

WHY IS POVERTY A HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS?



Irene Khan and Steven Vanackere

(Texts as used by the authors in their MO*Lecture on April 20, 2010,
in Beursschouwburg Brussels)

MO* PAPER

n° 44 – May 2010

www.mo.be



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[introduction]

‘Respect for human rights also requires that we also recognize that everybody has the right to the things which are essential for a dignified existence – food, water, basic health care, education and housing. Those rights – which are based on universal values – give people who live in poverty an instrument to restore the disturbed balance of power that keeps them poor.’

With this basic thesis out of the book *An unheard truth. Poverty and human rights*, Irene Khan – until recently Secretary General of Amnesty International – broadens the scope for the debate on human rights. She calls development a fundamental human right, and describes poverty as the worst violation of the human rights. At the MO*lecture, Irene Khan sketched the consequences of the thesis on an ethical foreign policy.

During this MO*lecture, minister of Foreign Affairs Steven Vanackere gave his vision on the connection between human rights, development and foreign policy. During a visit to the UN Human Rights Council – of which Belgium currently is the president – Vanackere stressed the importance of all human rights for everybody -including social and economical rights. ‘Poverty has to do with more than only a lack of income, in that sense it is also a question of rights. But you can not just equate human rights and the fight against poverty, that does not benefit the clarity’, thus the Minister in a short interview with MO*.

About Irene Khan

Irene Khan was born in Dhaka, de present capital of Bangladesh. From 2001 to 2009 she was Secretary General of Amnesty international. She was the first woman, the first Asian and the first Muslim who held this function. Irene Khan studied law in Manchester and Harvard and worked during the eighties and nineties for the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR. In 2007 she received an honorary doctorate at the university of Ghent.

About Steven Vanackere

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About MO*Lectures

The Belgian monthly magazine MO* (distribution 120.000 copies; with a focus on international trends and globalization) together with the Vlaams-Nederlands Huis deBuren took the initiative to organise high level lectures on important questions in the field of development, international politics and global governance. Partners are the cultural centers Kaaitheter and Beursschouwburg (Brussels), Vooruit (Ghent) and Zuiderpershuis (Antwerp), and the tv-channel Canvas. www.MO.be/ molezing for reports and video-reportages.



POVERTY – THE WORLD’S WORST HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS

MO* Lecture by Irene Khan

Do human rights matter in the fight against poverty?

Let me begin with the story of Rosie. I never met her. I heard about her from a counselor in a police station in Durban. South Africa has one of the most progressive laws against domestic violence which allows a victim to get a protection order very easily against the perpetrator. As part of that law, the government has set up counseling center at some police stations to advice and assist women who wish to submit a complaint to the police and to get protection orders from local courts. A counselor in one of those centers told me about Rosie, a mother of five children who lived in a poor township outside Durban. This poor woman was regularly brutalized by her husband until one day he beat her so badly that she died. “Why didn’t she get a protection order from the magistrate?” I asked. The counselor replied, “Rosie did not have the money to pay for the bus fare to go from her township to the nearest magistrate’s court.”

The best laws in the land could not protect Rosie. Her right to life depended on the cost of a bus fare. But there is more to Rosie’s story than just the money she did not have. Like so many poor people, Rosie lived in insecurity, marginalized and powerless.

Take the story of the women of Ciudad Juarez. The city is located in Mexico on the border with the US, just across from El Paso, Texas. Women from all over Mexico come to work in the maquilas of Ciudad Juarez - assembly plants built by US and Canadian companies to take advantage of the tax breaks in Mexico. The women are keen to improve their lives. Many of them work double shifts to make money, and then go to night-college to improve their skills, but on their way from work to home or school in the dark alleys near their homes, hundreds of these women have disappeared, or have raped, mutilated and murdered. The women were earning more money than before, but their higher income did not make them more secure because they were still powerless and marginalized. The authorities did nothing to investigate or prosecute the killings until there was an international outcry. When I met the mothers of Ciudad Juarez in 2003, one of them said to me, “No one listens to us, we don’t count.”

