

United Nations Update

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Keeping Our Readers Informed

In this article, we will present a summary of the World Information Transfer (WIT) UN Conference written by Dr. Claudia Strauss, identify the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and list Web Resources for MDGs and Gender Issues.

World Information Transfer Annual International Conference- April, 2004

By Dr. Claudia Strauss, Director, New York Office, WIT

World Information Transfer, Inc., (WIT) is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization, in General Consultative Status with the United Nations, dedicated to studying the connection between environmental degradation and human health.

Since 1992, WIT has held its annual international Conference titled, Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions, at United Nations headquarters in New York. In her opening remarks to this year's conference on April 29 and 30th, Dr. Christine K. Durbak, chair and founder of WIT, said, "Given the enormous impact of conflict on both our environment and our health, we have focused our thirteenth International Conference on war and the damage it imposes on us and the natural world we live in."

The Conference was co-sponsored by the governments of Croatia and Ukraine, WHO, UN Development Program (UNDP), UNAIDS, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and Physicians Weekly. In his remarks, Dr. Micovic, Rijeka Public Health Institute of Croatia, included the problem of depleted uranium in his country, a public environmental health concern which the UN Environment Programme has been monitoring around the world. Dr. Tronko of the Kiev Institute of Endocrinology and Deputy Minister Kapitula of Ukraine Ministry of Emergencies addressed ongoing public health effects of the Chernobyl nuclear tragedy 18 years ago. Dr. Leitner, Assistant Director General of the World Health Organization gave an overview of the work WHO has done to mitigate the human suffering caused by Chernobyl. UN Under Secretary-General Chowdhury provided information on the impact of war to the physical environment and the attendant public health consequences in the world's poorest countries, while Dr. Concha-Eastman of PAHO discussed the theme as it applied to Central and South America. UNEP director, Mr. Adnan Amin provided an overview of the work of UNEP in the aftermath of war and in so doing reviewed the legacy war imposes on natural resources.

Because war contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS, the global pandemic was the topic of a session which included papers by Dr. Techeste Guerma, WHO Senior Adviser for Africa, Dr. Kathryn Anastos of Montefiore and Lincoln Medical Centers in New York City who discussed the treatment and prevention for females, Dr. Marie Charles, who founded the organization, ICEHA, to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS in the developed world, and Dr. David Scott Rubin, of Weill Medical College, Cornell University.

Dr. Bernard Goldstein, Dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh, addressed our Thursday luncheon and discussed the pros and cons of the Precautionary Principle as it is being applied in international trade arrangements. Dr. William N. Rom, Chief, Pulmonary division, NYU Hospital, and currently a Fellow in Public Health in the office of Senator Hillary Clinton, spoke on US health care policy formation at the Friday luncheon.

The full texts of the conference papers will be published in the Special Issue of WIT's World Ecology Report, a quarterly digest of critical issues in health and environment.

WIT's motto: Knowledge brings new choices. Education brings new knowledge.

Contact information for the World Ecology Report and conference mailing list is Carolyn Comitta, Regional Director for North America (wit@dplus.net).

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Millennium Development Goals

Currently, the United Nations NGO conferences are focusing on the progress of the Millennium Development Goals to ensure that the rights of all people are being met according to specific deadlines. When the MDGs were first introduced at the United Nations Millennium Summit of September 2000, world leaders agreed to a time table and measurable goals that included; targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. The MDGs provide an outline for the entire UN system to collaborate to produce substantial improvements in peoples' lives. They have been refined into a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs - see below). For further information, visit the web sites at the end of this article.

Our work with UNICEF's Working Group on Girls Committee (WGG), have drawn our attention to the need to improve the rights of women and girls as stated in the third MDG goal -- Promote gender equality and empower women. The Secretary General specifically addressed this issue, "Study after study has shown that there is no effective development strategy in which women do not play a central role. When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately: their children are better educated; they are healthier and better fed; they are better able to protect themselves against AIDS and other diseases; their families' income and economy improve. And what is true of families is true of communities -- ultimately, indeed, of whole countries." (Secretary-General Kofi Annan, 2002) (<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/sgsm8157.doc.htm>)

MDGs

The framework to accomplish these Millennium Development Goals is to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
- Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

2. Achieve universal primary education

- Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

3. Promote gender equality and empower women

- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015

4. Reduce child mortality

- Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children the under five

5. Improve maternal health

- Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio

6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

7. Ensure environmental sustainability

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse loss of environmental resources
- Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
- Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020

8. Develop a global partnership for development

- Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory. Includes commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction—nationally and internationally
- Address the least developed countries' special needs. This includes tariff- and quota-free access for their exports; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries; cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction
- Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing States
Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term
- In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youth
- In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
- In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communications technologies

Web Resources for MDGs and Gender Issues

MDGs set clear targets for reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women by 2015.

UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)

Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations discusses his Report on the Implementation of the Millennium Declaration 2003 [Webcast: [Archived Video](#)] Girl's issues are addressed throughout this report.

Available at: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>

MDGs can be applied to girl child issues, which are covered in UNICEF's Working Group on Girls' (WGG) fact sheets and previous *Action for Girls* newsletters published by the *International Network for Girls*.

Available at: <http://www.girlsrights.org>. If you wish to access Fact Sheets on related issues see "Girls Situation" on the WGG website.

The Road Map towards the Implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration.

This is the Report of the Secretary-General. It contains the overview of the current situation.

Available at: www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/56/a56326.pdf

The Millennium Project's research focuses on identifying the priorities, organizational means of implementation, and financing structures necessary to achieve the MDGs. Available at:

<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org>

WHO: 'En-gendering' the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on Health

MDGs relating to health are #1, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8. One MDG addresses gender but it is crucial to address gender to every MDG.

Available at: http://www.who.int/mip/2003/other_documents/en/MDG3.pdf

Gender Equality and the MDGs is a report by the World Bank Gender and Development Group.

Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/gender/gendermdg.pdf>

The World Bank Group - MDGs – This web site describes the goals, partners, data and resources needed to achieve the goals of MDGs.

Available at: <http://www.developmentgoals.org/>

Monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

Lists key documents and links to other UN Millennium Development Goals sites. These resources can be applied to any age group or gender. Improving the quality of girls' education can also benefit boys but the reverse is not always the case. Another critical issue for children to attend school and complete their education, especially girls, is water and sanitation facilities.

Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_links.asp

Indicators for Monitoring the Millennium Development Goals

This website describes the goals, partners, data and resources needed to achieve the goals of MDGs. The Millennium Development Goals have shown the lack of data and limitations in availability and quality. There are a considerable number of countries that do not have enough data to track changes in poverty, child malnutrition and HIV/AIDS prevalence.

Available at: http://www.developmentgoals.org/mdgun/MDG_metadata_08-01-03_UN.htm

(This URL is case sensitive. You need to capitalize the MDG in the address.)

UN Nations Development Programme

Contains statements of the goals, has website links-UN system, news front stories on the goals, frequently asked questions, resource documents, country reports and tracks progress toward achieving the MDGs.

Available at: <http://www.undp.org/mdg>

UN Nations Development Programme- National Reports: A Look through a Gender Lens.

Available at: <http://www.undp.org/gender/docs/mdgs-genderlens.pdf>

Millennium Development Goals Country Reports collected by United Nations Development Program.

Available at: <http://www.undp.org/mdg/countryreports.html>.

Gender Equality and the MDGs- This web site provides access to resources to promote better understanding of and sharing of tools for addressing gender equality in all of the MDGs.

Available at: <http://www.mdgender.net/>

UNESCO: Reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Presents an overview of the current process, outlines the progress towards the goals and implications.

Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/bsp/eng/mdg.htm>

UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service - This web site discusses the MDGs.

Available at: http://www.unsystem.org/ngls/millennium_development_goals.htm

Human Rights and the Millennium Development Goals

Available at: <http://www.unhchr.ch/development/partners.html>

Accelerating Progress in Girls' Education- UNICEF's '25 by 2005' campaign

This booklet draws attention to out-of-school girls. It describes the campaign which is a global drive to assist the international community in meeting its commitment to gender parity in education by the year 2005. Denying a girl her right to education increases her risk of being exploited and abused, and her vulnerability to disease, including HIV/AIDS.

MDG # 2 addresses education; MDG # 4 addresses HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

Available at: www.unicef.org/publications/index_15525.html

UNICEF: The country programme approach to education

UNICEF works with partners to ensure that the rights of children and women are promoted and assists them to implement activities related to Girls' Education. UNICEF suggests using the following considerations when designing educational initiatives: **the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)**; National goals; UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) priorities; UNICEF's Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP); Education for All (EFA) Goals; Country resources; and Partners' expertise. MDG # 2 addresses education.

Available at: http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_countryprogramme.html