Analyze A Global Issue

SECTION 1: PARAMETERS OF A GLOBAL ISSUE

SECTION 2: GLOBAL TO LOCAL

SECTION 3: REFLECTION

SECTION 1
PARAMETERS OF A GLOBAL ISSUE

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GLOBAL CITIZENS

Some issues are of such a scale that they either involve the entire international community directly or have implications for the entire world.

Do global citizens, such as yourself, have a responsibility for knowing about international issues? If so, what type of information should an informed global citizen know about international issues? Record five points below:

READ ABOUT TWO GLOBAL ISSUES

1. Select and read either two United Nations (UN) briefing papers, or one UN briefing paper and a current international Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) operation overview.

The UN briefing papers provided are:

- Child Labour located at Appendix 1,
- Biodiversity located at Appendix 2,
- Poverty located at Appendix 3, and
- Human Rights located at Appendix 4.

Additional UN briefing papers are located at www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/briefing.

Information regarding a current international CAF operation may be found at www.forces.gc.ca > OPERATIONS (www.forces.gc.ca/site/operations/index-eng.asp) (be sure to review the related links at the bottom of the operation's page).

2. Review a provided national newspaper (hard copy or online) to search for articles related to the global issues you have selected.

3. Complete the Key Facts sheets and answer the questions on the following pages. Include information / make reference to the newspaper article when answering the questions.

IDENTIFY THE PARAMETERS OF TWO GLOBAL ISSUES

Key Facts

ISSUE:
Who Identify those most affected by the issue and those involved in addressing it.
What Summarize the issue in two or three short sentences.
Where Identify locations where the issue is occurring.
When Identify when the timeline on the issue starts and when it can be predicted to end.
Why List some of the main causes of the issue.

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SECTION 2
GLOBAL TO LOCAL

Place the issues in your local context by responding to the following questions:

To what extent do the global issues you looked at exist in your community?

If they do not exist, or exist very limitedly, why is that? What strategies to address the issues have been used? If one or both of the issues does exist in your community, what efforts are being made to address it or them?

Even the most distant issue can have some connection to Canada and your hometown. For example, extreme weather events, such as flooding, can be due to changing climate patterns, which is linked to the level of carbon dioxide in the air. Ensuring that there are viable alternatives to driving, such as public transit, is then connected to prevention of events such as flooding. This is not to say that Canadians are responsible for weather catastrophes around the world, but there is nonetheless a connection between communities here and effects there.

Are there causal connections between your community and the issues you reviewed? If so, what are they?

SECTION 3
REFLECTION

Now that the issue has been placed in the national and local context, discuss your personal connection to the issue by answering the following questions:

How did reading about the issues make you feel?

How do you feel about Canada's / your local community's connection to these issues?

Do you now plan to take any action regarding these issues? If so, what? If not, why not?

Congratulations, you have completed your self-study package on EO C501.02 (Analyze a Global Issue). Hand the completed package to the Training Officer / Course Officer who will record your completion in your Proficiency Level Five logbook.

UN Briefing Paper on Child labour

Overview

"…to enable families living in poverty to survive, a quarter of a billion children aged 14 and under, both in and out of school, now work, often in hazardous or unhealthy conditions…Having approved the International Labour Organisation convention on the worst forms of child labour, Member States must now implement it fully."

Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the *Millennium Report*

Vital Statistics

- Some 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 work either full time or part time.
- Almost half, some 120 million work full time, every day, all year round.
- Some 61 per cent of them live in Asia; 32 per cent in Africa and 7 per cent in Latin America.
- 70 per cent of them work in agriculture.
- 70 per cent work in dangerous environments.
- Of the 250 million children concerned, some 50-60 million are between five and 11 years and work, by definition, in hazardous circumstances, considering their age and vulnerability.
- Child labour is also common in developed countries. For example, in the United States, more than 230,000 children work in agriculture and 13,000 in sweatshops.

The story of Iqbal

Iqbal was only four when he was sold into slavery. He was a child of bondage, sold by his family to pay for a debt. Though very small and very weak, he was forced to work at a carpet factory for 12 hours a day. He was constantly beaten, verbally abused and chained to his loom for six years. Severe malnutrition and years of cramped immobility in front of a loom stunted his growth.

All this changed in 1992, when Iqbal and some of his friends from the carpet factory stole away to attend a freedom day celebration organized by a group working to help end bonded labour. With their help, Iqbal, too, became free and soon became a well known critic of child labour. His campaign scared many, especially those who used children as bonded labour. In December 1994, Iqbal visited the United States to receive a human rights award. Soon after his return, Iqbal was killed by a gunman hired by factory owners.

Iqbal was just one of over 250 million child labourers worldwide, but his story has inspired many to act for change.

What is Child Labour?

Among adults the term 'child labour' conjures up a particular image: children chained to looms in dark mills and sweatshops, as if in a long nightmarish line running from Lancashire in the 1830s right through to the South Asia of today.

In reality, children do a variety of work in widely divergent conditions. This work takes place along a continuum, from work that is beneficial, promoting or enhancing a child's development without interfering with schooling, recreation and rest to work that is simply destructive or exploitative. There are vast areas of activity between these two poles.

It is at the most destructive end, where children are used as prostitutes or virtual slaves to repay debts incurred by their parents or grandparents or as workers in particularly hazardous conditions, that efforts are focused to stop such abuse.

Who is a child labourer?

The term "child labour" generally refers to any economic activity performed by a person under the age of 15, defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) of the United Nations. On the beneficial side of the continuum, there is "light work" after school or legitimate apprenticeship opportunities, such as helping out in the family business or on the family farm. At the destructive end is employment that is:

- preventing effective school attendance; and
- hazardous to the physical and mental health of the child.

Many countries make a distinction between light and hazardous work, with the minimum age for the former generally being 12, for the latter usually varying between 16 and 18.

Are age limits for work the same in all countries?

Almost everywhere, age limits formally regulate children's activities - when they can leave school; marry; vote; be treated as adults by the criminal-justice system; join the armed forces; and when they can work.

But age limits differ from activity to activity and from country to country. The legal minimum age for all work in Egypt, for example, is 12; in the Philippines 14, in Hong Kong, 15. Peru adopts a variety of standards: the minimum age is 14 in agriculture; 15 in industry; 16 in deep-sea fishing; and 18 for work in ports and seafaring.

Many countries make a distinction between light and hazardous work, with the minimum age for the former generally being 12, for the latter usually varying between 16 and 18. ILO conventions adopt this approach, allowing light work at age 12 or 13, but hazardous work not before 18. The ILO establishes a general minimum age of 15 years, provided 15 is not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling. This is the most widely used yardstick when establishing how many children are currently working around the world.

What is hazardous work?

Most child labour, 71 per cent, is found in agriculture and fishing. The main tasks in agriculture include working with machinery, agrochemicals, picking and loading crops. Hazards may include unsafe machinery, hazardous substances (insecticides, herbicides) heavy lifting and extreme temperatures. In deep sea fishing, children might be diving to depths of up to 60 metres to attach nets to coral reefs, risking exposure to high atmospheric pressure and attacks by carnivorous and poisonous fish.

In manufacturing where 8.3 per cent of child labour is found, items such as glass bangles, matches, fireworks or bricks might be made. Hazards occur in the form of noxious fumes and radiant heat from the molten glass; stepping on or handling hot broken glass; exposure to hazardous chemical mixtures; stuffing cracker powder into fireworks, risking fire and explosion; exposure to silicate, lead and carbon monoxide, carrying excessive weights; and burns from ovens through the processing of clay in the making of bricks.

