

Whispers are not enough

“The people have roared, but the G8 has whispered”. This was the powerful metaphor used by Kumi Naidoo, Chair of the Global Call to Action against Poverty, to express his disappointment with the outcome of the meeting of the eight most powerful political leaders of the world in Scotland in July 2005.

Billions of people are estimated to have watched the “Live8” concerts on the eve of the G8 meeting. Millions of them actually sent messages via e-mail or cell phones, demanding concrete and practical decisions against poverty from the G8: more aid and of a better quality, debt cancellation for countries unable to provide basic social services to their own people, and fair international trade. The expressions of public opinion demanding actions against poverty were so impressive that the eight leaders decided to show their commitment to the cause by actually signing the final communiqué in a public ceremony, something unusual in G8 meetings. Not only did the official announcements fall short of expectations, but the ink had not yet dried on the communiqué when US president George W Bush’s main advisor during the meeting denied having agreed to any increase in US aid.

By then the world’s attention was on the bombs that exploded in the London transport system so the hasty muting of an enormous roar into a shameful whisper went largely unnoticed.

This Social Watch Report 2005 deals precisely with the gap between promises and action. Poverty and gender discrimination actually kill people. Thousands of silent deaths every day could be avoided.

Sixty years ago, when the United Nations was created, the immediate motivation was “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. Yet the visionaries that drafted the UN Charter in

San Francisco already felt that “collective security” and the absence of war were not enough and could not be achieved without “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small” together with the determination “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”.

In 1995, when the end of the Cold War reawakened the hopes that the promises of that document would be finally acted upon, citizen groups from around the world came together and created Social Watch to report independently once a year on how their governments were living up to their own standards and promises. The focus was, and still is, on the solemn pledges made by heads of State to achieve gender equality and to eradicate poverty, “making history” on the eve of the 21st century.

This is the tenth Social Watch report. Its essential concept has not changed: commitments were made by our leaders and it is a right and a responsibility of citizens to hold governments accountable to their own promises and legal obligations. What has changed over the last decade are the monitoring tools used by Social Watch and the breadth of its constituency.

The first Social Watch report in 1996 included the findings of NGOs in eleven countries. This Social Watch report 2005 compiles the findings from over 50 country coalitions on all continents. Each national Social Watch chapter is formed by organizations and movements that are active around the year on social development issues. They come together once a year to assess government actions and outcomes. Their findings are not intended as pure research but are used to interpellate authorities and help shape better pro-poor and pro-women policies. Thus, the Social

Watch report is not a commissioned report. The specific focus of each issue is discussed collectively and each national group decides on its own priorities and emphasis. To make the report possible, each group raises its own funds, most of which are invested in consulting with social movements to gather evidence and validate their findings. The role of the International Secretariat is to process all that information and edit it into the global report. The Social Watch International Coordinating Committee, elected by the national platforms in an assembly, provides guidance and leadership to the network. A team of social scientists based at Social Watch headquarters in Montevideo taps the latest information available nationally and internationally and processes it with methodologies designed, tested and scrutinized over ten years to produce the country by country figures and global summaries included in the report.

Based on methodology originally developed by the Social Watch coalition in the Philippines to monitor local governments, a Basic Capabilities Index has been developed and is included in this report together with a new Gender Equity Index. The indexes' findings are consistent with those of national reports and with the detailed analysis of each of the dimensions of poverty and inequity (education, health, nutrition and housing). The sad conclusion is that without a major shift in present trends, even the minimum targets agreed to solemnly by the heads of State and government

*during the Millennium Summit in 2000 will simply **not** be met. "The Social Map" of the world that accompanies this report seems doomed to be painted mostly in red, orange and yellow, the colours that symbolize different degrees of deprivation, when by 2015 the "social planet" should be entirely blue to indicate that the minimum level of social services has been met.*

The meeting of the G8 in Scotland failed to produce the new momentum needed to move towards a "blue", poverty free and gender equitable world. World leaders will have a new opportunity this year when they meet at the sixtieth anniversary of the UN in September and when their ministers attend the World Trade Organization gathering in Hong Kong in December.

*By demonstrating that previous promises have not been met we are not promoting cynicism, but demanding action. The story is still evolving; the final word has not yet been said and citizens **can** make a difference: the time to act against poverty is now!*

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