

4 April 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Closing of the Thematic Debate “Recognising the
Achievements, Addressing the Challenges and getting back on Track
to Achieve the MDGs by 2015”**

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

I would like begin by thanking all the 110 delegations - including many Ministers - representing Member States and Permanent Observers that have contributed to this important debate.

Our focus on facts and substance demonstrates that we take the achievement of all the MDGs by 2015, in all countries, extremely seriously. It also demonstrates that when dealing with substance the Assembly is stronger and able to send a strong message to the rest of the world.

Let me begin by highlighting some of the key conclusions that I will take away from our Thematic Debate on the Millennium Development Goals.

1. It is clear that significant progress has been made, but it is uneven and too slow. We have the solutions. The key issue is that we all have to deliver on our commitments, scale-up our efforts and accelerate progress.
2. Africa and Least Developed Countries need additional long-term assistance from the international community to catch up with the rest. In particular, there were strong calls for investment in agriculture – a critical source of income for the poorest of the poor - and infrastructure to achieve this.
3. The MDGs are interdependent. And, making progress on the ‘poverty and hunger’, ‘education’ and ‘health’ targets will have a catalytic effect on the other Goals.
4. The international aid architecture is constrained by too much fragmentation undermining the impact of aid. For our efforts to be more effective the international community needs to work together in closer partnership to reduce transition costs and increase predictability over the long term.
5. Partnerships with civil society and the private sector are essential to accelerate progress. The private sector should therefore be given the opportunity to provide goods and services to the poorest ‘bottom billion’, and large foundations should be encouraged to champion specific MDGs to produce concrete results.

6. Climate change is already undermining the achievement of the MDGs, particularly, in the poorest countries and those at greatest risks from its affects. Development must be environmentally responsible and sustainable.
7. MDG progress and economic growth can be greatly improved by closing the gender gap, empowering women and providing better access to maternal healthcare and basic health services, including reproductive health.
8. Trade is a potent tool in the fight against poverty. A timely and successful conclusion to the Doha Development Round has the potential to lift millions out of poverty. Preferential trade access for agricultural and value added goods for Africa and LDCs would immediately boost MDG prospects and economic growth. For example, if the EU and US removed cotton subsidies, cotton exports from Africa would increase by 75 %.
9. Rising food and energy prices are increasing food insecurity and malnutrition – a primary cause of infant mortality, stunted growth and other serious health risks.
10. Countries emerging from conflict urgently require better long-term support and better modalities for delivering aid from the international community to reduce the likelihood that they will descend back into violence and instability.
11. Better management of revenues, in particular from the recent commodity boom, including through establishing international guidelines, would increase domestic resources for development.
12. Education is the foundation for lasting development. An additional investment of US\$10 billion of oda is required to meet the Goal of providing basic education for all by 2010.
13. Investment in basic healthcare and services not only saves lives but is smart economics. According to a UNFPA study every dollar invested in family planning can save up to 31 dollars in government spending on education, food, health, housing and water and sewage services. US\$5.5 billion is required to achieve MDG 4 and 5 by 2015.
14. National ownership and policy space are vital requirements allowing developing countries to follow their own development path and take full responsibility for their own development. Fundamental reform of the international architecture is necessary to give developing countries greater voice and participation in the global policy and decision making process.
15. The MDG framework is the internationally accepted and intergovernmentally agreed benchmark for international development and forms the basis of our global partnership. Any attempts to change the Goals without intergovernmental agreement, only serves to undermine their legitimacy.

Excellencies,

If there is one point that has been made clearly and repeatedly, it is that delivering on our commitments is a priority and that delivering results a necessity.

Donors need to provide the additional aid and debt relief they have promised.

And, developing countries need to integrate the Millennium Development Goals into national development plans, and speed up implementation of other commitments, including better governance.

