

SUMMARY

Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly On “Partnerships towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Taking stock, moving forward”

Monday, 27 November 2006

I. Introduction

An informal thematic debate on development under the rubric of “*Partnerships towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Taking stock, moving forward*” was organized on 27 November by the President of the 61st session of the General Assembly, H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa. The aim of the debate was to give impetus to the implementation of MDGs, by providing a forum to examine practical measures and strategies that would lead to tangible results. It brought together donor and recipient countries as well as civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, which shared their successful experiences and new ideas.

Four key messages emerged from the debate. Firstly, commitments made at the major UN conferences and summits, particularly the one on global partnership for development, should be fulfilled in a timely fashion. Secondly, partnerships were critical in expediting the implementation of the MDGs and these should be encouraged and nurtured at the national and international levels. Thirdly, the role of UN is central to the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The experience of Millennium Villages was applauded. Finally, by working together, the MDGs could still be achieved, which would be the single greatest service to humanity. Qatar proposed to host a follow up meeting to the thematic debate in Doha in the first half of 2007. More detailed remarks of the speakers and participants are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

II. Morning Session

The President of the General Assembly, **H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa** emphasised that partnership is vital as development goals will only be achieved if the private sector, civil society and governments were fully engaged. She stated that we were more interdependent than ever before. At the same time, we were confronted with momentous challenges like climate change and demographic growth. She said that we should also take solace from the fact that progress was being made on many avenues and it was important that efforts to implement the commitments should continue. She declared that the 61st session of the General Assembly should be the year of action and implementation, as it follows from the 60th session, which was the year of promises and commitments.

The UN Secretary-General, **Mr. Kofi Annan** observed that when he took office a decade ago, the development debate had been distinguished more by disagreements than actual implementation. That has changed today, thanks to the vision and political will that emerged from the UN conferences and summits. We have much to be proud of, but cannot be complacent. We have the MDGs now but the

prospects of achieving the goals are mixed: the world may meet the poverty goal, owing to the progress in Asia, but even there, progress towards other goals – notably Goal 7, ensuring environmental stability – is lagging, while in other parts, notably in Africa, we are still a long way from where we need to be. And global partnership for development remains more a phrase than fact, especially in the area of trade. The developing countries themselves need to fulfil their commitments to adopt and transparently implement comprehensive national strategies for development, while richer countries, on their part, need to live up to their commitments and provide resources. Finally, he emphasized that the UN has a central role to play in national and global development efforts. He stressed his conviction that attaining the MDGs on time would be the single greatest service that we can collectively perform to humanity.

The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), **H.E. Ambassador Ali Hachani**, strongly stressed that international solidarity is the most crucial ingredient of global efforts to get rid of the menace of poverty and only through partnership can we eradicate poverty. ECOSOC has played an important role in involving all stakeholders in the follow up of the international conferences. The resolution on the strengthening of ECOSOC adopted recently by the General Assembly is an important step forward and the next substantive session of ECOSOC will be a milestone in enabling the Council to play its central role in realization of the UN development agenda, including the MDGs.

The Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), **Mr. Kemal Dervis**, noted that no region is on track in meeting all the MDGs and efforts to meet Goal 8 – global partnership for development – needs to be strengthened. Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania are the worst off regions, where none of the goals are likely to be met judging by current trends. However, these current trends can be changed with alterations in policy. Growth is today becoming less pro-poor than it has been in the past. Official Development Assistance (ODA) has risen, but much in the form of debt relief and there is a danger that ODA in the next two years will be lower than the level of 2005. There is today more recognition for the need for multilateralism than there was in 2000. It is only by working together that we can build human security and prosperity for all.

The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, **Mr. José Antonio Ocampo**, noted that the United Nations Development Agenda, drawn from the UN conferences and summits, provides shared principles and objectives and represents agreed goals and targets, of which the MDGs are a distillation. He highlighted two elements: the struggle for equity and the commitment to implement the Agenda in a spirit of partnership. He stated that the MDGs put eradication of poverty at the centre of development cooperation. With regard to partnership, he emphasized that the Monterrey Consensus provided the best formulation of the Global Partnership for Development, while voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiatives formed a fundamental outcome of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. He stressed that the progress in the implementation of the UN Development Agenda is contingent on building a more strengthened, dynamic and effective partnership among all stakeholders. He congratulated the President for her Initiative.

