

QUO VADIS MDGs?

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Voices of the South on Globalization is a monthly newsletter intended to inspire a meaningful North-South Dialogue by raising awareness for global interdependences and by offering a forum for voices from the South in the globalization debate. Each edition presents short analyses or commentaries from a Southern perspective on one particular issue of the globalization process.

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Neither Pity nor Charity

With only five years left until the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called on world leaders to attend a summit in New York on 20-22 September 2010 to accelerate progress towards the MDGs.

Coming amid mixed progress and new crises that threaten the global effort to halve extreme poverty, "the summit will be a crucially important opportunity to redouble our efforts to meet the Goals," he said, referring to the targets adopted at the UN Millennium Summit of 2000, aimed at slashing poverty, hunger, disease, maternal and child deaths and other ills by a 2015 deadline. "Our world possesses the knowledge and the resources to achieve the MDGs," the Secretary-General stated in his report to the UN General Assembly on 12 February 2010 in preparation for the September summit. "Our challenge today is to agree on an action agenda to achieve the MDGs."

The MDGs are the highest profile articulation of the internationally agreed development goals associated with the UN development agenda, representing the culmination of numerous important UN summits held during the previous decade, including summits on sustainable development, education, children, food, women, population and social development.

They are the world's quantified, time-bound targets for addressing extreme poverty, hunger and disease, and for promoting gender equality, education and environmental sustainability. They are also an expression of basic human rights: the rights of everyone to good health, education and shelter. The eighth Goal, to build a global partnership for development, includes commitments in the areas of development assistance, debt relief, trade and access to technologies.

The Secretary-General's report says that during the past decade, the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs have led to unprecedented commitments and partnerships reaffirmed in successive summits and meetings, including the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development at Monterrey, Mexico, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the 2005 World Summit in New York.

During this same period, the public and their Governments have also had to contend with new unanticipated challenges. Some have been specific to countries or regions, while others have been global, such as the food and economic crises of the last three years. "Our challenge today is to agree on an action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. With five years to go to the target date of 2015, the prospect of falling short of achieving the Goals because of a lack of commitment is very real. This would be an unacceptable failure from both the moral and the practical standpoint. If we fail, the dangers in the world -- instability, violence, epidemic diseases, environmental degradation, runaway population growth -- will all be multiplied," warns the report.

It adds: "Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains feasible with adequate commitment, policies, resources and effort. The Millennium Declaration represents the most important collective promise ever made to the world's most vulnerable people. This promise is not based on pity or charity, but on solidarity, justice and the recognition that we are increasingly dependent on one another for our shared prosperity and security." ☑