



**REPORT ON THE HELSINKI PROCESS MEETING**  
*Searching for Global Partnerships*  
**12/10/02**

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The Helsinki meeting, also known as the Helsinki Process, launched during 2-4<sup>th</sup> December 2002 in Helsinki by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, is aimed at beginning a process, which can identify common values as well as concrete initiatives for improving the current global governance structures. It is long term in nature, open ended in terms of participation, and addresses key global governance issues. The Meeting's overarching theme was Global Governance with sub-titles on

- a) *Values and aims of Global governance* – values play a crucial role in all actions and that the identification of common values is especially important when new structures, which shape human well-being, are contemplated,
- b) *Implementation* – the Millennium Declaration, Monterrey Consensus and Johannesburg Commitments provide a basis to meet the core challenges of our time. The number one task and challenge is to implement the objectives of these meetings/declarations. Lasting results can only be achieved through more equitable and inclusive dialogue.
- c) *Potential of existing institutions* - that there is a need not to focus only on in-depth analysis of the global governance institutions but rather to concentrate on the possibilities of strengthening these institutions in improving the management of globalization and its effects.

The Finnish Government is convinced that inclusive and equitable globalisation should be promoted through a closer dialogue and through new partnerships embracing not only governments and their institutions but also with civil society and private sector actors.

But the big question still remains whether this process will seriously address the key challenges that the world is facing today. It may or may not but it was hoped that it can at least create a basis for opportunities that would lead to such significant change.

The Finnish NGOs attending this meeting expressed dissatisfaction with the way the government of Finland were going about the Helsinki process. The key NGOs such as KEPA (an umbrella body representing over 200 NGOs in Finland) were not part of the preparations of the Helsinki Process. They criticized the process as being too bureaucratic (as evidenced in the government people invited) and also lacking direction and long-term focus. They admit though that there is some level of political will among some government officials although the political dimension of the whole process is still not clearly known.

### **Summary of Key Issues Addressed**

1. Values and Aims of Global Governance – Perspectives for a common approach
2. How to govern the Global Economy
3. Towards inclusive Global Governance – means of eradicating poverty
4. Practical Reformatory Approach to existing global governance – perspectives for global democracy and participation and capacity building.

**The UN and Global Governance: Realistic scenarios** - the core question here is how can the UN become central within the globalization process? What would be the most effective, realistic and feasible reform agenda? Key points:

1. The UN must be in the center of any global governance structure
2. General Assembly, ILO and ECOSOC must be strengthened
3. UN Financing is crucial and must be improved. Its current status is fully inadequate

4. EU must take responsibility on securing the role of the UN
5. A conference of Foreign Ministers should address the Security Council reform

### **Capacity Building, Participation and Global governance**

#### Key Points:

1. Non-discrimination, stability of structures and transparency, the three principles of WTO, must inform the framework for capacity building and participation. This would also strengthen the implementation of most agreements
2. Capacity building is necessary in the negotiation processes by developing countries and also for Northern countries to understand the issues
3. Technical assistance should not be used as a political tool and a means of compliance
4. Executive governance should also mean effective representation and enhancing skills of representative delegates.

### **Poverty and Debt Arbitration**

#### Key issues:

1. The long term call for Debt cancellation of the poor countries of the world must be placed back on the political agenda of the creditor nations and its actions prioritised
2. Debt cancellation provides for additional resources necessary for poverty reduction and sustainable development
3. The current global governance system in negotiating debt relief is weak, undemocratic and not neutral
4. There is urgent need to establish an independent, fair and transparent arbitration mechanisms within the UN system to redress the current Debt crisis
5. There is need to deal with both the long-term mechanisms (such as establishment of an arbitration court) but also need for adhoc mechanisms to deal with pressing debt problems like those of Argentina.

## **Possibilities and Constraints of Global Corporate Responsibility**

Key Issues:

1. World leaders need to adhere to the principles of the Global Compact (human rights, labour standard and environment), outlined by Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General
2. Good governance and global corporate responsibility are closely interlinked
3. Companies must constantly be reminded of issues of responsibility and sustainable development, in concrete ways, even at the level of language
4. Extra-territorial legislation is needed in order to make corporate responsibility more possible

## **Possibilities and Constraints of Emerging Transnational Civil Society**

Key Issues:

1. National Parliamentarians have proved to be more receptive when it comes to global issues and communication of the issues with international institutions as well as with CSOs and this trend must be encouraged especially through E-Parliament initiative
2. Increasing accountability by bringing in perspectives of the marginalised and non-profit management would help overcome constraints
3. Transnational civil society can play a role in the reorganization and democratization of global institutions
4. The concept of Civil society needs to be kept clear – Usually civil society is not a value neutral term but sometimes attached to certain progressive values and by and large excludes the business sector actors.
5. Civil society relations to political parties and parliamentarians is also critical
6. The strengthen of civil society breeds a mass movement that may provide for change.

## **What does the Helsinki Process Mean for Civil Society in the South?**

To start with the Helsinki process is not a new process as similar initiatives have been undertaken in the past. Hence, it should not be seen as an end itself but a means to a sustainable end. If the Helsinki process

does not create a basis for significant change in the global governance structures then it might not be a useful process.

Civil society should take advantage of this platform created to challenge the inadequacies of the current global governance structures. Civil society itself must strategically and effectively use the space accorded to them and not merely legitimatise such processes. They must be well prepared in their interventions by doing thorough homework, clearly identifying what key issues need to be challenged and to who, and have follow-up mechanisms in place and output indicators monitored etc.

If it is not rushed as a process, the Helsinki process provides civil society with an opportunity to define key principles and visions which could be identified as key elements for reform of the major players in the global economy like the IMF, World Bank, WTO and the UN system.

This process should be useful for coalition building not only among civil society organizations in the South but also between those in the North. Most importantly, it should include coalition building of the States to create a sustainable global structure, which is operational, but one does not compromise national sovereignty.

Civil society participation in such processes should be meaningful and not used as a 'window dressing' exercise. This would entail that the mode and form of participation must be clearly defined, and more time and space for real dialogue accorded to them.

It is critical that civil society see themselves beyond being 'conveyor belts' or watchdogs but useful contributors/actors in the whole development discourse.

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