The Vice-President of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IDB), **Mr. Amadou Boubacar Cisse**, stated that the bank is dedicated to fostering socio-economic development in its 56 member countries, all of which are developing countries. Fight against poverty is IDB's main strategic objective. Currently, IDB commits annually over \$4 billion in assistance, half of which is targeted at development programmes and projects, addressing both the impact and root-causes of poverty. He also highlighted the IDB's thirty-year partnership as a member of the Coordination Group, comprising mainly of Gulf-based bilateral and multilateral donors, which together has provided over \$80 billion in development assistance worldwide. Mr. Cisse announced that the IDB Board of Governors recently established a Poverty Alleviation Fund, with an initial proposed capital of \$10 billion. The Fund will provide financing on highly concessional terms and will primarily focus on Least Developed Member

Countries in Africa, with the priority areas in the framework of MDGs. He informed that the Fund is scheduled to start operations immediately after the formal approval of its charter in mid-2007.

Mr. Jeffrey Sachs, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals, stated that one special accomplishment is that the MDGs have given hope to the world. He underscored that the steps for achieving the MDGs were clear, simple and practical, such as to provide insecticide-treated bed nets or to provide small amounts of fertilizer to increase the agricultural yield. In addition, he emphasized the importance of access to information and communication technology. He stressed the importance of scaling up the intervention, with proven and practical ways. But for this he noted that more resources are needed and that the international community had the finance, technology and resources to help the world's poor.

In the interactive debate that followed, 12 delegations, some of which were represented at the ministerial and senior official levels, (**Egypt, Tajikistan, Dominican Republic, Mongolia, South Africa** on behalf of G77 and China, **Finland** on behalf of the European Union, **Barbados, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirate, Bahrain, Germany and Qatar**) took the floor. 22 other delegations had sought for the floor, but due to time constraint, the President invited them to actively participate in the Town Hall Meeting planned for in the afternoon. The following are the key points emerged in the interactive debate.

- The importance of **implementing the commitments on global partnership for development** was stressed by all. While many delegations reiterated that the full and timely implementation of global partnership on the part of developed countries was essential for the achievement by developing countries of the internationally agreed development goals, including MDGs by 2015. There was also a reaffirmation that each country needs to take primary responsibility for its own development. The importance of **partnership for development** within their own countries was also highlighted, involving public and private sector, NGOs and the civil society.
- A group of donor countries reaffirmed their **commitment towards meeting the target of ODA volume to reach 0.7 % of GNP** in order to support the efforts of developing countries as well as the time table in achieving the target by 2015. In addition, the importance of implementing the Paris Declaration to improve the **aid effectiveness** was emphasized. Some developing countries reported on their contribution to international cooperation both financially and in kind.
- In the sphere of international cooperation, some delegations mentioned various programmes on **trade**, noting their contribution to development. In particular, it was pointed out that Aid for Trade was a complement, not a substitute of a pro-development outcome of trade negotiations.
- Many delegations noted the importance of **the role that the United Nations** plays in forging and facilitating the global partnership and in the promotion of international cooperation for development.
- Many delegations reported on their efforts in pursuing the MDGs, in particular in **formulating their own national development strategies** that integrate MDGs. Some delegations emphasized the importance of having long-term development strategies, within which shorter, more focused poverty reduction strategies could be developed. The importance of **effective monitoring mechanism** as well as planning ahead in order to prevent problems, rather to confront them, was highlighted.

- While prioritization of goals depends on each country's situation, most delegations stressed the importance in pursuing **social development goals** together with economic growth. **Political stability and peace** was considered as fundamental in pursuing development.
- Qatar proposed to host a follow-up meeting in Doha in the first half of 2007.

III. Afternoon session – Town Hall Meeting

The afternoon session was organized in the format of a town-hall meeting. The Panel consisted of representatives from Government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The panel and the interactive debate that followed were moderated by **Mr. Shashi Tharoor**, Under-Secretary-General for Communication and Public Information.

The key message of the session was that while we are off track with the achievement of the MDGs in many parts of the world, with a drastic turn around, in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, the MDGs can still be reached. The participants unequivocally spoke in favour of forging new partnerships among governments, civil society and the private sector. The successful initiatives presented by the panellists, which often employ a set of low-cost, high impact interventions, demonstrated the enormous potential of partnerships and that their potential still needs to be fully tapped, in particular through scaling-up.

