

Madame President

The Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries established a global commitment to address poverty in low income countries by providing a framework for mobilizing greater resources for development.

Nonetheless, although important progress has been made to reduce poverty at the global level, it is a disturbing reality that at the current pace, most of the least developed countries will not achieve the objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action, nor the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Madame President

As recognized by the Brussels Programme of Action, conflict is one of the greatest obstacles to development. It is a sobering fact that almost half of sub-Saharan African countries have experienced violent armed conflict in the past five years and eighty percent of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered a major civil war in the past 15 years.

Peace and development are mutually reinforcing. Without economic and social development, a country's social fabric is eroded, and disparities become marked, which ultimately could lead to civil unrest and conflict. Without peace, developmental gains are quickly destroyed and poverty escalates. Breaking this cycle and creating an environment conducive to economic and social stability, and growth specifically for the benefit of the poor, requires special attention of the international community.

Madame President

Building peace after conflict is a challenging process involving a wide range of political and economic reforms. This process should not be overburdened with details and complex programmes. Instead, assistance must be realistic, focused and designed to each country's specific needs. In all these areas donor agencies can, and should, do a better job than they are doing today. Also, increased and better-targeted assistance for countries which are most at risk of civil war can play a crucial role in preventing conflict. In these cases it is especially important that the assistance is timely and gradually phased.

Perhaps more than in other settings, coordination and partnerships between stakeholders is critical in promoting economic and social development in conflict ridden countries. This holds true both for bilateral as well as multilateral development cooperation. It is especially important that the UN work in close cooperation with other key actors, including the World Bank, the IMF and regional development banks, as well as non-governmental organizations. The fundamental precondition for successful post-conflict recovery, however, remains the desire and determination of the people themselves and their leaders to re-build their own country.

Madame President

Assistance from the international community is a key factor in post-conflict reconstruction. I am pleased to be able to state that the Government of Iceland has recently decided to contribute further to attaining the objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action, as it is foreseen that by 2008/2009 the Icelandic Official Development Assistance (ODA) will have almost tripled from our current levels. Importantly, a preponderance of our ODA is specifically targeted towards the Least Developed Countries.

Moreover, addressing the nexus between conflict and development is an important pillar of Iceland's development policy. In recent years Iceland has contributed civilian experts to peace-building operations in the Balkans, Sri Lanka and Iraq. Iceland's latest undertaking in this area was to take over the control of the Kabul International Airport in Afghanistan in the beginning of June this year. By taking on assignments in such challenging post-conflict situations with the help of civilian experts we are exploring alternative ways for bridging the gap between military peace-building operations and long-term development efforts.

Madame President

Security is fundamental to reducing poverty and achieving the objectives of the Brussels Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals. Conflict and violence are as much a consequence, as a cause, of poverty and the inter-linkages between security and development cannot be overlooked by the international community. The 2004 substantive session of ECOSOC will, amongst other vital issues, give us an important opportunity to address those linkages, which should bring us further in the global fight against poverty, and ultimately to the achievement of our commonly agreed goals.

Thank you.