

Freedom and Development

Heads of State and Government at the Millennium Summit recognized the value of freedom, along with other fundamental values and principles, as essential to maintaining international relations in the twenty-first century. They also ascribed an important relationship between *freedom* and *development*, noting how the value of freedom could be translated to concrete action through the attainment of key objectives enshrined in the Millennium Declaration, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The Millennium Declaration embraced a broader understanding of freedom, defining it not only in the context of “*violence, oppression or injustice*”, but also as being the right of men and women “*to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger...*” In doing so, the Millennium Declaration defined freedom, not only from a political perspective, but also from a development and socio-economic one. Although the relationship between freedom and development has been examined and studied by development practitioners for a long time, the acknowledgement of this relationship in the Declaration reflects the international community’s affirmation of the role of development in preserving and promoting true freedom for people around the world.

During the Summit, governments vowed to “*spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject of dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected*”. But enormous challenges lie ahead in breaking the shackles of poverty and underdevelopment.

We live in a world where more than a billion still live on less than a dollar day and suffer under extreme poverty and hunger. In sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, millions of people are chronically hungry; half of children under 5 are malnourished. The spread of diseases also continue to destroy the lives of millions of people worldwide. HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases kill millions of people each year and, in sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS has now become the leading cause of premature death. In the developing world, many people are subjected to poor living conditions, with millions not even having access to safe drinking water. It is estimated that half the developing world even lack toilets or other forms of basic sanitation.

The Millennium Declaration provides us with the blueprint for action in eradicating poverty and freeing people from dehumanizing conditions of underdevelopment. Governments at the Millennium Summit resolved to create an environment both at the national and international levels that would be conducive to the elimination of poverty and advancing development. They also recognized that developing countries, in particular, small-island developing States and landlocked developing countries, should be supported in mobilizing the needed resources to finance their growth and development. Furthermore, governments have set upon themselves the Millennium Development Goals, which are quantifiable targets that need to be achieved by 2015 in the areas of poverty eradication, universal primary education, child mortality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, among others.

Governments also recognized that respect for the value of freedom would be incomplete if we fail to strengthen the rule of law and recognize the fundamental human rights and freedoms of our citizens. To achieve this, concerted effort to promote democracy and participatory governance, both at the national and international levels, are needed.