

United Nations Day Press Briefing Talking Points

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Tomorrow we'll be celebrating the United Nations Day – October 24th –. I'd like to share with you a Statement for this occasion by the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon. Copies of this statement in Arabic and English are given out to you. Please feel free to publish this statement tomorrow. In his statement the Secretary General stresses that global problems demand global solutions and that the demands on the United Nations are growing every day. He mentions that we must strengthen the UN's ability to play its fullest role in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace building efforts throughout the world, he talks about the necessity to redouble our efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in Africa. The Secretary General talks about the key role of the United Nations in building international consensus for action to reverse and mitigate the effects of Climate Change and that protecting the climate for present and future generations is in the common interest of all. Lastly he warns that we as the United Nations will be judged on the results that we will be able to achieve so we have a lot at stake.

I'd ask all of you to come to cover the United Nations Day event tomorrow – which will be a reception for Kuwaiti government and civil society officials, and members of the diplomatic community - the United Nations Day reception will be held tomorrow evening at Al-Rayya Ballroom – Marriott Courtyard hotel 7:00 (be there early because also German national Day starting at 7:30). We've invited the Editors in Chief of the Kuwaiti newspapers to the reception as well. October 24th is celebrated throughout the world as United Nations Day to highlight the role of the institution in world peace and security, development, human rights, and humanitarian issues. One of the many UN institutions, the IPCC (Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change) has just recently been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (along with Al Gore (for his documentary An Inconvenient Truth) for the scientific work the UN Panel is doing on Climate Change issues – so we are especially proud this year as we celebrate United Nations Day.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself - Valerie Cliff, I have two hats really as my business card notes -- I am the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Kuwait – that means I am the chief representative of the United Nations here in Kuwait and I coordinate all of the United Nations Offices and programmes in Kuwait. I am also the United Nations Development Programme or UNDP Resident Representative – that means that I lead and manage the UNDP's programme

here in Kuwait. In each country office, the UNDP Resident Representative normally also serves as the Resident Coordinator of development activities for the United Nations system as a whole. Through such coordination, UNDP seeks to ensure the most effective use of UN and international aid resources. We have a short bio of myself as another handout along with my business card (in Arabic and English), but I'll just tell you quickly that I have been here in Kuwait for almost 9 months now – February 2007 I arrived. Previously I've served with the United Nations in NY HQs, the West Bank and Gaza for 4 years, and covered and travelled throughout the Arab Region extensively. I am from the United States and I am married to an Arab-American (so my Arabic should be a whole lot better than it is). I joined the United Nations in 1991 after graduating from Harvard Business School with an MBA degree.

I'd like to explain a little bit about the United Nations presence in Kuwait – we have four resident offices of the United Nations here in Kuwait – the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (which I lead as UNDP RR), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – which is headed by Mr Wahid Ben-Amor; the International Labor Organization (ILO) – which is headed by Mr. Thabet Al-Haroun; and an affiliated institution of the UN System which is the International Organization of Migration (IOM), which is headed by Mr. Georges Braidi. We also have here in Kuwait some of the Administrative Support offices of UNAMI (the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq). I'm going to speak primarily about UNDP's activities now in Kuwait – but if you would like to meet with the other UN Agency heads, we could certainly put you in touch with them – and we have contact information for them as another handout for you.

So what is UNDP all about as an organization - and what are we doing here in Kuwait specifically? – UNDP as an organization is present in 166 countries – we are first and foremost a technical assistance organization – meaning we bring expertise – meaning people – consultants, analysts, advisors, development specialists in all kinds of fields (development experts, strategic planning experts, economists, gender specialists, environments specialists etc.) to come to Kuwait, to share their knowledge, their skills and their ideas with Kuwaiti counterparts so as to build local and national capacities in these same areas. The idea is to bring external expertise to Kuwait (international, regional) but in doing that also to build expertise locally, not to always and forever rely on foreign or external sources of expertise, but to build up that expertise locally – both national and local capacities to respond to development challenges effectively in the future. We do not want to REPLACE Kuwaiti expertise rather we want to build-up Kuwaiti expertise. We seek to build and transfer knowledge and to create strong institutions of governance in developing countries on human and economic development issues and finding and implementing effective responses to global and national

development challenges. We talk about being a development networking organization – meaning we connect countries to knowledge, experience and human and financial resources to help people in countries like Kuwait to build a better life for themselves and their families.

In UNDP, we have a strong advocacy role, in that we strongly believe the ‘human’ face of development is particularly important and sometimes overlooked– so its not just about economic development or capital investment levels or the economic prosperity of a country– but rather HOW a nation’s resources are invested in the social sectors for example (does the nation have access to good healthcare, and good education opportunities for example), its about how countries build good, sound, transparent and accountable institutions of governance and democratic governance in particular so countries are ensured of being well-led by their governments; its about how countries ensure that all of their population - women, the disadvantaged, the poor, the under-privileged - are able to fully and actively participate and benefit from economic and social development, and its about how a nation’s natural resources can be used most effectively and sustainably while at the same time ensuring the environment is protected and preserved for future generations. These are the kind of issues that UNDP in particular advocates for and that’s why we always stress and talk about the ‘human face’ of development – really how development and progress directly effects the people of a country – human development is a much broader, and we think more enlightening measure, than just the economic wealth of a nation.

