Delegation from
The Student World Assembly (NGO)

Represented by the
LaGuardia Community College

Position Paper for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

I. Post-Conflict Development

The Student World Assembly (SWA) is deeply concerned that in our age globalization with its great leaps in technology, still one quarter of the United Nation's member states find themselves in an internal or external conflict which undermines their future economic and social development. By the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's definition of armed conflict, our world has witnessed 101 armed conflicts from 1989 to 1996, ninety-five of which have been primarily internal in nature. As a result of this recurring global trend, there is an estimated 17 million internally-displaced persons world-wide. This tragic outcome is likely to put a drain on the economies and lead to further social fragmentation. It may also increase the likelihood of regional conflagration which will inevitably leave the populations in these areas vulnerable to famine, disease, poverty, death and even genocide.

The SWA advocates that the UN establish a world-wide monitoring system that can provide sufficient advance notice of impending conflicts. Adequate logistical support should be at the UN immediate disposal to act rapidly before conflicts escalate.

The SWA is fully supportive of the UNDP work in post-conflict countries. The UNDP just-published report on Afghanistan, "National Human Development Report: Security with a Human Face," is an exemplary effort by the UN to alert the international community of a "failed-state" condition Afghanistan may fall into if reconstruction aid is not forthcoming soon. The report's emphasis on the importance of efficiency, transparency and accountability in government as prerequisites for human development in Afghanistan are highly valuable advice. The UNDP partnership with the Government of France and the Afghan Civil Service Commission, following the publication of the report, is an effective international implementation effort that will ensure that Afghanistan's incoming parliament is provided adequate and proper support to do its work. The SWA hopes that other governments would also contribute their humanitarian help and expertise in post-conflict areas to enable the suffering people to return to normalcy and dignified living. Future world stability requires no less.

II. Sustainable Energy and the Environment

The SWA believes that sustainable energy is essential in today's modern society. However, there are still two billion people today, one third of the world's population, who live without sustainable energy sources. Without such energy resources, poverty, hunger, unemployment and disease may become wide-spread.

This is why the SWA encourages the development of sustainable energy sources and sees the following as direct effects of such development. (1) Providing sustainable energy can easily eradicate hunger by largely increasing agriculture and industrial activities. (2) Achieving universal education is essential for a society to advance. Sustainable energy sources can bring electricity to the rural areas, thus increasing the number of teachers who are willing to teach in these areas to educate children. (3) Lack of sustainable energy is leading to higher child mortality rates simply due to the fact that clean drinking water cannot be obtained. (4) With the expansion of sustainable energy sources people can than have access to radio and television which can spread important public health information about diseases, particularly concerning HIV/AIDS. Therefore, the SWA sees development of sustainable energy resources as critical for future economic and social development.

The SWA also feels that the poor people in developing areas, especially those in rural areas, that lack electricity and energy sources be provided sustainable solar energy. David Bornstein, award-winning author of How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas," who was invited to speak for a SWA-sponsored Reading Circle at LaGuardia Community College, spoke of the cost-effective rental of the solar energy equipment to the people in poor areas and enabling them through micro-credit to purchase them. This option is seen much more cost-effective, and much less polluting than the poor people using kerosene in heaters.

III. Urban Development

The increasing prevalence of urban decay in the typical forms of slums, shantytowns, ghettos, and housing projects—even in developed countries—in our globalized world in a matter of concern for the international community. Added to this, the "accidental cities" in the form of refugee camps that one finds in Palestine or Sudan are highly distressing and degrading. We agree with the statement that "urban decay is about exclusion." With the increasing phenomenon of "gated communities" in the urban areas, or their more-rapid emergence in the suburbs, the affluent have chosen to secede from those who are less fortunate. The revolutionary advances in information, communication, and transportation have made this isolation of the rich and successful feasible, enabling them to totally bypass the "undesired" urban ghettos. This has produced a digital gap as well since the children of those in the decayed areas usually are less connected to the internet. This could lead to their permanent underclass status.

The SWA supports the efforts of the UN agencies and NGOs in providing healthcare, shelter, education, clean water, energy, and other needed resources to the world poor, especially in the refugee camps. A healthy, interconnected, and sustainable global community demands assertive efforts to end these ugly trends that persist and increase in our globalized world. Governments must adjust their priorities, and work with NGOs, to end urban decay, exclusion, and accidental cities.