H.E. Dr. Fatima Al-Balooshi (Minister of Social Development, Kingdom of Bahrain) shared her experience of promoting partnership in support of the MDGs in Bahrain and described concrete steps which her government has taken to help the private sector and civil society to get engaged in the achievement of the MDGs. With regard to civil society involvement, she informed that her government, with support of UNDP had set up “NGO support centres” to provide both financial and technical support to NGOs. With regard to the private sector involvement, she stated that the government of Bahrain had established a list of projects, essential in achieving the MDGs, which has been made available to the private sector. Based on the list, private sector can “adopt programmes” which are then generally carried out by NGOs.

Ms. Maureen Harrington (Vice-President for Policy and International Relations, Millennium Challenge Corporation of the U. S. A.) gave a brief introduction to the work of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). She said that the MCC's approach relied on partnership, whereby funds are provided as grants, not loans, without any ties. She also stated that in order to leverage the resources available, the MCC chooses its partners carefully, focussing on (a) whether countries are ruled justly, (b) whether countries are investing in their people and (c) the political environment. Mrs. Harrington also stressed that the focus of the MCC is on the “return on poverty reduction” and in this regard pointed out that on several occasions the MCC has been working together with other donors to allow for the best poverty outcome. She also noted that the MCC regards private sector as its “exit strategy” since the long-term poverty reduction requires private-sector activities. The MCC, therefore, encouraged investment in the private sector, in particular the domestic entrepreneurs.

H.E. Mr. Hisham Alwugayan (Deputy Director General, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development) gave a brief overview of the work of the Kuwait Fund, which is designed to strengthen infrastructure, operating in a similar manner as the World Bank. The Fund embarks on over 20 projects a year, operating in 101 countries. It has spent \$12.5 billion to date. The Fund has realigned its work with the MDGs, focusing increasingly on the delivery of health services.

Mr. George Soros (Chairman, the Soros Fund Management) noted that Sub-Saharan Africa is the major stumbling block for reaching the MDGs. He identified four main challenges which had

prevented Africa from making progress towards the MDGs. First, the colonial legacy, second, the “resources curse,” which includes corruption and conflicts associated with the exploitation of natural resources. Third, HIV/AIDS and fourth, global warming. He stated that despite these daunting challenges progress had been made in addressing them. In particular, Mr. Soros noted that the pilot Millennium Villages for which he had provided \$50 million, accounting for one third of the cost, had proven to be a viable blueprint for sustainable rural development in Africa. He expressed the hope that governments would commit the necessary resources for rolling out the Millennium Villages Projects on a larger scale. He noted that over the last four years progress has also been made in addressing the “resource curse”, notably through the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), a joint initiatives of governments, multinational enterprises and NGOs. He also emphasised the importance of NEPAD in addressing the issue of governance through its peer review mechanism and in this regard highlighted the work of AfriMAP, a Soros Fund initiative, which is monitoring the performance of governments and promoting compliance of African States with the requirements on good governance, democracy, human rights and the role of law.

Mr. Tokyo Sexwale (Executive Chairman of the Mvelaphamda Group of Companies/ South Africa and Chairman of the African-Arab Civil Council Initiative) singled out corruption as the “threat No. 1” to reaching the MDGs in Africa., Mr. Sexwale informed participants that in order to advance the MDGs in Africa and Arab countries, the Africa-Arab Civil Council, which brings together business and civil society, had been established in September 2006. He proposed that each of the fortune 500 companies should adopt one Millennium Village. He said that rapid scaling up was possible, basing his remarks on the experience with his family foundation which will scale up the provision of wheel chairs to the most disadvantaged from South Africa to all 53 countries of Africa, starting with Angola. He urged the new Secretary-General to stay the course in the quest to achieve the MDGs. He hailed the Islamic Development Bank for their initiative to establish the Poverty Alleviation Fund..

Ms. Joanna Kerr (Executive Director, Association for Women’s right in Development) focussed her remarks on the importance of addressing the gender dimension of poverty, noting that the root causes of poverty were different for men and women and that hence a gendered approach to poverty eradication was necessary to fight the feminisation of poverty. She deplored the continuing low priority of gender on the international agenda and the lack of a gendered approach to poverty analysis and policy development. Ending on a positive note she commended the Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence for its proposal to create a consolidated UN gender equality and women’s empowerment programme and thereby to strengthen the issue of gender mainstreaming within the UN system.