Okay, so what are the main highlights of UNDP’s Programme in Kuwait? – now that you know that we are a local capacity-building organization, all about building strong institutions, and transferring development-related knowledge. Here in Kuwait, we are working with the Secretariat of the Higher Council for Planning and Development (and formerly with the Ministry of Planning) to design a new UNDP programme of support to the GVT of Kuwait for 2008-2012, we call it our Country Programme Action Plan. This is a good time for us now because we are starting new activities early next year that will last for the next 5 years. We have three main partners of our development programme – working with the public sector (GVT of Kuwait – ministries and agencies of the GVT), the civil society sector – NGOs’, organizations, universities, etc. (and thru civil society, with the people of Kuwait) and the private sector (the corporations and businesses of Kuwait) on key national development issues.

Let me give you an idea more specifically of the four main areas that we are focusing on in our UNDP Country Programme for 2008-2012 and the main areas to be covered. These areas are

not yet totally finalized but this will give you an idea of the types of programmes we are formulating with the Government of Kuwait for the next five years:

First area is in Development Planning and Governance – with the Higher Council for Planning and Development, we will help them in developing the 5 year strategic plan for Kuwait and we are working with them to set vision for Kuwait; in the Governance area we will be working with the Civil Service Commission and the Government Manpower Restructuring Programme to help increase the productivity and efficiency of public sector ministries and institutions – part of that is skilling and providing incentives to public sector workers to move to the private sector – we all understand the public agencies in Kuwait are over-staffed – but Gvt of Kuwait needs to find appealing and lucrative alternatives for workers in private sector. We are working on issues such as fostering transparency, accountability and productivity in the GVT institutions.

The second area is in Social Development – working with Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and Civil Society Organizations primarily – Gender Development issues (the economic, political and social empowerment of Kuwaiti women) and on capacity building for Civil Society Organizations –how to help CSOs operate more effectively to carry out their advocacy mandates.

The third area of our Country Programme is in Environment &the sustainable use of natural resources – Kuwait is very highly economically developed country but it may perhaps be significantly behind in terms of environment issues – building capacity of the Environment Public Authority (EPA) and the Judiciary Institute to train people on environmental legislation and enforcement – one of the biggest global development issues of our time is Climate Change – and we need to make sure Kuwait is preparing ahead for what it's going to do to make sure its people and its economy are protected from the looming impact of climate change.

The last area is Economic and Private Sector Development – we will be working with Ministry of Commerce and Trade and Chambers of Commerce on privatization issues – establishing investment and corporate laws that make it much easier to establish and run a business in Kuwait than it is now, sponsoring public-private partnerships that are aimed at bringing in the private sector (not just the money and resources of the private sector but the ingenuity, the creative and the problem-solving skills of the private sector to help GVT of Kuwait tackle national development problems (such as worker's rights; labor laws; environment problems and solutions, etc.)

So that's really a very quick summary of our new programme that we will be discussing and finalizing with the GVT of Kuwait and the Higher Council for Planning and Development for 2008-2012 over the next 2 months. The inspiration for our new CP comes both from Kuwait's national development plan and Kuwait's priority development challenges, and from the global Millennium Development Goals (or MDGs). World leaders have pledged to achieve the 8 [Millennium Development Goals](#) by 2015, including the overarching goal of cutting poverty in half by 2015. UNDP's networks link and coordinate global and national efforts to reach these Goals. You can get a wealth of additional information on the Millennium Development Goals (the goals, targets and indicators) from UNDP's corporate web-site www.undp.org if you are interested.

There are 8 MDGs that have been established and pledged – poverty reduction; universal education, gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIVAIDS and other communicable diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and lastly to forge global partnerships for development.

In terms of the MDG's in Kuwait, Kuwait is fortunate in that it is very advanced country – it has met most of the 8 Millennium Development Goals – there are two specific goals however where Kuwait has not yet met the MDG targets, and those are:

MDG 3: Promoting Gender Equality & Empowering Women (need to make more progress in the areas of political empowerment of women – particularly in women's participation in the national assembly elections).

MDG 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability – Kuwait is quite far behind in this area and we need to make some real improvements in the area of environmental protection and enforcement of environmental regulations. This is more important than ever now due to the threat of climate change – how is Kuwait prepared for climate change. Kuwait already has one of the most extreme environments in the world – so what happens if the global temperature keeps on rising – how is Kuwait preparing itself? What is Kuwait doing to advocate for global action to prevent and reverse climate change effects?

Now I'd like to quickly show you the new UN House - pictures which are on our website. We profoundly thank the Government of Kuwait, and in particular, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for its remarkable initiative in building the new "UN House" in Kuwait. The new building is almost completed (should be ready for an opening ceremony in the next 3-6 months) and really is a show-case in terms of conference facilities, a place for the UN to host local and regional events, and a strong and visible demonstration of Kuwait's respect and admiration for the UN organization.

Finally, I want to highlight our really excellent relationship with GVT of Kuwait and the Civil Society Organizations that the new UN house really symbolizes. The United Nations and the people of Kuwait have a very special bond – and we are very anxious to make sure we highlight, promote, and strengthen that very strong partnership.

Lastly, before we open the floor to a Q&A session, I'd just like to thank all of you for being here to learn more about the United Nations in Kuwait and I'd be happy to meet with any of you at any time to further discuss our programme here in Kuwait or any UN related issues, with any of your organizations on one-on-one sessions.

Questions and Answers session