A legal framework against child labour

Two UN agencies have directed their attention to the prevention of child labour worldwide: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). They have helped define the problems and develop international legal frameworks to correct them. As a result of their work, we now have several international treaties (or Conventions), banning child labour and identifying concrete measures for Governments to take. Once a country ratifies a convention, UN bodies monitor compliance and hold countries accountable for violations.

1919: The first ILO child labour convention, the Minimum Age (**I**ndustry) Convention No. 5, adopted within months of the creation of the **I**nternational Labour Organisation, prohibited the work of children under the age of 14 in industrial establishments.

1930: The ILO Forced Labour Convention No. 29 protected children from forced or compulsory labour, such as victims of trafficking, children in bondage, *like Iqbal*, and those exploited by prostitution and pornography.

1966: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, reemphasizing issues of slavery and forced or compulsory labour, was adopted by the General Assembly, along with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calling for the protection of young people from economic exploitation and work hazardous to their development.

1973: The key instrument of the **I**LO was adopted: Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for admission to employment (15 or the age reached on completion of compulsory schooling)

1989: UN adopted Convention on the Rights of the Child specifying the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and hazardous work, and the refraining of states from recruiting any person under 15 into the armed forces.

1999: ILO unanimously adopts the Convention Concerning the Prohibition and **I**mmediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182. It calls for states to prevent the most damaging child exploitation practices or the worst forms that currently exist.

Are making laws enough to prevent child labour?

Though the United Nations has already created a large number of international conventions, setting legal standards to prohibit the exploitation of child labour, the problem remains widespread. After all, laws mean very little if they are not enforced. Besides, specific measures attacking child labour must be taken at the national level.

According to the ILO, national strategies to address child labour issues should, at minimum, encompass the following five elements:

1. **National plan of action**: Single action or isolated measures against child labour will not have a lasting impact. Actions must be part of an overall national plan.
2. **Research**: To develop effective national (and international) policies and program, extensive research must be undertaken to determine the state of child labour.
3. **Awareness**: Child labour is often viewed as an unavoidable consequence of poverty. Without greater awareness about the extent and exploitative nature of child labour, the conditions for change will not occur.
4. **Broad social alliance**: Government action against child labour often ends with making laws. Initiatives against child labour traditionally come from non-Governmental organisations that have limited resources. Both need to work together. Other segments of civil society – the media, educators, artists and parliamentarians – should also be enlisted in the fight.
5. **Institutional capacity**: To formulate and execute a national policy, an institutional mechanism (such as a ministry or a department) within the Government must be created to monitor enforcement.

Signs of progress

- **Legal framework**: With over 20 international treaties against child labour in place, the world now has a legal framework. What is needed is its implementation at the national level.

- **International action**: ILO created the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 1992. It works toward eliminating child labour by helping developing countries strengthen their capacity to deal with the problem and create their own national action plans. So far it has helped implement more than 1,100 programmes in some 20 countries

- **Joining hands**: The United Nations wants to bring the Governments, factory owners and international donors together to work against child labour. Such initiatives as one between ILO, UNICEF and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association were undertaken to remove underage workers from 2,000 garment factories, place them in school and provide family income supplements. UNICEF also pioneered a policy of not buying any products made by child labour in their operations. Some Governments have followed this example.

- **International solidarity:** Children, youth, concerned citizens and Government leaders in Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America in 1998 took part in a march against child labour. This march travelled through 56 countries, gathered supporters and raised greater awareness, putting new pressure on Governments to ratify conventions on child rights.

- **Student advocacy:** More and more students are getting involved, raising funds to build schools and treatment centers for child workers. For example, Free the Children, a Canadian based student organisation advocating the elimination of child labour, formed by then 13-year old activist, Craig Kielberger, has raised funds to build schools in South Asia. The Kids Campaign to Build A School for Iqbal, a Massachusetts based grass roots student campaign initiated by a school in the United States, has drawn worldwide support to build a school for Pakistani children of bonded labour in honour of Iqbal Masih.

- **Corporate responsibility**: Growing concern has been shown by corporations to address this issue and develop corporate codes of conduct to reduce their numbers of underage employees / provide work to other members of the family or schooling to supplement work. For example, all major soccer ball manufacturers have developed a voluntary programme to eliminate use of children under 14 in factories in Sialkot, Pakistan, where 75 per cent of the world's hand-stitched soccer balls are produced. Supported by ILO, UNICEF and Pakistani manufacturers, a programme was launched to provide schooling for these child workers and instead give their jobs to other family members. In addition, many clothing manufacturers now hire outside companies to inspect working conditions in their factories. While some companies fund their investigators directly, others have agreed to independent monitors from human rights offices not employed by the corporations.

- **Advocacy by trade unions:** In Brazil, trade unions in cooperation with IPEC have managed to secure child labour clauses in contracts with employers in over 88 municipalities in over 8 federal states. In addition, employers have signed pledges to eliminate child labour from production chains of the charcoal, citrus and footwear sectors. Trade unions help by monitoring working conditions, denouncing abuses and reaching large numbers of adult members through education programmes, collective bargaining and campaigning for policy change at all levels.

- **Anti-sweatshop movement:** Campaign by labour rights groups has helped improve working conditions in "sweat shops". In several instances, multinational companies now put pressure on their contractors to ban or reduce child labour.

What are the areas needing attention?

UNICEF recommends the following:

- Immediately end hazardous and exploitative child labour -- including bonded labour, commercial sexual exploitation and work that hampers the child's development.

- Provide free and compulsory education - ensuring that children attend primary education full time until completion.
- Expand legal protection - ensure consistency and implementation in mutually supportive ways.
- Register all children at birth -- to protect the child's right to have evidence of the child's age.
- Extend data collection/ monitoring -- gather and analyse globally comparable child labour data.
- Develop codes of conduct and procurement policies -- Corporations should adopt codes of conduct guaranteeing that neither they nor their subcontractors will employ children in conditions that violate their rights and then abide by those codes.

Ratify ILO Convention No. 182 now!

The ILO Convention No. 182 is considered by many as perhaps the most significant legal instrument to tackle child labour. It defines the worst forms of child labour and asks all Governments to ban them. These are:

- All forms of slavery;
- Child prostitution;
- Using children for illicit activities, especially drug trafficking;
- Work exposing children to grave health and safety hazards.

Once Governments have ratified the Convention they must apply it in law and in practice. Among other things, Governments should:

1. Introduce action programs to remove and prevent the worst forms of child labour;
2. Provide direct assistance for rehabilitation of children and their social integration;
3. Ensure access to free education;
4. Identify children at special risk; and
5. Take account of girls and their special situation.

Governments must also report regularly to the ILO regarding the application of the Convention and be accountable for all allegations of violations.

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UN Briefing Paper on Biodiversity

Overview

"Environmental sustainability is everybody's challenge… Our goal must be to meet the economic needs of the present without compromising the ability of the planet to provide for the needs of future generations."

Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the *Millennium Report*

Vital Statistics

- Species have been disappearing at 50-100 times the natural rate, and this is predicted to rise dramatically.
- Based on current trends, an estimated 34,000 plant and 5,200 animal species – including one in eight of the world's bird species – face extinction.
- About 30 per cent of the main farm animal breeds are currently at high risk of extinction.
- Some 65 million hectares of forest have been lost in the developing world because of over-harvesting.
- Plant-based medicines provide more than 3 billion people with their primary health care.
- Fish catches have increased nearly fivefold during the last half-century, but almost 70 per cent of ocean fisheries are either fully exploited or over-fished.
- More than half the world's coral reefs are currently at risk.

