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Inequalities, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development Goal 10

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Research Panel: Inequalities, Rights, and Sustainable Development

Presenter: Gillian MacNaughton, University of Massachusetts Boston

Title: Inequalities, Human Rights, and Sustainable Development Goal 10

Abstract:

Most of the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets echo the goals and targets in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework. SDG 10 — reduce inequality within and among countries — is, however, completely new. The idea that the global community should work together toward equality had no part in the MDG framework, which focused on reducing poverty rather than making a more equal world. From a human rights perspective, the inclusion of the new SDG on reducing inequality is a great step forward.

Notably, Oxfam reported in January 2017 that the eight wealthiest men in the world own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of the global population. Such a distribution of wealth and other economic and social outcomes cannot be consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclamation that “[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity.” Nonetheless, the targets under SDG 10 are disappointing, as they do not aim at reducing economic or social inequality specifically but rather at raising the income and other human development indicators for those worst off. None of the SDG 10 targets references reducing the glaring inequalities between the wealthy and the poor.

This paper examines SDG 10 on reducing inequality from a holistic human rights perspective. It begins by examining the meanings of equality and nondiscrimination in international human rights law. Through this lens, the paper seeks to decipher the meanings of inequality in SDG 10 and its targets by delving into the debates during the consultations on the post-2015 development agenda and the subsequent discussion on indicators. It concludes that the new SDG on inequality, although seemingly promising, makes little change to the MDG framework that focused on poverty reduction.

About the presenter:

Gillian MacNaughton, JD, MPA, DPhil, is an assistant professor in the School for Global Inclusion and Social Development at the University of Massachusetts Boston. An international human rights lawyer, she works on economic and social rights and human rights-based approaches to social justice. She has consulted on projects for WHO, UNDP, UNICEF and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health. Her recent research is published in the *Health and Human Rights Journal*, the *Journal of Human Rights*, and the *Georgetown Journal of International Law*. She received her doctorate in law from the University of Oxford.