

Eminent Personalities Galvanize Support

The United Nations is leaving no stone unturned to galvanize action toward achieving by 2015 the global anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In run-up to a gathering of heads of government and state at the UN in September 2010, Secretary-General has set up an advocacy Group of eminent persons. A "real collection of superheroes in defeating poverty" has been chosen to serve on the Group, co-chaired by Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

The "superheroes" include two Nobel Peace Prize laureates – the Bangladeshi pioneer of microcredit Muhammad Yunus and the Kenyan environmental activist Wangari Maathai – as well as former Chilean president Michelle Bachelet and businessmen and philanthropists Bill Gates and Ted Turner.

Also participating are Jeffrey Sachs, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the MDGs, and Ray Chambers, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Malaria.

Qatar's First Lady, Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser, and the former Mozambican First Lady Graça Machel have also been named as advocates, along with former General Assembly president Jan Eliasson and Philippe Douste-Blazy, the UN Special Adviser on innovative financing for development.

The other members are: Stine Bosse, the chief executive of TrygVesta Group and the chairman of Børnefonden (the Children's Fund); Dho Young-Shin, the chairman of the UN World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) Sustainable Tourism for Eliminating Poverty Foundation; Julio Frenk, the former Mexican health minister and the Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health; Akin Adesina, the Vice-President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa; and Hiromasa Yonekura, the chairman of the Japan Business Federation.

Distinguished personalities from China, India and the United Kingdom "will also join the group soon", Ban said in an announcement on June 23, 2010.

Speaking to the 'UN News Centre', Chambers said that "it's a privilege to join such an accomplished group of leaders who have the experience and ambition to ensure that all MDGs remain on track at this critical juncture".

He added that "from our experience with malaria, we know that achieving the MDGs is within sight, and by coordinating our efforts and sharing best practices, we will maximize the likelihood that all eight Goals will be met by 2015."

The MDGs, which include targets for slashing poverty, boosting school enrolment rates, improving maternal health and increasing access to clean water and decent sanitation, were devised at the Millennium Summit in New York in 2000.

The latest UN assessment report on efforts to reach the Goals shows that there has been mixed progress in the developing world. Extreme poverty is falling rapidly but maternal health and sanitation are lagging and there are still large gaps between rich and poor, men and women, and urban and rural communities.

In another move toward achieving the MDG targets, meeting at a United Nations forum, leaders from the private sector, civil society and the creative world have underscored the critical role played by broadband networks in spurring global development. In what is being described as "private gathering" in Geneva, the Broadband Commission for Digital Development

conferred on July 11, 2010 on how to deploy the networks worldwide to accelerate progress towards the MDGs with a 2015 deadline.

Chaired by Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Carlos Slim Helú, Mexican businessman and one the world's wealthiest people, the body will deliver its conclusions to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on September 19, 2010 at an official side event of the high-level gathering on the MDGs in New York.

Serving as the joint vice chairs of the 30-member Commission are Hamadou Touré, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

"The global deployment of broadband networks will be as powerful a transformational force for the 21st century as the progressive installation of electricity networks was in the first decades of the 20th century," Touré said.

"Just as connection to the power grid is now seen as a basic element of social and economic empowerment, so ubiquitous connectivity to broadband networks will be vital to the ongoing development of every nation worldwide," he added.

Bokova stated that the latest information and communication technologies (ICTs) have created new opportunities to create, preserve, disseminate and use information.

"We aim to go further, towards the construction of inclusive knowledge societies in which people can transform information into knowledge and understanding that empowers them to improve their livelihoods and contribute to their social and economic development," she said in a message to the July 11 meeting.

Other members of the Commission include Richard Branson, Founder and Chairman of the Virgin Group; Jeffrey Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute and Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General; and Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Managing Director of Grameen Bank. Also during the soccer World Cup in South Africa, world's biggest sporting event, community festivals, television shows, posters, electronic games, multimedia campaigns and even a new song, the Millennium Development Goals were under the spotlight. ☑

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"We, the global public, have the right to expect from our leaders global concern in our enlightened self-interest. Most politicians have grown up in an era in which a primary goal was still the creation and delineation of nation states. They have learned to be preoccupied with pure national interests. Moreover, many donor country politicians are worried about ongoing power shifts. This stymies their willingness to think beyond national borders and to innovate.

"But in order to break out of the current spiral of global crises, we need more 'new type' of policymakers -- policymakers who recognize that international cooperation is today, under conditions of openness and interdependence, oft the best way to promoting and securing national interests," says Kaul, an eloquent member of the Committee. – Ramesh Jaura ☑