Biodiversity – the web of life

Biological diversity – or biodiversity – is the term given to the variety of life on Earth and the natural patterns it forms. The biodiversity we see today is the fruit of billions of years of evolution, shaped by natural processes and, increasingly, by the influence of humans. It forms the web of life of which we are an integral part and upon which we so fully depend.

This diversity is often understood in terms of the wide variety of plants, animals and micro-organisms. So far, about 1.75 million species have been identified, mostly small creatures such as insects. Scientists reckon that there are actually about 13 million species, though estimates range from 3 to 100 million. Biodiversity also includes genetic differences within each species – for example, between varieties of crops and breeds of livestock. Yet another aspect is the variety of ecosystems such as those that occur in deserts, forests, wetlands, mountains, lakes, rivers and agricultural landscapes. It is the combination of life forms and their interactions with each other and with the rest of the environment that has made Earth a uniquely habitable place for humans.

We are changing life on Earth

Protecting biodiversity is in our self-interest. Nature's products support such diverse industries as agriculture, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, pulp and paper, horticulture, construction and waste treatment. The loss of biodiversity threatens our food supplies, opportunities for recreation and tourism, and sources of wood, medicines and energy. It also interferes with essential ecological functions.

Just consider the many goods and services provided by ecosystems:

- Provision of food, fuel, fibre and shelter and building materials.
- Purification of air and water, detoxification and decomposition of wastes.
- Stabilization and moderation of the Earth's climate.

- Moderation of floods, droughts, temperature extremes and the forces of wind.
- Generation and renewal of soil fertility, including nutrient cycling.
- Pollination of plants, including many crops; control of pests and diseases.
- Maintenance of genetic resources as key inputs to crop varieties and livestock breeds and medicines.
- Cultural and aesthetic benefits.

While the loss of such charismatic animals as pandas, tigers, elephants, rhinos, whales and various species of birds catches our attention, it is the fragmentation, degradation and outright loss of forests, wetlands, coral reefs and other ecosystems that poses the gravest threat to biological diversity.

Our cultural identity is also deeply rooted in our biological environment. Plants and animals are symbols of our world, preserved in flags, sculptures and other images that define us. We draw inspiration just from looking at nature's beauty and power.

While loss of species has always occurred as a natural phenomenon, the pace of extinction has accelerated dramatically as a result of human activity. We are creating the greatest extinction crisis since the natural disaster that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. These extinctions are irreversible and, given our dependence on food crops, medicines and other biological resources, pose a threat to our own well-being.

An Agreement for Action

While concern for the environment is constant in history, heightened concern about environmental destruction and loss of species and ecosystems in the 1970s led to concerted international action. In 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm) led to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). In the following years, Governments, often under UNEP auspices, signed a number of regional and international agreements to tackle specific issues, such as protecting wetlands and migratory species and regulating the international trade in endangered species.

Twenty years later, in 1992, the largest-ever meeting of world leaders took place at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. An historic set of agreements was signed at the "Earth Summit", including two binding agreements, the Convention on Climate Change, which targets industrial and other emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, the first global agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Over 150 Governments signed the treaty at the Rio Conference, and since then more than 175 countries have ratified it.

The Convention has three main goals:

- the conservation of biodiversity;
- sustainable use of the components of biodiversity; and
- sharing the benefits arising from the commercial and other utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way.

The Convention recognizes – for the first time – that the conservation of biological diversity is "a common concern of humankind" and is an integral part of the development process. It also covers the rapidly expanding field of biotechnology, addressing technology development and transfer, benefit sharing and biosafety. The Convention also offers decision-makers guidance based on the precautionary principle that where there is a threat of significant reduction or loss of biological diversity, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to avoid or minimize such a threat.

Some of the many issues dealt with under the Convention include:

- Measures and incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.
- Regulated access to genetic resources.
- Access to and transfer of technology, including biotechnology.
- Technical and scientific cooperation.
- Impact assessment.
- Education and public awareness.
- Provision of financial resources.
- National reporting on efforts to implement treaty commitments.

National Action

The Convention on Biological Diversity, as an international treaty, identifies a common problem, sets overall goals and policies and general obligations, and organizes technical and financial cooperation. However, the responsibility for achieving its goals rests largely with the countries themselves. At the national level, private companies, landowners, fishermen and farmers take most of the actions that affect biodiversity. Governments need to provide the critical role of leadership, particularly by setting rules that guide the use of natural resources, and by protecting biodiversity where they have direct control over the land and water.

Under the Convention, Governments are required to develop national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and to integrate these into broader national plans for environment and development. This is particularly important for such sectors as forestry, agriculture, fisheries, energy, transportation and urban planning.

Other treaty commitments include:

- Identifying and monitoring the important components of biodiversity that needs to be conserved and used sustainably.
- Establishing protected areas to conserve biodiversity while promoting environmentally sound development around these areas.
- Rehabilitating and restoring degraded ecosystems and promoting the recovery of threatened species in collaboration with local residents.
- Respecting, preserving and maintaining traditional knowledge of the sustainable use of biological diversity with the involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Preventing the introduction of, controlling and eradicating alien species that could threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.
- Controlling the risks posed by organisms modified by biotechnology.
- Promoting public participation, and educating people and raising awareness about the importance of biological diversity and the need to conserve it.
- Reporting on how each country is meeting its biodiversity goals.

Taking action

The conservation of each country's biodiversity can be achieved in various ways. "In-situ" conservation – the primary means of conservation – focuses on conserving genes, species and ecosystems in their natural surroundings, for example by establishing protected areas, rehabilitating degraded ecosystems, and

adopting legislation to protect threatened species. "Ex- situ" conservation uses zoos, botanical gardens and gene banks to conserve species. There are many examples of country-level initiatives to integrate the objectives of conservation and sustainable use:

- In 1994, Uganda adopted a programme under which protected wildlife areas shared part of their tourism revenues with local people – an approach now being used in several African countries.
- Costa Rica's 1996 Forestry Law includes provisions to compensate private landowners and forest managers who maintain or increase the area of forest within their properties.
- Through weekly "farmer field schools", some 2 million rice farmers in several Asian countries have enhanced their understanding of the tropical rice ecosystem – including the interactions between insect pests of rice, their natural enemies, fish farmed in the rice paddies, and the crop itself – in order to improve their crop management practices. As a result, they have increased their crop yields, while at the same time almost eliminating insecticide use.
- Clayoquot Sound on the western coast of Vancouver Island, Canada, encompasses forests and marine and coastal systems. The establishment of adaptive management to implement the ecosystem approach at the local level is currently under development with the involvement of indigenous communities, with a view to ensuring rational use of the forest and marine resources.

The Convention's success depends on the combined efforts of the world's nations. The responsibility to implement the Convention lies with the individual countries and, to a large extent, compliance will depend on informed self-interest and peer pressure from other countries and from public opinion. The Convention Secretariat in Montreal regularly organizes global and regional meetings – where Governments, nongovernmental organizations, the academic and scientific communities, the private sector and other interested groups or individuals share ideas and compare strategies.

