

Millennium Development Goals Conference

Utrecht, November 19, 2010

Introduction

- Ladies and gentlemen.
- Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me here today to perform the official opening of the Millennium Development Goals Conference, organised by AEGEE-Utrecht.
- These are exciting times. With only five years to go until the target date, world leaders at the MDG Summit in September reaffirmed their commitment to the MDGs.
- But there is particular excitement in the Netherlands, where a new government has just taken office and will set out a new policy on development cooperation. I will come back to this.
- First, let me introduce myself. I am the Dutch Ambassador for the Millennium Development Goals and Public-Private Partnerships. My main task is, first, to involve more public and private players in reaching the MDGs and, second, to boost progress towards the MDGs by linking up initiatives from society.
- We believe that achieving the MDGs is not the task of governments alone. There are many other players out there who can make a significant contribution! We no longer turn automatically to traditional players like NGOs. We are also looking to others, like the business community, to play a role.
- As you might know, the use and effectiveness of development cooperation is the subject of critical debate in the Netherlands right now. And this in itself is good, provided it does not lead to cynicism and apathy.
- Fortunately, the new government decided to honour our international commitment to spend 0.7 % of our Gross Domestic

Product on development cooperation policy. The new coalition agreement also reaffirms the importance of the MDGs as our international framework for poverty reduction. In the years to come we will invest in empowering developing countries to foster economic growth. Economic growth, driven by a strong private sector, is the engine for poverty reduction. Businesses generate income and create employment, allowing people to support themselves.

- We all have to cope with global issues like migration, climate change, the sustainable use of natural resources, and financial stability. This will require a joint effort by industrialised and developing countries, government, business and civil society, men and women, old and young.
- I therefore believe strongly in increasing young people's awareness of critical global issues and the UN Millennium Development Goals. I am very enthusiastic about AEGEE's initiative in organising this MDG Conference. Your efforts will be vital, because the need for action on the MDGs is more pressing now than ever before.

MDGs - importance/where are we today?

- Ladies and gentlemen, why are the Millennium Development Goals so important?
- First, the Millennium Declaration is the first universal agenda on poverty reduction to have been endorsed worldwide. The eight goals were established in September 2000: 189 world leaders met at the United Nations and endorsed the Millennium Declaration, a commitment to work together to build a safer, more prosperous and equitable world.
- Second, the Declaration was translated into a roadmap setting out eight time-bound and measurable goals to be reached by 2015, known as the Millennium Development Goals. This means that, for

the first time, international agreement on poverty reduction was translated into concrete and measurable goals.

- Since then the MDGs have proved to be very useful instruments for focusing the efforts of the international community and talking the same language. And for mobilising partners and resources to reduce poverty.
- Where are we today on the road to 2015?
- Many countries have made undeniable progress on some MDGs.
- If you look at MDG 1: halving extreme poverty and hunger, we can see that between 1990 and 2008, the number of people living in extreme poverty (on less than one dollar and twenty-five cents a day) dropped from 1.8 billion to 1.4 billion, while at the same time world population grew substantially. If that trend continued, we would succeed in reducing extreme poverty by half by 2015! You should however be aware that this is a gender-sensitive figure: although formal statistics are lacking, it is estimated that two out of three poor people in the world are women and girls.
- Progress has also been made in other areas:
- MDG 2 on education has been quite successful. More children are going to school than ever before. The total number of children out of school is decreasing — from 106 million in 1999 to 69 million in 2008.
- Or take MDG 7: Since 1990, 1.6 billion people have been given access to clean drinking water. If current trends continue, the world will meet or even surpass the clean drinking water target by 2015.
- Unfortunately, some of the goals are still a long way from being attained. There is an obvious lack of progress on MDG 5 to reduce maternal mortality. Certainly, the number of women dying due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth has decreased by 34 per cent, but the absolute number of maternal deaths is still shockingly high! In rural Mali (in West Africa), the risk of a mother

dying during pregnancy or childbirth is still one in 22. In Afghanistan, the numbers are even worse: the national average is one in 11. In the Netherlands, this risk is about one in 10,000! And some western countries do even better.

- And on MDG 3, equal rights and opportunities for women, we are seeing progress in the enrolment of girls in education, but progress has been very slow when it comes to job possibilities, equal salaries and political participation of women. And we should remember one statistic that is not included in the formal MDG indicators but says it all: today one in three women worldwide will suffer gender-related violence in her lifetime. 'Security' remains a concept that is completely different for men than for women.

