

THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

Accelerating the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

Young Voices against Poverty

United Nations, New York

29 - 31 October 2006.

Engaging the Next Generation

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, all Member States adopted the Millennium Declaration, pledging to work for a more peaceful, secure and equitable world. The Declaration included a set of eight development goals: to strive to cut extreme poverty by half, achieve universal primary education, empower women and girls, reduce maternal and infant mortality, reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and ensure environmental sustainability -- all by 2015. Engaging youth in these efforts is essential, for they have the energy and commitment needed to spur progress towards the eight Goals.

With more than one-fifth of the world's six billion people between the ages of 15-24, of which 86 per cent live in less-developed countries, it is the largest group ever to enter adulthood on both sides of the development sphere. Moreover, they represent the part of the world population most affected by the Goals with the capacity to ensure their success.

The United Nations and its partners are committed to reaching out to youth worldwide so as to provide them with an opportunity to exchange perspectives on how they can accelerate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, or the MDGs. Over the past two years, they have organized regional youth leadership summits in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. With the creation of the United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) in October 2004, the focus of the summits was further developed to explore how the youth, with their strong appeal, can accelerate progress toward achieving the MDGs and help build a more peaceful world. UNOSDP works under the guidance of the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, Mr. Adolf Ogi, and former President of Switzerland, reaching out to the sports world, media and the private sector, as well as artistic and cultural leaders to promote sport as a tool for improving the quality of people's lives around the world.

The regional summits will culminate in the first ever United Nations Global Youth Leadership summit to be held in New York at the end of October 2006. The summit will bring together two young leaders – one young man and one young woman between the ages of 18 and 30 – from each of the member states of the United Nations, making this a

historic event which enjoys the support of the Secretary General and world political leaders.

The Global Summit is organized by UNOSDP on behalf of the United Nations system. It is being held in partnership with the Vishwa Prawasi Bhartiya Leaders Forum (VPBLF), a US-based non-governmental organization funded by the Gita-Mohan Mittal Foundation (GMMF) and the Inner Trip Reyukai International (ITRI). The summit has been fortunate to benefit from the inspiring story of Mr. Mohanlal Mittal, founder of GMMF and VPBLF, who has encouraged youth leaders to “focus clearly on the future with intensity and commitment and be like a fire that can reach any height.”

VPBLF’s membership, comprising non-resident Indian global leaders, supports various socio-cultural organizations to alleviate poverty, foster education with values of non-violence and human unity, as well as interfaith dialogue and harmony. Inspired by the Indian concept of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” or the “World is one family,” the VPBLF has held interfaith peace dialogues in over 40 countries. It also funds community centres, schools, hospitals and orphanages around the world.

With GMMF/VPBLF and ITRI, the United Nations will continue to strengthen the partnership of the youth leadership summit with the private sector to work for the alleviation of poverty and attaining the MDGs.

The Road to New York: Regional Youth Leadership Summits

The Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit held in Dakar, Senegal (27-30 June 2004), was the first of a series of regional youth meetings. Youth leaders were chosen by their UNDP country offices to partake in this conference. Upon conclusion, a Declaration was drafted and finalized in which the African delegates pledged to take action in their local communities and establish a permanent Young African Leaders Network. They also made a commitment to hold national youth meetings to inform young people about the MDGs, while further motivating them to engage in national dialogue with their Governments. They traveled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to present their plan of action to the African Union Summit, which took place a month later.

Encouraged by this outcome, youth delegates began initiatives to share their Summit experiences with others; consequently, they gained much public support and recognition which helped them to further the impact of their work.

Hiroshima, Japan, was the site of the second regional gathering - the Pan-Asian Youth Leadership Summit (19-21 September 2004), which was sponsored and hosted by Shumei International, an environmental and cultural organization headquartered in Japan. A workshop focused on ways to tap into sport and its celebrities so as to raise awareness and mobilize support for the MDGs whilst exploring the diversity within Asia. Other key areas of discussion for this region included the environment and HIV/AIDS. Prominent UN experts traveled to Hiroshima to address the delegates on these themes. Inspired by the peaceful spirit of Hiroshima and its global symbolism of

rebirth after the horrors of war, the 100 participants from 30 countries of the region, in their Declaration, called on the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the Pacific Island Forum States and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to “give youth a chance to present their vision for 2015.”

