



Press Release

General Assembly calls for action on Millennium Development Goals, President proposes annual meetings to hold partners accountable

UNITED NATIONS, 4 April 2008 -- The United Nations General Assembly concluded a three-day debate to accelerate lagging progress to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 with a call for decisive action and a proposal by the Assembly President for annual meetings to take stock of global implementation to hold all partners to account for commitments.

"Failure is not an option," General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim said. "It is clear from our debate yesterday that we have the solutions. The key issue is that we all have to deliver on our commitments, scale up our efforts and accelerate progress."

The General Assembly debate was extended by a full day to accommodate the 117 speakers, including 10 ministers and 9 vice-ministers, representing 110 countries. The debate also drew a wide range of participants from the United Nations system, academia, business, and non-governmental organizations on how to get back on track to achieve of the Millennium targets by 2015.

"2008 is the year of action," Mr. Kerim said, "it must be the year when our promises must be delivered on the ground."

Although significant progress has been made in fighting poverty and hunger, reducing infant mortality and increasing school enrolment, none of the Millennium Development Goals will be met in sub-Saharan Africa if current trends continue. One third of sub-Saharan Africa's population is malnourished and, without decisive action, one in six people globally – almost one billion – will still live on less than one dollar a day in 2015, according to UN statistics.

"Our efforts must not end in 2008," Mr. Kerim emphasized. "I therefore propose that each year until 2015, the General Assembly convenes a thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals to take stock of progress and to hold all partners to account for their promises." Since the Assembly established the goals, "it has a responsibility to monitor their implementation and the commitments made by all parties to achieve their full implementation," he said.

Mutual accountability was the only way forward, Mr. Kerim said. "Leaders across every level of the development system now need to hold themselves to account. Donors need to get back on track to deliver their promises."

During the debate, government representatives noted progress in efforts to achieve the goals, but also highlighted challenges. For example, Joanne Massiah, Antigua and Barbuda's Minister for Agriculture, speaking on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China, noted that the international community was far from making good on the \$50 billion worth of official development assistance it had promised.

Ziga Turk, Slovenia's Minister for Growth, speaking on behalf of the European Union, said the EU was committed to scaling up its aid and collectively contributing 0.56 per cent of gross national income to official development assistance by 2010, and reaching the UN target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2015.

Many delegations, both from developing and developed countries, emphasized the need to improve aid effectiveness and increased predictability of aid flows to ensure significant country-level impact. "When aid is effectively aligned behind national governments and predictable over the long term, progress can be achieved," President Kerim said.

Africa and the least developed countries needed additional long-term assistance from the international community to catch up with the rest, the President said, particularly in terms of investment in agriculture and infrastructure.

A number of speakers also pointed out that development progress was gravely threatened by the effects of climate change and other major environmental challenges. "Climate change is already undermining the achievement of the MDGs, particularly in the poorest counties and those at greatest risks from its affects," President Kerim said. "Development must be environmentally responsible and sustainable."

Government representatives also emphasized the importance of the successful conclusion of the Doha trade negotiations, in particular including development as its central pillar. "A timely and successful conclusion to the Doha Development Round has the potential to lift millions out of poverty," President Kerim emphasized in his closing remarks.

Together with the General Assembly President, the Secretary-General will convene a special high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals in New York on 25 September, bringing together world leaders, private-sector representatives and civil society partners to discuss specific ways to energize collaboration. "I expect the meeting will also send a strong message that governments are ready to rise to the financing for development challenge," the Secretary-General said.

See archives of the **webcast** of the General Assembly debate at <http://www.un.org/webcast>.

For daily **meetings coverage** of the debate, see <http://www.un.org/apps/pressreleases>.

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