

No Excuses: Promises must be kept

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I make many speeches to many types of audiences but you, Civil Society, are my absolute favorite.

It is Civil Society that was the prime mover behind the goals in the first place. By extracting promises from reluctant governments at the Great UN Summits of the 90s and it's these promises that evolved into the millennium development goals.



It is your passion, energy and your efforts to try and give a voice to the poor that make them heard at government levels.

It is you, Civil Society that insists on a rights based approach acknowledging that the poor need to be empowered to demand government action responsive to their needs.

It is you claiming participation and rightly so because people are actors and not targets of development.

It is you Civil Society that continues to give a human face to abstract statistics and global averages ensuring that action becomes relevant to the marginalized, the impoverished, the excluded, and to women, disabled and indigenous people.

It is my deep conviction that without you we would not have these goals agreed in the first place and, even more, without you we will not have them implemented. Without your continuing relentless advocacy and campaigning, demanding accountability and translation of the rhetoric we hear too often in this huge hall into real action on the ground. And indeed, many of you are already rising to the challenge doing exactly that. But among you here, there are also a few that express some doubts about these goals. On the one hand many of you find the minimum development goals in fact millennium development goals and on the other hand, however, minimum they might be some and you doubt if they are achievable in the first place. Now let me address both concerns.

Of course these goals are minimum goals. I am also impatient and often dream that other world that is possible and that we should be making now. However, let us never belittle the importance of the improvement of the life of every single individual human being let alone of the hundreds of millions of babies surviving, children getting education, and women empowered if we get the job done by 2015. And indeed, wherever the goals are not ambitious enough, please go ahead and raise the bar to what we call in UN speak "MDG plus." You are right that for many middle income countries but even poor countries, there is scope to increase the ambition and that is exactly what is happening with "MDG plus." East Asia and Latin America, include in goal 2, secondary education. But not only in middle income countries; in

Vietnam the bar is raised because poverty has already been halved in rich countries if your country has already achieved the 0.7% please go ahead and campaign for 1%. Your second doubt, Are these goals achievable? Please join me by simply not accepting that the goals are not going to be achieved. The world does have the resources and we know what to do. So please don't get disheartened by so many reports (including from the United Nations) that emphasize that so many countries are off track of so many of the goals, accentuating the negative that the glass is half empty, while relying on statistics that predate the adoption of these goals. Please reject this unduly pessimism because these goals are doable. Even indeed, while there is progress, it doesn't seem adequate and particularly the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa and least developed countries is worrisome. But even there: as Malawi and Ruanda can achieve goal 2 and get all their kids to school; as Tanzania is on track on the water goal; as Uganda and Senegal are able to reverse the AIDS pandemic, as for Mozambique the child mortality goal could be in reach: If some of even the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa can achieve some of the goals, I will not give up believing that the goals are achievable including in Sub-Saharan Africa and the least developed countries. The more as the success stories can simply be explained as cases where the global compact is implemented. The government concerned has reasonably good policies and rich countries have been relatively generous and helpful with aid and debt relief. So the global deal can work. And as the song about New York states: "If it can make it there, it can make it anywhere." The goals are doable.

Now let me also answer the cynicism that say that at the UN goals have been often set, but seldom met. Firstly, this is not true. And even for those not fully met, setting goals always led to acceleration of progress towards them. And defining success or failure has always been the degree of mobilization behind them, beyond the UN system, beyond the bureaucracies, and beyond the inter-governmental system into the real world country by country by country.

