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“Firm pledges of action”, not just exhortation and advice, are needed to aid poor

UN Secretary-General calls on G-8 to support Africa and strengthen world social and economic security

(NEW YORK, 18 June) The United Nations Secretary-General yesterday welcomed the decision of the Group of Eight to focus on solutions to Africa’s problems at their annual meeting 26-27 June in Kananaskis, Canada, and called on them also to act decisively on worldwide concerns that are encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals, especially the fight against poverty.

In an open letter to the leaders of the world’s eight richest and most powerful countries, released today, Secretary-General Kofi Annan says that the peoples of the developing world “have suffered disproportionately from the slowdown of in the world economy, and they are also the primary victims of terror and violence”.

“Equally, even the richest and most powerful countries, such as those represented at your meeting, are unlikely to achieve lasting security, either in the economic or the physical sense”, so along as billions remain poverty-stricken, the Secretary-General notes.

He calls on the G-8 countries to

- stand by commitments made at the World Trade Organization meeting in Doha to conduct negotiations that would open markets to exports from poor and developing countries;
- follow-up on commitments made at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, with further increases in development assistance;
- support international efforts to stem the spread of killer diseases and to make primary education available to all children;
- and commit to ensuring a productive outcome for the upcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development (beginning 26 August in Johannesburg).

While recognizing that success in the struggle against poverty “depends first and foremost” on the developing countries themselves, the Secretary-General adds that “the peoples of the developing world would . . . be bitterly disappointed if your meeting confined itself to offering them good advice and solemn exhortations, rather than firm pledges of action in areas where your own contributions can be decisive”.

The Secretary-General will be in Kananaskis to participate in the full-day working session on 27 June, which will feature presentations from five African Heads of State who have initiated the New Partnership for Africa’s Development.

The eight UN Millennium Development Goals, which world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, pledged to reach by 2015, are: to halve extreme poverty; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development.

These “are goals set by the world for the world, although it is in Africa that they present the toughest challenge, and in Africa that their achievement will depend most crucially on international solidarity”, the Secretary-General says in his letter.

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