

# **Remarks by Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, U.S. Representative to ECOSOC, for the US/Canada/Israel Team, 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on Human Rights, the Right to Development and Global Governance**

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On behalf of Canada, Israel, and the United States: thank you Co-Chairs, colleagues.

We welcome the opportunity to speak about rights and the post-2015 development agenda. We are not going to speak here about specific rights which we have addressed elsewhere but about the broader place of human rights in this agenda.

First, this agenda, at its core, is for us about the rights of every person on this planet, including future generations, to live a life of dignity and promise. What motivates our conviction about eradicating extreme poverty, or putting countries on a path of sustained and inclusive growth, or husbanding our natural resources, or combatting inequality, prejudice, and violence is rooted in a basic commitment to universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. It's about the dignity and worth of every individual and the opportunities and fundamental freedoms they all should enjoy.

Third, we know that all fundamental human rights are best protected in contexts where the rule of law prevails, where there are credible, responsive institutions, and where governments are open, democratic, and accountable to all their citizens. We also know that these are precisely the contexts that best promote development, that encourage investment, promote growth and job creation, and ensure that the benefits of development are enjoyed by all members of society, and no one is left behind. The institutional and political environments in which people are empowered to claim their rights are also the ones in which they are empowered as economic actors and in which they have more tools to make decisions about their futures in ways that can support sustainable development. The Task Team paper also makes this point in various ways.

Access to information, and mechanisms that can empower citizens to participate fully in civic and political life, to engage their governments, and to hold their public institutions accountable, is particularly critical for everything from basic service delivery to protections against violations of their fundamental rights. This was also reaffirmed in Rio+20: “individual participation in decision-making, access to information and to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, are essential enablers for inclusive, sustainable development.”

Open, responsive, and accountable governance is the obvious underpinning. The UN’s MyWorld Survey continues to accumulate votes from every region of the world that honest and responsive governance is among the highest priorities for all of our citizens in every country. It is not optional, it is essential for sustained and sustainable development, it is a universal demand, and our agenda will need to reflect that.

Fourth, the question of “rights-based approaches.” There are obviously very different views on the question of “rights-based approaches” as well as the right to development, and lawyers can spend hours debating the finer points and distinctions. For our purposes here, we do not see this question per se as a particularly productive use of our time. We would rather debate how to deliver better health care, educational outcomes, access to justice, equality for women, investment in critical infrastructure, access to finance and markets, and preventable child deaths.

Finally, a word about global governance. We also clearly live in a changing world, and our institutions need to be modernized along with our economies and societies. They need to reflect new actors and voices as well as new challenges to and opportunities for cooperation. These are extremely important issues. First, we need to ensure that our international institutions are knowledge-driven and dynamic, focused on addressing 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. We do not think, however, that global governance should be a major focus of our effort at this stage. We have many venues and processes in which to discuss those issues, and we do have concern that discussions of global governance will distract us from the issues we believe require our immediate attention – health, education, jobs, equality, freedom from want and fear, stewardship of natural resources that husbands them for future generations as well as our own, and the 1.2 billion who still live in extreme poverty.

Second, we believe that in order to advance these fundamental rights and freedoms, particular attention must be given to the most vulnerable. Eliminating all forms of discrimination against girls and women must remain a priority. Women perform two

thirds of the world's work and produce half of the food. But they earn only 10 percent of the income and own only 1 percent of the property. Women make up more than half the population, but represent only 20 percent of political leaders in the world. Most unacceptably, around the world, one in every three girls and women will experience some form of violence in her lifetime and the scourge must end.

The rights and perspectives of children should also be incorporated into the new development framework, and specific actions must be undertaken to ensure their equal participation. This inclusivity must also extend to persons with disabilities, who represent 15 percent of the world's population.

Thank you.

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