

Talking Points for Shashi Tharoor

57th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

Millennium Development Goals:

Civil Society Takes Action

Closing Session, 5-6 p.m., Friday, 10 September 2004

I would like to thank my colleagues Mark Malloch Brown from UNDP, Kavita Ramdas from the Global Fund for Women, and Jacques Attali from PlaNet Finance, for sharing their valuable inputs this afternoon as respondents at the Public Hearing. Thanks also to Zain Verjee of CNN International in her excellent work as moderator and commentator as well. I am honored once again to join you for this closing session on behalf of the Department of Public Information.

Before I introduce my colleague Jacques Attali to deliver the Closing Address, I would like to make some closing remarks. As I mentioned to you at the Opening session, this Conference is above all about partnership. I had no doubt about your positive impact on the work of the United Nations, but I can tell you that the entire house is impressed by the quality and substantive work and exchange that has taken place here over the past three days. This week, you have demonstrated the power of your efforts as members of civil society and the global community in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The over 1800 representatives from 540 Non Governmental Organizations from 93 countries are present here this week. You have far extended the global reach of the United Nations and helped raise awareness of the key issues necessary to advance these goals by the target date of 2015.

As NGOs, you have positively influenced public opinion toward the MDGs by carrying its message forward. As the Secretary-General stated in his message at the Opening Ceremony, "There is no time to lose in ending extreme poverty and putting the world on a more humane and just path."

The Secretary-General also stressed that Non-governmental organizations could be proud of the contributions they have already made. You have been innovative, and have put pressure on governments to deliver on their commitments and bring real change into people's lives. The Secretary-General looks forward to your recommendations which are the result from these last three days and is eager for NGO reaction in the coming weeks when he puts forward suggestions for implementing the recommendations of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations' Relations with Civil Society, which would strengthen partnerships and help the United Nations keep pace with new developments in international affairs.

In his address on Wednesday, the Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals, Jeffrey Sachs, expressed concern that he had not seen concrete efforts by developed countries to meet their commitments of 0.7 per cent gross national product (GNP) in development assistance. He emphasized that the 12 months ahead will be critical in getting the MDGs on track. Our collective work on behalf of the MDGs over the next year will have to be intensive. I believe this Conference has provided you with the tools and strategies to bring the MDGs home to your continents.

As was said yesterday, extreme poverty in any part of the world translates into instability everywhere.

I am very pleased to learn how productive the 30 Midday NGO Interactive Workshops have been over the past three days. Yesterday afternoon, in the Midday workshop entitled, "Empowering Women Worldwide: Implications for Gender Equity," speakers discussed ways to highlight women's roles in achieving these measurable goals, and how to garner political will to make these goals achievable. In speaking to reporters at a press conference earlier in the afternoon, Kavita Ramdas, President of the Global Fund for Women explained to reporters "Women's bodies are the first place where wars get played out," indicating an even greater need to mainstream gender issues in all the eight goals as they cannot be achieved without women in the forefront.

For your part, NGOs can be proud of your contributions. You have put pressure on governments to deliver on their commitments and have brought real change into people's lives. We must increase the pressure.

At all levels, people often question the usefulness of Conferences such as our Annual Conference. Yesterday, at the morning plenary panel, Strategies to Overcome MDG Obstacles, Ms. Bineta Diop, from Femmes Afrique Solidarite, underscored the importance of these Conferences, noting the valuable networking and exchange of ideas and best practices that you have been engaged in over these last three days. This direct interaction and exchange is invaluable to your work in the field and to us in the United Nations.

Ms. Wu Qing, another one of the presenters visiting from China, was careful to remind us that action is just beginning. We must continually remind ourselves that 2015 is not so far away and at that time we will be held accountable—the United Nations, governments and Civil Society."

The message of the Conference has been clear:
Without security there can be no enduring development and if there is no long-term sustainable development, then there can be no security for any of us. In line with the recent Cardoso report, the United Nations continues to promote the role of NGOs across the entire UN system. We do not always expect to agree, but we learn much from the openness and dynamism that have characterized this dialogue.

Once again, this Conference has proven to be an important and timely initiative and an effective partnership with the NGO community working directly with the United Nations. It has reflected the many national, regional and international initiatives of the United Nations and civil society to implement and monitor these ambitious goals. As much remains to improve the human condition by 2015, constructive engagement must be ongoing with our civil society partners and is more important than ever.

The significant participation of NGOs in the Conference's 57th year, has delivered a strong statement about your commitment to the Millennium Development Goals. Moreover, it is your determination to take action, in partnership with the United Nations, to overcome obstacles and achieve the Goals, in order to promote social progress and better standards of living all over the world. I wish you a successful coming year and commend you for your spirit, energy, dedication and commitment in working together with the United Nations.

To echo the words of Ms. Wu Qing, "I have a dream bigger than anything on earth. I want everyone to be educated, to become responsible global citizens, to know their rights and respect the rights of others."

I am very pleased to introduce Jacques Attali, whom you have to come to know well over the past two hours. Mr. Attali brings a unique perspective to the Conference. He is one of these rare and special individuals who work equally effectively in the private sector, the non-for-profit world and the intergovernmental organizations.