

Let's not Waste this Opportunity! UBUNTU Forum for the UN Summit of Heads of State and Government

The next United Nations Summit of Heads of State and Government will be held in New York on 14, 15 and 16 September. Considerable hope and energy has gone into the preparation of this summit, being held during the year of the 60th anniversary of the UN and the 5th anniversary of the approval of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The summit has been preceded by the work of a number of panels and, above all, Kofi Annan's report «In Larger Freedom».

At the present time, negotiations on the final wording are ongoing and it is essential that we use all the means at our disposal to ensure that there are no last-minute cuts and trims, as have occurred on previous occasions. Despite the efforts of all those involved – including civil society organisations around the world – there is the danger that the meeting will end with a declaration that does not include any significant proposals nor, in particular, any effective commitments to put them into practice without further delay, at last giving the world the instruments and the powers required to tackle the serious problems and challenges that face us today.

This danger has been exacerbated greatly since the US government submitted, just three weeks before the summit, what could be considered an amendment to the entire existing text, in which they remove, among other things, any reference to the Millennium Development Goals, 0.7%, climate change and collective security based on the United Nations Charter and respect for international law.

For this reason, we the signatories to this communiqué are raising our voices louder than ever before and invite the citizens of the world to add their voices to ours (for example, by participating in the global mobilisation organised in this context for 10 September). In addition, we urge the Heads of State and Government as a whole so that they shoulder the responsibility which is being raised before them, do not to miss this opportunity and call on them, without further excuses or delay, to take the decisions and assume the commitments, including, at this time of their review, those which will ensure that we are able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Without going into the broad range of themes under consideration nor into the specific wording of the final text, at the level of a communiqué, we single out the major directions which, in our view, the outcome of the summit ought to aim towards:

1. Financing for development, global governance and the strengthening of the United Nations

The only way to advance towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (which should be seen as the minimum we should be aiming for) and the programmes of the UN summits in the 1990s (which have never been implemented) is to equip ourselves with mechanisms to finance development. This requires immediate fulfilment of the historical commitments for Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the implementation of new International Finance Facilities (IFF). Taxing international financial capital and initiatives undertaken by the Action Against Hunger and Poverty should lead to the consequent creation and use of worldwide cohesion funds for development. Equally, the cancellation of external debt (without any more of the misleading manoeuvres for the media seen at the last meeting of the G8) and a fair world trade system are goals that need to be achieved urgently and at the same time. Commitments in all these areas will make it possible to eradicate world poverty.

It will only be possible to reaffirm the Monterrey Consensus, in terms of the goals described above and the need to reform the international financial architecture and enhance the coherence, governance and consistency of the international monetary, financial and trading systems, if we take the necessary steps towards refounding the Bretton Woods Institutions (the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and others) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) within the UN. Only then will a reformed, reinforced and more democratic ECOSOC (turned into Economic and Social Council, to which ought to be added «Environmental», with all the consequences that this would entail) finally be able to play the role envisaged for it in the United Nations Charter.

Only with these actions will the United Nations be truly strengthened as the heart of the multilateral system of international institutions and a system of global democratic governance that will halt and reverse the tendency for public responsibilities essentially in the private sector to be abandoned.

2. Human rights, peace and security

Firstly, we applaud the forcefulness with which the current text explicitly covers the themes of gender equality and the empowerment

of women. Human development, peace and security will only be possible with this equality and empowerment.

We wholeheartedly concur with the current text (and earlier versions) when it says that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing and cannot be enjoyed without each other.

As a result, we, who have without reservation criticised and continue to criticise terrorist attacks (the most recent being in London and Egypt), as well as the illegal use of «preventive» force (the most unilateral use of such force being in the war in Iraq), insist that:

1. firstly, the UN Security Council needs to be reformed by being made more democratic and stronger through the elimination of the veto; increase in the number of seats based on the regional reality of the world; and effective control by the General Assembly. These are all essential steps to regain the world's trust in a body that ought to be the guarantor of worldwide peace and security by focusing its work, with the General Assembly and its other councils, in the following areas: conflict resolution by peaceful means; disarmament and non-proliferation; and the use of force as a final resort and only in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter.

2. secondly, the vicissitudes affecting the world and in particular the increase in violent tension call for new intelligence and approaches. In this respect, we applaud the fact that, until now, the current text establishes or raises concepts such as the following to the status of being necessary: peace-building, for which it includes a proposal to create a specific UN commission; peace-keeping; the culture of peace and initiatives on dialogue among cultures, civilisations and religions; human security; universal adherence and implementation of the global legal framework at local and international levels; a collective security system in accordance with the United Nations Charter, respect for international law, the resolution of international conflicts, economic growth, the full enjoyment of human rights, etc.

3. thirdly, as formulated in the current text, the proposal to set up a new Human Rights Council is a useful step in the necessary strengthening of the United Nations and in future development. It is important, though, to sustain and increase the support to the current functions of the Commission. Only then, will this council also serve to ensure that human rights, one of the UN's fundamental pillars, permeate every other area and situation.

3. Responsibility and consistency: commitments and measures

The new text, currently in force, undoubtedly aims to measure up to the current circumstances. The many and varied problems that we now face are serious and interrelated. In general, the proposals are interesting, though in some cases they are still inadequate, as we have already brought to others' attention. Nevertheless, its weakest point remains, perhaps, the consistency between the declarations of principles and proposals, the acceptance of responsibilities and the approval of the necessary commitments (with dates, amounts, etc.) and the explicit details of the specific and effective measures and action (by whom, where, when, etc.) to truly implement them. It is within this framework of a global vision that we call upon the Heads of State and Government, as political representatives, and the leaders of international organisations, to strive to pursue and uphold the course in which the negotiations had progressed in recent months. Only then the international community, with the active participation of civil society, can face the challenges and look ahead to a brighter future.

We still have time! Let's not waste this opportunity!

Federico Mayor, Fundación para una Cultura de Paz; Mario Soares, Fundação Mario Soares; José Saramago, Nobel Prize in Literature Laureate; Noam Chomsky, Writer; Edgar Morin, Sociologist; Nawal El Saadawi, Writer; Cora Weiss, Hague Appeal for Peace; Poul N. Rasmussen, Global Progressive Forum; Willy Thys, World Confederation of Labour; William R. Pace, World Federalist Movement - Institute for Global Policy; Roberto Savio, Inter Press Service; François Houtard, Centre Tricontinental, CETRI; Marino Busdachin, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation; Lois Barber, EarthAction; Mohammed Fayek, The Arab Organization for Human Rights; Herman Spanjaard, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War; Alexander Likhotal, Green Cross International; Virginia Vargas, Articulación Feminista Mercosur; Richard A. Falk, Princeton University; Chico Whitaker, Justiça e Paz - Brazil; Sara Longwe, FEMNET - The African Women's Development and Communications; Ann Pettifor, New Economics Foundation; Fatma Alloo, DAWN - Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era; Kinhide Mushakoji, ARENA Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives; John Foster, The North-South Institute; Rajesh Tandon, PRIA - Participatory Research in Asia; Carlos Tünnerman, Instituto Latinoamericano de Educación para el Desarrollo ILAEDES; Antonio Papisca, University of Padova; Arcadi Oliveres, Justice and Peace, Europe; Giampiero Alhadeff, SOLIDAR; Simon Burall, One World Trust; Rómulo Torres, Jubilee South; Donald Charumbira, World Assembly of Youth; Vicente Garcia-Delgado, CIVICUS; Jorge Nieto Montesinos, Centro Internacional para la Cultura

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The list is followed by hundreds additional signatures.