Sharing the benefits of genetic resources

An important part of the biodiversity debate involves access to and sharing of the benefits arising out of the commercial and other use of genetic material, such as pharmaceutical products. The treaty recognizes a country's sovereignty over its genetic resources, and provides that access to valuable biological resources be carried out on "mutually agreed terms" and subject to the "prior informed consent" of the country of origin. When a micro-organism, plant or animal is used for a commercial application, the country from which it came has the right to benefit through cash, samples of what is collected, the participation or training of national researchers, the transfer of biotechnology equipment and know-how, and shares of any profits. Work has begun to translate this concept into reality and there are already examples of benefit-sharing arrangements, such as:

- In 1995, the Philippines required bio-prospectors to get "prior informed consent" from both the Government and local peoples.
- Costa Rica's National Institute of Biodiversity (INBIO) signed a historic bio-prospecting agreement with a major drug company to receive funds and share in benefits from biological materials that are commercialized.

The Biosafety Protocol

Since the domestication of the first crops and farm animals, we have altered their genetic makeup through selective breeding and cross-fertilization. The results have been greater agricultural productivity and improved human nutrition.

In recent years, advances in biotechnology techniques have enabled us to cross the species barrier by transferring genes from one species to another. We now have transgenic plants, such as tomatoes and strawberries that have been modified to protect the plants from frost. Some varieties of potato and corn have received genes from a bacterium that enables them to produce their own insecticide. Other plants have been modified to tolerate herbicides sprayed to kill weeds. Living Modified Organisms (LMOs) are becoming part of an increasing number of products, including foods and food additives, beverages, drugs, adhesives, and fuels. Agricultural and pharmaceutical LMOs have rapidly become a multi-billion-dollar global industry.

Biotechnology is being promoted as a better way to grow crops and produce medicines, but it has raised concerns about potential side effects on human health and the environment. In some countries, genetically altered agricultural products have been sold without much debate, while in others, there have been vocal protests against their use, particularly when they are sold without being identified as genetically modified.

In response to these concerns, Governments negotiated a subsidiary agreement to the Convention to address the potential risks posed by cross-border trade and accidental releases of LMOs. Adopted in January 2000, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety allows Governments to signal whether or not they are willing to accept imports of agricultural commodities that include LMOs by communicating their decision to the world community via a Biosafety Clearing House, a mechanism set up to facilitate the exchange of information on, and experience with, LMOs. In addition, commodities that may contain LMOs are to be clearly labelled as such when being exported.

Exporters must also provide detailed information to each importing country in advance of the first shipment of seeds, live fish and other LMOs that are to be intentionally introduced into the environment, and the importer must then authorize the shipment. The aim is to ensure that recipient countries have both the opportunity and the capacity to assess any risks involving the products of modern biotechnology. The Protocol will enter into force after it has been ratified by 50 Governments.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his *Millennium Report* has proposed convening a high-level global policy network to address these and related controversies concerning the risks and opportunities associated with the increased use of biotechnology and bioengineering.

A new initiative for assessing ecosystems

During the past three decades we have become increasingly aware that the natural ecosystems on which human life depends are under threat. But we still lack detailed knowledge of the extent of the damage – or its causes. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his *Millennium Report*, has underscored the need to develop a truly comprehensive global evaluation of the condition of the five major ecosystems: forests, freshwater systems, grasslands, coastal areas and agroecosystems. This proposed the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment seeks to produce just such an evaluation.

An initiative of the World Resources Institute, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme, among others, will draw on and collate existing sources of data and promote new research to fill the missing knowledge gaps.

The Secretary-General has called on the Member States to help provide the necessary financial support for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and to become actively engaged in it. Both developed and developing country Governments will benefit from the research work. The private sector will also benefit by being able to make more informed forecasts. And it will provide civil society with the information they need to hold corporations and Governments accountable for meeting their environmental obligations.

Joining hands

While Governments should play a leadership role, other parts of society need to be actively involved. After all, it is the choices and actions of billions of individuals that will determine whether or not biodiversity is conserved and used sustainably.

In an era when economics is a dominant force in world affairs, it is more important than ever to have business willingly involved in environmental protection and the sustainable use of nature. Fortunately, a growing number of companies have found ways to make a profit while reducing their environmental impacts, thus increasing goodwill from their business partners, employees and consumers.

Local communities play a key role since they are the true "managers" of the ecosystems in which they live. Many projects have been successfully developed in recent years involving the participation of local and indigenous communities in the sustainable management of biodiversity.

Finally, the ultimate decision-maker for biodiversity is the **individual citizen**. The small choices that individuals make add up to a large impact because it is personal consumption that drives development, which in turn uses and pollutes nature. By carefully choosing the products they buy and the government policies that they support, the general public can begin to steer the world towards sustainable development. Governments, companies and others have a responsibility to lead and inform the public, but, finally, it is individual choices, made billions of times a day, that count the most.

On a practical level, one can join others in:

1. Beautifying school grounds and parks, using local plant species.
2. Reclaiming abandoned lots into community gardens; adopting a local park.
3. Educating one another about local species of animals and plants.
4. Forming wildlife and gardening organizations, or joining existing ones.

UN Briefing Paper on Poverty

Overview

"I call on the international community at the highest level ... to adopt the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and so lifting more than 1 billion people out of it, by 2015."

Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the *Millenium Report*

Vital Statistics

- More than 2.8 billion people, close to half the world's population, live on less than the equivalent of $2/day. More than 1.2 billion people, or about 20 per cent of the world population, live on less than the equivalent of $1/day.
- South Asia has the largest number of poor people (522 million of whom live on less than the equivalent of $1/day). Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people who are poor, with poverty affecting 46.3 per cent or close to half of the regions' population.
- Nearly 1 billion people are illiterate; more than 1 billion people do not have access to safe water; some 840 million people go hungry or face food insecurity; about one-third of all children under five suffer from malnutrition.
- The estimated cost of providing universal access to basic social services and transfers to alleviate income poverty is $80 billion, which is less than 0.5 per cent of global income.
- The top fifth (20 per cent) of the world's people who live in the highest income countries have access to 86 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP). The bottom fifth, in the poorest countries, has about one per cent.
- The assets of the world's three richest men exceed the combined Gross Domestic Products of the world's 48 poorest countries.

The poverty trap

Until recently, poverty was understood largely in terms of income—or a lack of one. To be poor meant that one could not afford the cost of providing a proper diet or home. But poverty is about more than a shortfall in income or calorie intake. It is about the denial of opportunities and choices that are widely regarded as essential to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others.

People don't live in the squalor of the slums, squatter communities, low-rent districts or beside garbage dumps because they want to. They have no other choice. Possessing little money, little education, few skills for the marketplace and a multitude of health problems, nearly half of all the people in the world live in poverty, without much opportunity to improve their lives.

Poverty has multiple dimensions, and many of them are inter-related, making for a vicious cycle:

- Poor health, disease and disability can prevent people from working full time, limiting their income and their ability to work to move out of poverty. Health problems for the breadwinner mean income problems, but an illness in the family can ruin an entire household. Not only is income lost, but expenses go up due to the need for medicines and health care and the need for family members to care for the sick person.
- Those with less formal education tend to be disproportionately represented in the ranks of the poor, perhaps because they are more likely to hold poorly paid jobs or to be unemployed. Poor families often

face enormous difficulties in keeping their children in school due to the costs, as well as to the pressure to have as many household members, including children, out working. The next generation, being poorly educated, could in turn end up holding similar poorly paid jobs.

- Women with children constitute the majority of the poor in many countries. Where women can move out of poverty their children appear to face a brighter future, but where their chances are limited, poverty is transmitted inter-generationally. In many cases, girls have higher dropout rates as they are the first to be pulled out of school to help with household work and childcare. Yet, experience has shown that investment in girls' and women's education not only makes for greater equity but also tends to translate directly into better nutrition for the family, better health care, declining fertility and potentially greater economic empowerment.