I tell you about Rosie and the women of Ciudad Juarez to demonstrate the point that poverty cannot be defined only in terms of income. Rosie did not have that dollar and died for it. The women of Ciudad pushed their income beyond a couple of dollars a day but they were still insecure, marginalized and ignored – and died for it.

Redefining poverty

The World Bank's definition of extreme poverty as \$1.25 a day and poverty as \$2 a day does not capture the full problem. I do not discount the importance of increasing the income of the poor but what I am saying is that income is only one aspect of poverty.

Look at poor people and you will clearly see the deprivation. They lack health, education, housing, opportunity which are essential to a dignified life. Yes, you might say that they lack these basic needs because they don't have money.

But listen to the voices of the poor and they will tell about insecurity – the uncertainty of jobs if you are a cleaner, a part-time worker, a day labourer, a migrant worker; the high levels of crime in poor neighborhoods; the insecurity of tenure if you are a landless peasant or slum dweller. People are impoverished by war – the poorest countries of the world tend to be those trapped in long-standing armed conflict and violence. Poor women also face higher levels of gender based violence – because of tensions in the family, crime in the neighbourhoods in which they live or because they are compelled by their poverty into work that exposes them to sexual harassment and violence – and being poor they have few other opportunities of escape.

The poor will also tell you about discrimination. It is not just a coincidence that women, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples make up a disproportionate number of the poor. It is not just accidental that in the United States, the highest earning income group is white men, the lowest are Hispanic females. Or that even in the middle of the First World we see the Third World – such as the Roma communities living in deprivation in Europe. People are poor because they are discriminated but they are also discriminated because they are poor. Income often determines whose rights are recognized and whose are not.

Ironically the rule of law on which human rights activists so often rely does not work for the poor very often. If you are poor, your government does not give you the information you need or listen to you. The police see you as a threat and attack you when they should be protecting you. You cannot afford the bribes the petty officials demand, and that is why you cannot register your marriage or the birth of your baby or even prove that you own this piece of land that the landlord is falsely claiming. You do not know how to petition your member of parliament or approach your municipality, and even if you do, they treat you with contempt and brush you aside. If you and your community try to organize yourselves, you can be thrown into prison – and you cannot afford lawyers, the judges belong to the elite classes who do not understand the language you speak and have no sympathy for your cause.

Being poor means being excluded and ignored – being voiceless. Your government can build a dam and drown your village. An oil company can build a pipeline through your land and displace you. Your landlord can evict you without any due process and millions of people are forcibly evicted from slums and other illegal settlements every year with no remedy or compensation.

Poverty boils down to powerlessness – the poor have no control over their lives, they have only limited choices.

Look at one of the biggest threats that poor women face in many parts of the world: dying in child birth. Just this week we heard the encouraging news that the numbers of women who die because of pregnancy or child birth has gone down in the last thirty years from 500,000 to 360,000 – but is that really good news? In the past, one woman died every minute, now one woman dies every minute and a half. 99% of maternal deaths are in the poorest parts of the world – but even in those poor countries, if you look at the data closely, you will find that most deaths occur among the poorest sectors of the population – e.g. in remote communities, among lower caste people, among illiterate women and so on. Experts will tell you that the key is to provide trained birth assistants and where needed, emergency obstetric care. That's the public health answer to the problem and I don't doubt it is important. But as a human rights activist, I want to ask: who decides when a woman should get married, who decides when she should conceive, how many children she should have, how she should space them? Who decides if she would get medical help? And most importantly, who decides how much of the national budget should be spent on maternal health?

Discrimination, deprivation, insecurity, exclusion and the denial of voice - the hallmarks of poverty - are human rights problems. Human rights are claims that the weak have to hold the powerful to account – and that is why poverty is first and foremost a human rights problem.

