

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Geneva, 6 July 2009

Your Excellency President Merz, [of Switzerland],
Ambassador Lucas, [President of ECOSOC]
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start with a special word of thanks to you, President Merz, and to Switzerland, which hosts ECOSOC every other year.

We meet in difficult times. The crises of the past 12 months -- the energy crisis, the food crisis and the current economic crisis -- have caused widespread hardship and grief.

They have also shown how closely our fates are linked. The influenza pandemic is the latest reminder of our vulnerability and mutual interdependence.

The growing impacts of climate change are also a source of grave concern, and a threat to all the Millennium Development Goals. This is why we must Seal a Deal in Copenhagen in December.

Such challenges demand our full collaboration -- all nations working together for the benefit of all people. They demand a renewed multilateralism based on universal principles and buttressed by resources, political will and respect for internationally agreed commitments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's *Millennium Development Goals Report* delivers a message that should not surprise us but which we must take to heart: the current economic environment makes achieving the goals even more difficult.

Higher food prices in 2008 have reversed the nearly two-decade trend in reducing hunger. Momentum to reduce overall poverty in the developing world is also slowing. Tens of millions of people have been pushed into joblessness and greater vulnerability. Some countries stand to miss their poverty reduction target.

The target for eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 has already been missed.

If we are to achieve the sanitation target, 1.4 billion people must gain access to improved sanitation by 2015.

We have been moving too slowly to meet our goals. Yet the report also shows that when we have the right policies, backed by adequate funding and strong political commitment, actions can yield impressive results.

Fewer people today are dying of AIDS. Many countries are implementing proven strategies to combat malaria and measles, two major killers of children. We are edging closer to universal primary education. We are well on our way to meeting the safe drinking water target.

We can and must build on these foundations.

In Africa and across the developing world, we have abundant evidence that aid can help transform lives. But delays in delivering aid, combined with the financial crisis and climate change, are slowing progress.

This is why, when I meet with world leaders, I have repeatedly called for solidarity and special attention on the poor – those least responsible for the crisis, and those least able to bear its impact. I did so in April at the G20 London Summit. I will do so again at the G8 meeting two days from now.

The G8 and G20 have made specific commitments to increase financial and technical support to developing countries by 2010 to achieve the MDGs.

Those commitments include raising annual aid flows to Africa, yet aid remains at least \$20 billion below the Gleneagles targets.

I urge the G8 to set out, country by country, how donors will scale up aid to Africa over the next year.

The credibility of the international system depends on whether donors deliver.

The United Nations, for its part, will continue to do its utmost to speak up for those most in need. As the President of ECOSOC said earlier, we are establishing a Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System to be able to better track the impact of the economic crisis on the poorest and most vulnerable populations

The film you saw at the opening of this session provides a sense of how we are trying to meet the demand from global leaders for better, faster information. This is absolutely vital if we are to mount a meaningful response.

Later this month, we will brief your representatives in New York and seek your feedback on how the system can best serve decision-makers. I plan to formally launch the system in September at the General Assembly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to global public health, the focus of this year's Annual Ministerial Review.

Health is the foundation for peace and prosperity. Investments in health are investments in society. They save lives and benefit economies through improved productivity. Prevention efforts can avoid huge future expense.

However, many of the determinants of health lie outside the health sector. Even in wealthy countries, factors such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and geographical area dictate life expectancy. Gaps of more than a decade exist between different groups.

The MDG Report and my report to ECOSOC gives a snapshot of where we stand.

Children's health shows mixed results. Some countries in sub-Saharan Africa have achieved significant success with key child-survival interventions. These are expected to produce further declines in under-five mortality over the next few years.

But many countries, both in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, have made little or no progress at all.

I am especially concerned about maternal health. This is the goal where we have seen least progress.

One woman dies every minute in childbirth. Ninety-nine per cent of these deaths are in the developing world. This should be unacceptable to us all – and a rallying cry for action.

Maternal health care is a barometer of how well a health system functions. If women have access to hospitals, clinics or trained community health workers, they are less likely to die in childbirth. These same facilities in turn reduce the burden of illness and deaths from other causes.

The MDG Report also shows the benefits of investments in health.

For example, a new and promising phase in the fight against malaria has begun. Countries are increasingly adopting more effective strategies to combat the disease. Immense efforts have been made to accelerate delivery of insecticide-treated bed nets.

We are also seeing a decrease in the global incidence of tuberculosis. Unfortunately, progress is not keeping pace with population growth, so the absolute number of new infections is still rising.

The health of 2.5 billion people is also threatened by continued lack of access to safe forms of sanitation.

So, the results are mixed, at best. The challenges to reaching the health goals remain formidable.

We need more multi-sectoral approaches, with a greater focus on reducing poverty, increasing incomes and providing decent employment.

We need to achieve our targets on clean water and sanitation, and provide education and basic sanitary information to all.

We must promote greater health literacy and behavioural changes that will reduce non-communicable diseases and tobacco and alcohol abuse.

We need shifts in attitudes, especially towards women and girls. We must also empower women. The expansion of paid employment for women was slow even before the economic crisis. Opportunities remain scarce in many regions. Women need access to employment, education and nutrition, as well as health care services.

We must use new technologies and engage doctors and health practitioners.

We must increase official development assistance in public health, including for building basic infrastructure.

Often small investments – for example in the area of neglected tropical diseases – can yield significant results.

Finally, governments should take a strong lead in strengthening national health systems in partnership with community leaders, faith-based organizations, charitable foundations and the private sector.

These are some of the key policy messages that have emerged through the regional preparatory meetings and the philanthropy event in New York.

Let us take full opportunity of this forum to move towards the common goals we have set for ourselves.

I wish you a very productive session.