



Living in a Global World, what is my responsibility?

We live in an interconnected and global world, we are not just citizens of Australia but we are global citizens. The actions and the choices I make have an impact on my life, but also the lives of others whom I may never meet or know. As a young person living in the developed world it is so easy for me to forget or ignore the challenging realities and situations that my fellow brothers and sisters experience every day. Although I shouldn't forget this, as here in Australia we have major inequalities in health and opportunities for Indigenous Australians. So where does that leave me? Well as a 22 year old young person working for a Christian high school students movement it challenges me to take action!

I was reminded of these things when I recently attended the 'Advance Global Health: Achieve the MDGs', 63rd Annual United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI) Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Conference in Melbourne in August. This Conference brought together over 1,600 representatives from 70 countries around the world to address the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), specifically those focused on health and to look at the struggle against global poverty. I attended as a representative of the International Young Catholic Students (IYCS) which has 2.5 million young people involved in over 75 countries in the world, with two other young people and an adult from the Australian YCS movement. We were one of several groups at the conference run by and for young people.

The Millennium Development Goals are eight- time bound goals that aim to be reached by 2015 to take significant actions on worldwide poverty and its effects. They were developed in September 2000 after 189 world leaders met at the UN and endorsed the Millennium Declaration, a commitment to work together to build a safer, more prosperous and equitable world. Part of the Goals is that each member nations would contribute 0.7% of their Gross National Income to international aid. Currently Australia is giving 0.33% and will not reach the 0.7% Commitment by 2015 which is extremely disappointing. Many other developed countries have reached this target and are now moving beyond it.

Recently Kevin Rudd, Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister, spoke at the UN Millennium Summit a gathering of world leaders that looked at the next 5 years (being the final 5 years) and how the goals can be achieved. At this meeting Kevin Rudd said the following

Millennium Development Goals

- Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
 - Reduce by half the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day
 - Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger
- Goal 2 Achieve universal primary education
 - Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling
- Goal 3 Promote gender equality and empower women
 - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015
- Goal 4 Reduce child mortality
 - Reduce by two thirds the mortality of children under five
- Goal 5 Improve maternal health
 - Reduce maternal mortality by three quarters
- Goal 6 Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases
 - Halt and reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS
 - Halt and reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases
- Goal 7 Ensure environmental sustainability
 - Integrate principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; reverse the loss of environmental resources
 - Halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation
 - Improve the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020
- Goal 8 Develop a global partnership for development
 - Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system
 - Address special needs of the least developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states

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"As members of the family of nations, we cannot stand idly by... when hundreds of thousands of women die through childbirth – an estimated 358,000 in the year before last"

These realities were echoed at the UN DPI NGO Summit with many NGO's highlighting the urgent need for action around the globe to improve health and sanitation conditions for people living in developing countries, or impoverished communities in the developed world. Many of the illnesses suffered by those living in poverty are preventable, and the deaths of many mothers and children during pregnancy and childbirth could be avoided if the basic health needs of people could be met. Even more challenging for us here in Australia is the inequalities in Indigenous Health, with a 17 year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and Non Indigenous People.

Throughout the conference, I met many inspiring individuals and organizations who are working on the ground level to provide services and relief to communities, and advancing the health of all people. However at the UN Conference I was also reminded that there is a great need for advocacy and critical analysis of *why* people are experiencing the hardships and struggles of poverty. We need to look at the role that individuals, organizations and governments play in upholding the injustices that we want to change so much.

I have been very lucky through my experiences in the YCS Movement where I see the real grass roots empowerment of young people to be the leaders and instigators of change in their communities. The method we use for action in the YCS is called the Review of Life, where we think about issues critically and reflect on our faith and how Jesus calls us to respond and we then develop targeted actions to make a tangible change. If the MDG's are to be achieved, this deep analysis and empowerment needs to be occurring.

