

Catherine Ashton

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice President of the European Commission

Brussels, 8 June 2010
Our Ref.: B973

Dear Baroness Ashton,

Subject: Putting Human Rights at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals

Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to the next Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union on the 14 and 15 June 2010. The Council's Agenda will consider, among other issues, the European Commission's 2010 Development Communication Package, which this year focuses on how the EU can support accelerated and sustained progress towards the MDGs. This package will be adopted into Council Conclusions along with the Common EU Position for the forthcoming UN High Level Event on MDGs in September.

The EU and its Member States should ensure that the Council Conclusions and the EU common position on MDGs are consistent with international human rights standards. Human rights – and the duty of governments to fulfil them – must be put at the heart of MDG efforts in order to fulfil the promises made in the Millennium Declaration to strive for the protection and promotion of economic, civil, cultural, political and social rights for all. Integrating human rights in all MDG efforts is key to making them effective in overcoming poverty.

However, crucial gaps exist between the recognition of the importance of human rights for development and the practical application of human rights in all MDG efforts. There continues to be insufficient attention given to human rights violations that undermine efforts towards achieving the MDGs and to addressing discrimination – including gender discrimination and inequality. Targeted interventions should focus on the most vulnerable and excluded, including those who are victims of discrimination based on ethnicity, race, caste, disability and indigenous status. These forms of discrimination are closely linked to poverty, yet the MDGs remains silent on them. Consequently, the root causes of poverty and underlying human rights violations are completely overlooked. This means, for example, that even perfect laws of universal coverage to basic healthcare will not achieve the goal of access to these services if the underlying causes for why the most marginalized cannot reach healthcare are not addressed.

Although 70% of those living in poverty are women, gender equality and women's rights are only partly and very poorly reflected in the MDGs, reducing it to MDG 3 and MDG 5. In addition, gender-based violence, a pervasive barrier to gender equality which threatens to undermine progress on all the MDGs, is not reflected in any of the MDG targets. This is a long way from states' obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women. States have a duty to address discrimination against women and to guarantee equality under each of the goals and targets. Gender equality and women's human rights should be fully integrated in all the MDG targets and indicators. Since women and girls typically face the greatest burdens of extreme poverty, hunger and disease, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon stated that 'there is a need to look at the MDGs through a gender lens.'¹

In this context Amnesty International urges the EU and its Member States to ensure that the Foreign Affairs Council results in a strengthening of national and European MDG efforts to meet and exceed the MDGs by ensuring consistency with international human rights standards and increasing accountability

¹ Report of the Secretary General A/64/665 'Keeping the promise: a forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015', 12 February 2010

for their achievement.

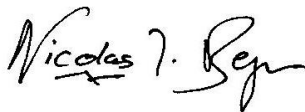
In particular, Amnesty International urges the EU and its Member States to initiate and express support by adopting Council Conclusions and a Common Position, which:

- **Underpin** the EU's approach to the MDGs by the framework of international human rights law and adopt the agreed language in the 2005 world summit outcome by stating that *"gender equality and the promotion and protection of the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms are essential to advance achievement of the Millennium Development Goals."*²
- **Ensure** that the use of development assistance resources promote non-discrimination and advances equality – including gender equality – and give priority to the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
- **Ensure** that effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms are in place to address failures to implement these rights both within and outside the EU, by strengthening and ratifying existing human rights mechanisms, such as the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- **Ensure** that support for the MDGs facilitates the participation of people living in poverty in MDG-based planning, implementation and monitoring at all levels, in particular the equal participation of women.

Acknowledging and integrating the invaluable role of human rights, would ensure that the MDGs address not just the effects or symptoms of poverty, but also the root causes, in turn ensuring the resources used are achieving maximum impact.

We are at your disposal for discussing these issues further and would be grateful for feedback on how these matters are being taken forward.

Yours sincerely,



Nicolas Beger
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Cc: Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner on Development

² Paragraph 12 of the World Summit Outcome, adopted by consensus in General Assembly on 16 September 2005 (A/RES/60/1).