MDG Map

- These were global figures, but for people in developing countries what matters is the situation in their region, their country and their village. These figures vary substantially.
- To illustrate this, I would like to present to you the MDG Map, developed by the Dutch National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development.
- You all know what a map of the world normally looks like. (*slide 1*). If you change the map and size up the world in terms of poverty (MDG 1), the picture would look totally different (*slide 2*). As you can see, 940 million people in Southeast Asia live on less than 1.25 US dollars a day. In Sub-Saharan Africa, this number is 380 million people. Western countries are not visible.
- If we look at the world in terms of the number of children not going to school (MDG 2), you would get this picture (*slide 3*). Again, it's completely different. Now Sub-Saharan Africa is largest, with 35 million children not going to school. And this image only reflects school attendance. It doesn't say anything about the quality of education, for instance the quality of school books and teachers.

- Finally, let's look at the world in terms of people infected with HIV (MDG 6). As you can see, this problem is still enormous in Sub-Saharan Africa. The epidemic appears to have stabilized in most regions, although prevalence continues to rise in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and other parts of Asia due to a high rate of new HIV infections. The number of people living with HIV-virus is growing, largely due to the life-sustaining impact of antiretroviral therapy.
- To sum up, we are making good progress, but a great deal of effort is still needed if we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The food, financial and economic crises have reversed some of the progress that had been made and another 65 million people living below the poverty line. We cannot close our eyes to this problem.

Private sector

- Ladies and gentlemen,
- In the effort of working towards the Millennium Development Goals, we need to be more effective. The Netherlands has an important role to play, since we are still a frontrunner in international cooperation. We need to foster economic growth in developing countries in order to improve their ability to cope independently with global issues. The involvement of the private sector is critical to success.
- For the Netherlands, working with the private sector is becoming part of the 'acquis' of development cooperation – in fields as varied as health, energy, water and sanitation.
- We have embarked on public-private partnerships as a means to achieving development. Combining different parties' knowledge, capacities and resources can make development cooperation more effective. Synergy between public and private sector partners can release private funds, creating more leverage than in regular development aid programmes.

- Through the instrument of public-private partnerships, the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will increasingly become that of a broker or matchmaker, bringing potential partners together, rather than just a funding source.
- The Netherlands is currently involved in 75 public-private partnerships of various shapes and sizes, entailing an investment of 750 million euros. The business community and other partners are contributing a total of 1.48 billion euros. We work in worldwide coalitions, like the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation, multi-stakeholder projects like the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative and partnerships with individual companies like the Dutch energy company Nuon in Rural Energy Services in Mali.
- To give you an example, I would like to elaborate on the the Sustainable Trade Initiative, or IDH. IDH, launched in 2008, is a partnership between the Dutch government, more than 40 Dutch companies and multinationals and 24 NGOs and trade unions. The aim is to create synergy and improve value chains, making them more sustainable on both the supply and demand side. Programmes have been set up at the start of production and trade chains. IDH started out in six sectors: cocoa, tropical timber, tourism, natural stone, soy and tea. Programmes for cotton and aquaculture have been developed in the past year, and other sectors like cashews and electronics are being explored.
- In the cocoa supply chain in Ghana for instance, smallholders were given training in farming methods, such as the use of pesticides. The project also worked on alternatives to child labour and on a transparent distribution system and transparent market prices. Since certification and standardisation were among the goals, the Sustainable Trade Initiative worked with Utz Certified and the Rainforest Alliance. Cocoa companies like Mars, the world's biggest chocolate producer, were very interested, because there is already a

shortage of sustainable cocoa. So they are prepared to invest, out of enlightened self-interest.

- Development and sustainability will happen if companies focus on their core business and base operations on enlightened self-interest. The most successful PPPs offer sustainable, locally owned, innovative solutions to common and shared problems. They produce 'win-win-win' solutions: good for the partners in both the public and private sector.

Conclusion

- Ladies and gentlemen,
- Over the next few days you will learn about and discuss the Millennium Development Goals. You are being offered an interesting and varied programme, with lectures on many different and fascinating subjects.
- I hope you will be inspired by these lectures and by concrete examples of development cooperation. The Dutch government can only come closer to achieving the MDGs through partnerships. We need the private sector, NGOs and universities, and we need you to develop innovative strategies to reduce poverty and to create linkages between the worlds of NGOs, business and research institutes.
- I hope that you, too, will be an MDG ambassador in your own circle and contribute and raise awareness about the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.
- Together we can make a difference!