

17 March 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Millennium Development Goals Awards**

Excellencies,  
Honoured Guests,  
Brothers and Sisters All,

I am very pleased to welcome all of you to this hall to honour some very remarkable friends, who are deeply involved in the struggle to eliminate poverty in the world. As you may remember, I have dedicated my presidency of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly to the poor and oppressed of the world. Tonight we celebrate two men who have dedicated their entire lives to this ever-elusive goal.

Over the past months we have been witness to an economic catastrophe of as yet unknown proportions – a crisis that has been provoked by an unparalleled frenzy of greed, fueled by delusional disregard for our dear Mother Earth and her inhabitants. Even as crises multiplied -- global warming, scarcities of food, energy and water -- we rushed ahead. Suddenly, unprecedented financial bankruptcy has spotlighted the moral bankruptcy of our drive to wealth and domination.

While we hope that our current recession does not tip into a global depression, it is inevitable that the ongoing economic turmoil will tip tens of millions of people into deep poverty with each passing month. We are talking about a lost decade in a time when we expected to be slowly closing the enormous gap between rich and poor.

Over the past months, the United Nations has been working overtime to avert the transformation of economic and environmental calamities into prolonged human tragedy. In the General Assembly, we stepped up appeals to developed countries to honour their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals. In November in Doha, Member States again pressed for promises that financing for developing be maintained at levels that continue to advance the MDGs. Now we face the reversal of progress towards the eradication of poverty. How many millions will have the pay the price?

Tonight we continue to keep our eyes on the MDGs, which in reality represent a minimalist campaign given the vast deprivation of so many people. We still do not know the extent of the setbacks they face. But increasingly we understand that we are at a transformative moment in human history. The humanitarians whom we celebrate this evening are men, both followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who possess the vision and the credibility as leaders in this transformation.

My dear friend of forty years, Dr. Kevin Cahill, has provided humanitarian assistance in scores of countries over the past five decades. Through his academic work and over twenty books, he continues to share his profound knowledge today. In addition to keeping me alive as my physician – nothing short of miraculous! – he and his late wife Kate have inspired me by their deep and unswerving commitment to marginalized peoples and the search for a sustainable development paradigm.

The Reverend Desmond Tutu is a man so well known and admired that all of us count him as a beloved friend, even those who may never have shaken his hand. He is one of a handful of international leaders who can articulate with compelling logic the need for renewed moral and ethical commitment in our political and our economic lives. His example continues to inspire millions to look into themselves for the strength and courage of their convictions. The world is a better place for the humanity that he has helped us discover.

Both of these extraordinary advocates for justice and peace are committed to imbuing our communities – local and international – with a renewed sense of solidarity. They know that we are all brothers and sisters and that the eradication of poverty as symbolized by the MDGs depends on this simple but profound truth.

It is with deep respect and honour that I congratulate them and welcome the host of distinguished and dedicated witnesses who will also give meaning and relevance to their accomplishments.

Thank you.