- Poverty has been identified as a major factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS in many parts of Africa. From simply being a cause of individual suffering, HIV/AIDS has become a major economic and social crisis for entire economies, as it affects the economically productive sections of society and makes it harder to eradicate poverty. It is estimated that at the end of 1999, nearly 34 million people worldwide were infected with HIV and by that by 2010 in Africa alone there will be 40 million orphans from the epidemic.

- As United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan points out in his *Millennium Report*, "poor countries -- especially those with significant inequality between ethnic and religious communities -- are far more likely to be embroiled in conflicts than rich ones." In fact, twenty of the world's 38 poorest countries are either in the middle of an armed conflict or have recently emerged from it, according to other UN sources.

The roots of poverty

Poverty exists in many of the industrialized countries and characterizes whole regions of the developing world. The roots of poverty lie in a tangled web of local situations combined with national and international circumstances. It is the product of economic processes occurring at a variety of levels, as well as a range of particular social and economic conditions that appear to structure the possibilities of the individual.

Consider the following:

Some countries have to pay more to finance their debt than they can spend on health and education: An obligation to repay debt incurred by past regimes—sometimes due to bad advice from developed countries, sometimes due to corrupt regimes—has severely curtailed the ability of many countries' efforts to break the poverty cycle. Sub-Saharan Africa pays over 14 per cent of export revenue in debt service. South Asia, another very poor region, pays 22 per cent. The Latin American and the Caribbean region must devote almost one-third of its export revenue to debt servicing.

- In recent years, Tanzania's debt service payments have been nine times its expenditure on primary health care, and four times as much as that spent on primary education.

- The value of Honduras's debt is 208 per cent of its exports; its debt service accounts for 55 per cent of Government expenditures.

In 1999, the IMF and the World Bank adopted the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, aimed at providing debt relief to 41 heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs). The plan is expected to relieve up to 70 per cent of the approximately $170 billion debt that these countries owe. But so far, few countries have been able to qualify for relief and debt servicing has not always been sustainable. i.e. even after debt relief, the cost of servicing the debt has been greater than the amount spent on basic health and education, leave alone allowing for increased investment levels necessary for economic growth.

Trade-related factors and structural adjustment policies have had unfavourable effects: Many developing countries must rely on exporting unprocessed agricultural commodities to earn income overseas, but the prices of these agricultural products have been relatively unfavourable and have continued to fall. At the same time, world market prices for fuel and for manufactured and processed goods have risen. Furthermore, many

developed countries have imposed steep trade restrictions on agricultural products from developing countries, making it harder for them to sell their goods. With depressed earnings, many countries have been unable to break out of the poverty cycle through a focus on exports. At the same time, depressed export prices but a rising import bill made for balance of payment problems, a rise in borrowing and in the current context, higher debt levels. Some estimates of the loss on account of declining prices in the year 1992, find it to be higher than the total aid budget of the OECD for that year ($65 billion compared to $58 billion). The situation was often compounded by structural adjustment policies which encouraged depreciation of the currencies.

- Indonesia, once self sufficient in food, more recently had come to depend on imported food – 20 million tonnes of rice a year. This had disastrous consequences in the late 1990s, when in the wake of the Asian crisis, the currency was severely devalued (500%) and local conditions made for inadequate supplies of domestically produced food. The price of imported rice skyrocketed and according to one estimate, more than 100 million Indonesians joined the ranks of the poor as a consequence.

Owning few assets, the poor have little access to capital or credit: In many countries, a majority depend upon agriculture and inadequate access to land is one of the primary causes of rural poverty. Most of the world's poor either own no land or own land not worth owning. The land they live on is generally of poor quality for farming, and often subject to damage from storms and other natural disasters. Or they are subject to century-old land-owning systems that perpetuate an almost feudal-like system of land tenure, such as in the *hacienda* system in the Philippines. Caught in a trap between marginal incomes and little chance to obtain funds for improvements, there is little opportunity for advancement. Land reforms, public investment in rural infrastructure, technology and marketing services along with increased credit and price stability are necessary to remove the multiple constraints restricting the possibilities of the rural poor.

Lack of sufficient employment opportunities: Escaping the poverty of the rural areas, many people head toward the cities – in their own and in foreign countries – to find a job. But in most countries, there aren't enough decent jobs—the kind that pays a living wage—to go around. Poor people then tend to try to eke out a living at the margins—in what has become known as the informal sector. The pressure on this sector is heightened with labour displacing technical change, declining growth of the economy and formal sectors, and by budget cuts. However, people in the informal sector barely scrape by, and enjoy little or no social protection. Globally, it is estimated that of a workforce of a three billion people, 140 million are unemployed, and between a quarter and a third are underemployed.

Inadequate infrastructure and lack of access to basic social services in relation to education, health and reproductive health: Often living in areas that have no sewage or clean water, poor people are much more susceptible to illness and disease. They also often lack the mean to obtain the health care they need. At the same time, people living in poorer areas lack information on health and reproductive health issues, and consequently, are often uninformed on measures they can take to avoid risks.

Social exclusion: There are biases and prejudices in every country, and in some cases policies that exclude people of a certain race, religion, or sex from attaining positions of power or from getting good jobs. Often the bias has no basis in the law but is active nevertheless as in the case of gender discrimination or marginalisation of indigenous peoples. In such cases, affirmative action policies may need to be adopted for a period of time to improve the conditions of the excluded and to make for more equitable access to job opportunities.

Re-defining poverty

In the early days of the UN, poverty was measured in terms of the ability to meet a minimum number of calories or to have a minimum level of income to satisfy needs (income poverty). A "poverty line" defined this minimum level and the poor constituted the actual number of people whose incomes or calorie intake is less than this. A commonly used measure for purposes of international comparisons of income poverty is the $1 or $2 per day measure (purchasing power equivalent to $1 or $2 in the United States in 1993). There have been changes in thinking as to how to measure poverty with attempts at incorporating some of its various dimensions, as well as its circular connections that we talked about earlier.

In the 1970s the International Labour Organization (ILO) broadened the focus, and poverty came to be seen as the inability to meet basic needs. In the 1980s and 90s, the concept underwent further change by considering non-monetary aspects such as isolation, powerlessness, vulnerability and lack of security, as well as an individual's capacity and capability to experience well being.

Inspired by the work of Amartya Sen, a world famous economist who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1999, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced measures for progress and for deprivation that focus on poverty from a human development perspective. It now views poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life. The human poverty index (HPI) constructed for each country provides a country-by-country picture of deprivation in terms of longevity, education and economic factors. Considering poverty in a different way leads to new observations. For example, an elevated level of the United States population experiences acute "human poverty" despite its high average income levels.

A strategy to fight poverty

In programmes aimed at tackling poverty, specific goals have been created and efforts concentrated or focused on meeting those targeted goals. Through this approach there has been some progress in poverty reduction since 1970, although it has not been spread equally over the different parts of the world. Most of the decline in poverty took place in East Asia, notably in China. In developing countries, infant mortality was cut by more than 40% and adult illiteracy by 50%. A newborn baby can expect to live 10 years longer, and combined net primary and secondary school enrolment has increased by nearly 50%. But there have also been reversals over the last few years, and huge problems remain.

Based on the experience of the past years, there is now a growing consensus among national and international policy makers on what works and what does not in fighting poverty. Policies that are part of the successful poverty reduction package of different countries include the following:

Inclusive and broad-based economic growth: Economic growth is one of the most important factors in helping to reduce poverty, but it is not sufficient. The effectiveness of economic growth in reducing poverty depends upon the structure of growth, existing levels of inequality and on how the benefits of growth are distributed.

