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A Human Rights Lens on Full Employment and Decent Work in the Post-2015 Development Agenda (abstract)

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Research Panel: Visualizing Rights

Presenters: Diane F. Frey and Gillian MacNaughton

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Abstract

Since the turn of the Millennium the elimination of global poverty has been a top priority of the international community. In the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the leaders from 189 nations committed to work together for poverty eradication, human rights and global peace.

Toward these ends, the Declaration was transformed into Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets that aimed to unify governments, international organizations, foundations and nongovernmental organizations to focus their expertise, efforts and funds on achieving specific targets in the areas of poverty reduction, education, gender equality, health and other areas of human development. Yet, the MDGs failed to take into account a key element of poverty reduction and human development, namely decent work. The International Labour Organization, the UN specialized agency that focuses on work and poverty, has recognized for almost 100 years that “the best way to avoid a life of poverty is to find decent work” (ILO 2001).

Moreover, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that everyone has the right to decent work. Nonetheless, the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs failed to acknowledge that decent work for all is an essential element of eradicating poverty, realizing human rights, and achieving global peace. In contrast to the MDG framework, the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 international agenda look promising. Goal 8 of the proposal presented by the UN Open Working Group on the SDGs in July 2014 calls for full and productive employment and decent work for all by 2030, a proposal the UN General Assembly will consider in September 2015. This paper reflects over the shortcomings of the MDGs and considers the decent work SDG and its potential in the post-2015 framework to bring sustained efforts toward ensuring decent work as a means to eradicate poverty and realize human rights for all.

Keywords: Decent work, poverty, human rights, sustainable development goals, millennium development goals

Reference: International Labour Organization, Poverty Reduction and Decent Work in a Globalizing World, GB.280/WP/SDG/1, at ¶ 32 (2001).

Biographies:

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Gillian MacNaughton, JD, MPA, DPhil, is an international human rights lawyer, an Assistant Professor in the School for Global Inclusion and Social Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and an affiliate member of the Economic and Social Rights Research Group at the University of Connecticut. Previously, she was the Executive Director of the Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy at Northeastern University School of Law. MacNaughton has taught at the University of Sarajevo in Bosnia, Brandeis University in the US and the University of Oxford in the UK, and she has consulted on projects for the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, as well as several nongovernmental organizations. She received her DPhil from the University of Oxford.