

Welcome to Helsinki

We would like to welcome all the participants of the Helsinki Conference to Helsinki and to the series of events 'Democratising Globally' 5-9 September. We are happy that so many people have decided to come to Helsinki and join the discussion on democracy and globalisation at the Helsinki Conference. With this letter we would like to invite the delegates to the related civil society events.

Background of the Helsinki Process from a civil society perspective

Many civil society organisations have taken a keen interest in the Helsinki Process since 2001 when the initial steps of the process were taken by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland. In the December 2002 Helsinki Conference more than twenty civil society participants discussed the future of the Process at the Conference and wrote an open letter to Minister Tuomioja making suggestions for the Helsinki Process. In the letter the participants had four main points:

- The Helsinki Process should counter the militarisation of globalisation
- The Helsinki Process should become a model for democratic practice and involve Southern popular movements, indigenous people, communities of faith, landless rural workers, trade unions etc.
- The Helsinki Process should focus on the debt problem by means of a comprehensive systemic resolution including audit of the legitimacy of the existing debt, cancellation of debts when illegitimate, and by way of creating a new process for the fair resolution of the debt crises.
- Other important themes for the Helsinki Process should be (i) the promotion of a critical, democratic review of existing WTO-agreements which would provide the basis for recommendations for WTO-reform, and (ii) the Currency Transaction Treaty.

Some of the signatories of the open letter and other civil society representatives were invited by the governments of Finland and Tanzania to join the Helsinki Group or the three Track Groups. Moreover, the Helsinki Process provided resources for the Citizens' Global Platform, initially with networks in Tanzania and Finland, to discuss the themes of the process and to provide inputs into it. With these important opportunities the civil society organisations sought to advance the agenda of the Open Letter and other concerns raising from their work.

Citizens' Global Platform seeks to:

- Create channels through which initiatives of civil society can be taken into account in globalisation policies
- Deepen and diversify the discourse on managing globalisation in North and South by bringing in new actors and strengthening co-operation between organisations working in different sectors and movements of different segments of societies
- Ensure that the voices of marginalised stakeholders are heard in the course of the initiative

Initiatives supported by the Citizens' Global Platform Finland:

- The marginalised voices - people, environment, cultures and values - need to have a stronger voice in decision-making processes at all levels

- The UN should be strengthened, reformed and democratised.
- Companies need to be transparent and accountable in their social relations
- The environmental tax reform and the currency transaction tax need to be implemented
- The WTO and international financial organisations need to be reformed and the member countries need to be given more policy space to develop their societies in the manner they find the most suitable
- An independent debt arbitration court needs to be established
- Tax havens that enable massive global tax avoidance and evasion need to be curbed down
- All people need to have equal access to primary health care. In addition to HIV/AIDS, attention should be focused on other diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis
- Women need to be guaranteed equal access to education and political decision-making
- A multisectoral approach, including legislation and law enforcement measures as well as poverty reduction, needs to be adopted to promote children's rights
- The role of civil society in conflict prevention should be strengthened and arms trade controlled more effectively

Citizens' Global Platform has communicated the above mentioned policy recommendations to the Helsinki Process on several occasions and participated actively in its construction. For more information on Citizens' Global Platform's networks and activities in Tanzania, Brazil, Finland and India, please see www.globalplatform.fi

Civil Society, the Helsinki Conference and the future of the Helsinki Process

On the eve of the Helsinki Conference 2005, the assessment of the Helsinki Process is a mixed one. On the one hand it can be considered a break-through in that the government of Finland joined hands with a government in the South to launch a large programme on democracy and globalisation. The Process itself is a significant step in the Finnish foreign policy and is a source of optimism and hope. It has provided opportunities for a dialogue and generated political will to solve some important global problems.

On the other hand there is a feeling that the Process needs to strengthen the integration of civil society concerns in its work. This is a key issue for the legitimacy of the Helsinki Process. It is vital for the participating like-minded governments and the future of the process to establish deeper dialogue with civil society.

By organising the series of events in connection with the Helsinki Conference we wish to contribute to the Helsinki Process. Please see the attached programme for further details. As a participant of the Helsinki Conference we warmly welcome you to the related civil society events.

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