

TOWARDS SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT, FAIR DEVELOPMENT, A PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT AND REINFORCED DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The 5th edition of World Forum on Human Rights will represent one of the highlights of *Nantes, European Green Capital 2013*. In this particular context and one year after the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20, the forthcoming edition will focus on the challenges of sustainable development respectful of Human Rights, with the participation of all the following stakeholders gathered on an equal footing: local, regional and national public organisations worldwide, NGOs and relevant associations, national and international organisations, the academic community and the business sector... In this way, the Nantes Forum intends to contribute to the definition of the Sustainable Development Goals to be launched by the United Nations by 2015.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20 held in June 2012 – did not deliver the results urgently expected in face of the environmental, social and economic deterioration. Considering the vicious circle created by the crisis and the downsides of globalization, Rio+20 represented an excellent opportunity to bring together two different yet interdependent worlds: environmental protection and international solidarity. Beyond the environmental issues in the strictest sense of the world, it was hoped that the outcome would place Human Rights at the core of the reflection and action, at a global level.

This was not the case, even though the importance of economic and social rights (right to food, health, education, safe drinking water and sanitation...) was reaffirmed in the final Declaration. These rights were already embedded in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) adopted by the United Nations in 2000... However, the Rio+20 final Declaration provides for the definition of a new generation of *Sustainable Development Goals (ODD)* based on and in replacement of the MDGs due to expire at the end of 2015.

Navi Pillay, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has appealed to the international community to regard the Rio+20 final Declaration “as the first step towards a more ambitious and responsible agenda for our planet and for the people [...]”. As we move now to develop Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)² and to establish a new institutional framework, as called in the Rio+20 final outcome, we must ensure that the SDG framework is a human rights framework. Only a human rights approach can be truly a people-centered approach.”

HUMAN RIGHTS: NOT AN ADJUSTMENT VARIABLE!

Human Rights cannot be regarded as an adjustment variable in the implementation of sustainable development, be they economic, social and cultural rights (right to healthy and adequate food, right to safe drinking water and sanitation, right to adequate housing, right to decent work, health, social security and development...) or civil and political rights (freedom of information and association, including free trade unions, right to education and political participation...) which go hand in hand with human security and sustainable development. The objective is to promote all Human Rights for all human beings.

While the dominant economic model – destabilized by the financial crisis – is put in question by an increasing number of individuals and organizations, some do not hesitate to contest the very concept of sustainability. This concept is regarded as a cover for the vested interests of those who argue in favour of a neo-liberal economy, uninterested in the effectiveness of rights, especially social rights. However, there is a widely shared view that sustainable development is a necessary condition for the protection of the biosphere. It is defined as a balance-seeking approach between the three inter-related dimensions of human society – environmental, economic and social. Unless we strike the right balance, we take the risk of seeing an overall regression of human-kind on a dried planet.

It is urgent to take action. But this should not stop us questioning the substance of sustainable development in relation to human rights international law. Could the human rights legislation be dissolved in the “modern” concept of sustainability? Beyond the differences between the economic approach with a focus on the needs and the legal approach based on individual and collective rights, aren't there any convergent solutions to the need for men's liberation?

The last articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which are put in broader context, are often overlooked. Art. 28 states that “everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized”. This is tantamount to demanding a true social democracy and world governance that would guarantee a fair and equitable “order”. Furthermore, art. 29 of the 1948 Declaration states that “everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”. Individual development is closely associated with international solidarity and human-kind has to be considered in its natural environment. Peace, justice and development are inseparable from the place of humans in their biosphere and from the balance of the planet.

2. In August 2012, Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations General Secretary, launched the **Sustainable Development Solutions Network**, with the purpose to mobilise research centres, universities and technical institutions to find workable solutions to the world's most pressing environmental, social and economic problems.

Amartya Sen once defined development in these words³: “*For the most part, development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. As such, expanding is both an end in itself and the main tool for development, what I call respectively the “constitutive role” and the “instrumental role” of freedom in development*”.

This process of expanding freedoms, in association with the necessary legal regulations (national and international) comes under the responsibility of states. States which, at least in democratic countries, remain the guardians or dispensers of Human Rights. In all cases, they are the first “rights receivables”. But the global challenges impose a new model of world governance that moves away from the law of the jungle and fierce competition with their implications in terms of social dumping, insecurity and relocation. As regards climate change, utter selfishness or the “every man for himself” attitude is simply suicidal.

Multinational companies also have a part to play to keep to the terms of the *Global Compact* in which human rights, workers’ rights, environmental protection and the anti-corruption fight are closely connected. Coming back to a real economy, in opposition to the speculative bubble, requires a new type of corporate social and environmental responsibility. This applies to companies for which immediate profit is not the only goal, in a world of flags of convenience and tax heavens.

RECOGNITION OF KEY ACTORS: CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Lastly, it will be necessary to take more and more account of the local governments which, closest to the populations and the territories, are particularly concerned by the concrete issues of environmental protection and sustainable development just as human rights. Organised into international networks (UCLG, Eurocités, ICLEI...), they have, over the past few years, become increasingly important partners for world organisations. In addition, the close relationships often developed between local authorities and NGOs on the ground result in heightened efficiency in the actions undertaken, particularly in the field of decentralized cooperation.

In fact, one of the results of Rio+20 is the recognition – explicitly formulated in the outcome document – of the role of local governments. Some might view it as recognition by default: given the renouncement by the states and in view of the economic and political stalemate that blocks the emergence of world governance in favour of sustainable development and the protection of the biospheres, one turns to local authorities as a last resort.

This might well be the case... However, it is on the ground that the transition towards sustainable development is and will be done. The politicians in charge of cities, regions and provinces are often responsible for public policies aimed at a balanced development of the regions (housing, mobility, local economic development, education and training, health and culture...). Whenever possible within the national political framework, local governments guarantee the public interest. They ensure social and environmental democracy as well as solidarity between territories and generations.

A number of local authorities, on their own or within networks, are already engaged in that process on a daily basis. Networks such as UCLG (*United Cities and Local Governments*) – with whom the Nantes Forum has worked since 2006 – will be invited to play a large part in the discussions during the 2013 Forum. The aim is to collectively “produce” public policies that can be implemented at the local level.

In the run-up to the *Sustainable Development Goals* by 2015, the World Forum on Human Rights will represent a key milestone where all the representatives and actors of the *major groups* present at Rio+20 are invited:

- » Trade and industry
- » Children and youth
- » NGO
- » Local authorities
- » Workers and federations
- » Indigenous people
- » Women
- » Science and technology community
- » Agriculture

3. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1999. *A new economic model. Development, justice and freedom*. Chapter VIII, p. 56.