



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
18 February 2010

Original: English

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## Human Rights Council

### Thirteenth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the impact of the global economic and financial crises on the realization of all human rights and on possible actions to alleviate it\***

### *Summary*

The present report is a response to Human Rights Council resolution 12/28 entitled “Follow-up to the tenth special session of the Human Rights Council on the impact of the global economic and financial crises on the universal realization and effective enjoyment of human rights”, in which the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to “consult Member States of the United Nations and all other relevant stakeholders on the issue with a view to presenting to the Council at its thirteenth session a report on the impact of the crises on the realization of all human rights and on possible actions required to alleviate it”. Accordingly, the report draws from contributions received from Member States and other relevant stakeholders in response to the above resolution, as well as from outcomes of major events, including the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development held in New York in June 2009.

The report highlights potential human rights issues raised in these deliberations, reports and contributions. They indicate that, while it is still too early to assess the full impact of the crisis — as some of its longer-term effects continue to affect different countries and regions in varying degrees — it is clear that the global crisis has the potential to reverse or slow down the progress made so far towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. The report also notes that, while recent economic forecasts suggest that the crisis may be tapering off, it will take some time before its longer-term impact on individuals and their human rights is fully known. A number of potential impacts were raised in various deliberations, reports and conferences, such as an increase in global poverty or unemployment; a possible decrease in

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\* Late submission.

social spending resulting in more limited access to health care, education, housing and other social programmes; and a deterioration of the situation of some marginalized groups. Furthermore, the report notes several actions, initiatives and proposals put forward to address the impact of the crisis on human rights, as highlighted in contributions, reports and analyses made by Member States, treaty bodies, special procedures mandate holders, the United Nations system and other relevant stakeholders. The report concludes by noting the importance of continuing to monitor the impact of the crisis on human rights in order to guide national and international efforts to ensure respect for and protection of all human rights of those who are affected by the crisis.

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## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 12/28 entitled “Follow-up to the tenth special session of the Human Rights Council on the impact of the global economic and financial crises on the universal realization and effective enjoyment of human rights”, in which the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to “consult Member States of the United Nations and all other relevant stakeholders on the issue with a view to presenting to the Council at its thirteenth session a report on the impact of the crises on the realization of all human rights and on possible actions required to alleviate it”.

2. Accordingly, Member States and other relevant stakeholders were invited to submit information in response to the above resolution. At the time of submission of this report, written inputs had been received from the Governments of Afghanistan, Cuba, Colombia, Greece, Morocco, Serbia, Switzerland and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) as well as from the United Nations Children’s Fund, the World Health Organization and the International Network for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights. In addition, this report also draws on publicly available documents from relevant stakeholders and other consultation processes and deliberations under the Council and the General Assembly, such as the tenth special session of the Human Rights Council on the impact of the global economic and financial crisis on the universal realization and effective enjoyment of human rights, held in Geneva on 20 February 2009; the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development held in New York in June 2009; and the 2009 Social Forum of the Human Rights Council, held in Geneva from 31 August to 2 September 2009. All written submissions received for the preparation of this report are available for consultation in the files of the secretariat.

## II. Overview of the global financial and economic crisis

3. Over the last few years, the world economy has experienced one of the most severe financial and economic crises since the Second World War. Beginning with the collapse of the housing market in the United States of America in 2007, the crisis spread rapidly from the financial markets of developed countries to large parts of the global economy. Collapsing world trade and commodity prices were quickly translated into losses in employment and income, affecting the real economies both in developed and developing countries. The General Assembly noted that, “The origins and causes of the crisis are complex and multifaceted, but it is widely recognized that many of the main causes of the crisis are linked to systemic fragilities and imbalances that contributed to the inadequate functioning of the global economy.”<sup>1</sup>

4. Contributions to the present report received from Member States, as well as available data and analyses, suggest that the impact of the crisis has not been uniform, differing across countries and regions. For example, World Bank and United Nations analyses suggest that Europe and Central Asia were among the most affected regions, whereas the recovery was relatively swift in East Asia and the Pacific region.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, in many of the poorest countries which lack the capacity and resources to undertake

