

**STATEMENT OF THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF THE “FOREIGN POLICY AND GLOBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE”  
ON THE IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISES  
ON THE REALIZATION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS**

*Human Rights Council, 1 March 2010*

Mr. President,

I have the honor to take the floor on behalf of the members of the “Foreign Policy and Global Health Initiative”, namely, Brazil, France, Indonesia, Norway, Senegal, South Africa and my own country, Thailand.

In 2007, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of our seven countries got together to encourage new ideas, identify new mechanisms for partnerships and develop innovative patterns of cooperation in the field of foreign policy and global public health.

This panel presents us with an opportunity to address the specific impact of the economic and financial crisis on the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. In this regard, international cooperation is crucial to mitigate the effects of the crisis on the realization of all human rights.

Mr. President,

The health sector of most countries has been seriously affected by the economic downturn.

More than one billion people face difficulties in accessing quality basic health services. This large number is increasing due to the overwhelming effects of recession and the lack of funds to meet the needs of the health sector, particularly in developing countries. This represents a major drawback to the attainment of the health-related MDGs.

The report of the High Commissioner on the impact of the crisis on the realization of all human rights stresses that the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health has been severely hampered. Moreover, the World Bank has estimated that the 43 countries which were still in recession at the beginning of December 2009 face an 11.6 billion U.S. dollar shortfall in core spending areas, which include health. Due to the economic and financial crisis, there has been a cut back in tax collection in an expressive number of countries. Vital investments had to be reconsidered and urgent needs, postponed.

Our common challenge is to find concrete answers on how to ensure the sustainability of health systems. International efforts to address health needs should be as bold as those made to save financial institutions from bankruptcy in recent times. Nothing less can be expected in the light of the commitments and time-bound goals agreed upon by our leaders in the Millennium Summit.

Limited progress on maternal and child health, MDGs 4 and 5, particularly maternal mortality, is a cause of major concern. Figures reveal an alarming reality. Every year, five hundred thousand women around the world die due to pregnancy-related preventable complications. Moreover, many countries have faced obstacles to acquire vaccines for their children due to budget constraints. We are also concerned by the fact that some child diseases, which had previously been eradicated, have now started to recur. In several countries, progress towards achieving universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment, as well as treatment for other major diseases, is recently increasing at a lower rate. Access to those treatments should not be limited by prejudices and discriminations. Access for everyone to medicines that are affordable, safe, effective and of good quality is one of the fundamental elements in the field of health. Furthermore, the shortage of health workers and the imbalanced distribution within countries and throughout the world is of particular concern.

Mr. President,

It is equally important to highlight that setbacks in other MDGs – such as reducing the number of people who live with less than \$1 a day – will also have an impact on health. An integrated approach is required if we are to achieve our common development goals. Indeed, hunger and extreme poverty represent an added burden for developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable ones. If these scourges are not properly addressed, it is virtually impossible to reduce child and maternal mortality. Violence against women has further aggravated physical and mental health. Education and empowerment of women are also critical so as to improve maternal health and reduce mortality.

The reduction of inequalities within and among countries is essential for the realization of human rights. The conditions in which people are born, grow, live and work have a large impact on their chances to survive and on their opportunities to prosper. Reciprocally, respect for all human rights, which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, is of crucial importance for all policies and programmes to fight poverty at the local and national levels. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us to work together to address the common challenges facing us in these areas.

Mr. President,

Economic and financial hardship must not serve as an excuse to overlook human rights. As we address the continuing effects of the economic and financial crisis, it is our responsibility to also address the social dimensions of human rights, in which the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is a vital component. Without political will, as well as due cooperation and financing at national and global levels, we will fall short of fulfilling our common responsibility to mankind and to the promotion of public health and protection of human rights.

Thank you very much.