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MILLENNIUM SUMMIT'S ANTI-POVERTY GOALS 'COMMON CAUSE' FOR INTERNATIONAL

COMMUNITY SAYS DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL IN ATHENS ADDRESS

Following is Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette's address to the European Foundation Centre's annual General Assembly in Athens, 30 May:

It is a pleasure and an honour to address you today. Above all, I am heartened that you have asked for the United Nations to be present at your Annual Assembly. I take this as a most welcome signal that European foundations appreciate the need to reach beyond the borders of Europe to the world at large.

And how apt that you are holding your gathering in Athens on the theme of bridging civilizations and cultures. Surely there is no city in the world richer in symbolism and history as a meeting place of people, intellects and ideas. This summer, there is no place that will rival Athens as a focal point for friendship among nations, when athletes gather under the flame of the Olympic Torch.

And Mrs. Angelopoulos, I attest, as one who lived here in Athens for many years, to the extraordinary work achieved that transformed Athens into a modern capital, full of life without losing anything of its charm. I am confident that the Olympic Games this summer in Athens will be very successful.

The global theme of your Annual Assembly could not come at a more crucial time in world affairs. Recent events have surely shown all of us that in today's world, it is more important than ever to build bridges among cultures, communities and countries; to reach out and seek to make common cause around our most fundamental and universal values.

What are those values, you may ask? Is there even such a thing as a universal set of values? I would venture that there is -- and that we have a document to prove it.

Four years ago, the world's governments adopted the Millennium Declaration -- the product of the Millennium Summit, the largest gathering of leaders the world has ever seen.

In it, they stated that they had "collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level".

They recognized that as leaders, they had a duty "to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs".

And they held "certain fundamental values to be essential to international relations in the twenty-first century". Among those values, they counted freedom, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility.

Those were the values they saw as the glue binding together the peoples of the world.

Four years on, the consensus behind the Millennium Declaration has been challenged by upheavals we could not have imagined in the year 2000.

Major differences have emerged in the international community, shaped above all by the threat of terrorism, by the war in Iraq and by events related to it.

Those events have raised a number of wider questions about the nature of the security challenges we face, and about the ability of the multilateral system to deal with them

They have brought home to us that there is a pressing need for the international community to find common ground again.

They have underlined the need to make the United Nations a more effective instrument in meeting threats to global security in the twenty-first century.

And they have made us realize that we must re-evaluate our existing capacities, as well as build new ones to meet the threats and challenges ahead.

That is why, in November, the Secretary-General appointed a High-Level Panel to examine the threats we face, evaluate our existing policies, processes and institutions, and make bold recommendations for change.

But surely we already know -- and we do not need a panel to tell us -- that to find common ground, to build bridges between cultures and civilizations, we must also focus on what the ordinary people who make up those cultures and civilizations have in common. We must look to the things that fundamentally matter to them.

And ultimately, what matters most to them are not necessarily issues discussed in the Security Council of the United Nations. Rather, they are issues to do with building a decent life for themselves and their families -- enough food on the table, adequate housing, good health care, clean drinking water, an education for their children. Issues expressed in the Millennium Development Goals -- eight commitments drawn from the Millennium Declaration which, taken together, form a blueprint for building a better world in the twenty-first century.

These eight goals range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of major diseases and providing universal primary education -- all by the target date of 2015. They represent a set of simple but powerful objectives that every man and woman in the street -- from Athens to Addis Ababa -- can easily understand and support.

And I must say that I am delighted that the International Committee of the European Foundation Centre has adopted the Millennium Development Goals as its framework for action.

Yes, these goals are ambitious. But they are not utopian. Why are they different from other bold pledges that became broken promises over the past 50 years? Well, I see three reasons.

First, the Millennium Development Goals are people-centred, time-bound and measurable. A classic complaint about development aid is that undirected, uncoordinated resources tend to be wasted by corruption and mismanagement without any mechanisms to track progress and ensure accountability. Now we have a set of clear, measurable indicators, focused on basic human needs, that can provide clear benchmarks of progress -- or the lack of it -- both globally and country by country.

Second, the Millennium Development Goals have unprecedented political support. Never before have such concrete goals been formally endorsed by rich and poor countries alike. And never before have the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and all the other principal arms of the international system come together behind the same set of development goals.