The UNDP country office of Brazil took the lead in organizing the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Leadership Summit (12-16 May 2005), in partnership with UNOSDP with support from the federal government of Brazil, the city of Belo Horizonte and the Citizenship Institute, a local non-governmental organization. Sport, with its wide appeal among youth, was the highlight of the summit, and the International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005 offered a framework for reaching out to youth on the MDGs. A number of talented and articulate leaders emerged from this effort, thus constituting the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Youth Network.

Soon after, King Mohammed VI of Morocco offered to host the second Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit in Irfane (18-23 August 2005). The regional chairs from the Asian and Latin American and Caribbean regions participated and shared their experiences, which strengthened the bonds of the global network of young leaders that was emerging. Returning to Africa, both sports and peace-building took hold as central themes and the momentum was clearly accelerating. This second African Summit was the first to hold an exhibition of the MDG-related projects of the delegates, and the Moroccan Government offered awards to 10 delegates for their projects.

The Government of Austria, then holding the Presidency of the European Union, invited young leaders from across the European Union, and the two accession countries of Bulgaria and Romania, to the United Nations European Youth Leadership Summit it hosted in Vienna (19-21 June 2006). The European Summit encouraged youth leaders to take an active role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, with a focus on Goal 8 – “Develop a global partnership for development”. The deliberations also reflected on key issues facing the youth of Europe, such as education, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, and social integration. The delegates were inspired develop their own projects and advocacy campaigns, in cooperation with the United Nations system and other partners.

The delegates adopted the Vienna Declaration, which will be presented, through the Government of Austria, to the United Nations Secretary-General through the European Union Summit in Finland later in 2006, as well as to the Global Youth Leadership Summit in New York. The Declaration affirms the commitment of European youth leaders to reduce poverty and promote education, health, empowerment of women and girls, and environmental sustainability. It also urges all Union Members to fulfill their commitment to contribute 0.7 per cent of their GDP to development assistance. The Declaration identifies creative sport and cultural activities as tools to increase youth employment and health rates, empower women’s participation, and create awareness on health issues

Networks Circling the World

Through these five regional meetings, a global network of youth leaders has emerged who want their voices to be heard. The network consists of young professional, community leaders, social entrepreneurs and students, who are effective in grassroots outreach, as well as advocacy with their governments, civil society, academia, the private sector and media. There are four on-line forums through which delegates have created their own communication channels. For instance, the environmental sustainability working sessions at the Moroccan Summit were particularly vibrant. Soon thereafter, a young leaders' environmental on-line network was initiated to continue the dialogue, which was promptly joined by delegates from previous regional summits.

A key message of this series of the regional summits is that youth from every region have contributions to make, and each region offers unique expertise, understanding and cultural traditions, forming the kaleidoscope of intrinsic interconnectedness of communities around the world. As delegates forge relationships with young people from other regions, they are laying the foundations for international cooperation that will yield a more widespread exchange of resources and knowledge among countries, regardless of their socio-economic condition.

Summit Content and Structure: Creating a Transformative Experience

The first ever United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit, with the convening power of sport and culture as a central theme, aims to:

- Educate youth leaders on the MDGs and inspire them to work toward their achievement through improving living standards and empowering their local communities;
- Build a global network and international partnerships, working together with governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector;
- Connect youth to the United Nations system locally and globally so as to become part of the effort to build a more secure, sustainable and prosperous world.

The United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit will also build upon the efforts and progress made by the previous regional youth leadership summits to:

- Evaluate progress of youth network activities by identifying challenges and solutions;
- Foster understanding of diversity among delegates;
- Give a stronger voice to the youth;
- Adopt a global declaration agreed upon by youth leaders from different regions.

The Summit is designed to provide a framework for youth leaders to discuss and debate strategies to achieve the MDGs and promote peace, create their own networks for exchanging ideas, cooperate on new initiatives, and reach out to more young leaders and organizations.

Prospective delegates to the Summit will be nominated by Permanent Missions to the United Nations and UNDP Offices, where existing, and selected on their leadership experience and potential, their record of accomplishment and vision in support of the MDGs. Countries will be represented by one young man and one young woman in accordance with UN principles of equal opportunities and empowerment of women.

An Inter-Generational Dialogue, moderated by the Secretary-General, will provide a platform for youth participation in a policy discussion with leaders of countries that have hosted regional youth summits, including Austria, Brazil, Japan, Morocco and Senegal.