Economic analysis does not capture the true picture of poverty and economic solutions alone will not solve. Economists like Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze have long recognized that freedom matters in fighting poverty. In fact, Sen argues that freedom is both the means by which development is achieved and the ultimate goal of development.

I don't analyse poverty as a human rights problem simply to point fingers – but because I believe that human rights brings value to development. Human rights are a part – a crucial part - of the solution to poverty. Why?

- First, human rights teach us to focus on the human being – not on economic outcomes but on the impact on people's lives. Not on how fast the economy is growing but on whether there are decent jobs for people. Not on whether school buildings have been built but whether girls have equal access to education as boys. Not on whether agricultural production has gone up but on whether malnutrition has gone down.
- Second, human rights expose inequalities and injustices. Human rights are not about the aggregate, but about the differences – they ask about the individual – they ask who is being left behind and why? Human rights force us to confront racism and gender bias – whether in law, policy or practice.
- Thirdly, human rights are an empowering process. The poor don't have more rights than others – they have the same rights as others and those rights must be respected. The poor gain dignity through rights, they are able to organize, mobilize, criticize, protest and demand their rights - they become empowered.
- Human rights are an accountability framework. There are rights holders but there are also duty bearers. Rights place an obligation on the state and on other powerful actors, like big business, an obligation to respect rights, and create accountability.

- Human rights encourage participation – through free speech and the right to information, through freedom to organize and mobilize, they build a more engaged citizenry. But these rights also force those in power to become more transparent and accountable. For instance in India, the freedom of information laws have been crucial in the fight against corruption which hampers development.

So, why are human rights not fully integrated in development strategies? Why do the poor still remain poor without rights?

I would point to three specific groups who ignore or undermine human rights in the context of development: they are 1) skeptics; 2) pretenders and 3) profiteers.

Who are the skeptics? There are two groups:

Those who believe that authoritarianism is the best route to development. They point to China. Yes, China's growth has been remarkable – yes, China has reduced poverty from thirty per cent to ten per cent. But to what extent can we credit that remarkable achievement to China's appalling record on human rights, and to what extent to other measures, such as investment in health and education, the ending of collective farms, the opening up of markets, the investment in infrastructure? May be suppressing human rights helped the government to suppress unionization and keep wages down – but that is no longer a valid argument as wages are now going up in China. On the other side, the Chinese people have paid a high price for authoritarianism. On the contrary, there are growing disparities in income between rural and urban populations, and within urban populations (urban migrants) which is leading to social unrest. There is also a long history of disastrous outcomes in China – let's not forget the great famine. Furthermore, lack of transparency and accountability leads to inefficiencies and inability to address mistakes when they happen. Think of the HIV scandal, the SARS scandal, the melamine in the milk powder scandal, the poor construction of school buildings scandal.

China may well be an exception – given its vast size, its huge population, its very specific history and civilization. For one China that succeeded to cut down poverty without conceding on human rights, there are many more – like North Korea, Myanmar, Zimbabwe – that have failed.

Don't take my word for it – look at the research by the World Bank's own experts and others that show respect for human rights produce better development.

Then there are other skeptics who recognize the importance of civil and political rights – in particular the economic freedoms - but who do not believe that health care, housing, decent work or food can be human rights. Some are ideologically opposed – like the United States – to economic and social rights. Others believe that food, jobs, health care and housing are social needs to be met by the market. They argue that open economies will raise all boats.

I don't accept either of those view points. Economic and social rights are as much human rights as civil and political rights – they are in international human rights treaties signed up over 160 countries, they are in 40 national constitutions and courts are adjudicating them and because without economic and social rights, your civil and political rights don't have much meaning. Your right to life becomes meaningless if you have do not a right to health care. Your right to read the newspaper of your choice is of little use to you if you have had the right to education..

I don't accept that the economic growth and the market alone will solve the problems of poverty. Of course growth is important for addressing poverty – no country in the world has been able to reduce poverty without growing its economy. Growth creates opportunities and the poor benefit from some of those opportunities. But the field is tilted against the poor – as I have just said – through deprivation, discrimination, insecurity and lack of voice.