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution 63/303 on the outcome of the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, the World Bank, “*East Asia and Pacific Update. Transforming the Rebound into Recovery*”, November 2009.

necessary countermeasures, there is a fear that the crisis has the potential to significantly slow down progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

5. There has been an unprecedented policy response to the crisis, including monetary, financial and fiscal measures to stabilize financial markets and revive global growth. According to the latest economic forecasts available at the time of the submission of this report, these countermeasures and stimulus packages have contributed to slowing down the pace of the economic downturn, giving way to a slow and fragile recovery.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, these forecasts and various reports caution that the trend towards recovery remains weak. While the global economy will require continued stimulus until it sees a more vigorous sign of recovery, there are already signs that the stimulus measures in place are draining the financial reserves of many countries, increasing deficit levels across the board, which could further contribute to financial instability.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that it will take some time until the full impact of the crisis is known, including in many of the poorest countries.

### III. The impact of the financial crisis on human rights

#### A. Overall implications for human rights

6. Since its outbreak, the crisis has prompted concerns about the impact on individuals and their human rights in both developed and developing countries, especially those who are already living in extreme poverty, marginalization, discrimination and fear. The crisis and its effect on such issues as employment, poverty, access to basic services and social protection have a bearing on the ability of individuals to exercise their human rights and that of States to fulfil their obligations. These concerns were reiterated at the tenth special session of the Human Rights Council and its ensuing resolution S-10/1, in which the Council expressed “serious concern at the negative impacts of the global economic and financial crises on economic and social development and on the full enjoyment of all human rights in all countries”, as well as at the 2009 Social Forum held in September 2009. Concerns about the human rights implications of the crisis have also been highlighted in numerous reports and analyses issued by United Nations agencies, treaty bodies, special procedures mandate holders and other relevant stakeholders.

7. Contributions from Member States and other stakeholders generally reflect these concerns, as well as the varying levels of real and potential impact of the crisis across countries and regions. The Government of Afghanistan reported that, since the country has no financial markets, the impact of the global economic crisis on its economy is low. A decrease in foreign aid due to the crisis, as well as a forecast fall in revenues would, however, affect Afghanistan. In its submission, the Government of Cuba stated that the crisis was triggered by deregulation of the financial sector and has, in particular, affected economic, social and cultural rights. The Government of Greece reported on rising unemployment rates from May 2008 until August 2009 as a consequence of the economic crisis. The Government of Morocco reported that, despite fears of a severe economic downturn in several sectors, the impact has been relatively moderate. The contributions

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2010*, available at <http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wesp2010files/wesp2010pr.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Latest estimates by the International Monetary Fund show that the deficits of the advanced countries averaged 1.9 per cent of national income before the financial crisis started in 2007. This year they are expected to reach 9.7 per cent, followed by 8.7 per cent in 2010. Emerging economies with their faster economic growth and greater constraints on borrowing expect much lower build-up of debt.

from the Government of Morocco as well as from the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasized that migrants also face increased discrimination and xenophobia in addition to unemployment. The Government of Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) indicated that the crisis has had an impact on articles 13, 16, 17, 22, 23, 25 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8. Generally, the crisis and the global economic slowdown associated with it, has the potential to impact on human rights directly and indirectly, including on the ability of individuals to exercise and claim their rights and on the ability of States to fulfil their obligations. The World Bank has estimated that 89 million more people could be pushed below the poverty line of US\$ 1.25 a day by the end of 2010,<sup>5</sup> and many other reports have also pointed to the potential of the crisis for slowing down progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, which are important milestones and benchmarks for the realization of human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights. While poverty exists in both developed and developing countries, many of the poorest countries lack the necessary means to protect their people from exogenous shocks, while at the same time facing difficulties in mobilizing additional resources.

9. The reports have also raised the increase in unemployment as an issue of major concern. The International Labour Organization (ILO) stated that unless adequate measures are adopted and in some cases continued, more than 40 million people could drop out of the labour market.<sup>6</sup> In its “World of Work Report 2009: The Global Jobs Crisis and Beyond”, the ILO indicated that “employment in high GDP per-capita countries may not return to pre-crisis levels before 2013. In emerging and developing countries, employment levels could start recovering from 2010.”<sup>7</sup> The report also indicated that, based on experience from earlier crises, the risk of unemployment is especially acute for low-skilled and older workers.

