

**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
LEONEL FERNÁNDEZ, TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

United Nations Headquarters
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Distinguished Mr. President,
Distinguished Secretary General,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Ministers of Foreign Affairs,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my heartfelt congratulations to the distinguished Libyan diplomat, Dr. Ali Treki, for having been recently chosen to preside over this sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly and for his call to establish a dialogue among civilizations and among religions as well as promoting peace and security and reducing the gap between the rich and the poor.

Mr. President, exactly a year ago, while we were evaluating the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals halfway its tenure, something unexpected happened. That is, the collapse of some of the most emblematic investment banks and the worsening of the global financial crisis that accompanied such event.

Before this crisis took place, however, the world, and developing countries in particular, were already under the effects of two other crises that had been incubating simultaneously: the oil and the food crises.

As a result of the first one of these, that is, the oil crisis, important demonstrations took place in different parts of the world. All of a sudden, all goods became more expensive. Governments were compelled to increase their supply of foreign currency to pay for oil and offer various subsidies needed to maintain the peace and democratic governance.

With respect to the second one, that is, the food crisis, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), established that, as a result of it, there was an increment of 150 million people in the number of those who literally go hungry around the world. With this increment, the total number went over one thousand million people for the first time in history.

Before these two crises unleashed, the World Bank had already indicated that, in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the seven years remaining before the deadline is up (that is, from 2008 to 2015) 250 billion dollars were required. In other words, 50 billion dollars are required each year.

Obviously when the aforementioned crises unleashed started affecting the economies of developing countries, the amount of resources required to achieve the goals towards

reducing world poverty would have significantly increased over the projections estimated by the World Bank.

As we can see, Mr. President, there already was a bleak and worrying situation last year at the moment when we were analyzing and evaluating the achievements obtained and the challenges that lie ahead in order to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals.

In spite of the dark clouds looming on the world economy horizon, we still felt optimistic and hopeful regarding the possibility of achieving our goals. After all, we had been continuously moving forward with respect to the fulfillment of some of those goals.

But then the flood of the global financial crisis took place all of a sudden. Since then, the storm has been so intense that it has provoked a generalized sense of anguish and anxiety all over the world, which had not been seen in decades.

According to the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Margaret Chan, 400 thousand more children and dozens of thousands of women will die each year as a direct result of the global financial crisis.

Today, while this session of the General Assembly at the most important organization in the world takes place, 25 thousand kids will die in different parts of the planet. That is equivalent to saying that one child will die every three seconds and 18 children will die every minute.

Mr. President, at the end of my 15-minute speech before this plenary, 270 children will have died. All of them are premature deaths, which could have been avoided. During this year, nine million children, a number equivalent to the total population of my country, the Dominican Republic, will have lost their lives without any reason or justification.

This constitutes a human tragedy of epic proportions. A true catastrophe. This is something morally and politically unacceptable.

It is because of this reason, among others, that we consider necessary to address this General Assembly, asking to have an emergency state declared regarding the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals.

We could adopt different attitudes towards the challenges implied in the achievement of the eight goals proposed in 2000, to improve the human condition and dignity of millions of persons around the world.

We could think that we have failed. We could think that those goals could never be reached. That they constitute a new utopia and, therefore, what we have to do is to give up and abandon any effort to achieve them. Of course, this would be a cowardly and inconsistent attitude. That would be the worst decision of all. It would imply leaving all those who need human solidarity and compassion abandoned and on their own.

A second attitude would be to rethink the goals and extend the timeframe for achieving them. This sounds logical and reasonable. This kind of reasoning, however, has just one problem. The children, the women, and the poor of the world cannot wait.

Mr. President, the only way to really ensure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 as planned, is for this General Assembly to contribute in creating the conditions for a real commitment among nations, governmental and non-governmental institutions, so that they undertake the tasks necessary for the economic and social development of the peoples affected by poverty, hunger, disease, and illiteracy on an emergency basis.

No one will be able to argue that there are not sufficient resources to address this enormous task. The diligent way in which the collapse of the international financial system has been confronted confirms to us that which which our peoples have always said: "If you want, you can".

The first thing to take into account looking forward is that with the announced end of the world economic recession and, therefore, the gradual reactivation of economic growth, we do not repeat the experience of a sudden and abrupt increment in oil and food prices as a result of excessive speculation in futures markets.

We are warning against this because we have been observing with some concern during the last three weeks, a rise in the price of milk in international markets. The price of this product has increased more than a thousand dollars a ton without any valid justification that could explain such change.

It is necessary to defeat all private interests, all sources of resistance, and all obstacles to reforming the global financial system and stock markets in order to implement new regulatory mechanisms that prevent a new crisis like this one from happening.

Given the almost general failure of developed countries in fulfilling their commitment at the Social Development World Summit in Copenhagen to contribute to the development of the weakest and most vulnerable countries, as well as the prevailing situation of a global recession, let us draw the attention of the General Assembly regarding possible new funding sources for the Millennium Development Goals.

As such, we suggest the creation of a Task Force that can undertake a high quality research project and submit a report with recommendations including an action plan aimed to set a tax for development on capital deposited in tax havens, offshore banks, and international financial centers.

The placement of financial resources in tax heavens implies a yearly tax evasion of at least 250 billion dollars. As we have said, this is equivalent to the amount of funds estimated by the World Bank needed to complete funding for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), there are approximately 7 trillion dollars deposited in tax havens that are not contributing a single penny in terms of taxes.

Oxfam has indicated that more than 50 billion dollars in tax revenue are forgone each year by developing countries due to the existence of tax havens and offshore banks. The organization Christian Aid has somberly pointed out that tax evasion will be responsible for the death of more than 5 million children between 2000 and 2015. That is, the timeframe corresponding to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

There are abundant resources around the world. The problem is that they are unequally and unjustly distributed. And that is due, among other reasons, the existence of a global financial architecture prone to lack of transparency, keeping secrets, money laundering, tax evasion and fraud.

The only hope to revert the current situation of economic decline, social deterioration, and moral crisis prevailing in the world, lies in the brave, wise, and timely decisions that we can take from this prestigious global forum. The peoples of the world are waiting for those decisions. They are aware of the fact that their right to a dignified, honorable, and happy life depends on it. Let us not disappoint them. Let us act with justice, courage, a sense of history and a vision of the future.

We cannot conclude these words without referring to the situation prevailing in Honduras. This organization of the United Nations issued a resolution condemning the coup that took place in that Central American nation in June this year and asking for the return to democratic order. The Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union, the African Union, and the Arab League assumed the same attitude.

Despite worldwide condemnation of this attack on democracy, the de facto government of Honduras has continued in power, highlighting weaknesses in the implementation of measures by the international community.

Now, President José Manuel Zelaya, the only legitimate President of Honduras, who was scheduled to speak today before the General Assembly, chose instead, with great display of personal boldness and courage, to return to his country. And right now, he is just waiting for us, the representatives of the peoples united in this global forum, to act with the same dignity, with the same responsibility, and with the same level of commitment to the reign of democracy, liberty, and justice.

Thank you very much.