

There was a vacuum here at the United Nations summit this month, an aching space demanding to be filled. What was lacking, quite simply, was leadership: the vision that could have put backbone into long overdue reform and new purpose into the multilateral drive to tackle poverty.

We didn't get it. And the disappointment felt by civil society across the world is palpable. Instead of opening a new chapter for the UN, we got a summit of fudge: the self-important restatement of goals already agreed and some shameful backsliding on old promises. As the leaders headed home, the world's desperate poor were left largely where they had been at the beginning of the week.

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There were things to welcome in the summit agreement. One was the firm language over "responsibility to protect," that will now allow the international community to take uninhibited action when faced with acts of genocide. But this was just a single leg of a stool whose other props failed to materialize. The urgent issue of a new human rights council was pushed to the back burner, and nothing came up on how to tackle the trade in small arms - which are the real weapons of mass destruction. But, most distressingly, there was no significant impetus on development spending: The summit left the triumphal announcements after the G-8 meeting this summer looking hollow.

Curiously, however, the vacillations in the General Assembly chamber seemed to energize the people outside it.

The summit's failures have made the tasks ahead more clear. What is needed now is concerted effort to fill the gaps that our leaders have left. Civil society, re-energized by the mass protests around the G-8 summit this summer; businesspeople with the vision to see that a secure and healthy world is a better place in which to operate will be critical actors in the times ahead.

From these new partnerships may well come the drive to push forward that revitalization of the UN we so badly need; to hold our leaders to account for those commitments they made five years ago and to achieve a successful conclusion to the Doha trade round.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/09/25/opinion/edrobinson.php>