



THE WATCHDOG

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OPEN UN VS. CLOSED UN: USEFUL CONVERSATIONS IN THE EVE OF THE MILENIUM SUMMIT

Med Manzanal, Philippines

Youth Coalition attended yesterday the Open UN meeting organized by Bridge Initiative International in partnership with 16 organizations including Youth Coalition itself.

The Open UN is an alternative space where the civil society can speak with one another with regard to the UN Millennium+5 process specifically the UN reform. Rather than asking the UN for access to the official meetings, the Open UN created its own for a where voices of the people and the civil society, not experts and world leaders, can be heard and their voices be brought to bear in the context of power play-filled negotiations happening in the Millennium Summit.

While leaders debated and fought over texts and language, the Open UN participants ponder on the future of the UN and the possibility of real reform in the United Nations, its role in the movements of civil society's quest for social justice and genuine development. Questions like how do you see the UN reform process in the midst of fundamentalism? What can the civil society do to reshape and reclaim this global institution that could be more responsive to people's needs for a just world? What strategies, approaches, and methodologies can be used by the NGOs other than the usual instruments to campaign?

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Two Youth Coalition members volunteered to the reporting of the summary of the workshops. Mirlande Demers (Haiti/Canada) reported the summary of the Workshop 1 on the Economic and Military Violence :IMF/WB policies, Two sides of the Same Coin. She strongly put forward the link between economic and military violence and the damage of IMF/WB policies done to the sexual and reproductive rights of people, including young people. Med Manzanal (Philippines) worked on Workshop 3 which stressed the saliency of two approaches relative to the UN reform, one is through active and critical engagement with the process itself and the second one is an issue-based tactic aimed at hitting where it really hurts. Successful campaigns on issues such as the land mines and the Cities for Peace deserves to be mentioned.

In the sense, the Open UN meeting however lacking in needed attendance, achieved the essential character of a dialogue where alternative, progressive, non-traditional and some times out of the box ideas, visions, and provocative perspectives not to mention many suggested approaches of attack were put on the table. This is a forum where Sexual and Reproductive Rights activists like YOUTH COALITION can be orientated and can appreciate in fact the broader context of the burning issues of globalization, war and militarization, poverty, the UN in which the SRR discourse and the whole conversation on rights and equality can be framed and interrogated.

EVERY 14 SECONDS

Claudia Ahumada, Chile

Today I decide to write something about achieving MDG goal 6, on combating HIV/AIDS. I have called my article “every 14 seconds”. Why, you might ask? The answer is simple, and sad: every 14 seconds, A young person is infected with HIV. That’s sad. But, more than anything, it’s a disgrace, to us, to our governments, to our policy makers. To the people that believed that MDG’s actually meant something, that they are achievable and not more a mere declaration of good intentions. 5 years after the adoption of the MDG’s, we are still talking. Half of the infections are being recorded in the 15-24 age bracket. Most young people living with HIV are unaware that they are even carrying the virus. Approximately 80% of the HIV infections around the world are transmitted sexually. And yet, here we are. Still discussing whether or not it’s appropriated “ to have youth participate in the prevention of the HIV, still discussing whether or not it is recommendable for youth to have access to comprehensive SRRH education. Every 14 seconds. What are we waiting for? For it to be every 10, every 5, every 2 seconds? MDG goal 6 is to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. But, this is not enough, for in order to achieve this goal, we need concrete policies. Which policies, you may ask? Well, at the international Youth Forum, organized by the Youth Coalition, and held in Argentina, in may, over 60 youth from around the world met and came up with a series of essential policies for the fulfillment of the goal 6.

First of all, we need:

1. Greater integration of HIV/AIDS and SRHR in policies and programs to maximize efficacy of prevention.
2. Public awareness to inform, educate and include youth in HIV/AIDS prevention efforts.
3. Greater youth-friendly access to voluntary counseling and testing (VCT)
4. Improve measures to access quality and affordable HIV/AIDS treatment, support, care and overall quality of life for young people living with HIV/AIDS.
5. Particular attention to the gendered nature of HIV/AIDS prevention efforts to the vulnerabilities of young women.
6. And the last, but most certainly not least, we need: Greater resource mobilization for funding youth HIV/AIDS initiatives. In relation to this, also essential that donor funding directives endorse realistic and comprehensive approaches to combat HIV/AIDS among young people.

Only when we fulfill these policies, will MDG goal 6 begin to be a reality. Only when we realize and are true to the fact the young people's SRR are integral to combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, will this goal be feasible ladies and gentleman, in the time it took you to read this article, over 30 youth have been infected with HIV/AIDS. Let's do something about it. Talking, obviously isn't enough!!!!

Gender equality is more than what the MDGs suggest!

Fredrik Lindahl, Sweden

The 60 Youth that got together at the Youth Forum earlier this year recognised that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3, on gender equality is not enough. The MDGs are very much concerned with education and to a certain extent work, that is good but not enough. This becomes obvious to me when looking at my own country, Sweden. The country would do fine if you measure ratio of women in education and parliament as the MDG indicators propose. But equality is more than that! For example, you can look at the issue of gender violence.

According to The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 23 000 cases of violence against women were reported to the police in 2004. But still all the cases of violence against women are not reported to the police. The same council for crime prevention estimate that only 20 to 25 percent of the cases where a man in close relation to the women are the perpetrator are reported to the police.

There is a need to understand that the whole world is part of a power structure where

women are subordinated. Gender violence is just one part of an unequal society, I could go on making loads of examples. Each example is something that is denying many women from the same chances in life as men and examples such as gender violence is a clear violation of the physical integrity of the women. We, Men and Women, need to understand that this power structure is in every part of society and that there is a need for more indicators, which measure equality in public institutions and in the private life. Otherwise a country like Sweden will go on looking like a country where gender equality is achieved even when the case is that most of my sister is facing far more threats and discrimination than me and most of my brothers!

Let It start With You !

Olena Bilokha, Ukraine

The way I see the future is young people changing things for the better. It often seems hard to do, unrealistic – and it can be hard, but not impossible. I believe that we are never given desires without the power to make them come true. When you start taking small steps, you might at some point think that you're not making any visible progress, but in some time, look behind you and you'll see the changes that you brought to life. Or, if you hesitate and stay where you are, you won't see a thing. It's your choice to make. You are now and here given an opportunity to change things because you are young and full of energy. This might sound a lot like patriotic stuff... But looking behind it, I'm selfish. I think much more of myself and people who are close to me than of global things like world community. And I want life improved for myself and for those I love. What I believe though is that if every one of us tries and does his/her best for the benefit of our local communities, together we are the power that can change the whole world by improving the part of it that we belong to.

The key element of success is the belief in the power of the individual to enact change. When we say, "It starts with me!" we are giving voice to the responsibility and possibility within each of us. We recognize that environmental, social, and economic problems can seem impossibly large when we speak in the abstract, but that such problems are also connected directly to each of us. Individuals make the decision to throw trash on the ground or to clean up trash, to give or accept bribes, and to speak out or remain silent. But the most important is to remember that it starts with you. You are responsible for the decisions and actions and you have the power to impact the world. You may only make a small difference in one small way, but you know that you are a part of a larger movement toward greater empowerment, a healthier environment, and a better society!