Economic growth in fact leads to growing inequalities. Brazil – a country with impressive growth – is also one of the world's most unequal countries. Gross inequality can lead to social injustice and also social tensions. One statistic produced by the New Economics Foundation shows that only 1.5% of all the global GDP in the last twenty years trickled down to those living on less than \$1 a day.

Growth by itself will not help the poor. For instance, investing in agriculture can lead to high crop yields but it does not help the landless peasant gain security of tenure, building a school does not ensure that girls get to school same as boys. In India half the rural children are malnourished – and this proportion has not changed since 1992 despite impressive economic growth overall in India.

But the skeptics – China, the United States, the growth-touting neo-liberals are powerful players on the global stage holding back a better integration of human rights and development.

Next let's look at the pretenders. In this group I count donors, development organizations, international financial institutions, and some developing countries. They talk the talk but do not walk the walk of human rights – in other words, the rhetoric does not match the reality. This is not to say that their policies or even practices on development aid are devoid of any human rights content but more often, that they are erratic, superficial, or ineffective.

Human rights conditionality of aid is a hot topic – and one which some human rights activists also support. I can understand the desire – particularly in the most egregious cases. Why fund a Mugabe or a Bashir or a Mobutu when he persecutes his own people? However, we need to be very careful with conditionality - financial and economic conditionality in the past by international financial institutions back-fired because they were imposed from outside, took little or no account of local situations and therefore had no local ownership. Human rights conditionality can also be of little use if it is used as a blunt instrument. If it is not targeted carefully, it can hurt the innocent and has no impact on the guilty. For instance in Zimbabwe, the lack of international aid has hurt the education system and a whole generation of children are missing out on schooling. The intention of the international community is to hurt Mugabe but the brunt is being borne by innocent children. The other problem with human rights conditionality of aid is that donors are inconsistent in their behaviour - the aid is conditioned on good human rights practice but the trade in weapons continues to the regime! Double standards are also apparent when donors apply human rights conditionality to one recipient and not to another even though the two may have similar human rights records. Human rights conditionality becomes a matter of pursuing the national interest of the donor rather than a matter of seeking how best to influence the human rights situation in the country concerned.

I am not against human conditionality but I think that the manner in which it is often pursued has reduced its value and generated cynicism about human rights.

As for the IFIs, the World Bank and IMF showed supreme indifference to economic and social rights of the poor in their structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s and 1990s, advocating severe cuts in public spending, and led to no or little growth – leaving the poor to suffer from the devastating lack of services – as well as lack of opportunities. The imposition of user fees for health and education has had devastating impact on women and children in particular. Bilateral and multilateral donors acknowledge the importance of an effective state in upholding human rights. The Bank at least has backtracked but the policies and practices pay more lip service than genuine commitment to rights.

Participation is seen by most development agencies as a technical requirement – a ticking of boxes on a form or a formal meeting – rather than true participation. Genuine engagement with civil society organizations is still limited. More investment is going into what is called good governance – aspects of which clearly fall within a human rights agenda – improving state institutions, tackling corruption and so – but the hard questions of free speech, free media, open civil society engagement, of the right to protest and dissent, to organize, are rarely touched upon, issues of discrimination against political dissidents or women or ethnic minorities are rarely challenged by the Bank – they are considered too controversial or political.

On the other side, the developing countries have long argued for a right to development, but without looking to carefully at the duty of good governance. The right to development has been mired in controversy – with one side asserting that the injustice of the global economic order gives rise to a collective right to development and the other side denying any duty to set the injustices right, other than on a purely discretionary basis. The end result is that we do have a UN Declaration on the Right to Development - but with so much compromise it has little meaning or value.