Inequality in income is a function of the distribution of economic assets (land, industrial and financial capital), and so-called "human capital" in the form of education and skills. Governments need to work on creating more equity in the distribution of income and assets.

The effectiveness of growth in reducing poverty also depends on the extent of growth and employment opportunities created, and whether it takes place in areas and sectors where the poor are located. In most cases, with the exception of the South East Asian countries (Republic of Korea, Taiwan Province of China, Malaysia, etc.) in their high growth phase, there has not been sufficient employment generation in the formal sector of the economy. Attention now needs to be paid to the informal sector of the economy.

- According to the Secretary-General's *Millennium Report*, a 1 per cent increase in a country's gross domestic product can bring about an increase in the incomes of the poorest 20 per cent of the population. But this cannot happen where inequalities in society do not permit growth to benefit the poor.
- China is an example of what could be achieved by rapid economic growth built on investment in people: the gap in average income between China and the rest of the world has decreased by over 50 % compared to 40 years ago.

However, prospects for growth in the world economy currently are rather bleak. The world economy appears to be growing too slowly to create enough jobs or to make a real impact on poverty. Even the industrialized countries appear to be stuck with high unemployment, a major cause of poverty. This suggests that economies cannot rely on growth to pull them out of poverty, but must take specific steps to target poverty reduction directly.

Growth, if it is achieved at the cost of environmental degradation, can also undermine the livelihoods of the poor who are dependent upon these resources. Hence, development policies need to be sensitive to the social and economic environments of the poor.

- After the 1992 Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), the Philippines was the first country to establish a council for sustainable development with partners from Government, civil society and private business. Key businesses worked to implement sustainable development initiatives – reusing by-products, controlling pollution levels and including environmental provisions in collective bargaining agreements with labour unions.

Realizing Globalization's Potential: The phenomenon of large corporations operating in many countries, in the hands of private individuals who make decisions about opening/closing and reorganizing operations that affect the lives of many people, is a reality of this new millennium. The process called globalization and increased economic integration offer countries many positive market and employment opportunities. But there are also risks and problems associated with it. The poor in poor countries at this time are often victims of this process. (See *Briefing Paper on Globalization* for a more comprehensive discussion of its pros and cons.) Countries need to prepare themselves for globalization by:

- building up the competitive advantage of their industries.
- addressing the problems of those who will lose out from global competition; and
- improving technology and increasing productivity so as to avoid competing on the basis of low wages, poorly regulated working conditions and exploitation of the environment.

Even after they have done all this, nothing is guaranteed. Markets may be saturated and despite globalization, many industrialized countries also still protect their markets with tariffs and quotas and discriminate against the products of developing countries. Better trade policies, fairer rules and terms that allow poor countries to enter developed country markets need to be put in place. The United Nations Secretary-General has urged all industrialized countries to consider granting duty-free and quota-free access for essentially all exports from the least developed countries. Governments and international agencies also need to work on preparing countries assisting them in developing regulatory policies that will soften the negative impact of volatile financial flows.

Promoting good governance, accountability and participation: Honest and fair government practices, free of corruption; decision making open to the input of the public; and follow-up actions in accordance with decisions made, are measures needed to eradicate poverty. Of prime importance are:

- good governance - the conduct of a government that is honest and fair; see briefing on governance
- transparency :- decision making can be open to public input and scrutiny; and
- accountability - ensuring that follow-up actions are in accordance with decisions openly arrived at, and that they can help ensure that the benefits of growth and poverty reduction policies actually reach the poor.

Key in bringing this about is the role that civil society can play, as is the process of allowing and encouraging the participation of the poor themselves in the making of policies, especially those that affect them directly. There is a clear link between empowering the poor and overcoming poverty. According to the UNDP Poverty Report 2000:

- In Andhra Pradesh, India, women organized themselves into self-help groups (SHG), which mobilized community savings, created opportunities for income generation for women via the increased access to credit and through a focus on skill formation and improved the status of women. The groups mobilized the community to make recommendations about loan priorities, and also tried to reduce or eliminate child labor and improve the condition of girls.

- Similarly, in Cambodia, local communities developed their own anti-poverty projects. Villagers brainstormed about their problems, they asked questions of officials and expressed their opinions about how best to do things.
- In Bulgaria, self-governing civic organizations increasingly provided vocational training, fostering new businesses, protecting the environment and resolving conflicts.

Provision of basic services and budgetary policies: The way in which public resources are mobilized and spent determines the kind of impact that it has on poverty. A fair and equitable public budgetary policy (relating to expenditure, taxation and government fiscal priorities) can also help to promote economic growth, reduce inequality and make development more pro-poor. Examples of success in pro-poor and participatory budgetary policies can be found in India, Brazil and Uganda.

Bringing about improvements in the quality of life, or reducing the level of deprivation, is a function not only of the resources available but also of the economic and social priorities and policies of government. Reducing the impact of the various dimensions of poverty is possible, even at low levels of income. Government spending on health and education, in combination with other policies that promote equitable growth, is particularly important in addressing poverty. Such social provisioning policies can help:

- reduce the experience of deprivation and poverty;
- increase peoples' productive capacities and possibilities; and
- reduce the amount that government must spend on dealing with the impacts of health or other crises and deprivation.

Countries such as Costa Rica, Cuba, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam and the state of Kerala in India have secured better health conditions, greater reductions in mortality and improvements in literacy over others with similar or greater economic resources. Viet Nam, with a per capita income of $350, has a lower infant mortality (31 as compared to 60 per 1,000 live births) and higher adult literacy (92.9% as compared to 84.6%) than South Africa, which has a per-capita income of $3,310.

Mauritius, a small island nation in the Indian Ocean cut its military budget and invested heavily in health and education. Today, all Mauritians have access to sanitation, 98 per cent to safe water and 97 per cent of births are attended by skilled health staff.

Achieving Gender Equity: More women than men live in absolute poverty. Economic crises have often hit them harder. Few of them tend to get fewer skilled jobs, and in situations of growing unemployment they are often the first to lose their jobs. This increases their vulnerability and makes them more susceptible to falling into poverty, a phenomenon referred to as the feminization of poverty.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, experience has shown that investment in girls' and women's education translates directly into better nutrition for the family, better health care and declining fertility. It has also been widely acknowledged that poverty is unlikely to be overcome without specific immediate and sustained attention to girls' education and women's empowerment. According to one estimate, closing the gender gap in education adds 0.5 percentage points to annual growth in GNP per capita.

National and International targets for poverty reduction: Throughout the 1990s, a series of international conferences on global development issues was held, with the eradication of poverty as a central goal. The World Summit for Social Development in 1995 expanded the context of poverty eradication to include such factors as:

- access to basic services
- productive employment
- sustainable livelihoods

- sense of human security
- reduction of inequalities
- elimination of discrimination
- participation in the life of the community.

At the summit, 117 nations pledged that their countries would take steps to eradicate poverty. Following the summit, countries were expected to establish national targets and policies to eradicate poverty.

The five-year follow-up review conference in Geneva in June 2000 recognized that "Since the Summit, globalization has presented new challenges for the fulfillment of the commitments made and the realization of the goals of the Summit … The growing interdependence of nations, which has caused economic shocks to be transmitted across national borders, as well as increased inequality, highlights weaknesses in current international and national institutional arrangements and economic and social policies, and reinforces the importance of strengthening them through appropriate reforms."

