



THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

Keynote statement

by

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Mr. Secretary General,
Madam President of General Assembly,
Your Excellency Madame President of the Confederation,
President of ECOSOC,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak at this year's high level segment of ECOSOC, which is the first high level segment of a renewed ECOSOC which, I hope, is truly well placed to act as a central coordinating body responsible for reviewing the UN system's contribution to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

It is up to us, its membership, to make ECOSOC the forum for cutting edge discussions, practical recommendations and a real capacity to follow-up on decisions. The ability of the reformed Council to respond to the challenges facing us in the economic and social arena will be the true test of its effectiveness.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Across the globe, economic growth over the past years has been quite promising. Due to strong growth in developing regions over the past few years, an estimated 135 million people managed to get out of extreme poverty. Dollar-a-day poverty has fallen in all developing regions, with the biggest drop in East Asia.

My own region, Central and Eastern Europe, also achieved significant progress in poverty reduction. Promising changes are also taking place internationally in the fields of primary education for poor children, child vaccination against measles, and the number of HIV positive people gaining access to retroviral treatment, to name but a few.

But the progress attained so far is not sufficient and we cannot be complacent. Overall progress in achieving the MDGs, including poverty reduction, remains uneven. In spite of repeated recognition of the special needs of Africa and recent record growth of a number of African economies, poverty and hunger remain huge challenges in sub-Saharan Africa and the Least Developed Countries (LDC).

With poverty and hunger still a daily reality for millions of people across the globe, we must live up to our commitments. We must do more and with greater urgency. And we must break from the mold of business as usual. Or else, the Millennium Development Goals will remain no more but a promise.

The importance of national poverty reduction strategies with a strong sense of ownership cannot be stressed enough. At the same time, in order to see real progress in fighting poverty and hunger, local efforts need the sustained and coordinated support at regional and global levels. What is required is a comprehensive, multidimensional approach.

Sustained economic growth is a major factor in reducing poverty. But growth alone, as we have seen from our own experience, is not sufficient. It does not translate automatically into reduced poverty levels and less hunger. In fact, in most of the rapidly growing economies, inequalities tend to increase as well.

In order to translate economic growth into pro-poor gains on the domestic level, growth must be accompanied by strengthening institutional capacity, equitable delivery of public services, active social inclusion, bridging the gap between urban and rural development, as well as investment in human capital. Empowerment of the poor, of the vulnerable- empowerment in the broadest sense of the word- is extremely important in bringing about a change for the better.

Empowerment happens, among other things, through good governance, effective administration, creating a favourable climate for private initiative, and fostering a vibrant civil society. My country would not be where we are today without our firm commitment to institution building, the rule of law, fight against corruption, and local ownership of the processes.

The importance of empowering women in the context of overcoming poverty and hunger merits a special mention. The productive and creative potential of women who make up over half of the globe's population is a tremendous asset. In Lithuania, for example, we have identified and implemented four priorities for women empowerment: women in decision making; balance between family and work; equal wages policy; and gender roles.

Education and skill acquisition are equally powerful tools in poverty eradication. Lack of education and employment opportunities are among the determinants of poverty's perpetuation from generation to generation, and without added improvements in this field, breaking away from the poverty trap is highly difficult.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To deliver on our commitments to reduce poverty and hunger, we must also tackle the dialectical link between poverty and conflict. It is the fragile states that pose the greatest difficulty in fighting poverty. For post-conflict countries, international assistance is vital to enable them to recover and lay foundations for a sustainable peace. An early withdrawal of international assistance from a post-conflict country in its recovery process can be extremely damaging to the creation of long-lasting peace and thus better lives for many. Unless our efforts to help individual countries are well sustained and predictable, the results will be disappointing - or mixed at best.

In this context I would also like to highlight the importance of addressing the unfortunate situation of “donor orphans”. If unattended, such troubled spots may grow into much bigger problems that can end up being a lot more costly than the assistance originally required.

I trust the ECOSOC can contribute significantly to the work of respective institutions dealing with fragile and post-conflict states. The Peacebuilding Commission can benefit from ECOSOC’s own experience, also taking in mind the work of the *ad hoc* advisory groups on countries emerging from conflict. On the other hand, as the Peacebuilding Commission gathers strength, ECOSOC should also be able to draw on the experience this new UN body, thus ensuring the synergies between their respective activities and improving the effectiveness of both in their areas of comparative advantage.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To add to the list of problems that make fighting poverty a daunting challenge, climate change is increasingly a factor to be reckoned with. When natural disasters strike, it is usually the poor who are affected the most and take the longest to recover. For example, small island developing states have witnessed encouraging economic growth over the past few years, promising better lives for their people. Yet how easy is it to sustain that growth if these islands are under an increasing risk of environmental disasters, or losing valuable land to rising ocean levels?

Equally, there are the serious concerns regarding the effects of climate change vis-a-vis agriculture and food security, water resources, energy, human health, and human habitat - all with a potential threat of making our efforts to combat poverty and hunger ever more challenging.

Time is not on our side. I am therefore pleased to see a renewed interest and a sense of urgency in recognizing that climate change requires a long-term global response. I hope that we will collectively rise up to the challenge and approach the multilateral process ahead of us in a spirit of commitment to action and willingness to compromise.

What I consider extremely important is for our engagement to reduce the effects of climate change and our efforts to combat poverty and hunger to go hand in hand and not be seen as opposing or conflicting tracks. In fact, I believe we need an increasing focus on “green growth” or “climate friendly development” to make sure that environmentally sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction strategies make an integral whole.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The eradication of extreme poverty demands a constructive and truly global partnership of developed and developing countries. The EU to which my country belongs has made major efforts to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Collectively, the European Union is providing 57 per cent of global ODA and is committed to reaching the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2015. EU countries are also committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of aid. To this effect, last May we adopted a Code of Conduct for Division of Labor, in order to better coordinate and collaborate while providing aid.

The activities of emerging donors are also contributing towards growth and poverty reduction. As an emerging donor, my country Lithuania is making her first modest but steady steps in providing assistance to developing countries. Our sense of responsibility and the living memories of our own recent reconstruction experience compel us to take a more active part in global action to support those in need. Over the past two years, Lithuania has doubled its aid budget and will continue to increase it in line with our commitment.

However, with multiple challenges in various parts of the world, the need for urgent assistance and resources for sustained aid is ever increasing. How to work best in face of such increasing demands and finite resources? I believe one answer lies in better coherence and coordination. ECOSOC must be part of the broad effort of ensuring that the system wide coherence enables all relevant bodies and stakeholders to contribute in a timely, needs-based, efficient, and effective manner.

I believe it is urgent to agree on measures that will strengthen the UN capacity to deliver as one in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment, while taking into account the cross cutting issues, such as gender equality, sustainable development, and human rights.

Tangible results in reducing the grim reality of poverty and hunger can only be reached through comprehensive, consistent, and coherent measures, involving all levels, from the domestic enabling environment and national poverty reduction strategies to international mobilization of aid, trade, investment, and debt relief.

The upcoming UNCTAD XII conference to be held in Accra in 2008, the follow-up to international conference on financing for development in Doha in 2008 and a successful conclusion of the Doha Round trade negotiations depend on developed and developing countries alike. These would be practical and pragmatic steps towards taking the world closer to the implementation of the goals we set seven years ago in Monterrey- and also a step closer to reducing poverty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have committed ourselves to the eradication of poverty as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind. The international community cannot move back from this strong moral obligation which is at the heart of our collective efforts. Living up to the promise of eradicating poverty and hunger internationally, of restoring the dignity of millions of human lives, must be a measure of our own human dignity.

Thank you.