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# General Assembly

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### **'THINK BIG' IN LAUNCHING FINAL PUSH TO MEET MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS, PLAN**

### **POST-2015 STRATEGIES, SAYS GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT IN DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE**

#### **Vast Backlog of Deprivation to Persist beyond 2015, Says Deputy Secretary-General, Insisting Time Has Come to Consider All Who Will Be Barely Touched by Achievements**

Citing many examples of real progress around the world that testified to the soundness of the “people-first” approach embodied in the Millennium Development Goals, senior United Nations officials today said that, with the 2015 deadline for achieving those ambitious targets rapidly approaching, stakeholders must not be afraid to “think big” in shaping the final push, even as they planned strategies to alleviate the suffering of millions “who will need our attention come 2016 and beyond”.

“We must advance the United Nations development agenda in a way that will be inclusive and appropriate for all stakeholders,” said General Assembly President Joseph Deiss (Switzerland), as he opened the 192-member body’s development dialogue. The day-long meeting also featured an address from United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro and was framed by two informal panel discussions, respectively on “MDG implementation and accountability: women’s and children’s health as an engine for progress” and “Advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015”.

Mr. Deiss said that an important development in the implementation and accountability of Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 had been the launch in 2010 of the Secretary-General’s Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health. That initiative had substantially increased commitments and contributions, including financial contributions, towards advancing women’s and children’s health, and had brought together all the key actors under one umbrella, integrating their objectives into a single coherent approach to advance the respective targets.

Another key event in efforts to push the global development agenda forward had been the adoption by world leaders of the Istanbul Declaration at the conclusion of the recent Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. That Declaration specifically noted that, beyond 2015, the world’s poorest countries would need assistance to further enhance their capacities and accelerate poverty reduction to achieve sustained socio-economic growth and development. The ultimate aim was to help those nations progress to the point where the “least developed” category became obsolete.

“This renewed commitment of the international development community is extremely positive,” he said, but cautioned that such initiatives must not obscure the fact that, in many countries and in several areas, the Millennium Development Goals might not be achieved. “Making a tangible difference on the ground in the lives of the poorest people will be the way to prove the United Nations is a reliable, credible and responsible partner,” he said, calling for improved accountability mechanisms and better monitoring of field-level implementation.

But looking beyond 2015, he said the deadline should not be a pretext for relaxing efforts “to accomplish what we have pledged to do”, and he urged renewed efforts to mobilize resources, especially at national levels, towards broad achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. “We can’t stop [at merely halving world poverty]; we must seek [its] total eradication. We must not fear thinking big,” he declared.

In her remarks, Ms. Migiro said that the United Nations agenda was becoming more crowded every day — with its staff and programmes helping countries cope with the effects of conflicts, disasters and other emergencies. “But we cannot relent in our campaign to reach the Millennium Development Goals,” she said, noting that a major step had been taken last week during the Assembly’s High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS, where Member States had agreed to intensify their efforts to realize the shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.

That historic commitment and the initiatives noted by Assembly President Deiss were just part of the global mobilization behind the Millennium Goals that had brought the international community a long way since the Goals were first articulated more than a decade ago. “We can go a similarly long way in the four precious years that remain until 2015, [but] we have to do even more than we have done already,” she said, noting that food prices were high and volatile, millions of children were not in school, unemployment was destroying family incomes, and hundreds of thousands of women still died in pregnancy and childbirth each year.

“In such a climate [...] we do not have a moment to lose,” she said, calling for scaling up those interventions that had the best chance to generate progress across the Goals. No such multiplier effect was more dramatic or more proven than investments in the health of women and children. Healthy women delivered healthy children who could attend school and become part of a healthy workforce. In turn, a healthy workforce was a productive workforce, able to do its rightful part in building cohesive, prosperous societies.

Calling for greater strides towards balanced and sustainable development, she said: “We do not have a moment to lose.” Indeed, with the deadline for achieving the Goals fast approaching, there was a need to intensify talks on what lay beyond 2015. “Even a decade ago, we knew that achieving the MDGs would, in a sense, be only half the job. We knew that there would still be a vast backlog of deprivation,” she said, emphasizing that the time had come to look at those numbers — at those people — at all the women, men and children who would be barely touched by what was accomplished by 2015.

The first Panel was entitled, “MDG implementation and accountability: women’s and children’s health as an engine for progress”, moderated by Mr. Deiss. Panellists included Juma Duni Haji, Health Minister of Zanzibar; Gilles Rivard, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations; Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Donna J. Hrinak, Vice-President for Public Policy and Government Affairs at PepsiCo; and Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary of the World Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA).

Introducing the discussion on women’s and children’s health, Mr. Deiss described progress this year under the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health, noting that an important cornerstone was the Commission on Information and Accountability, which was created one year ago to ensure pledges were honoured and resources were spent in the most effective way to save as many women’s and children’s lives as possible. Today, participants applauded that focus on accountability, with Mr. Rivard describing the Commission’s report and Canada’s response to it in its development partnership programmes. He also urged all donors and partners to integrate the report’s recommendations in their programmes. Delegations speaking from the floor also praised the stress on accountability and follow-up, some welcoming Canada’s engagement with the issue.