As of now, it appears that with the slow growth in the world economy, and with countries struggling to revive economic growth, there is no prospect for their reaching their poverty targets any time soon.

Targets for a new millennium: In his Millennium Report, Secretary-General Kofi Annan lists ensuring freedom from want as the top-most priority facing humanity today. "We must spare no effort to free our fellow men and women from the abject and dehumanizing poverty," he declares. In the report, he identifies the following seven goals:

- halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day;
- halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger;
- halving the proportion of people who are unable to obtain safe drinking water;
- providing primary education to all girls and boys on an equal basis;
- halting—or even reversing—the spread of HIV/AIDS and the scourge of malaria;
- reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters and child mortality by two-thirds; and
- improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

But how are such goals to be achieved?

The Secretary-General proposes very specific actions that affluent Governments should undertake:

- Grant free access to their markets for goods produced in poorer countries;
- Write off foreign debts;
- Grant more generous development assistance; and
- Work with pharmaceutical companies to develop an effective and affordable vaccine against HIV.

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UN Briefing Paper on Human rights

Overview

"As Secretary General I have made human rights a priority in every programme the United Nations launches and in every mission we embark upon. I have done so because the promotion and defence of human rights is at the heart of every aspect of our work and every article of our Charter. Above all, I believe human rights are at the core of our sacred bond with the peoples of the United Nations.

Kofi Annan, "The Question of Intervention," 1999

Vital Statistics

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted unanimously in 1948 and translated into over 300 national and local languages, is the best known and most cited human rights document in the world.
- More than 80 international human rights instruments have been created since then.
- The office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN official with principal responsibility for human rights activities, receives reports of over 200,000 violations per year.
- A statute creating an International Criminal Court was adopted. Over 100 Member States signed it.
- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has set up a fax hot line for receiving complaints of violations of human rights. The fax number in Geneva is 41-22-917-9018.

A small step…

There are some 200,000 Guarani Indians living in Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. For many years, schools in these countries taught only in Spanish and did not allow the use of Indian languages. Guarani children were unable to cope with the new language and lagged behind. Many thought they were stupid and backward. Then in 1989, two United Nations agencies, UNICEF and UNESCO, started a new school programme for the Guarani children, allowing them to learn two languages, Spanish and Guarani.

The initiative soon paid off. Guarani children began getting higher grades in all subjects. As a result, fewer children left schools before finishing. Thanks to the United Nations, the Guarani Indians will no longer be punished for speaking their own language.

...toward a giant leap

Now, more than a decade later, the world's indigenous peoples, including the American Indians, have won another significant recognition. For the first time, the United Nations has established a permanent forum to discuss issues important to the indigenous peoples. This forum, which will be a sub-group of the UN's Economic and Social Council, will deal with human rights, environmental, educational and development issues affecting indigenous people around the world.

"It is an exhilarating, historic day," said a spokesman for the indigenous peoples. This was another important step for the United Nations in its quest for establishing universal recognition of all rights for all peoples, a principle enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The explanation and articulation of the rights defined by the Universal Declaration has now achieved virtually universal acceptance. Today the Universal Declaration, translated into over 300 national and local languages, is the best-known and most cited human rights document in the world. It has served as a model for numerous international treaties and declarations as well as the constitutions and laws of many countries. The Declaration has inspired more than 80 international human rights instruments, which together constitute a comprehensive system of legally binding treaties for the promotion and protection of human rights.

There is now international recognition that respect for human rights includes:

- the right of political choice;
- the freedom of association;
- the freedom of opinion and expression;
- the right to express and enjoy one's own culture;
- the right to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention;
- the right to an adequate standard of living, including health, housing and food;
- the right to be free; and
- the right to work.

During the past five and a half decades, the list of rights clarified and articulated by International Law has expanded dramatically to include new issues, such as the right to development, capital punishment, children in armed conflicts, compensation of victims, disability, discrimination based on HIV/AIDS, enforced or involuntary disappearances, environment, impunity, indigenous peoples, migrant workers, peacekeeping operations, sale of children, terrorism, human rights defenders, war crimes and many more.

But assuring human rights for all people remains a daunting challenge, especially given the impunity with which they continue to be violated in all parts of the world. In a survey conducted in 1999, the world's largest ever public opinion poll survey conducted by Gallup International, respondents showed widespread dissatisfaction with the level of respect for human rights. In one region, fewer than one in 10 citizens believed that human rights were being fully respected, while one-third believed they were not observed at all. Discrimination by race and gender were commonly expressed concerns.

The building blocks

The major advances in human rights and human development came after the horrors of the Second World War. The 1945 Charter of the United Nations, followed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, ushered in a new era of international commitment to human freedoms. Among other things, they:

- emphasized the universality of rights, centered on the equality of all people;
- recognized the realization of human rights as a collective goal of humanity;
- identified a comprehensive range of all rights -- civil, political, economic, social and cultural -- for all people;
- created an international system for promoting the realization of human rights with institutions to set standards, establish international laws and monitor performance (but without powers of enforcement); and
- established the State's accountability for its human rights obligations and commitments under international law.

Work on international human rights legislation continued. But polarized by the cold war, the rhetoric of human rights was often reduced to a weapon in official propaganda for geopolitical interests. The West emphasized civil and political rights, pointing the finger at socialist countries for denying these rights. The socialist (and many developing) countries emphasized economic and social rights, criticizing the richest Western countries for their failure to secure these rights for all citizens. In the 1960s this led to two separate covenants -- one for civil and political rights; the other for economic, social and cultural rights.

The 1980s brought a strong renewal of international interest and action, propelled by a surge of activity by civil society on issues of democracy, women's and children's rights, rights of indigenous peoples and other issues. The two most notable achievements in these areas were: the Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Another milestone was the adoption in 1984 of the Convention against Torture and Other Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which declared torture as an international crime.

In 1986 the Declaration on the Right to Development was adopted. And further strong commitments were made at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. This was followed by the creation of the position of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the growing advocacy for rights internationally and nationally. The late 1990s and the turn of the millennium brought other exciting developments:

- The 1998 Rome Statute to establish the International Criminal Court opened up possibility for prosecuting those responsible for crimes against humanity. By April 2000 nearly 100 countries signed it.
- Establishment of the International Tribunals for former Yugoslavia (1993) and for Rwanda (1994) is helping enforce individual accountability for war crimes.
- The optional protocol to CEDAW (1999) has opened the way for individuals to submit claims of violations of women's rights.
- Two new Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child have strengthened the landmark 1989 treaty: one on child soldiers, the other on sale of children.
- Useful stock taking exercises regarding government programs in women' rights and social development was carried out in the Beijing+5 and Coppenhagen+5 review conferences.
- The appointment of three new Special Rapporteurs -- on the right to adequate housing, the right to food and the issue of globalization and its impact on the full enjoyment of all human rights -- will help focus on the emerging human rights issues.

Principal human rights instruments

- **International Bill of rights**: The International Bill of Rights consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two optional protocols and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCER). UDHR is a Declaration adopted by the General Assembly and hence requires no ratification; ICCPR has been ratified by 144 countries and ICESCER by 142 countries.
- **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**: Adopted in 1965 and entered into force in 1969, it deals with a particular kind of discrimination – that based on race, colour, descent or national ethnic origin. Ratification: 156 countries.
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).** Adopted in 1979 and entered into force in 1981, this represents the first comprehensive, legally binding international instrument prohibiting discrimination against women and obligating Governments to take affirmative action to advance gender equality. Ratification: 165.
- **Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment.** Adopted in 1984 and entered into force in 1989, the Convention lays out the steps to be taken by Governments to prevent torture and other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment. Ratification: 119 countries.
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child**. Adopted in 1989 and entered into force in 1991, the Convention recognizes the need for specific attention to protecting and promoting the rights of children. Ratification: 191 countries.