From this perspective, the Millennium development goals have already broken all records. Already within a couple of years, as the SG's report stated "these goals have transformed the face of global development cooperation. There has been unprecedented coordinated action in the multilateral system, in the wider donor community, within developing countries and most importantly mobilization far beyond governments by Civil Society, among parliamentarians, faith based communities and local authorities." In the real world, country after country and everywhere it is you Civil Society, that makes that happen. So I don't accept from you that these goals are not achievable, because that would render them into a self-fulfilling prophecy. So it's in your hands. Rightly so, the Secretary General says, "It is not at the UN that the goals will be achieved. They have to be achieved in each country by the joint efforts of the governments and people." Indeed the United Nations can provide the platform for governments to make promises, but the UN is only as strong as its member states allow it to be. The real problem is that government leaders come to the United Nations make beautiful speeches and promises and take back the plane to business as usual. This was the case with the promise of the 0.7%, 30 years ago and it's the case now with Millennium Declaration the past four years. How many governments actually, after their Presidents and Prime Ministers returned from New York from the Millennium Summit sat down

with their Cabinet members to discuss what their signature implied for health and education policies in developing countries and for finance and trade policies in rich countries.

It is political will that is needed. As the SG stated; "Political shifts only if there is national and local mobilization by the public and only when leaders are held accountable. Appeals by international organizations are one thing, but what would really make a difference is if at the local level the goals achieve a critical mass of support and even become vote getters." Indeed the real world is at country level. There is no point in producing global norms and goals unless they are translated in concrete political action at country level. All politics is local: think global, act local – get the message out to your own politicians-better act or else you'll lose votes. So we don't need more international meetings. What we do need is mobilization at the local levels and in the developing countries the millennium development goals indeed reflect the people's aspirations. But also in rich countries public opinion polls show time and time again that the people want their government to be more forthcoming to help poor countries to achieve the goals. What is lacking there? Is it transmission belts to ensure that politicians realize that they can win, not lose votes by acting. A German NGO told me that Civil Society had a meeting with Bundes Chancellor Schroeder, during the election campaign, and that he told the NGOs, "well you are not exactly a mass movement." This is where the problem is. And the Millennium Development Goals provide this perfect umbrella to bring about such a mass movement. To create a grand alliance across many social actors, AIDS activists, women, health workers, environmentalists, teachers unions, consumer organizations, local authorities, labor unions and world wide, tapping into broad concerns of people to ensure that "globalization benefits all" as the Millennium Declaration literally promises. The millennium development goals are a road map to shape fair globalization ensuring a social dimension and a human face. And while you are working to create such broad movements, think about surprising partners. For instance, Olympic Medal Winners, the Boys Scouts Movements. But also the private sector, as Oxfam UK did by sharing a platform with the CEO of Unilever to demand elimination of agriculture subsidies or the campaign in Brazil where the private sector plans to ensure that every milk carton on the breakfast table of every Brazilian mentions the millennium development goals. Last but not least-in terms of allies: You must engage parliamentarians. After all making governments accountable is their job and mandate. Parliaments hold the purse and set the laws of the land. That is where political will can and must be generated.

While campaigning to hold your governments to account please acknowledge the division of labor in the global deal. Let me first elaborate what this means if you come from a rich country. The millennium development goals are a global compact built around mutual commitments and demand mutual accountability by all countries. So rich countries have to meet their commitments reflected in goal 8: increase aid and aid effectiveness, debt relief and trade opportunities while eliminating agriculture subsidies which destroy markets on which poor farmers in poor countries depend. That is what goal 8, the global partnership is about, but any real partnership assumes mutual accountability and reciprocal obligations and until now while goals 1-7 have concrete deadlines, these are lacking for goal 8. The global deal is really not a fair deal. But the good news is the number of rich countries that

set themselves targets for goal 8 is increasing and you Civil Society in the North can help making that happen . On quantity of aid, by now 5 countries, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, have actually achieved or surpassed the 0.7. Five other countries have promised to do so, well in advance of 2015 (as our check cannot still be in the mail): Ireland by 2007, Belgium by 2010, France and Spain by 2012, and the United Kingdom by 2013. Now if you come from these countries, please mobilize for monitorable annual intermediate targets up to that date, to be set and met. Now if you come from elsewhere in the rich world from Italy, Germany or Australia and elsewhere please mobilize to ensure your country get its act together to join the “G 0.7.”

