

SUMMARY: "Legal Empowerment of the Poor and Eradication of Poverty"
64th Session of the General Assembly (2nd Committee) Special Event
Friday, 16 October 2009

1. At the request of the member states, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized a Special Event on "Legal Empowerment of the Poor and Eradication of Poverty". The special event – held on 16

5. *Legal empowerment as a broad concept.* The **United States of America** expressed support for legal empowerment as a practical concept that complements the broader development agenda and transcends the North-South division that often dominates UN discourse. Furthermore, the US delegation welcomed the idea of the “Empowerment Gateway” as a global hub for legal empowerment knowledge, expertise and project support. **Ireland** and **Venezuela** noted that legal empowerment goes way beyond legal issues and that it is much broader. **The Philippines** and **Ireland** underscored the importance of improving the business environment, and **the Philippines**

8. *Legal empowerment and voice.* **The Philippines** and **The Netherlands** reiterated Prof. White's argument linking voice and democracy. The Philippines highlighted support for capacity-building modalities that strengthen the voice of the poor (e.g., enhanced right of suffrage, education, information and communication technology). **Portugal** noted the importance of national voice before seeking external support and pointed to not only the UNDP Initiative on Legal Empowerment of the Poor, but also the Optional Protocol for Economic and Social Rights as a means to give people voice. Dr. Rashid noted that the Initiative on Legal Empowerment of the Poor focuses on the poor's participation in decision-making processes that directly or indirectly affect their lives. For example, in the face of increasing commercial pressures on land, UNDP is designing projects that build communities' capacity to effectively negotiate land deals. **Venezuela** highlighted the importance of democratic participation, where citizens make decisions on legislation, health care, food security, and other similar programmes.
9. *Universal applicability of legal empowerment.* Many delegations recognized the universal appeal of the legal empowerment agenda. **Egypt**, while recognizing this universality, asked how legal empowerment can be implemented universally since UNDP only operates in developing countries. Dr. Rashid concurred that there is a universal appeal of the legal empowerment agenda and reminded that the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor – which was comprised of 22 commissioners from both developed and the developing world – represented the diversity of thoughts and approaches and presented a universally acceptable framework for legal empowerment of the poor. The framework will help to meet the specific needs of different countries and develop innovative solutions, not just create new laws and regulations.
10. *Taking into account different legal contexts.* **Egypt** asked how do differences in legal systems in different countries come into play when implementing a blanket concept like legal empowerment. Mr. McInerney responded that the outcomes legal empowerment is trying to achieve, namely to help the poor protect themselves, may facilitate the identification of some commonalities that can be shared more broadly. Dr. Rashid responded that UNDP is by no means promoting a one-size-fits-all approach, and reiterated that programmes are implemented with local partners and take into account the heterogeneity of different local legal and administrative systems. UNDP, for example, is currently implementing a project to build the capacity of Family Courts and Dispute Settlement Offices in Egypt, working with paralegal services and pro bono lawyers to facilitate expedited resolution of case backlogs.
11. *Focus on domestic issues in the context of global crises.* **Egypt** asked why legal empowerment solely focuses on the domestic issues, especially at a time when there are a number of challenges – financial crisis and climate change – at the international level. Prof. White responded that in several ways this legal empowerment initiative does invoke the imperative of connection across borders (e.g., taking account of trends, parallel phenomena, multinational bodies, international organizations, international human rights instruments) and offers many ways for both cross learning and collaboration. Mr. McInerney noted that understanding global problems as seen from the poor's perspective is critical to avoid larger development debacles in the future. Dr. Rashid had alerted in his presentation to the fact that various LEP initiatives seek to promote and strengthen land rights, resulting in sustainable land management, thereby contribute to food security and help fight climate change.

12. *Legal Empowerment and Women's Empowerment*. **Sweden** noted that empowering women could lead to a significant reduction in poverty. **Liechtenstein** highlighted the link between legal empowerment, gender dimension, and the MDGs. The representative asked how the UN and

coordination and cross-country learning so that UNDP can match demand and supply, promote best practices, develop expertise and roll out programmes without duplication. Member states can play a role by ensuring a more coordinated response to legal empowerment. Dr. Rashid proposed