Both donors and developing countries have signed on to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a common anti-poverty agenda. But the MDGs fail to note any reference to human rights. They set very precise targets to reduce poverty, hunger, infant mortality and maternal mortality and promote education and gender equality, among other things. But it is clear that many of these targets will not be met. This is partly because of under-resourcing – despite all the talk the aid is still not forthcoming – but also because the lack of human rights content has weakened the goals. For instance, the issue of discrimination is not mentioned except in relation to women and girls – yet as we all know race, religion, caste, social status are key factors in perpetuating poverty. Progress reports on the goals use aggregate data, hiding the true picture of who is being left behind. Evaluation of development projects and academic research has shown very clearly that participation of people in the development process is critical to development – yet there is no reference to participation in the MDGs. We know the law does not work for the poor – yet, there is no reference to improving the rule of law in the MDGs. The accountability of governments is weak, of developing countries but also of developed countries to provide international assistance.

Now let me turn to the profiteers – the private economic actors – big business - who ignore human rights in the context of development. One of the most important aspects of today's economy is its globalization which has led to enormous foreign direct investment in developing countries. FDI outstrips development aid several times over. Yet, big business pays little attention as to how it conducts itself in relation to the rights of people.

No country today can operate in isolation from the international economy or from gig business. Jobs are on the line when trade fluctuates, remittances fall when migrant workers lose jobs. Agricultural subsidies in the rich world can destroy the livelihoods of poor farmers thousands of miles away.

The rise of corporate power across borders has been a characteristic of economic globalization. Large companies, headquartered in one country, raising funds from several stock markets, operating their supply chains across different countries, affect millions of people in dozens of countries through their business operations and practices. Big companies can move in and out of a country, bringing or taking jobs away with them. They pay large sums into the coffers of the state – and feed corruption, nepotism or even conflict between competing factions in a country.

The impact is both positive – in creating jobs, bringing growth and prosperity – and negative – in exploiting resources in an unsustainable way, promoting corrupt practices or acting in complicity with governments on security or human rights abuses. In many of the resource rich countries in Africa, populations live in deep poverty because of the collusion between corrupt governments and greedy businesses. It is no coincidence that these countries are frequently mired in conflict and violence. In my book, the Unheard Truth I give the examples of Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria as resource-rich countries with impoverished populations where corrupt governments and complicit corporations, often supported by powerful allies among developed governments, set back development.

I have spoken much about the value of people participating in the development process. What does the right to participate mean for local communities when the decisions that matter take place not in their country but in distant board rooms in foreign capitals? What does state accountability for human rights mean when the state has neither the capacity nor the will nor the systems to ensure that human rights are not violated by companies operating in its territory? How can big business be held accountable for human rights abuses?

Although the global economy inter-acts – often collides - with human rights in many different ways, the human rights responsibility of economic actors remains largely unclear. A process has been underway in the UN for a number of years to clarify responsibilities but it has faced considerable resistance from both governments and big business. Under international law the primary responsibility for human rights rests with states but that does not absolve companies of their responsibility to respect human rights – in other words, to ensure that their operations do not violate human rights, for instance workers' rights or rights of the communities in which the company is operating, e.g. through forced displacement from land or pollution of water, to give just two examples. Companies should not be complicit in human rights crimes committed by the government – in other words, they should directly or indirectly participate in, encourage, support, instigate or collude with the government in human rights violations.

But so far, even though there is a growing recognition that companies cannot escape human rights responsibility, the nature and extent of that responsibility remains unclear. There is a reluctance to go beyond voluntary codes of conduct. But experience shows that voluntary codes only work for the willing. How do we convince the vast multitude of companies from around the world – including emerging economies, or state-owned

enterprises as in China operating in Africa - into respecting human rights? How do we enforce rules in countries with weak legal systems where many multi-national companies are operating but where governments are unwilling or unable to enforce the law? I think the answer lies in binding international standards for corporate accountability on human rights, backed up by the possibility of enforcing those standards in national courts in countries where those companies are headquartered will work.

In conclusion, what should human rights activists do?

