

Remarks by

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Second Committee Special Event

**Panel discussion on “Achieving the MDGs by 2015:
Preparing for the 2010 UN MDG Summit”**

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here today representing the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa at this very timely and relevant panel discussion. Cheick Diarra sends his warmest regards and best wishes for the success of this event, and regrets that due to official travel he could not be here with you.

Congratulations to the Chairman and other members of the Bureau on their well-deserved election. You are chairing the work of the Second Committee at a particularly challenging time. Our sincere thanks and appreciation also to Professor Sachs for his important key-note address. May I also express our thanks and appreciation to the other distinguished panellists for their important contributions.

In preparation for next year’s MDG Summit, it is informative and useful to look back very briefly and consider what the MDGs represent in international development cooperation. They are the expression of a renewed global consensus, a renewed global partnership in international development cooperation. They have helped to usher in a more enabling environment within which the global debate on development cooperation has taken on a renewed vigour and intensity.

The MDGs have also given us clear targets to be met, attainments by which to measure the world’s progress in feeding the hungry, healing the sick, educating the illiterate, empowering women and creating a more equitable world. Since the Millennium Summit, the MDGs have been vigorously promoted and publicized by global civil society, both in developed countries, and in the developing world. Many developing countries have placed attainment of the MDGs at the very centre of their development agenda.

While the MDGs relate to the developing world as a whole, it is widely recognized that Africa is the region where many of the greatest challenges confront the international community. Africa is where HIV/AIDS has caused the greatest devastation. Africa is where food production has declined steadily in recent decades. Africa is the one major region of the world where, unless present negative trends are dramatically reversed, many countries will not attain the MDGs by the target year of 2015. We therefore face a huge challenge in helping Africa scale up its current efforts in order to improve the chances of attaining the MDGs.

It is in this context that the Secretary-General's MDG Africa Steering Group, and the outcome of its efforts, are particularly significant. The entire multilateral development system was mobilized by the Secretary-General to assess and review the requirements in key sectors for Africa to be able to attain the MDGs by the year 2015. These needs were then quantified so that the international community would have a clear picture of exactly what it would take for Africa to have the resources necessary to build the infrastructure and create the enabling environment for success with regard to the MDGs. As a result of this important exercise, we now know exactly how much is needed in the areas of basic education, primary health care, food production and infrastructure. The 2010 UN MDG Summit will be a convenient opportunity to review progress in this important initiative.

But as we prepare for the Summit, the global economic crisis has fundamentally changed the context and the realities within which the preparations are being made. Instead of sustained economic growth, we are experiencing the severest economic downturn in decades, with hundreds of thousands of jobs still being lost each month in the US and other major industrialized countries.

Developing countries are also seriously affected by the crisis, and Africa's recent encouraging trend of sustained economic growth has stalled. Commodity export earnings, foreign direct investment, and remittances from expatriate or diaspora Africans have all declined significantly. To make matters worse, much of Africa is suffering from the negative effects of a food security and drought crisis respectively, not to mention the on-going devastation due to the impact of HIV/AIDS.

As the world strives to contain the current global economic crisis, it is open to question whether or not by the time of the MDG Summit in 2010, there would be enough positive signs to suggest a recovery, and if so, whether or not it would be a recovery strong enough to impact positively on development. There is therefore the possibility that the Summit could take place in a climate of severe economic distress, one in which many countries will find it difficult to re-commit to the international partnership necessary for the attainment of the MDGs.

But as Prof. Sachs has so eloquently demonstrated on many occasions, the MDGs are not only crucial, but they are achievable, if the efforts of developing countries, especially those in Africa, are adequately buttressed and supplemented by the requisite support of the developed countries on a sustained, predictable basis.

We need to reiterate that investing in the future of the “Bottom Billion” is in itself an essential and necessary part of the process of global economic recovery. We need to demonstrate that the attainment of the MDGs would benefit not only the most vulnerable and the poorest members of the global community, but would be good for everybody, including the citizens of the wealthiest countries.

With these general observations or remarks, let me now turn to some specifics regarding preparations for the 2010 UN MDG Summit. The organizers of this meeting have identified a number of important questions to be considered in preparation for 2010.

Mutual accountability needs particular emphasis in the preparations toward the Summit. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and subsequent agreements have provided a clear road map in this regard. What is now needed in the preparatory process is to ensure that all sides in the development debate actually give meaning to the process of mutual accountability. For far too long, only one side has been held account; it is time for this to change fundamentally.

Another important aspect or dimension of the Summit preparatory process is the quality of involvement on the part of the diverse constituencies of stakeholders, many of whom played a central role in the success of the Millennium meeting, as well as in publicising the MDGs. Many of them have already mobilized themselves, but it would nevertheless be helpful if the UN could appropriately support their efforts to raise awareness, convene review meetings and commissions studies.

It is against this background that effective preparation for the 2010 MDG Summit must involve a broad range of national and international stakeholders. Parliamentarians, trade unions, student groups, women’s organizations, the faith-based community, charities and the media, each have a role to play in wide-ranging discussion of the MDGs, at national, regional and international levels, respectively. These perspectives would greatly enrich the debate at the 2010 Summit. Here also, we in the UN have a crucial facilitating, convening role to play to help ensure the success of these gatherings and to feed the outcomes of these diverse processes into the main preparatory arrangements.

Due attention should also be paid to new and emerging challenges, in particular, the impact of climate change on developing countries. The current devastating, severe drought in much of East Africa, which has lasted more than five years, vividly illustrates the extent to which environmental factors can negatively impact upon development.

The rapidly growing strategic partnership between Africa and the People’s Republic of China, Brazil, India, and Republic of Korea is both a challenge and an opportunity. Severe new challenges such as the threat of transnational organized crime and terrorism also require urgent attention. However, it would be a serious mistake to ignore the political context of the global effort to achieve the MDG durable peace, sustainable development will not be possible. Our preparations for the 2010 UN MDG Summit should therefore include a thorough review of the peace processes under way

globally, regionally and in specific conflict situations (especially in Africa). International initiatives to resolve conflict situations need to be adequately evaluated to determine how far they facilitate the attainment of the MDGs.

Regarding the kind of policies, processes and institutional structures which need to be adjusted to address these new challenges at the national, regional and global levels, it is becoming increasingly apparent that, in the light of radically changed conditions, they all require action. The issue is, how far-reaching and effective will these adjustments be, and the crucial point is that each of these adjustments must be far-reaching enough to tackle the complex challenges of today and tomorrow. For instance, everyone now accepts the urgent need to restructure and reform the rules and regulations governing the global financial system. Similarly, there is general agreement on the restructuring of the Bretton Woods institutions. The United Nations should play a central role in the international community's efforts to meet these new challenges.

Mobilization of the required additional resources to help implementation of the MDGs will require a special effort of political will on all sides. Developing countries will need to scale up those processes and initiatives which have a proven track record of success, and developed countries will need to act decisively in meeting the commitments and promises made repeatedly at international for a such as Gleneagles.

With specific reference to Africa we should recognize the urgency of the situation regarding prospects for the attainment of the MDGs and the necessity of a special effort of political will if progress is to be made and sustained. But we should also accept that if the resources outlined in the report of the Secretary-General's MDGs Africa Steering Group can be mobilized, and if the initiatives and reforms by African countries continue as in NEPAD, then it is still feasible for Africa to attain the MDGs.

I thank you for your kind attention.