

**INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE – “ENDING POVERTY AND HUNGER” AT THE UN SUMMIT ON
THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA
25 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

The struggles against poverty and hunger are truly ongoing struggles as with the struggles for democracy, greater social justice and better education and health services.

The struggle against widespread poverty and hunger remains urgent. It is here that all nations represented in this institution in various capacities must combine their efforts to engage in an ongoing fight against those myopic policies, for which some of us are responsible, that compound the situation of poverty and hunger.

Poverty is not a matter of individual, family or community choice or deficiency.

It is, on the contrary, rooted in political, social and economic injustices.

It has been said that there are enough resources on Planet Earth to feed and provide shelter and clothing for around 12 billion people when the population stood at approximately 7 billion in 2011 and is expected to rise to just over 9 billion by 2050!¹

And yet the statistics concerning people caught in the poverty trap are shocking, more so in the continents of Africa and regions of Latin America and the Caribbean than in say the perceived ‘affluent’ Continent of Europe from where I come.

And yet, according to the previous European Commission President, José Manuel Barroso, the amount of people caught in the poverty trap, within the European Union, is expected to reach a hundred million by 2020 (the figure stood at 80 million by October 2014).

¹ Jeremy Gernand, ‘The Earth Can Feed, Clothe, and House 12 Billion People’ in *Progressiprocity*, 4th February 2011, <http://true-progress.com/the-earth-can-feed-clothe-and-house-12-billion-people-306.htm>

Swathes of poverty therefore exist everywhere and, if anything, the shocking European Union statistic makes one wonder what the figure, based on similar calculations, would be for countries in Africa and other continents.

The well documented facts represent the stark, bleak reality of the current state of our civilisation.

I am under no illusion that poverty can be readily solved, given the society in which we live, the policies that inform it, and the economic interests that drive these policies.

It is quite common to come across policymakers who are mainly preoccupied with overarching economic concerns and devise policies on these grounds.

Many a time, these policies serve the people who influence the very same policy-making process. These strategies condition people's lives, and the various social systems that govern them.

One of the signs of poverty is the inability to participate effectively in social and political life.

Furthermore, knowledge about poverty and its related conditions (illiteracy, greater propensity for contracting diseases, lack of formal education, lack of control over one's own life, lack of access to basic goods in a market-driven soulless economy, risking life and limb to escape conditions resulting in human migrant tragedies) can never be static. After all, the world is not static but in flux.

New issues arise, including issues concerning old and new forms of poverty, stark or relative.

I believe that in order to combat poverty effectively, we constantly need to refine and update our understanding of the nature of this scourge.

The current socio-economic scenario has demonstrated how this type of economic and social thinking has created greater disparities in access to resources and

therefore decent living, hence increasing poverty and hunger.

This concept has induced some governments to withdraw their safety nets and provision of social programmes which would otherwise have allowed a greater number of people to gain access to those goods that we associate with decent living: pensions, health care, education. In some countries, these are now being presented as consumer goods operating according to the luxury of the market.

But we know that the market lacks the human face that is required to save people from falling into destitution.

The market has proved time and time again that it requires regulation to safeguard the interests of the vulnerable.

The market cannot be left to its own devices. One of the most insidious aspects of the current and predominant mode of thinking is that it accentuates the role of the

individual as being solely responsible for her or his own welfare or wellbeing.

While I am not playing down the issue of personal responsibility, a good free education, accessible to all, can help instil the self-discipline required for this, however I am concerned about the overemphasis on this to the detriment of others.

Overemphasis on the personal can simply serve as a pretext to give the possibility for states to withdraw from their responsibilities and shred the ‘social contract’, that ‘contract’ which was the result of democratic struggles over the years.

I urge governments to attach greater importance to meaningful, integrated and inclusive social policies. This would include greater investment in a broad holistic concept of education, community development and a decent public health care system.

All these are to be seen as matters of social and not simply individual responsibility.

Furthermore, I call on many countries represented here, especially those belonging to economic power blocs, to revise their ‘fortress’ economic and agrarian policies because of the way these policies impinge negatively on economic development in Africa and other continents or regions.

Moreover, I appeal to all countries not simply to sign but to closely observe environmental accords. Failure to do so will have a negative effect on climate change with disastrous effects in the form of droughts that increase impoverishment and hunger in several parts of the world.

I also appeal to governments to engage in collective efforts to shackle the arms industry. Policies shackling this industry can help countries stricken by poverty and unequal resource distribution to spend more on educational programmes and less on repressive measures.

On concluding, I would like to echo the words of the much revered Nelson Mandela. I share the view that overcoming poverty and hunger is not a matter of charity but one of social justice. Poverty and hunger are human - induced.

I therefore believe that, as with all things human-induced, we can collectively help overcome this malaise that hinders humankind from enjoying what is rightly theirs that is dignity, safety and wellbeing.