Across the world, young people in the IYCS are taking actions on the realities and experiences that are affecting their everyday lives using this method of the Review of Life. As the Conference was focusing on Health and HIV/AIDS it was inspiring to share about the work of the YCS in awareness and advocacy in their HIV/AIDS campaign among students through various programs such as training sessions, exposure program and expression of solidarity, promotional materials etc, in many regions of the IYCS most significantly in Asia and Africa. These actions are linked closely to the International YCS's Campaign of **'Fight Poverty-Build Peace'**

aiming to mobilize students across the world to take direct action to fight poverty.



Ali O'Regan, Vicky Burrows and Devett O'Brien from the AYCS at the Conference

I believe it is the responsibility of all people to take action to ensure that the basic rights of all people are met. However as a person living in the developed world I have a responsibility to the wider community and am committed to keeping my government accountable to the commitments that it makes to global aid and development. Kevin Rudd at the UN also highlighted this by saying:

"[Australia's] view is that the richest among us have a profound responsibility to help the poorest members of the human family out of poverty. Poverty is degrading. Poverty is de-humanising. Poverty destroys human dignity" -Statement to UN General Assembly 22 Sept.

We as Australians need to keep him accountable to this.

As individuals, we can often feel helpless and doubt our abilities to make a difference, however when we act together in a community these changes will happen. The Fair Trade Movement is an example of this,

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they have mobilized many people to make lifestyle changes, such as choosing Fair Trade certified products, and also advocate for trade that is more just for all involved. Devett O'Brien the Adult Assistant of the Australian YCS Fair Trade Team advocated for the UN DPI NGO Summit to be aware of the needs for more Fair Trade, not free trade, to lift farmers out of poverty which was included in the final conference papers.



Devett O'Brien asking questions at the Conference

International trade has a significant impact on all our lives, we rely on trade and we know that many products that we consume and use have been produced in many different countries. In the same way many items that we produce here in Australia are exported and traded to other countries. Trade is a powerful means of generating wealth, creating opportunities and freeing people from poverty. If that is the case, why is it that we still have rampant poverty in the world? This is a question the Australian YCS is addressing through our National Campaign? Why is it that Ghana and Ivory Coast, the largest producers of cocoa that goes into our chocolate are still poor? Unfortunately, the experience shows us that the international trade favours the powerful and rich countries and Transnational Corporations (TNCs). When some trade occurs local farmers are often not paid or do not receive a just wage. In the case of cocoa farmers receive less than 5% of the chocolate profits; over 70% goes to the TNCs*. This is unfair, to counter this, a movement called Fair Trade has developed.

Fair Trade means decent working wages for farmers of commodities such as coffee and cocoa beans, which in turn support local community development and determination. The income secured by farmers working in a fair trade system helps provide financial security and can lift families and even whole communities out of poverty. One of the most important outcomes for the YCS was the inclusion of the issue of fair trade in the UN DPI NGO Conference declaration: *"Change international financial and trade systems so they create equality of opportunity for people in resource poor countries – fair trade not free trade and trade that maximizes health and well-being before profits"*

As an Australian young Christian living in today's modern society, what choices should I make? Our personal everyday choices affect many others, and depending on what these choices are, this can be for better or worse. I challenge you to make choices that you know will benefit not only you personally, but also the local, national and even global community, and to take personal actions that uphold the dignity of all. You could buy fair trade chocolate and coffee, make sure your clothes are sweat shop free and made of fair trade cotton, find out about the Close the Gap Campaign, write a letter to the government about the Millennium Development Goals, or even join and participate in a Campaign, organization or group to get your voice heard! Develop a critical mindset of enquiry and research to understand and analyze the causes of poverty and inequity among people and nations. Keep asking the question 'why is this happening?' But don't shy away from the big challenges either, let's challenge our governments and the systems that exist and show the global community that we care, that we will act and stand in solidarity with them. Good luck!

Vicky Burrows

Vicky Burrows works for the Australian Young Christian Students Movement, which is a secondary school student led movement empowering students to transform themselves and the world around them through living the Gospel in their everyday lives. For information about the YCS visit www.aycs.org.au

**information sourced from the www.fairtrade.net.au*

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