Several participants described national strategies towards reaching the Millennium Goals. Minister Duni Haji said a key element of Zanzibar’s progress towards Goal Four was immunization against childhood diseases, vitamin A supplements, de-worming, promotion of breast feeding, measures against malaria and other interventions against the major killers of young children. In the area of maternal mortality, he added, better data collection was pursued, as well as the provision of midwife training for nurses that visited villages, and, again, a concerted campaign against malaria. Integrating efforts at the national and village level was key. Many speakers agreed that a

strong community focus was critical; however, the provision of skilled workers and technologies to that level were seen as major challenges.

In general, speakers welcomed the proportion of commitments made over the past year that have been kept, both at the international and national levels, with one speaker noting that one vaccination programme was even over-funded, allowing for quicker progress than planned. Participants also spoke of the need to involve young people, particularly girls, in all programmes, with Ms. Gumbonzvanda stressing that they should be made central to all initiatives, aware of their reproductive rights and empowered to handle their affairs. In that vein, Mr. Osotimehin of UNFPA emphasized the importance of education and livelihood opportunities for women to give them the best chance of having healthy lives and healthy babies. Investment must be made in community-level social change, particularly in regard to attitudes towards women and their rights, speakers said.

There was broad agreement of the need for private sector contribution for both scaling up efforts and transferring the latest technologies. Some speakers stressed the need to ensure that private-sector initiatives were coordinated with United Nations strategies. Ms. Hrinak said that for PepsiCo, it was important, not only to contribute funds, but also technological know-how specific to the company, such as the most efficient ways of getting women access to potable water. Several speakers emphasized the importance of mobile telephone technology to connect women and communities with knowledge, services and medical care. Speakers also highlighted the importance of the integration of sectors, given the interrelationship among all the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the extreme importance of partnership and coordination among all stakeholders along a coherent strategy, in meeting Goals 4 and 5 by the agreed deadline of 2015.

The second panel discussion, on “Advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015,” also moderated by President Deiss, included panellists: Richard Manning, Independent Consultant and Journalist; Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, Director for the Population and Reproductive Health programme of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation; and Amithab Behar, of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty.

Setting the stage for the discussion, President Deiss said the Millennium Development Goals had become iconic and, now, 11 years on, were perhaps the United Nations most successful exercise in “branding”. Indeed, they had boiled down the myriad complexities of development into simple, clear language that could be easily understood by policymakers and the wider public, alike. Perhaps the best known Goal was that of halving global poverty by 2015. “Well, what about the other half?” he asked, and noted that discussions on the way forward should maintain a focus on achieving past pledges, while setting a solid framework for the future.

Mr. Manning said the big question before the international community was whether the global development agenda was still being driven by the Millennium Declaration or whether there now was a need to integrate a host of emerging socio-economic issues, such as climate change. At the same time, while the “MDGs” had indeed become a massively successful global brand for the United Nations, there was an urgent need to figure out what the Goals were actually for, beyond the broad notion of, for instance, halving abject poverty or reducing mother and child mortality. Once that was established, there would be a need to decide whether that broad set of indicators should be updated, re-imagined or set aside, altogether.

In any case, he said that, if the international community left for too late the discussion of what happened after 2015, “we could wind up in a bit of a mess”. He, therefore, called for early decisions on whether or not to work on a post-2015 framework; what its purpose should be; and what would be the scope of its implementation. He also said the consultation process should be “quite broad and detailed”. It must address the strengths and weaknesses of the existing Millennium Development Goal framework, and must be agreed by at least mid-2014. He also urged acknowledgement of the fact that remittances and tax revenues were becoming more important for development, and that the impact of aid had decreased drastically.

Ms. Kanyoro saw the Goals as a “spotlight that exposed what is obvious and what isn’t”. That was exactly why there had been a successful rallying point, because that revealed what was possible and what remained to be done. When the United Nations gathered in 2015, therefore, it should review prepared reports that spoke directly to challenges and progress, especially since it was so clear that actual levels of achievement varied widely.

Stakeholders could follow the general approach taken by the private sector: “did this work, and if not, why not?” The world community should ask if development gaps were so wide because, for example, a country lacked financial resources; was plagued by corruption or poor leadership; or was emerging from conflict.

Agreeing that the results on achieving the Goals was uneven, Mr. Behar said the post-2015 agenda must be led by the “common man” and be guided by the need to bolster social inclusion. While global indicators showed progress, a closer look revealed that specific groups within broader communities “are probably going to miss the bus altogether”. Going forward, it would be very important for the Assembly to send the message that it was not addressing “mere manifestations of poverty”, but structural deficiencies, which led to lingering underdevelopment. “We need to have a far more holistic approach that goes beyond development and looks at social justice, including human rights and climate justice,” he said.

When audience members weighed in, speakers generally agreed that, before a wholesale re-imagining of the Goals was carried out, every effort should be made to ensure that the largest number of countries possible achieved the current agreed targets on time, with the representative of the Netherlands cautioning against “throwing away your old shoes before you’ve got new ones”. At the same time, he said the Goals, while a “successful brand”, had perhaps oversimplified development challenges.

Indeed, he said the Declaration was silent on any underlying economic theory of development and did no justice to a holistic view of development. The representative of India reminded the room that the Millennium Declaration and the Goals that had emerged from it represented the “very minimum” to which the international community had been able to agree at the time. “We still have a long way to go to meet even those targets,” he said, urging the global community to remain focused on the most disadvantaged, and to “pitch in together” so that everyone could benefit from progress.

During the brief plenary that followed the panel discussion, the representative of Turkey spoke, as well as the representative of Hungary on behalf of the European Union.

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