Council be its own council and not be a subsidiary of the General Assembly. (Para. 183) This is more in keeping with the intention of the S.G. to mainstream human rights throughout the organization and to put human rights on a par with security and development.
- We concur with the Joint Statement on the Reform of the Commission of Human Rights made by the President of CONGO on April 12, 2005 at an informal session of the CHR.
- Given our own organization's field staff experience on the ground with various U.N. agencies around the world, we strongly recommend that the UN operate as one integrated presence on the ground (Para 198). This would greatly facilitate the effective liaison of our field staff with the appropriate UN agencies and make for more efficient collaboration.

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