

Just Participation: A Call from Cologne

Statement of the Cologne Religious Leaders Summit, Cologne, 6 June 2007

Convened here in Cologne in a Conference of Religious Leaders, meeting on the eve of the G8 Summit, which will take place in the Baltic resort of Heiligendamm, Germany, we speak as Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Shinto and indigenous Religious Leaders from religious communities of the G8 countries, from Africa and international religious bodies to the G8 Heads of State and to those who struggle for worldwide poverty eradication. In so doing, the Conference developed many of the themes previously discussed by religious initiatives at the time of the British G8 in 2005 and the World Summit of Religious Leaders at the time of the Russian G8 in 2006.

Common to all our traditions is the belief that human dignity and justice are gifts from God. The Jewish faith focuses on the protection of the poor, weak, foreigners, widows and orphans. Central to the Christian belief is Christ's presence alongside every single poor, marginalised and oppressed person. Within the Islamic tradition the equality of all human beings and the spread of justice are major ethical principles. In the Hindu tradition, the concept of *Sewa* – service to others without seeking reward - is seen as one's duty in life. The Buddhist ethical philosophy embraces the interconnectedness of all being entities which leads to love and compassion. Shinto belief sees humans as children of the *kami* (God) and owing their life to God and their ancestors.

This common belief challenges us to break the chains of poverty. Our religious communities do so by strengthening the values of solidarity and social coherence in our societies, by providing education, health care and social and other welfare services and by speaking out on behalf of the poor and marginalized. We remain concerned that justice and dignity are not a reality in the lives of so many of our sisters and brothers. We acknowledge that religions still have to develop a broader co-operation for the welfare of all. But, we call on the G8 Heads of State and Government to create structures of participation and empowerment that provide for people to make choices for their well-being and the well-being of others.

The Millennium Development Goals are Achievable

As in 2005 and 2006 we remain alarmed about the slow and uneven progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). 2007 now marks the half way point in the MDG process. The degree of extreme poverty in our world is a scandal. The crisis of poverty, including that in the countries of the G8, is not abstract. It involves real human suffering and it remains the most severe in the Sub-Sahara, where despite some successes, such as improved primary school enrolment, the majority of countries are not on track to achieving the goals. Increased migration flows from Africa to the G8 and the G8s inability to develop coherent and ethical responses to this issue is itself indicative of the global economic imbalances between rich and poor. Yet, by adopting the MDGs in 2000, Heads of State and Government recognised that in addition to their separate responsibilities to their own individual societies, they had a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, justice and equity at the global level and declared poverty alleviation as an overarching goal of international co-operation.

We welcome the steps taken by the current Presidency of the G8 to encourage the better integration of Southern economies into the system of democratic global governance. However, we remain concerned that under the motto "Growth and Responsibility", the G8 Presidency has prioritized expanding market-driven mechanisms, but it has put much less emphasis on the G8's responsibility for pursuing clear and coherent poverty eradication programmes with a focus on human development.

- 1) **Rethinking a controversial economic model:** The G8 still appears to pursue an economic model that prioritizes economic growth regardless of its social and economic impact, a reality which has led, even in their own countries, to a widening gap between rich and poor. The G8 has, so far, failed to develop binding frameworks for monitoring the social and ecological accountability of private corporations. The "Guidelines of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for Multinational Enterprises", of which all G8 countries, except Russia, are members, need to be endowed with effective mechanisms. A dimension of ethical responsibility and a convincing development agenda has to be included into the "Economic Partnership Agreements" of the European Union with the former African, Caribbean and Pacific states.
- 2) **Strengthening Africa's position in international relations:** We welcome the fact that the G8 has committed itself to supporting the African reform process in the spirit of NEPAD (the New Partnership for Africa's Development) by intensifying its support for good governance, improved financial management and enhanced transparency. But at the same time, we are aware of the weak position Africa has in international institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, whose regulations impede an appropriate participation of the African countries in decision-making processes even though their policies and programmes impact on the social development of African countries. This has often hindered progress towards

the MDGs. We propose the creation of a permanent forum involving the G8 and Africa based on mutual respect and understanding.

- 3) **Enhancing peace and security:** The Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without peace and security. The G8 needs to support the African Union in building African security structures capable of resolving endemic conflicts, as in Darfur. This support must not be compromised by the G8's export of arms to countries affected by violent conflict or by its own intensive military spending programmes. We are concerned at the deteriorating relationships between G8 members regarding the question of ballistic missile defence and the perceived fear that such a system might contribute to an arms race.
- 4) **Honouring Past G8 Promises for Poverty Eradication:** In 2005, the G8 promised to increase aid by \$50 billion annually by 2010, with half of this increase going to Africa. It further agreed to cancel the debts owed by the world's poorest countries to the World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Fund. The G8 of 2005 also recommitted itself to concluding the development-friendly 'Doha' round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) so that poor nations would benefit from the global economy. These promises represented substantial commitments for poverty eradication. The G8's record on delivering on these promises has, to date, been very disappointing.

a) Official Development Aid shows significant increases on the 2005 levels but all too often these figures include large debt cancellations, most notably that for Iraq and Nigeria. G8 governments must stop double-counting debt cancellation as part of their aid budget and set firm timetables for delivering on their promise of increasing aid, mainly for the Least Developed Countries. The German Presidency's decision to persuade other G8 partners to contribute their share to the work of the Global Fund for combating HIV/Aids, tuberculosis and malaria is welcomed. Equally urgent is strong investment in the research and development of medications against Malaria and other tropical diseases, which primarily affects populations in countries of the global south.

b) Debt Cancellation has enabled a number of countries to make important investments in health care and education. Yet, the 'Enhanced Heavily Indebted Countries Initiative' and the 'Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative' have proved incapable of addressing the full extent of the debt problem. These mechanisms have often created new problems with some eligible countries having to adhere to stringent policy conditions. The illegitimacy of certain debts has so far not been recognized.

c) International Trade remains problematic. The indefinite suspension of the 'Development-Round' of the WTO has meant that many African countries have been deprived of an important driver of economic and social change. The inability to overcome trade deadlocks illustrates the persistence of structural economic imbalances between rich and poor countries. The rich countries are still unwilling to adopt policies which are good for small-scale agriculture in the global south, which then suffers heavily under unfair competition against highly subsidized agriculture in the northern countries.

- 5) **Towards a new international framework on Climate Change.** Climate change is a reality for many poor people living in areas where the weather is presently variable and/or in communities highly vulnerable to minor changes to the weather, minor changes which can have devastating effects. We warmly welcome and support the German Presidency's decision to use the Heiligendamm Summit to generate an impulse for a world-wide protection agreement, to take effect after 2012. At present there remains a significant deficit of political will, a miasma of national interests and a real concern on the part of poorer and developing nations that they will have to give up the prospect of economic growth if they commit themselves to any restraints on CO2 emissions. For an international climate agreement to be workable it must have at its heart development-friendly mechanisms by which the developed countries fund clean development activities in less developed countries.

To the Future

Given all of these realities, given the Divine Imperative which calls all of us, all peoples and the whole inhabited world, to systems, structures and relationships of justice, equity, respect and human dignity, we stand together at this Religious Leaders' Summit and call on the G8 Heads of State and Government and all peoples of good will, to work with us, with renewed vigour, commitment and creativity, towards the fulfilment of the MDGs and the promises of the 2005 G8. We call for concrete, discernable, life-giving and life-sustaining progresses in the lives of our sisters and brothers and our planet. We both call for and pledge ourselves to the future of life, now. We commit ourselves to meeting again in Japan in 2008.