How is compliance monitored once a country ratifies a Convention?

Within each of the six major human rights treaties there is a provision to set up a treaty body to monitor compliance. This treaty body examines report of States which have ratified the treaty. Each year they engage in dialogue with approximately 60 national Governments and issue concluding observations and suggestions by independent experts for improvement. Some of these bodies are:

- The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- The Committee on the Rights of the Child
- The Committee against Torture
- The Human Rights Committee
- The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

In addition, mechanisms have been set up beyond the Conventions to address special issues. Such mechanisms include the creation of:

- United Nations Special Rapporteurs
- Special Representatives of the Secretary-General
- Experts
- Working Groups

Human rights and human security

In the 1990s, the world witnessed some of the worst violations of human rights. In country after country, innocent civilians became targets of unprecedented terror, often led by armed groups who demonstrated scant regard for human life and human values. In some cases, the Governments were unable to protect their own civilians; in others, the Governments themselves took part in attacking civilians, especially minority ethnic groups. From Angola and Sierra Leone to Bosnia and Kosovo to East Timor, millions have been killed; over 30 million have been displaced; countless men, women and children have been denied some of the most fundamental human rights.

What should be done when faced with such humanitarian crises?

Secretary-General Kofi Annan says the United Nations – and the international community – cannot accept a situation where people are brutalized behind national boundaries. "A United Nations that will not stand up for human rights is a United Nations that cannot stand up for itself. We know where our mission for human rights begins and ends: with the individual and his or her universal and inalienable rights -- to speak, to act, to grow, to learn and to live according to his or her own conscience," he said.

To address the new humanitarian challenges, in a report to the Security Council submitted in September 1999, the Secretary-General proposed specific recommendations for consideration by the Member States, including:

- **Ratification and implementation of international instruments**: He urged Member States to ratify the major instruments of international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law, and to adhere to them.
- **Accountability for war crimes**: When Governments or groups fail to comply with such international humanitarian law, enforcement measures should be considered. He asked the Member States to ratify the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

- **Minimum age of recruitment in the armed forces**: He asked the Member States to support raising the minimum age for recruitment in the armed forces to 18.
- **Intervention in cases of systematic violations of international law**: He asked the Member States to consider appropriate enforcement action in the face of massive and ongoing abuses.

Human rights and development

"Poverty limits human freedoms and deprives a person of dignity," says the *2000 Human Development Report* published the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This statement only re-emphasized what has already been clearly stated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Declaration on the Right to Development (1986) and the Vienna Declaration adopted at the 1993 Human Rights Conference.

To quote the General Assembly Declaration on Development, "the human person is the central subject of the development process and …development policy should therefore make the human being the main participant and beneficiary of development." Yet, at a time of unprecedented economic growth, more than a billion people live in abject poverty; almost 800 million people suffer from malnutrition, 140 million school age children do not go to school; and 900 million adults are illiterate. Of a total world labour force of some 3 billion, 140 million workers are out of work altogether, and a quarter to a third are underemployed.

One of the ways the United Nations has tried to respond to this need is by setting specific goals and working towards achieving them. In each of the major world conferences held in the 1990s, the United Nations set such goals and subsequently took stock of progress made. Based on the experience of the past years and through close collaboration with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations has now come up with seven specific goals to be achieved between the years 2000 and 2015. The goals, outlined in a report entitled "*2000: For a better world*," are as follows:

- Reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half;
- Enroll all children in primary school;
- Make progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education;
- Reduce infant and child mortality ratios by two-thirds;
- Reduce maternal mortality ratios by three-quarters;
- Provide access for all who need reproductive health services;
- Implement national strategies for sustainable development to reverse the loss of environmental resources.

In the words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the goals are not utopian. They are ambitious, but achievable. "To reach them, we will need to work hard."

Signs of progress

- The ratification of the Children's Rights Convention by nearly every country on earth since its adoption by the General Assembly in 1989 has made it the most ratified human rights treaty in history. Marked changes are occurring in its implementation. At least 22 countries have incorporated children's rights in their constitutions. More than 50 countries have a process of law review to ensure compatibility with the Convention's provisions. Parliaments in Brazil, South Africa and Sri Lanka have enacted legislation and national budgets to more clearly identify allocations for children. Such harmful traditional practice as genital mutilation is now banned in a number of West African states, including Burkina Faso and

Senegal. Corporal punishment of children in schools and in the family is prohibited in Austria, Cyprus and the Nordic countries.

- Two new Optional Protocols to the Children's Convention have been adopted. One is on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It raises from 15 to 18 years the age at which participation in armed conflicts will be permitted and establishes a ban on compulsory recruitment below 18 years. The second relates to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It gives special emphasis to the criminalization of serious violations of children's rights - namely sale of children, illegal adoption, child prostitution and pornography.
- CEDAW's new optional protocol allows individuals to claim remedies for violations of Convention rights.
- Non-governmental organizations can now submit "shadow reports" – alternative statements to supplement State submissions – to all human rights treaty bodies.
- The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda found Jean-Paul Akayesu guilty of the crime of genocide, making him the first person ever found guilty of the crime of genocide by an international tribunal.
- Efforts are under way to set up a tribunal to deal with crimes against humanity committed by Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has recommended that any such tribunal should have an international character.

Several major multinational corporations have joined with the United Nations in a "Global Compact", agreeing to respect fundamental human rights, labour rights and environmental norms everywhere, including in countries where such rights are not fully upheld.

The Seven Freedoms

In an important contribution to the rights-based approach to development, the *2000 Human Development Report*, prepared by the United Nations Development Programme, lists seven freedoms which all people have the right to enjoy:

- **Freedom from discrimination** - Women, racial and ethnic groups have suffered violent discrimination. While the struggles against deep prejudices have brought many gains in freedom, the war is not yet over for the billions still suffering from discrimination.
- **Freedom from want** - There is enough food, but distribution inequities still account for hunger and malnutrition. National and global economic systems have to honour obligations to those humiliated by want.
- **Freedom for personal development** - Fundamental changes are occurring in the communications and information industries, and at near lightening speed. The opportunities afforded for personal development through technological changes are enormous. But a digital divide still exists in the world. Information is different and must be accessible to those who need and want it. We are all impoverished if the poor are denied opportunities to make a living. And it is within our power to extend these opportunities to all.
- **Freedom from threats to personal security** - The frequency of torture in history provides a tragic indicator of the evil that lurks in the hearts of people. The elimination of torture, and the national and international prosecution of those who engage in it, are central to the continuing struggle for the freedom of personal security. And when rape is the issue, institutions and values that deny dignity and protection to women must be accountable.
- **Freedom for participation** - The global gains in democracy are still very recent. Active involvement in civic institutions and unprecedented access to information and knowledge by all will enhance fundamental political freedoms.

- **Freedom from injustice** - Securing this freedom will require institutions that protect people through transparent rules applied equally to all. Social institutions must be based on legitimacy, consent and rule of law.
- **Freedom for productive work** - Much has been achieved in protecting children and improving the working conditions of adults. Many enjoy this freedom but millions toil in inhumane conditions while others feel socially excluded by lack of work. Dignity demands a commitment to including the ostracized and abolishing oppressive working conditions.