10. Longer-term effects, such as unemployment and an increase in poverty, can directly affect the ability of a country to levy taxes. This can result in decreased budgetary resources, endangering social spending and the progressive realization of a number of economic and social rights. The independent expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, has stated that “countries which are already struggling to fulfil their basic human rights obligations will face increasingly difficult obstacles as national funds grow scarce, and conditions for contracting loans grow increasingly stringent”.<sup>8</sup>

## **B. Economic, social and cultural rights**

11. The impact of the crisis on economic, social and cultural rights has been highlighted by the Human Rights Council special procedures mandate holders and United Nations agencies. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimated in its 2009 report, entitled “The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Economic crises –

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.worldbank.org/financialcrisis/>.

<sup>6</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Institute for Labour Studies, *World of Work Report 2009. The Global Jobs Crisis and Beyond*, p. viii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Statement to the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development, p. 1, available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/development/debt/docs/GAConferenceFinancialCrisis24Jun09.doc>.

impacts and lessons learned” that more than a billion people were undernourished in 2009 and even before the crisis, hunger was on the rise.<sup>9</sup> In the meantime, as needs increase, the ability of aid agencies to respond is being limited by the global economic downturn. In his report to the Council in July 2009, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food noted that the global food crisis has not unfolded in isolation from the global financial and economic crisis, with the consequence that many developing countries might face increasing difficulty in financing agriculture and rural development, subsidizing food to improve its affordability for the poorest, and establishing or strengthening social protection programmes.<sup>10</sup>

12. In her report submitted to the tenth session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, pointed out that the crisis has worsened affordability problems for housing and land across the world.<sup>11</sup> The Special Rapporteur also stated that the crisis and its origins in the housing market reflect fundamental flaws in economic and housing policies, revealing the inability of market mechanisms to provide adequate and affordable housing for all. She further noted that these economic, financial and housing policies and approaches that have seriously impacted the right to adequate housing in the past decades have contributed to the present crisis.

13. In developed as well as developing countries the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to health and the right to education, are particularly vulnerable to budget cuts. The World Bank has estimated that the 43 countries which were still in recession at the beginning of December 2009 face a US\$ 11.6 billion shortfall in core spending for health and education.<sup>12</sup> The World Health Organization has estimated that one billion people faced difficulties in accessing quality basic health services even before the crisis. This large number might increase due to the lack of available funds.

### C. Rights of women and children

14. The crisis and the economic and social distress caused by it tend to disproportionately affect women and children, especially young girls. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, in its statement issued on 6 February 2009, expressed its concern that, while the scale of the crisis was still largely unmeasured, women and girls in both developed and developing countries would be particularly affected by the potential social and economic consequences, such as unemployment, increase of responsibilities both at work and at home, decrease of income and potential increase in societal and domestic violence.

15. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, in her statement issued on International Women’s Day (9 March 2009), pointed out that violence against women intensifies when men experience displacement and dispossession related to economic crisis. Referring to analyses by ILO and others, in her report submitted to the eleventh session of the Human Rights Council, she emphasized that the impact of the economic crisis is expected to be more detrimental to women’s employment than to that of men in most regions of the world, and that women migrant and domestic workers have already been

<sup>9</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The State of Food Insecurity in the World. Economic crises – impacts and lessons learned*, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> A/HRC/12/31, para. 6.

<sup>11</sup> A/HRC/10/7, summary and paras. 18 and 49.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.worldbank.org/financialcrisis/>.

among the first to be laid off.<sup>13</sup> Such worrisome signs are likely to result in serious setbacks to the realization of gender equality and the elimination of violence against women. The Special Rapporteur further highlighted the experience from past crises, for example the impact of the Asian financial crisis (1997–1998) on women and girls which in some countries strained intra-household relationships, boosted suicides, domestic violence and abandonment, and provoked a private and public backlash against women's rights.

16. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) noted that the full impact on children is yet to be felt. In previous financial and economic crises, child mortality has risen and school enrolment dropped, and there are already indications that this crisis — compounded by recent food and fuel price instability — is causing increases in poverty and malnutrition. Furthermore, many impacts of the crisis in developing countries, such as slowing growth, reduced demand and employment, and declining budgets are only now beginning to unfold, severely threatening progress on health, education and child protection, and leaving children with the long-term mental and physical repercussions of malnutrition.

#### **D. Rights of migrants**

17. In addition to the impact of the crisis on remittance flow, several human rights experts expressed concerns about the increased vulnerability of migrants, migrant workers and their families, as a result of the crisis and economic downturn. In his report to the eleventh session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants highlighted the fact that child migration, as well as adult migration, is influenced by new global phenomena such as climate change, the food crisis and the financial and economic crisis.<sup>14</sup> The independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty also indicated in her report to the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly that, in times of recession, the lack of work opportunities and increased discrimination and xenophobia deeply affect migrants' enjoyment of their human rights.<sup>15</sup>

### **IV. United Nations response to the crisis**

18. At the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development in June 2009, world leaders pledged their commitment to continue to work in solidarity on a vigorous, coordinated and comprehensive global response to the crisis, in accordance with their respective abilities and responsibilities. Proclaiming that "we are all in this crisis together", they pledged to combine their short-term responses to meet the immediate impact of the financial and economic crisis, particularly on the most vulnerable countries, with medium- and long-term responses that necessarily involve the pursuit of development and the review of the global economic system. They also requested the Economic and Social Council to coordinate system-wide follow-up to the recommendations in the outcome document, and consider setting up an ad hoc panel of experts on the crisis and its impact on development. In the annex to General Assembly resolution 63/303 on the outcome of the Conference, the Heads of State and Government stressed that developing countries had not caused the crisis, but were nevertheless being affected by it, and stated that their endeavours must be guided by the need to address the human costs: an increase in the already unacceptable number of poor

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<sup>13</sup> A/HRC/11/6, paras. 25, 26 and 71.

<sup>14</sup> A/HRC/11/7, para. 21.

<sup>15</sup> A/64/279, para. 43.



and vulnerable, particularly women and children, who suffer and die of hunger, malnutrition and preventable or curable disease; a rise in unemployment; the reduction in access to education and health services; and the current inadequacy of social protection in many countries.

19. As recommended by the Human Rights Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights participated in the Conference and called on all stakeholders to prioritize human rights in formulating responses to the crisis. Several special procedures mandate holders issued statements and briefings at the time of the Conference to highlight the impact of the crisis on human rights relevant to their mandates. The Special Rapporteur on the right to food emphasized that, in spite of the current economic meltdown, the continuing global crisis in food prices should not be forgotten and called for greater attention to be paid to the right to food framework. The independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty appealed in a briefing note to the Conference to ensure the right to social security for all people at all times by establishing or strengthening social protection systems, and the independent expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of human rights made a statement on the difficulties ahead for countries already struggling to meet their human rights obligations and now facing increasingly stringent loan contract conditions (see paragraph 10 above).

20. In the annex to resolution 63/303 on the outcome of the Conference, Member States also supported further development of the comprehensive crisis response of the United Nations development system in support of national development strategies, through a coordinated approach by United Nations funds and programmes, specialized agencies and the international financial institutions at the country level.<sup>16</sup> The United Nations system has been promoting such a coordinated approach through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). In its communiqué of April 2009 the CEB stated that, “In the face of this unfolding crisis, the multilateral system must deploy all its resources and capacities in a rapid and effective response, while upholding the principles, values and goals to which the international community has committed. Open economies and societies must be defended to avoid the risk of reverting to inward-looking policies, protectionism and even xenophobia. Human rights, democracy, social justice and peace must be preserved.”

