

Bill Gates

United Nations High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals

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Prepared remarks

Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is unusual for a member of the philanthropic sector to be given the opportunity to address heads of state here at the United Nations. I am honored by it—and also encouraged. I see it as a sign of partnership; the world understands that no sector acting alone can achieve the goals for humanity that are the mission of the United Nations.

We are here today to assess where we stand on the Millennium Development Goals. As I look at it, the Millennium Development Goals are like a report card that helps us judge our performance.

A fair amount will be said about the areas in which we're falling short of our targets and our funding commitments. These points are important, and they need to be addressed.

It is crucial to evaluate our performance in both areas, but I also think it's important at this point to evaluate the goals themselves as a force for change.

So here's my evaluation: I love the Millennium Development Goals. They are one of the best ideas for fighting global poverty I've seen in my lifetime. With all the mountains of measures and studies and reports in the world—the Millennium Development Goals have broken through and grabbed our attention.

Thanks to these goals, we know how we're doing in crucial measures of poverty, hunger, health, and education. Some of the numbers are good; some are not. But the fact that we're now focusing on these numbers is excellent.

It means we can see where things are going well, and spread those approaches. We can

see where we're falling short, and decide what to do next. That is the purpose of the Millennium Development Goals, and it's a brilliant purpose. So whatever the individual measures are by issue and by location – on the question of raising the visibility of the suffering faced by the world's poorest people, I give the Millennium Development Goals an A.

Of course, greater attention alone can't help us change the future. We also need greater innovation—in both the tools we discover and the way we deliver them. Scientific innovation led to the smallpox vaccine. Combining that with an innovative approach to delivering it helped us track the disease, immunize around it, and eradicate it. Innovation in discovery and delivery has cut child deaths from 20 million a year in 1960 to under 10 million today – through childhood vaccination.

Eradicating smallpox and expanding childhood vaccination are two of the greatest accomplishments in the history of global health. These were achieved without the stunning new tools we have today. New advances in biotechnology, computers, and the Internet will give us the power to solve many more problems—and that's why the future will be better than the past.

As an example, the world is working on some very exciting breakthroughs in agriculture, including drought-tolerant maize for Africa. This could bring dramatic increases in yield that would help African farmers adapt to climate change.

Researchers are now working on new vaccines for livestock. The simplicity of the scientific trials means you can invent a vaccine for a few million dollars. If you can prevent families from losing their livestock to disease, the economic benefits are amazing.

The Medicines for Malaria Venture is working on a new synthetic treatment that works like artemisinin. In early animal studies, a single dose of this drug cured malaria—something we've never seen before. This opens the possibility for a single-dose cure of malaria for people.

The opportunities for innovation are just staggering. And the Millennium Development Goals can guide the search for new discoveries by showing us where innovation can bring the biggest returns. This is their genius, and I am really optimistic about what they

can help us accomplish.

Naturally, we have to acknowledge that progress in some areas is disappointing. But disappointing should not mean discouraging. This is the first time the whole world has ever made a focused effort to track its progress in improving the lives of the poorest people. Of course we're not going to be perfect. So I disagree with those who focus only on the disappointments and try to spread around blame and guilt. People aren't motivated by blame and guilt. People are motivated by success. And we have phenomenal opportunities for success.

I'm convinced that progress on the Millennium Development Goals will help fuel the broad-based economic growth that leaders seek for their countries. This is an important reason why they should have the strong support of governments. And yet fighting disease and poverty is a good thing not just because of the economic gains that come with it. It is a good thing, period. It's the best and highest use of our time and energy.

When the Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000, Melinda and I would never have predicted the power of these goals to gather the world's heads of state, our governments, businesses, and foundations in a focused effort to fight poverty and disease. And we certainly never expected that eight years later, one of our daughters would come home from school with an assignment to learn about the Millennium Development Goals. She was especially troubled to learn how many mothers die during childbirth.

This problem is going to be an interest and a focus of the children in her class and in her school for the rest of their lives. In its own way, the concern of the world's children is just as important to our future as the attention of the people gathered here today.

There is more power in these goals than we ever imagined. Now that we've seen it, we want to work with you to intensify it – and push for the day when all people, no matter where they're born, can live a life filled with health and opportunity.

Thank you.