Third -- and most important -- the Millennium Development Goals are achievable. Take the goal of halving poverty. The number of people living on less than one US dollar a day is around 1.2 billion -- little changed from the late 1980s. But that figure disguises some huge successes.

East Asia has seen the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day plummet from 28 per cent to 14 per cent in one decade. In South Asia, where nearly half the world's very poor live, there has been a more modest drop from 44 per cent to 37 per cent -- but progress is accelerating.

Progress is also being made in the fight against HIV/AIDS. There have been remarkable successes in some countries in Africa and Asia, despite rising infection rates in those regions as a whole. Senegal, Uganda and Thailand have launched nationwide programmes of prevention that have contained the rates of infection.

In every region, and at every level, the Millennium Development Goals are proving to be a powerful catalyst for change. Millennium Development Goal-based poverty monitoring systems are being introduced to sharpen national poverty reduction strategies. And Millennium Development Goal action plans are being mainstreamed into the development process.

Nevertheless, overall progress has been uneven at best. There is no rising tide in the global economy that will lift all boats. Good, democratic governance and sound development strategies are paramount.

Equally indispensable is a true partnership of developed and developing countries -- as expressed in the eighth Millennium Development Goal. Much more can and should be done by governments in the developed world to open up markets, increase official development assistance and provide debt relief.

There is a multitude of ways in which all of you, as foundations, can be active partners in the work to build bridges among cultures and civilizations; in the mission to make common cause around what matters most to people's lives.

First, many of you have ideas and expertise to share on ways to solve global problems. You can advance knowledge and understanding of the issues, influence debate, and contribute to decisions about the kind of research that is worth investing in.

Second, you can take up roles of leadership and advocacy. You are credible and respected actors in your respective countries and communities, and you can use your voice to build wider support for the Millennium Development Goals. You raise public consciousness, and speak to people's conscience.

Third, you can work as partners on the ground on specific projects. Many of you have long and solid experience at the local level of how to get things done. You can use that experience to take action, working with local partners in other countries where the need is even greater.

You have plenty of examples to draw on. Over the past decade, there has been a virtual explosion in the number of partnerships bringing together Governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and foundations. By forging alliances, by pooling skills and resources, by making the connection between the local and the global, these partnerships are making an impact more widely and deeply than one actor ever could.

Let me mention a couple of examples. The MTCT-Plus initiative is an alliance of nine foundations working with other institutions to protect children from being infected with HIV through mother-to-child transmission, and to provide treatment for their mothers. It is a wonderful illustration of the role foundations can play in the fight against AIDS through both prevention and care.

Or look at the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which brings together more than 100 partners in an international programme to provide scientific information to decision-makers and the

public about the consequences of changes in the ecosystem, and options for responding to those changes.

There are many other examples, and we in the United Nations welcome and embrace them. In recent years, we have opened up to this way of working with non-State actors on a scale that could not have been imagined a few decades ago.

The UN office for international partnerships, established in the first instance to channel the billion dollars donated to the United Nations by CNN founder Ted Turner in 1997, works together with the agencies of the UN system to foster collaboration and synergies. This has inspired a number of other foundations and philanthropists to work with the UN in areas ranging from education to maternal health to biodiversity.

The UN is also reaching out to the business community. More than 1,400 companies from over 70 countries, as well as dozens of civil society organizations and global trade union federations, have joined our Global Compact initiative -- a forum promoting the practical application of universal principles on human rights, labour and the environment.

This has helped many corporations address issues such as human rights for the first time. It has helped business, labour and non-governmental organizations learn how to work together through learning and dialogue, and discover that cooperation is better than confrontation. It has helped the United Nations learn how to open up its doors and work with the business sector. And it has inspired a range of new projects on the ground in the developing world, for the benefit of those who need them most.

The United Nations is truly transforming the way it works with the outside world. Partnering with us has never been easier. We stand ready to welcome you, and work with you.

Above all, I hope that you will bring all your creativity and experience to bear on the mission we surely all have in common -- the work for human dignity, freedom and solidarity, for tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility.

And I hope your example will encourage and energize others to act. I thank you for listening to me today, and look forward to seeing many of you again. Thank you very much.

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