21. The CEB then developed a package of nine joint initiatives consisting of:

(a) Additional financing for the most vulnerable through advocating and devising a joint World Bank-United Nations system mechanism for the common articulation and implementation of additional financing, including through a proposed vulnerability fund under the World Bank;

(b) Improved food security through strengthening programmes to feed the hungry and expanding support to farmers in developing countries;

(c) Fighting protectionism, including through the conclusion of the Doha round and strengthening aid for trade initiatives and finance for trade;

(d) A green economy initiative for promoting investment in long-term environmental sustainability and putting the world on a climate-friendly path;

(e) A global jobs pact for boosting employment, production, investment and aggregate demand, and promoting decent work for all;

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<sup>16</sup> Para. 52 (b).

(f) A social protection floor for ensuring access to basic social services, shelter, and empowerment, and protection of the poor and vulnerable;

(g) Humanitarian, security and social stability, including emergency action to protect lives and livelihoods, meeting hunger and humanitarian needs, protecting displaced people and shoring up security and social stability;

(h) Technology and innovation – developing technological infrastructure to facilitate the promotion of and access to innovation;

(i) Monitoring and analysis to strengthen macroeconomic and financial surveillance and implementing an effective economic early warning system, as well as establishing a United Nations system-wide vulnerability monitoring and alert mechanism to track developments and report on the political, economic, social and environmental dimensions of the crisis.

OHCHR contributes to several of these joint initiatives in order to integrate human rights perspectives in global responses by the United Nations system.

## **V. Possible actions to alleviate the impact of the crisis**

22. Addressing the impact of the crisis on the realization of human rights requires concerted efforts both at national and international levels. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution S-10/1, called upon States to note that the global economic and financial crises do not diminish the responsibility of national authorities in the realization of human rights and urged the international community to support national efforts to protect the most vulnerable segments of their societies.

23. Reflecting the above-mentioned Council resolution, several Member States provided information in their contributions to the present report on relevant actions undertaken by governments to counteract the impact of the financial crisis and to protect the rights of those severely affected by it. This section highlights several examples of such actions taken by States as well as those recommendations and proposals made by the United Nations human rights mechanisms and other relevant stakeholders.

### **A. Protection of the most vulnerable**

24. As called for by the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis, a number of governments reported on their efforts to coordinate national responses and to protect or mobilize resources for social protection, food security and other basic services for the most vulnerable population affected by the crisis. For example, the Government of Colombia reported that it has adopted a five-pronged strategy in response to the crisis, including strengthening social assistance to the most vulnerable sections of the population. Similarly, the Government of Greece reported that a number of measures had been adopted to balance the effects of the crisis on the most vulnerable population groups. The Government of Morocco established a coordinating body (*Comité de veille stratégique*) presided over by the Ministry of Economy and Finance to deal with the effects of the crisis. The Government of Serbia reported that it had reacted in a timely manner to the emergence of the global economic crisis including through the adoption of an Economic Stability Plan on 9 April 2009, with a view to mitigating the adverse effects of the crisis and ensuring the social security of citizens.

25. According to the ILO, 80 per cent of the global population had less than adequate social protection coverage even before the crisis.<sup>17</sup> The need to establish or strengthen a social protection floor has been emphasized in the CEB joint initiatives, including the Global Jobs Pact adopted by the International Labour Conference, as well as in the Ministerial Declaration of the Economic and Social Council. Several special procedures mandate holders have been advocating that such initiatives should be grounded in national and international human rights frameworks so that they effectively contribute to the protection of the human rights of the poor, the most vulnerable and those who are discriminated against. The importance of social security as a tool for the protection of the basic human rights of all persons was also highlighted at the second meeting of the Social Forum of the Human Rights Council held from 31 August to 2 September 2009 in Geneva which brought together a wide range of stakeholders concerned with the negative impact of the economic and financial crisis on efforts to combat poverty. The Social Forum recommended, *inter alia*, that States need to take all necessary measures to provide social security coverage to all, particularly to the most vulnerable, and highlighted that civil society played an important role in raising awareness and advocating more inclusive social security systems.