Please also monitor how the money is being spent: for geo-political reasons to fight terrorism? Or in order to achieve the goals by focusing on poor countries that need concessional external resources and on sectors that are relevant to achievement of the goals. And ensure it is delivered in a fashion that enables poor countries to take charge and use it effectively. On trade: Doha Development agenda is set including the issue of elimination of agriculture subsidies. However, again dates and deadline s are lacking. In one rich country, the UK, the trade minister has called for a timely concrete deadline for this. Wherever you come from in the rich world, please mobilize in order that your government follows this call.

On debt, while thanks to the Jubilee Movement, some poor countries received some debt relief, the International Financial Institutions still do not define debt sustainability in terms of resources needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Please mobilize to ensure your Finance Minister complies with what your government leaders pledged and instruct their representative at the International Financial Institutions accordingly. Finally, on accountability, almost 100 developing countries have prepared reports on how they plan to achieve goal 1-7, but until now only Denmark, Netherlands, and Sweden have reported their efforts to ensure achievement of goal 8, while Belgium, Spain, Finland, Norway and the UK have announced to do so. If you are from elsewhere, please promote this example. And while rich countries preach poor countries that their reports should come about in a participatory fashion, most of them don't seem to practice that with their own reports. So please claim to be involved.

Those of you who are from developing countries: your focus should be on the primary responsibility of your governments to achieve the first seven goals. In some countries campaigns have started under the banner “No Excuses.” And this is exactly what this is about. Even while rich countries fail to live up to their commitments there is no excuse for developing countries not to do a better job. For instance, primary education is not expensive. Even the poorest countries should be able to mobilize and prioritize domestic resources to get all their children to school. So don't let your own government off the hook to be accountable to its own people on how your own resources are being used. Ensure that these goals are localized, tailor made to your national context and local priorities and are both ambitious and feasible. Localized also by breaking down statistics to reveal differences in gender, in regions and social economic groups to ensure that action focuses on those that are at risk of missing the goals. And don't let your government off the hook with “strategy documents.” The Millennium Developments Goals need to be integrated

into all national plans, sectoral policies and budgets at all levels. They need to be mainstreamed into the sinews of government at every level. And in the implementation machinery of all line ministries. So the goals need adopted, to be adapted, translated, operationalized and implemented. You don't want to monitor intentions but results. Not just budget allocations but actual delivery all over the country at primary schools and health care centers. Join the fight against corruption to ensure the huge integrity dividend that would accrue to be redeployed for the achievement of the goals. So holding your governments to account, both South and North, is what it takes to achieve the goals. So as the momentum is building, grab it and run and make it a home run.

Next year in this same building and in this same hall, governments will meet once again five years after Millennium Summit, to come together and ask themselves "Where are we in achieving these goals?" That is what you should ask them today. There is no excuse not to start acting today. In order to ensure that indeed next years' Summit will be a turning point in the fight against poverty; a window of opportunity to focus and re-energize political will to scale up and speed up political commitments and translate them into real action. But particularly concerning goal 8, we know that it is not at the United Nations that important decisions are taken by rich countries. They have to be taking well ahead in meetings preceding the Summit in September next year here. Within the World Trade Organization meetings of the Doha Development Round. At EU Ministerial Councils and Summits. At G8 Meetings and at the World Banks Development Committee and at the IMF Committee. So start working now to demand your government to do what it takes in order that they will deliver in September 2005. Presently a coalition is being formed North and South under the banner "Making Poverty History." And this coalition is planning to organize global mobilization days to show to leaders that citizens North and South do care and want to put an end to poverty. Indeed there is an unprecedented mobilization and a unique window of opportunity to put an end to poverty.

Already is 35 large countries, both North and South national coalitions are being formed to participate. On Friday, Salil Shetty will talk to you more about this.

While government leaders take back the planes home to business as usual, I know that you do not. And indeed we need action now, children in developing countries cannot wait and neither can this world afford yet another generation growing up in rich countries with no clue of how their peers live elsewhere and who are illiterate on how their own society shares responsibility for this situation. We are the first generation that can put an end to poverty and I would like you to refuse with us to miss that opportunity.