

New York, 10 March 2008 - Secretary-General's opening remarks at press conference following meeting of MDG Africa Steering Group

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the media.

The MDG Africa Steering Group has just completed the second meeting. The level of collaboration representing leaders within the international development community is unprecedented. As has just been introduced by the Spokesperson, we have all the leaders of the world development pillars [African Union Commission, African Development Bank, World Bank, European Commission, International Monetary Fund, Islamic Development Bank, and OECD.]

The fact that we are here together to speak with one voice on the MDGs underscores the urgency we see in taking concrete action to achieve Goals in Africa.

We see important reasons to be optimistic. No new promises are needed to make 2008 the year of opportunity for the "Bottom Billion". Tremendous gains are possible if the international community translates its commitments into deliverables.

The facts on the ground in Africa speak very clearly: with the exception of maternal mortality, each individual MDG will be reached in several African countries. We have seen plenty of successes due to carefully designed programmes and sound policies, backed up by strong Government leadership and support from the International Community. To mention just three examples: Malawi has drastically reduced child mortality rates, and Senegal is making rapid progress towards meeting the water and sanitation MDG targets. Tanzania has recorded creditable achievement in primary education.

These successes show what is possible. The challenge now is to replicate these successes in more countries.

This morning, we reviewed a first set of draft recommendations from the MDG Africa Working Group, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General. We propose that African Governments work toward the following, with support from the international community by:

- Working toward the launching an African Green Revolution to accelerate economic growth and combat hunger;
- Implementing comprehensive school feeding programmes using locally produced food and ensuring coverage of micronutrients;
- Achieving the Education for All Goals by 2015, including gender parity at all levels, and implement the Action Plan for the Second Decade on Education;
- Controlling infectious diseases by:
 - Providing comprehensive access to HIV/AIDS treatment by 2010;
 - Halving the burden of malaria from 2000 levels by 2010 and bringing malaria mortality close to zero by 2012;
 - Implementing the Global Stop Tuberculosis Plan of Action; and
 - Taking action to control Neglected Tropical Diseases by 2015;

- Ensuring access to emergency obstetric care for all women by 2015;
- Providing family planning services for all by 2015;
- Meeting the water supply and sanitation MDG targets;
- Making critical infrastructure investments in power, transportation, water and sanitation to raise productivity, ensure low-cost service delivery, and integrate Africa into the global economy; and
- Implementing the Marrakesh Action Plan for Statistics.

As you can see, we have identified a critical set of programmes that need to be implemented in coming years. We have also identified several pressing urgent challenges. In particular the dramatic rise in food prices underscores the pressing need to invest in raising agricultural productivity across Africa. At the same time, the high prices dramatically increase the need for additional resources to fight malnutrition and hunger. At least some \$500 million will be required to meet the most urgent needs. Importantly the crisis provides us with a critical window of opportunity for improving access to markets and reducing subsidies for agriculture in rich countries. Rapid progress is possible and needed in the Doha Round of trade negotiations, and we call on all participants to take the necessary decisions to move forward.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The systems, knowledge and tools are in place to meet ambitious targets in each area, an effort that will save millions of lives and empower African countries to achieve sustained growth. To finance these programmes, African countries need to mobilize domestic resources, and receive the support promised by development partners. In some areas, particularly in infrastructure, the private sector can provide important co-financing.

In particular, the Steering Group has identified the lack of aid predictability, poor alignment with country systems, and inadequate division of labor among donors as major constraints. We call on development partners to issue schedules for how aid will be increased and make greater progress in implementing the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The upcoming high-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra provides an important opportunity to do so.

It is our hope that the Steering Group's detailed recommendations in the areas I have outlined - recommendations which will soon be shared publicly - will encourage world leaders to focus on the specific steps that need to be agreed at the upcoming summits and international conferences on development later this year to reach the MDGs in Africa. We see a lot of leadership from African Governments on these issues, and we are committed to working with them to support the design and implementation of country-led strategies and programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to announce that on 25 September this year, the President of the General Assembly and I will convene a high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals. The event will bring together world leaders, civil society and the private sector to help translate existing commitments into action. It is my sincere hope that this event will make a real difference in bridging the implementation gap, and strengthen the accountability of all parties in the global partnership for development.

Thank you very much. And with this, ladies and gentlemen, we will try to answer your questions.