

PRESIDENT OF THE 63RD SESSION UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

At the Launch of the World Day of Social Justice

New York, 10 February 2009

Excellencies,
Madame Robinson,
Dear Friends,

I am honored that you have invited me to speak to this Commission on Social Development and participate in the launch of the first World Day of Social Justice. I understand that this is the first time the President of the General Assembly addresses this central body within the Economic and Social Council. I presume that this is because you know that the advancement of social justice and the inclusion of the socially marginalized, have been a focus of my work for my entire life and are priorities of my tenure here during the 63rd session of the General Assembly.

These are especially trying times for the world and particularly for the hundreds of millions of marginalized people who too often live in poverty and isolation. In recent weeks, we have been witness to the unspeakable violence against the most afflicted members of our world community, the Palestinian people in Gaza. As we know, social development, integration and social justice cannot be attained in the absence of peace, security or respect for all human rights. On a global scale, hunger and poverty are growing before our eyes. Each day, millions of the marginally poor are tipping into extreme poverty due to the global financial meltdown, unemployment and even scarcity of food. They already know first hand the catastrophes that climate change has in store for all of us.

Today we launch the First World Day of Social Justice. It is an important issue that demands a prominent place on our international agenda. How can we bring the poor, the people with disabilities, older persons, disaffected youth and abused women and other minorities into the mainstream of societies? I believe that such integration and justice require that we recast the global financial architecture in such a way that the marginalized have full access to the economic and social system locally and internationally. We need policy making that recognizes their human rights as full members of society. We need a financial system that includes those who are being excluded.

For decades, if not centuries, the dominant economic system has favored the wealthy; those who are rich have structured the world for their benefit -- in many cases, their exclusive benefit. Entire regions of the world, scores of developing countries, have been denied access to fair trade. Poor, developing countries have been ordered by the Bretton Woods institutions to cut back on the social and economic programmes that ensure a decent standard of living for their citizens, perpetuating the murderous deprivation of their poorest people. These institutions have demanded food exports needed by the wealthy countries at the expense of local food production and food security in poorer countries.

As you may know, the General Assembly, with the help of its Presidential Commission of Experts on reforms of the international financial, economic, trade and monetary system, recently began its work to explore new ways to ensure the integration of developing countries into a more fair and responsive international financial framework. Our aim is to bring the United Nations, the G-192, into the discussion about changes needed in the failed financial

architecture. We must help to ensure that the needed new order reflects a more just and equitable system, one in which the marginalized participate and benefit. Through the General Assembly and the many important bodies within ECOSOC, we must press for social justice as well. Only working together with strong and courageous leadership will we be successful in this endeavour.

The work of the Commission and the General Assembly resolution calling for the World Day of Social Justice provide us with opportunities for Member States, civil society organizations and individuals around the world to take concrete steps to promote awareness of social justice. I encourage all Member States to raise awareness of the principles of equity, democracy, participation, transparency accountability and inclusion that provide the underpinnings of social justice. I congratulate H.E. Nurbek Jeenbaev, Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan, who has taken the lead in promoting this special day at the UN and salute his country's efforts to imbue the spirit of social justice into the fabric of society. We need inspiration and leadership in promoting these essential values in our societies.

I think that our world is in great need of paradigms, of embodiments of the virtues we will need to rise up to the great challenges confronting us in the XXI century. I have been inspired by many people, known and less known, over the years.

As I see it, the great hero of social justice, the one whose example can greatly help us all in our non-violent struggle for social justice is Julius Nyerere, the first Tanzanian president who helped lead all of Africa out of colonialism, and into a social and economic system that placed human beings rather than maximization of profit at the center of all economic endeavour.

I remain indebted – I think all humanity remains indebted – to Fidel Castro, who has dedicated his life to the tireless practice and promotion of SOLIDARITY with oppressed people throughout the world. More than a hero, Fidel is as close to a saint as we can find in our troubled world. And we see the emergence of new leaders like President Evo Morales of Bolivia, who against all odds is leading our indigenous peoples – in Bolivia and throughout the world – to take their rightful places at the centre of our societies as well as courageously defending the sovereignty and independence of Bolivia, is an unequalled hero of water and Mother Earth in general.

So let us celebrate all of these leaders in the struggle for a better world. More importantly, let us all become leaders and advocates for a more just world -- one imbued with respect for the inherent dignity due everyone.

Thank you.

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