It is important to convey the idea that human rights are not yet another strategy for poverty eradication – they are an essential part of any and all development strategies. Human rights are both the ends and means of development.

The human rights movement must engage actively in the development discourse and campaign for the full recognition of all rights, political and civil as well as economic, social and cultural. The divisive views of China and the United States are detrimental both for the future of human rights and for the future of development. European governments could play a crucial role in closing this fissure. Freedom from want and freedom from fear are equally precious.

The Millenium Development Goals must be made to work better for the poor through greater acknowledgement of the role of human rights in fighting poverty. At a very practical level, there is an opportunity at the UN Summit in September 2010 for the European Union under the Belgian presidency to push this issue.

But governments hold the key to only part of the problem. We must also bring the global economic actors into the fold of human rights, including international financial institutions and companies. There can be no power without accountability, and it is high time that economic actors are held accountable for human rights. We need international standards and mechanisms through these standards can be enforced at the national level.

In the final analysis, we cannot rely only on governments. Look at all the great developments of history – the abolition of slavery, the emancipation of women, the ending of apartheid – did not happen because of governments but because of people power. They happened because ordinary people stood up, spoke out and demanded change. Past generations had their challenges – the eradication of poverty is our generation's challenge.





THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

MO*lecture by **Steven Vanackere**,
vice Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium

In her book 'The Unheard Truth' Irene Kahn focuses on the link between development and human rights. She explains that the 'war' on poverty cannot be won without being successful in the 'battle' for human rights. Violation of human rights keeps people in poverty, for it withholds justice from the oppressed and denies the dignity of the poor.

Although it is not simply evident that the eradication of poverty is a human right by itself, it is clear that poverty is a violation of human dignity. A victim of poverty is a human being deprived of his first freedom, the freedom from want. Therefore, the eradication of poverty sets people free. As the US president Herbert Hoover observed in the late twenties of the last century (alas, a short time before the crash of Wall Street) : "Through liberation from widespread poverty we have reached a higher degree of individual freedom than ever before..."

Without freedom from want a human being cannot be a free man with rights and duties. Poverty is a deeply embedded wound that permeates every dimension of life and society. Gandhi once said that "poverty is the worst form of violence". And it should be added that the violence of poverty attracts several other forms of violence. As Irene Kahn writes, poor people live in fear, not only of disease and hunger, but also of gangs and guns, police brutality, family violence and armed conflict.

Without human rights a man cannot fully enjoy his freedom from want. Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" illustrates this truth very eloquently. It is also wrong to think that political and civil freedoms can wait or have to wait till economic and social

freedoms are fulfilled. The lack of development cannot be invoked by states to justify the abridgment of internationally recognized human rights, and it is the primary responsibility of states, including developing states, to create the internal conditions for the realization of the right to development.

Irene Kahn calls this so-called wish to prioritize one set of rights to achieve results “the sequencing trap”. It is not necessarily true that civil and political freedoms will follow automatically economic development, investment in health, education and housing.

But it is also an error to think that investment in rule of law and democracy without investment in social progress will create automatically an engaged citizenry able to debate on equal terms the development options.

At the first World Conference of Human Rights after the end of the Cold War (Vienna, 1993), UN members States recognized that democracy, development and respect of human rights and freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders followed the appeal of Secretary General Koffi Annan in stating clearly that development, peace, security and human rights are forever interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

This leads to somewhat of a paradox. Progress in one field is a necessary condition for real progress in the other field – and vice versa – but neither can be considered to be a sufficient condition for progress in the other area.

The interdependence of human rights and poverty is obvious when we compare democracy and authoritarian regimes. The former being the cradle of human rights, the latter being the oppressor of human rights. We should note that no democracy has let absolute poverty worsen over a substantial length in time, and no democracy has allowed famines to take place. Authoritarian politics have seen of both and have for long periods of time also managed to get away with it.

The wild authoritarian fluctuations contrast sharply with a certain democratic consistency. Democracies may not be necessarily pro-poor, but authoritarian systems can be viciously anti-poor. Democratic attacks on poverty have simply been slow but steady.

