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Through Rainbow-Colored Glasses

By Christine Dinsmore

The United Nations General Assembly opens on September 13. In spite of its bureaucratic warts and the 800-pound gorilla that sits on the Security Council, the UN is our best hope and well worth attempts to salvage it.

There's an electricity around 46th Street and 1st Avenue when all 191 member states descend upon New York. Long before 9/11, the NYPD came out in full force to fortify the neighborhood where friend and foe sit down at the global table in an attempt to hammer out solutions to the Earth's gravest problems. This year, the General Assembly will review the Millennium Development Goals (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/), which were passed unanimously at the Millennium Summit in 2000.

I'm a believer in the United Nations—or some world body that brings people together with the noble goals of peace, justice, and equality. In theory, I'm a gregarious citizen of the world. In reality, if it weren't for my partner, I'd opt to be a hermit. Because, quite frankly, human beings drive me nuts. It never fails to amaze me how negative people are. For instance, during the Live 8 concerts of July 2, people were crawling out from under rocks to criticize entertainers' use of their celebrity to further the cause of ending poverty. Perhaps naïve, perhaps too corporate, perhaps too simplistic, perhaps too white, perhaps all of the above, but Live 8 certainly didn't deserve the vitriolic e-mails that were bouncing around the Internet.

Reading criticism about canceling the developing world's debt from people who've never heard of Djibouti (a country in East Africa) or Angélique Kidjo (a singer from Benin—a country in West Africa) is as inspiring as listening to Tom Cruise talk about psychiatry. Live 8 was an awareness campaign, not a comprehensive economic strategy. My guess is that before the concerts, few Americans even knew what the Millennium Development Goals were. It seems as if the critics are mistaking the menu for the meal.

I'll opt to side with Nelson Mandela, thank you. I certainly don't support George W. Bush's ideas for ending poverty. Bush fought tooth and nail against the G8 Summit proposals to forgive the debt and increase aid to 0.7 percent of gross national income (GNI), the UN's official development assistance target. The United States lags way behind most industrialized countries, earmarking a measly 0.16 percent of our GNI for aid. How many times must the chickens come home to roost before we realize that our failing the world's poor ultimately comes back to bite us in the ass? (Ouch, have I gotten up on the wrong side of the bed this morning!)

Enough of my kvetching. On the brighter side of global politics, Spain joined Belgium and the Netherlands in legalizing same-sex marriage this past July. And the progressive triumvirate soon became a foursome when Canada's Senate overwhelmingly approved legislation to formally recognize gay wedded bliss. The House of Commons had previously passed the bill over the objections of Canada's right-wing politicians and

religious zealots. Gay civil unions are legal in 19 countries, including Denmark (1989), Norway (1993), Sweden (1995), France (1999), Finland (2002), parts of Sweden (2002) and the United Kingdom (December 2005). And we can't forget Massachusetts' legalization of same-sex marriage and Vermont's and Connecticut's approval of civil unions.

But this lefty's heart sang in July when headlines read, "Spain's socialist ruling party wins out on fight to assure marriage for all, angering Roman Catholic opponents of the bill." May the good Sisters of Mercy from my old elementary school forgive me, but what a double dip. Socialists win and Roman Catholic hierarchy pissed—both in the same headline.