The Summit will include plenary sessions and smaller cluster meetings on the MDGs. To the maximum extent possible, the youth delegates will organize and guide the work of the Summit themselves.

The Summit has a web site (un.org/youthsummit), which will be expanded to provide space for on-line discussions, inputs from youth worldwide and other web tools to enhance communications and networking. Sun Microsystems, the technology partner for the Summit series, will offer mentoring assistance to help delegates harness the power of information technology in their work. Digital Story Telling (DST) will be an interesting feature of the Summit, provided by the Global Education Learning Community (GELC). DST is an exciting technology that connects words and images, engages minds and hearts, supports rapid dissemination and invites content exploration. Sharing digital stories at the Summit is way for the youth leaders to share their passions and drive the transformation of our world in the 21st Century.

“Summit Diaries” will be another interesting aspect which enables delegates who are involved in MDG-related activities, or working on proposals, to post their project description on the Summit web site.

The Summit will also offer undiscovered young leaders a support system under which they can flourish, a network to mentors and a community of motivated people striving for common aspirations. It will also be an opportunity for young professionals seeking a way to connect to a larger global community to make a difference as they move toward taking their place in leadership positions. By bringing together leaders from youth organizations, as well as young professionals from the private and public sectors, the Summit aims to prepare them for the challenges ahead to create a more prosperous, safe, peaceful and healthy world for future generations.

The Power of Information Technology

Information and communication technologies are transforming our world and opening new vistas for global cooperation and action to advance progress toward the MDGs. Young people are on the cutting edge of this new technology, and many are skilled in harnessing it in their own activities. An important issue for the European Summit, however, was the digital divide: youth in other regions are also eagerly taking advantage of new technologies, but some lack access or have far more limited access than their

peers in developed countries. Even within the developed regions of the world, there are disparities among communities in their ability to take advantage of new technologies. These issues have profound implications for education, employment and progress in other sectors towards the MDGs, and will be addressed by young leaders at the Global Summit.

Organizing the Summit: a Total United Nations Involvement

The United Nations has strongly advocated the need to recognize the central role young people play in efforts to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty at the global, regional and national levels. Forging cooperation across the United Nations system, the United Nations New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace helped create an inter-agency Working Group on Sport for Development and Peace to discuss coordination and cooperation to maximize the impact of sports activities. The Business Plan for the Working Group is a comprehensive agenda for sports initiatives by the United Nations system and its partners in support of the MDGs and peace building, including the Youth Summit Leadership series and other activities focusing on youth.

The Office works closely with the Group of Friends of Sport for Development and Peace, formed in 2005 through initiative of the Ambassadors of Switzerland and Tunisia to the United Nations in New York. The open-ended group of ambassadors aims to encourage governments to support sport-related activities, including those for youth, at the United Nations, in their national policies, and at the international level.

The Group of Friends drafted General Assembly Resolution 60/9, unanimously adopted on 3 November 2005, which requests the Secretary-General to develop an Action Plan to expand and strengthen sports for development and peace activities and sport partnerships. The resolution reflects the commitment of the world community to mainstream sport as part of the global development agenda. The Office is preparing the Action Plan, within which youth play a pivotal role in the governmental policies and programmes of Member States.

The United Nations Youth Leadership Summit series is an important dimension of the Office's outreach to civil society on behalf of the United Nations system in cooperation with governments of several countries hosting regional summits, including Austria, Brazil, Japan, Morocco and Senegal.

Sponsors and Partners Who Make the Summit Happen

As mentioned earlier, the main partners of the United Nations Global Youth Leadership Summit are the Gita-Mohan Mittal Foundation, providing support through Vishwa Prawasi Bhartiya Leaders Forum (GMMF/VPBLF) and the Inner Trip Reikyukai International (ITRI). GMMF/VPBLF has joined with ITRI in sponsoring the Summit and its follow-up activities in an historic partnership with the United Nations extending to 2015, aimed at the alleviation of poverty by empowering youth to work for the achievement of the MDGs.