H.E. Mr. Markku Niskala (Secretary-General, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) stated that, while the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies continue to be seen by many as humanitarian and hence relief-minded organisation, they were equally committed to long-term development. He informed participants that to this end they had adopted their own Global Agenda last year. Mr. Niskala identified five risk areas as having an immediate impact on the achievement of the MDGs: (a) climate change and its consequences; (b) the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other global health crises; (c) increased food insecurity; (d) economic instability and the intolerance and social tension it brings; and (e) insufficient disaster preparedness. He also said that action had to focus at the community level where MDGs had to be met and that each organisation working on MDG should focus on its respective organisational strength in MDG delivery.

Mr. Gary Cohen (President of Becton Dickson Medical) focussed his remarks on the role which the private sector can play in the achievement of the health-related MDGs. He stated that there is a pressing need to apply the gifts of innovation to developing countries, where they are most needed. In his intervention he focussed on how his company had contributed to addressing this challenge. Noting

that today Africa has 10 per cent of the world population, 25 per cent of the disease burden and only 1.3 per cent of the health workers, he said that his company was focusing on the provision of health services which allow for the provision of vaccinations, basic laboratory work as well as the prevention of the spreading of diseases.

Wrapping up the discussion, **Professor Jeffrey Sachs** (Special Advisor of the Secretary-General for the MDGs) focussed his remarks on the large inequalities present in today's world economy, how the MDGs fit in in this context and how practical low-cost interventions as tried out in the Millennium Villages could help turn around the destiny of the poorest of the poor within a year. He expressed the hope that the Millennium Villages Projects could be rolled out to other parts of the world. He noted that many countries had made requests for villages, but that the requests could not be met due to a shortage of funds. Professor Sachs made an urgent appeal to participants to make the necessary funds available, stressing that the projects cost money, though not a lot of money.

Mr. Jon Hall (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)) said that the agreement of a set of indicators provided by the Millennium Development Goals was a great achievement. At the same time he said that much improvement was still needed to make the indicators more reliable, stressing in particular the need to improve the capacity of national statistical offices. He also stressed that increasing the need to measure societal progress was recognized and that the OECD was partnering with the World Bank, the United Nations and the European Commission to develop a set of economic, social and environmental indicators. In this regard, he informed participants that the OECD will be holding a meeting on "Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies" in June 2007 in Istanbul. The meeting is meant to start a global conversation on "what is meant by progress". The findings of this discussion are meant to prepare the international community as it starts to think beyond 2015.

Mr. Fred Tipson (Senior Policy Counsel and Director for International Development Policy, Microsoft) stressed the need to base partnership on a reliance of the resources that local populations could provide. He said that people need to be given the capability to "take on" technology. He also noted that in particular for women, access to technology is frequently a key to development and to opening the doors of opportunity for them. He therefore urged participants to give women tools that they can use and also to keep resourcefulness in mind when talking about resources.

In a brief interactive debate that followed, 10 delegations (**China, Cuba, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Switzerland, Afghanistan, Armenia, Barbados, France, Chile**) and one institution (**the African Development Bank**) took the floor. The key messages emerged from the interactive discussion are the following

- Many speakers noted the success of **Millennium Villages**, but in scaling up they considered that all development partners need to live up to their commitments.
- Some delegations called for more focus on **ODA, FDI and trade**. Some examples of **innovative mechanism for financing** were presented, such as one involving the Diaspora and the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID).
- Based on their experience, some delegations highlighted the importance of focusing on **women and girls**
- Some delegations stressed the importance of **access to medications and vaccinations** against communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis.

- The importance of improving **aid effectiveness** was reiterated, for which the Paris Declaration provided a framework.
- In addition to Africa, it was pointed out that the **vulnerability** of certain countries, such as the Small Island Developing States, needs to be considered.

IV. Conclusion

H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, President of the General Assembly expressed her satisfaction with the fruitful discussion and emphasized that if we remain committed, we will be able to achieve the MDGs. She reiterated the Secretary General's statement that to achieve the MDGs would be one of the greatest gifts to humanity. Civil society and the private sector must be kept engaged with this process to ensure a more stable and safe world. She expressed her gratitude to the Islamic Development Bank on its announcement of the proposed \$10 billion Poverty Alleviation Fund. She also thanked Mexico and Qatar for playing the pivotal role in driving forward the follow-up process to the International Conference on Financing for Development. She further thanked Qatar for its proposal to host the follow-up meeting to the thematic debate on development during the first half of 2007. She hoped that the discussions would fortify ongoing partnership and pave the way for new ones, with the aim of achieving the MDGs by 2015.