Ekhard Deutscher, Chair of the OECD-Development Assistance Committee, made it clear that donors ‘are not on track’ to increase aid by US\$50 billion by 2010 – that aid has fallen in real terms for the second consecutive year.

“Money is not everything, but everything is nothing without money” he said.

We also heard that only 17 per cent of developing countries have operational strategies to integrate the MDGs into national development plans. The target they set for themselves is 75 per cent by 2010.

Despite the many positive initiatives that many Member States have emphasized over the past few days, it is clear that progress on both sides of the partnership is lagging.

Without concrete, results focused MDG plans, donors naturally find it difficult to cut their own domestic spending to invest in developing countries - they need to demonstrate results to maintain public support.

Without the confidence that they will deliver extra resources, developing countries aren’t able to scale up programmes that deal with the MDGs.

This appears to be a classic catch 22 situation.

But really its not! Fortunately, many donors, developing countries, multilateral organizations the private sector and NGOs are already meeting halfway.

This is in the true spirit and meaning of MDG 8 to forge a ‘global partnership on development’, and the values the United Nations promotes and holds dear.

It is clear that more commitment and dedication is needed to achieve the goals on time. As one delegation said, "we have the knowledge, technology and wealth to make a difference for millions of people on our planet by helping to lift them from grinding poverty."

That is why; I would like to commend Ted Turner’s United Nations Foundation initiative, working with Lutheran and Methodist organizations, to provide US\$200 million to fight malaria in Africa.

And, the Secretary-General’s work to scale up implementation in Africa by identifying MDG financing gaps in partnership with all stakeholders. Donors now have concrete investment opportunities to deliver on their promise to double aid to Africa by 2010.

It is also clear, that the aid landscape is changing. The private sector now contributes around US\$14 billion in aid, NGOs and civil society around US\$12 billion in aid.

The role of the private sector will continue to grow, but it will not replace the role of governments. Development doesn’t happen without effective and accountable states, capable of delivering services to their citizens.

We did however hear some very compelling arguments for the private sector to be given the opportunity to provide goods and services to the poorest ‘bottom billion’. That private equity is prepared to work for a social dividend.

Charitable foundations are also playing a bigger role by championing specific goals and bringing in donors and developing countries to work on targeted initiatives. The MacArthur Foundation’s work on MDG 5 – maternal health – is an excellent example of this.

More foundations should be encouraged to ‘champion’ specific MDGs where they can add value and generate public support.

It is clear that working together we are stronger. That in partnership we can make progress.

When aid is effectively aligned behind national governments and predictable over the long term progress can be achieved.

Malawi recently doubled agricultural productivity in just one year.

Ghana has introduced a successful national school feeding programme.

Since 2003, India reduced the number children out of school children by almost five million per year.

Honduras, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and many other countries have abolished fees for primary schools dramatically increasing enrolment.

Zambia has cancelled fees for basic rural health services, and Burundi introduced free medical care for mothers and children.

Excellencies,

The General Assembly has a critical leadership role to play in mobilizing global support to achieve the MDGs. Many delegations endorsed my proposal for the Assembly to meet each year until 2015 to take stock of global implementation and to hold all partners to account for their Millennium Development Goals commitments.

The General Assembly established the historic Millennium Development Goals. It therefore has a responsibility to monitor their implementation and the commitments made by all parties to achieve their full implementation.

In addition, to holding an annual meeting devoted to this objective the General Assembly should mandate the United Nations Secretariat, working with all relevant Funds Programmes and Agencies, to provide an Annual MDG Global Monitoring Report analyzing implementation in all countries, to form the basis of our debate.

The Assembly has further opportunities to demonstrate its leadership role; our meeting on 22 September, focusing on Africa's specific development needs, and the MDG event to be organized by the President of the General Assembly and Secretary-General on 25 September, provide two additional opportunities to rally global support and announce concrete new initiatives.

Let this debate be an impulse which will resonate not only in New York but around the world.

2008 must be the year of action.

Thank you.