Poverty as a social problem calls for a social solution. That solution is the clear, conscious and deliberate removal of the factors of poverty, including ignorance and lack of education, bad governance and lack of freedom.

It is too easy to pass the buck on the responsibility of the wealthy nations alone, when we see that in some regimes the rise in economic growth is accompanied by growing disparities in the country affecting the greater part of the population. Why is that, especially in more authoritarian states? Because in democracy it is not only the state that runs the society, but the state shapes freedom for society to run itself with responsibility. In a democracy the state is not the only responsible actor and does not pretend to govern all aspects of life.

A democratic state respects the fundamental freedoms of their citizens and allows them to organize themselves and take their destiny in their own hands, to plead for better social and labour conditions and to be the active participants of development, welfare and growth, in what the Rhineland Model of the economy calls the tripartite cooperation of state, economy and society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Poverty is not only about economics, growth and income levels, but also and foremost about a lack of respect for human rights. The fight against poverty is a fight for human dignity and it has to be carried out in a human rights perspective. My country and all members of the EU support the realization of the right to development. Let me quote the Declaration of the General Assembly of the UN on the Right of Development, which states that “the human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development”. It also underlines that “States have the primary responsibility for the creation of national and international conditions favorable to the realization of the right to development”.

This means that states have to formulate socio-economic development policies, but also have to respect the principles of good governance, the rule of law, non-discrimination, empowerment and participation of all citizens. The respect for democratic principles is a pre-condition for the realization of the right to development. In this perspective the UN-declaration reaffirms that “States should encourage popular participation in all spheres as an important factor in development and in the full realization of all human rights”.

In the past the bipolar world of the Cold War, the East tended to emphasize the collective social and economic rights, the West the individual political and civil rights. Today the old adagio “bread before ballots” occurs again, meaning that freedom can be an obstacle to economic growth. When economic growth prevails to human rights we see that due to a lack of political control the rights of decent housing and work are violated in the name of economic growth. How can a country develop if its citizens cannot participate to the decision-making process and raise their concerns through free and fair elections? As I have done so in my speech to the Human Rights Council on March the 1st this year, one can never stress the fundamental importance of the universality and indivisibility of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Freedom of expression and the right to organize are essential in creating a society where citizenry is actively engaged in debates on development. When the American president Franklin Roosevelt in his Union Message in January 1941 set out a vision of the post-war world centered on what he called the ‘four essential freedoms’ for peace, dignity and development, he mentioned in the same breath “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear”. Poverty creates fear, fear leads to poverty.

That poverty still prevails in the world, even in Europe, is a crying shame for humanity and a disgrace for civilization. Social inequality, both within a single country and between the populations of different countries, diminishes social cohesion, thereby placing democracy at risk, through the progressive erosion of ‘social capital’: the network of relationships of trust, dependability, and respect for rules, all of which are indispensable for any form of civil coexistence.

Although I have said that the state is the first responsible authority to eradicate poverty and to respect human rights in its realm, in a globalized world no country can function on its own. The necessity of international cooperation in the struggle against poverty and the involvement of the international community in the struggle for human rights are obvious.

Therefore, in Belgium's external policy on human rights, the fight against poverty is closely related to the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights. Our country actively contributed to the drafting of the Optional Protocol on economic, social and cultural rights and has signed it in September 2009 when it was first opened for signature. We also act by supporting the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, including in our development cooperation policy. The Belgian government has committed itself to spend 0.7 percent of its Gross National Income in development aid from 2010. In fact, EU Member States and the EU provide approximately 50 percent of the global development aid in the world.

We all agree, I think, that a rights-based approach to development – that means the integration of human rights and development – is the way forward. I hope that with the publication of Irene Kahn's book this truth about the interdependency of violation of human rights and poverty on the one hand, and respect for human rights and development on the other hand will no longer be an Unheard Truth.

