



The World Needs To Re-Affirm the Universality of Human Rights

By GCAP Africa secretariat

On December 10th, 2008, we will celebrate the 60th year of existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Global Call to Action against Poverty Africa (GCAP Africa) is partnering with the Every Human Has Rights campaign (EHHR) -spearheaded by the Elders including Bishop Desmond Tutu, Aung San Suu Kyi, Mary Robinson, Graçia Machel, Kofi Annan and Nelson Mandela.

GCAP and the EHHR together with other partners, is calling for true reflection on the universality of these celebrated rights. It is calling on all humanity and even more so those in power to re-look their interactions and perceptions of those that are extremely marginalized and have absolutely no voice. We are calling for a level of honesty from those in power that sees abject poverty as a violation of rights. An honesty that sees the right to a decent living, the right to medicine, school, etc. as universal rights even for those that have only known destitution.

“Africans are well aware of the disparity in the application of all documents regarding human rights. The continued exodus of African people toward the West in search of “better lives” is one clear manifestation of dissatisfaction in Africa. One cannot help but wonder when Africa and African people will truly benefit from equity, justice and a humane perception they so desperately crave.” Says Adelaide Sosseh

The very premise of the universal declaration of human rights in 1948 has remained questionable to many African people. As is well known this was a period of gross human rights violations in Africa. Most countries were under brutal colonial rule at the time. The same colonialists were ruling with an iron fist in Africa while signing a document on equality for all humans with the other.

What has changed since then? Did the end of colonialism bring with it human rights? When one looks at the current situation of abject poverty in which more than 50% of the African population lives, it is hard to imagine that things have changed.

Africans are at that place between a rock and a stone wall, and as is clearly visible in mortality rates, and gender disparity, women and children bear the brunt of it all. Issues such as fair trade and foreign aid continue to be down played by those responsible. Endless conflicts that receive little attention continue to plague Africa. It must be pointed out that even the document itself remains available to most African people in only two languages, French and English.

The lack of solidarity on the part of the international community and even on the part of the African people assures one thing. The promise to reach the Millennium Development Goals at the anticipated 2015 time frame can be forgotten. The United Nations High Level Event on MDGs recently held in New York could have yielded much more; instead participants tacitly agreed that no solid conclusions had been reached. Rather, the world leaders have only recommitted themselves without no clear decisions.

As the world gets ready to mark this 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we at GCAP Africa feel the need to re-affirm our demands and to call for governments to not just achieve but exceed the seven Millennium Development Goals and go beyond that,

GCAP Africa together with its other partners demands:

- full realization of the Millennium Development Goals that is:
 - end to poverty and hunger,
 - universal education,
 - improve child and maternal health care,
 - combat HIV/Aids,
 - address environmental issues
 - a push toward true global partnership.
- Fulfillment of human rights which would both increase and improve distribution of financial aid to help Africa

- The actualization of gender equity and women's rights
- The inclusion of Africans in the discussions of climate change

It is not unknown to Africans that the recent financial and economic crises will affect the world as a whole, but it is also clear to Africans, that these types of crises have happened before. As a social movement, GCAP will not fail to continue mobilizing citizens to keep pushing for its agenda. We will not allow African issues to be thrown into the background simply because we live in a system that does not put people at its center. It did not go unnoticed to African people that over a trillion dollars was pulled out of a hat in an instant to solve problems that only came to the public's attention a few months ago. Africa's problems have been here for centuries, the truth is now out there...all we have been given right now is mediocre assistance and a bunch of invalid excuses.

"It is high time we open our eyes to the link that exists between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the responsibility towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. If a woman cannot trade her products at a fair price and therefore has no food to eat or feed her children, is her very right to life not violated? While it maybe every individual's responsibility to fight for their rights, the truth is some people have been totally marginalized and it is these people that GCAP Africa is mobilizing and pleading for. Leaders you need to answer to the people!" Christophe Zoungrana GCAP Africa Coordinator.

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Notes to Editors:

The Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) is a civil society alliance of social movements, international NGOs, trade unions, community groups, women's organizations, faith and youth groups, local associations and campaigners working together across more than 100 national coalitions/platforms, including 25 coalitions in Africa. GCAP is calling for action from the world's leaders to meet their promises to end poverty and inequality. In particular, GCAP demands solutions that address the issues of public accountability, just governance and the fulfillment of human rights; trade justice; more and better aid; debt cancellation; and gender equality and women's rights. For more information, visit www.whiteband.org

From October 17-19th 2008, GCAP Africa was part of the GCAP global movement called Stand up take Action which registered the participation of 117 million people worldwide calling for the Millennium Goals to be met and for poverty to be ended once and for all.

See www.standagainstopoverty.org