26. Recognizing that migrants are among the most vulnerable in the context of the crisis, the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis highlighted the need to resist unfair and discriminatory treatment of migrant workers and the imposition of unreasonable restrictions on labour migration in order to maximize the benefits of international migration, while complying with the relevant national legislation and applicable international instruments. Efforts to raise awareness of the human rights of migrants and their positive contribution to development both in host countries and their countries of origin are important elements of such efforts. Anti-migrant sentiments and discriminatory practices are not only a human rights concern but also obstacles to the inclusion, acceptance and integration of migrants in host countries. Conversely, human rights-based regulations and policies which promote access to decent work, health care, education and adequate housing are important not only for the protection of the human rights of migrants, but also for their social inclusion and integration. In addition, regular labour migration channels should remain open with a view to meeting a continuing demand for migrant workers, thus helping to prevent irregular migration and trafficking and to reduce the vulnerability of migrants to exploitative employment outside the regular labour market.

## **B. International cooperation**

27. While national initiatives were at the core of the measures taken to address the crisis, international cooperation was also required in view of the global nature of the crisis. At the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis in June 2009, world leaders pledged their commitment to continue to work in solidarity on a vigorous, coordinated and comprehensive global response to the crisis, in accordance with their respective abilities and responsibilities (see paragraph 18 above).

28. At the 2009 Social Forum, participants recalled that international assistance and cooperation is enshrined in, *inter alia*, article 2 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and that there is a duty to assist countries that do not have the domestic resources to achieve progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the Covenant. It was reaffirmed that human rights principles and obligations

<sup>17</sup> ILO, Social Security Department, "Can low-income countries afford basic social security?" Social Security Policy Briefings, Paper 3, 2008.

had established the foundation for effective international assistance and cooperation. The Social Forum further recognized that international assistance and cooperation played a significant role in making social security viable for all States, and urged donor States to fulfil their official development assistance (ODA) commitments, for which they should have mechanisms in place to ensure the efficient and objective use of ODA.

29. The need for further reform of the decision-making process on international economic policy was another area of international cooperation highlighted in several contributions from Member States and other stakeholders from civil society. As underlined by the Council in its resolution S-10/1, they pointed to the need to establish an equitable, transparent and democratic international system to strengthen and broaden the participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting.

### **C. Responsibility of non-State actors**

30. The global economic and financial crisis brought a renewed focus on the role and responsibilities of non-State actors along with those of States. In its contribution to the present report, the Government of Switzerland emphasized that it encouraged the private sector to contribute to sustainable development in a manner respecting human rights. In this context, the Government reported that it has actively promoted the United Nations Global Compact and reaffirmed the importance of the ten principles that underline this initiative.

31. In his report to the eleventh session of the Human Rights Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises maintained that while markets can be highly efficient means for allocating scarce resources and powerful forces for promoting social objectives ranging from poverty alleviation to the rule of law, they must have adequate institutional underpinnings and be embedded in the broader values of social community. He stressed that these governance gaps create the permissive environment within which blameworthy acts by corporations may occur without adequate sanctions or reparation. He recommended that governments must avoid erecting protectionist barriers or lowering human rights standards for businesses; their short-run gains are illusory and they undermine longer-term recovery. For companies, even downsizing and plant closings must be conducted responsibly, and restoring public trust and confidence in business is as much of an immediate challenge as reinventing viable business models.<sup>18</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

32. **At the United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development in June 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that this crisis was not only a crisis of development, but of human rights as well. Throughout the crisis the United Nations human rights mechanisms have stressed the importance of putting individuals and their human rights at the centre of considerations in responding to the crisis, and the value of human rights principles and international standards in guiding and strengthening national and international policies and responses to the crisis. Public participation, transparency, access to information, judicial protection and accountability serve as important building blocks ensuring sustainable recovery and growth in a manner that minimizes the impact on human rights and further contributes to their realization.**

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<sup>18</sup> A/HRC/11/13, paras. 7 and 9.

33. This report notes a range of implications that the crisis has had or can have for the effective enjoyment of human rights, as well as commitments and actions undertaken to address the impact of the crisis. At the same time, because of its global and multi-faceted nature, it is expected that some of the impacts of the crisis will continue to emerge in a gradual and differentiated manner. There is a need to continue to pay attention to the impact of the longer-term effects of the crisis on human rights and to monitor the impact of national and international efforts, in order to ensure respect for and protection of all human rights of those who are affected by the crisis.

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