ITRI believes that by fostering shared human values, promoting individual peace through a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of our global communities around the world will develop the respect and understanding that are prerequisites to a peaceful world. Headquartered in New York, and active in several parts of the world, ITRI supports peace building initiatives and United Nations efforts to promote economic and social progress through cultural preservation, training of youth leaders for peace and development issues, wider distribution of Information Technology, values education, promotion of multi-faith and multi-cultural dialogue and sustainable development initiatives.

Mr. Mohanlal Mittal, Founder-President of GMMF/VPBLF, is Chair of the Council of Mentors, who serve as role models for the youth. The other members of the Council are Mr. Hiroshi Matsumoto of ITRI, and Mr. John Gage, Founder and Chief Researcher of Sun Microsystems.

Other partners for the youth summits vary from region to region and include governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. They include the Government of Senegal; the Federal Government of Brazil, the City of Belo Horizonte, and the Citizenship Institute of Brazil; the Kingdom of Morocco; and the Government of Austria – whose countries hosted the regional summits.

The Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW), the NGO partner for the Summit, is an international network of women leaders who come together to stimulate peace building and reconciliation efforts in war-torn areas of the world and those recovering from conflict. Its members share two primary goals: to bring alternative resources, be they spiritual, economic or educational, to aid in healing conflict; and to relieve the social and economic stresses that lead to violence.

As the technology partner for the Youth Summit series, Sun Microsystems has made a significant contribution for creating and managing the Summit web site. It has also helped young leaders understand the implications of new technologies, and the ways through which they can use their power to advance their work and link up with peers worldwide, and thereby bridge the Digital Divide. Sun Microsystems' creation, the GELC, which will introduce digital story telling at the Summit, empowers people worldwide through Open Source Curricula (OSC). This technology eliminates the Education Divide by moving learning into the Participation Age.

.In the media world, a key partner is Eurosport, which broadcast coverage of the European Youth Leadership Summit to 54 countries in 19 languages, and will also cover the Global Summit. The US-based National Association of Black Journalists, the largest professional organization of nearly 4,000 journalists of colour striving to honour excellence, in cooperation with their Asian American and Hispanic journalists, is setting up a team of student journalists to work with a group of youth delegates to provide daily coverage of activities on the Global Summit web site. Other media partners covering the event are BBC and Radio France International (RFI).

A Call for Urgent Action

The Summit offers the opportunity of a breakthrough towards conquering extreme poverty. Achieving the Goals is the most pressing social imperative of our time. With decisive leadership and a clear focus on implementation, extreme poverty can be halved within a decade. At issue is whether countries will follow through on commitments. The right choices must be made at all levels, and a new decade of bold cooperation launched. The stakes could not be higher, with tens of millions of lives at stake, and youth hold the key to that future. Their commitment can make the difference, and only with the involvement of young people on every continent can the achievement of the MDGs become a reality.

Last year, leaders from nearly all 191 Member States participating in the United Nations World Summit 2005 agreed to adopt and implement ambitious national development strategies based on the Millennium Development Goals by 2006. If a national strategy outlines the maximum effort that a developing country can make towards the Goals, then donor countries should fill the funding gap of support required. This is particularly important for the poorest countries that have very few resources available.

The World Summit also agreed to launch Quick Impact Initiatives, which can have enormous benefits on millions of lives in the poorest countries. Countries can, for example, fight malaria through mass distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets and artemisinin-based combination therapy, campaign against hunger by focusing on school meals using locally produced food, and help abolish fees for basic healthcare and primary education, backed by increased development assistance to make up for the revenue shortfall. Success will require developed and developing countries to work closely together to mobilize the resources and implement activities. Youth can play a vital role in such initiatives, enlisting the power of sport and culture to raise awareness and mobilize support.

Developed countries (of North America, Europe and Asia and the Pacific) also need to adopt national strategies for the Goals. Youth have an important stake in these strategies, both in aspects that focus on domestic priorities and those responding to the call of the eighth MDG to create a global partnership for development. Nowhere is the test of this Goal more meaningful than at the level of supporting developing countries' national strategies to achieve their own targets and aspirations for the MDGs. It is incumbent upon the developed world to support them, and for the younger generation represented at the Global Summit to take a stand to see that commitments to achieve the MDGs are met.

The MDGs represent first and foremost a vision of a better world for the youth. It should therefore come as no surprise that the Youth Leadership series launched in 2004 by the United Nations continues to witness the active involvement of an increasing number of youth organizations to make sure the MDGs are achieved by 2015.