



The NGO Forum

at the
3rd United Nations Conference
on the Least Developed Countries

Press Release

The NGO Forum: the voice of civil society at the 3rd United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

To eradicate the poverty of least developed countries (LDCs) against the background of economic globalisation with the support of the international community and in cooperation with official institutions: this is the aim of the Forum organised in Brussels by the NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations) from **10-20 May 2001**, in parallel with the 3rd United Nations Conference on the LDCs (14-20 May).

The **NGO Forum** will represent the voice of civil society at the UN Conference. It invites NGOs and the other organisations of civil society from all over the world to express their views and influence the decisions of the Conference. It is made possible by a donation from the European Union. At least 600 Non Governmental and civil society organisations, including about 250 NGOs from least developed countries, are expected to participate in the NGO Forum and the UN Conference. The NGOs participants include those concerned about environment, women, human rights, debt, health, microcredit.

The NGOs will open their Forum with a Plenary Assembly (10-12 May) in the **Charlemagne building** (170, rue de la Loi - Brussels). During the main UN Conference (14-20 May) the NGO Forum will be housed in the **Bibliothèque Solvay** (Maison de l'Europe, 137 Rue Belliard - Parc Léopold), four minutes' walk from the official UN Conference at the European Parliament: a careful choice to stress how closely NGOs want to be integrated into the official process.

The issues that will be discussed by the NGOs will follow the themes of the official UN Conference: reducing poverty by one-half in the least developed countries by 2015; elimination of debt; increasing development aid, encouraging the flow of foreign investments, free access to industrial markets for all LDC goods (except arms) and reform of the inequities in WTO trading rules; measures against wars, conflicts and prohibition of arms sales; solutions for refugees, health (particularly AIDS); promotion of women's equality; environmentally sustainable growth.

Today there are 49 least developed countries — 34 in Africa, 9 in Asia, 5 in the Pacific and 1 in the Caribbean — with more than half of their populations living on less than 1 US dollar a day. Their economies are marginalised by global trade, as their share of world exports is about 0.5 per cent. Many LDCs spend 40 per cent of their GNP on debt servicing. In addition, in many countries development has been held back or put into reverse by the impact of HIV/AIDS and armed conflicts. Global trading rules and strategies have undermined the interests of LDCs and reduced their space for democratic national development strategies. NGOs believe that it is crucial for the Conference to have a clear follow-up programme, which can be measured and evaluated, as well as pressing for clear "benchmarks" to be included in the UN Programme of Action. Civil society has a crucial role in making sure that governments and international organisations do not duck the challenges and that they take concrete action to monitor and implement commitments. Outcomes need to be both concrete and far-reaching.

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