Human Rights in Developing Countries: How can Development Cooperation contribute to furthering their Advancement

UN Conference Vienna - June 2003

Opening Address

Erich Stäther
State Secretary - Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this Development Policy Forum on "Human Rights in Developing Countries" on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. This is the second occasion on which we have held a high-level international policy dialogue on the issue of human rights and development. This event shows the value we place on the application of all human rights, and on the progress made in establishing further international relations to promote peace and development.

The German Federal Government sees development not only as a process with social and economic aspects, but also as a deeply political process per se! Development means an increase in the freedom of individuals. We view sustainable development as a globally shared task, and it is thus within the context of international action that we organize our efforts for the fair shaping of globalization, changes to global structures and framework conditions, development cooperation with partner countries and also our own necessary reforms. Bearing in mind the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the development goals it contains, the Monterrey Consensus and the outcome document of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, Germany has been situating its development policy contributions within the context of the Programme of Action on Poverty Reduction, thereby putting into practice the German Federal Chancellor's undertakings at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000.

"Given this background, why should we be concerning ourselves with human rights and development?"

This is a question some people may be asking. While international development goals require the global community to reduce extreme poverty, improve access to basic education and health care, and protect the environment and resources, they make no explicit reference to human rights. Surely these aims can be achieved simply by mobilizing and transferring the necessary financial resources, adapting structures and framework conditions, building capacity and improving technical know-how?

Many of you are already convinced that human rights and development are interdependent and must be viewed together. After all, you have all come here today in your capacity as experts in this field.
Nonetheless, I would like to reiterate some of the reasons why German development policy has put so much effort into linking human rights and development issues in recent years.

The United Nations Development Programme clearly stated in 2000 that development and human rights appeared - partly as a consequence of the East-West conflict - to have existed for many years in two separate worlds. In fact, the world of development policy, with its focus on projects and programmes, often contradicted the human rights language of standards and duties.

There has been an increasing rapprochement over the past ten to fifteen years. The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 stated in its final document that human rights and development are interdependent and mutually affect and strengthen one another. The UNDP's Report on Human Development, which has been so important to the conceptual debate on development policy, described human rights and the "human development" model in 2000 as being complementary and mutually supportive.  

It is thus necessary to intensify the cooperation between the two "spheres" and put it into practice. In this regard, there is still much to be accomplished and further progress to be made in ministries and development organizations.

German development policy in recent years has laid a particular emphasis on the following areas of human rights:

* German development cooperation includes human rights in all four of our target dimensions - political, economic, social and environmental. (I am sure that representatives of other donor organizations will be reporting similar approaches over the next few days.) The 2015 Programme of Action on Poverty Reduction, which, as I mentioned previously, is Germany's contribution to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, names human rights - be they civil, political, or in particular economic, social and cultural - as a criterion, goal and instrument of our policy.

* We support the affirmation and anchoring of human rights at a global level via participation in the UN High Commission for Human Rights, the strengthening of standards and mechanisms - e.g. the use of an individual appeal procedure in the Social Pact, and also in the International Criminal Court, which fortunately is now able to commence work - and also in the context of the EU.

* We are actively raising human rights issues in our Policy Dialogue with partner countries and have been working since 1991 with what are known as the Five Criteria of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Along with other considerations, these criteria determine the nature and scope of our cooperation. This approach applies to all criteria that either explicitly or implicitly relate to human rights. A serious violation of the criteria can lead to a reduction or even suspension of bilateral development cooperation. The approach here, however, is not solely sanction-based; the aim is to find the combination of measures that best promotes human rights.