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Introduction

Charles Goerens

Minister of Cooperation, Humanitarian Affairs, and Defense (Luxembourg)

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Introduction

by Charles Goerens

Eradicating poverty worldwide with the Millennium Summit goal as a minimum, protecting the environment, expanding and enhancing education, regardless of sex, and the development of a health policy that encourages family planning and pursues the elimination of the three most contagious diseases, AIDS, tuberculosis, and paludism, are the major principles guiding the developed world's effort in promoting sustainable development.

The starting point for such change is to create a new value system, redirecting the choices that the world makes in production and consumption. In a May 29, 2002 editorial published by the Financial Times, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan reprimanded the developed countries that met 10 years ago at the Earth Summit in Rio for not having lived up "to the promises they made either to protect the environment or to help the developing world."

In anticipation of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) recent editorial analyses in the Herald Tribune indicated that official development assistance (ODA) in total financial flows to developing countries has seen a reduction in the last decade, while direct investment and commercial credit saw a marked increase, most often meant to support large-scale projects needed to create sustainable livelihoods. Foreign direct investment (FDI) worldwide in 2000 totaled \$1.1 billion; however, the developing-country share decreased from 35 percent in 1997 to 17 percent in 2000. This August, the WSSD needs to set clear targets and clear mechanisms for monitoring, enforcement and compliance, as well as for improved civil-society access to information and decision-making. With 70 percent of the poorest people in developing countries living in rural areas, directing financing at rural populations is a strategy that many of the major groups participating at the WSSD had identified and embraced at prior conferences. This means not only stopping the decline in ODA but doubling the present figure for ODA, which may sound ambitious, but would still fall short of the recognized goal of 0.7 percent of GNP to be provided by developed countries for development assistance.

Most recent UN conferences and international agreements, such as the Doha Development Agenda, the Monterrey Financing for Development Conference and the Food Summit, have reiterated the European Union's commitment to take action

Charles Goerens is the Minister of Cooperation, Humanitarian Affairs and Defense, as well as the Minister of Environment of Luxembourg. An agronomist by training, he embarked upon a political career which has included the offices of President of the Assembly of the European Union and the Chairman of the Democratic Party. He also served as a Member of the European Parliament from 1994 to 1999.

toward implementing a plan aimed at the many challenges in relation to the global dimensions of sustainable development. It was agreed that oriented action must be channeled toward poverty eradication, development of sustainable patterns of production and consumption, conservation and sustainable management of natural and environmental resources, strengthening the autonomous governance for sustainable development at all levels, in particular international environmental governance, and the creation of a Global Foundation whose mandate is to institute a long-term strategy directed towards the prevention of the three most contagious diseases in the underdeveloped countries. "Faced with what promises to be an epidemic without precedent in the history of mankind, we must counter with actions that have no precedent," said Bernard Kouchner, the former French Minister of Health.

Health issues are inextricably intertwined with all the concerns that will be addressed at the WSSD. Most of the 23 million sub-Saharan Africans who have tested positive for the AIDS virus do not have access to the drugs most effective in treating this disease due to the enforced cost-control and patent rules imposed by the WTO that allow pharmaceutical companies to monopolize drug pricing. The report of the UN Secretary-General on health and sustainable development in preparation for the WSSD asks for health issues to be incorporated into all sustainable development plans: "The goals of sustainable development cannot be achieved when there is a high prevalence of debilitating illnesses, and population health cannot be maintained without ecologically sustainable development." The first principle of Agenda 21 while making health a top priority also brought into play the wide range of issues encompassing this need, such as poverty eradication, hunger, food and water safety, environmental pollution, climate change, and armed conflicts.

The recent UN conference in Bali brought into focus the lack of agreement existing even within developed nations as how to concretely implement the development programs set forth at prior summits. While they all agree on the need to create coalitions between civil society and receptive states, rich countries, among them the United States, categorically refused to accept committing specific sums of money directed toward combating even basic needs, such as water and sanitation in poor countries. This reluctance stems from a fear that without any guarantees placed on the distribution of these funds, they will not reach the people most in needs of such relief. However, the Bali Summit succeeded in hammering out a 158-point agenda for the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development agreed to by most of the delegates. The WSSD, whose focus will be more on poverty alleviation, could foreseeably generate one more success story of a global civil society similar to the Kyoto global warming treaty, the convention banning land mines, the International Criminal Court, and the Rio Summit on global warming. Valli Moosa, South Africa's environment minister was quoted as saying in the June 15, 2002 issue of *The Economist* that "the stage is being set for one of the most significant global gatherings of modern times."

Indeed, the world's hope for its future well-being lies heavily in the successful outcome of this summit.