

United Nations Day Press Conference, 21 October 2008

Introductory Remarks by Mrs. Valerie Cliff, United Nations Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident Representative in Kuwait

Good afternoon everyone and thank you all for joining us here today as we celebrate United Nations Day in Kuwait. I hope all of you will be staying through the press conference today and will be joining us tonight upstairs at 7:00 pm where we will be hosting a reception and where our Guest of Honour tonight will be Her Excellency Dr. Moudi Al Hamoud, Minister of State for Administrative Development and Minister of Housing of the State of Kuwait.

For those who don't know me yet, my name is Valerie Cliff, and I am the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Development Programme's Resident Representative in the State of Kuwait. I will say just a few words first on the message of the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, which you have in both English and Arabic.

On behalf of the UN Secretary General, I would like to highlight that this year, 2008, we are now mid-way through the global efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015. The Millennium Development Goals serve as an internationally agreed and recognized common agenda and action plan aimed at reducing poverty around the world by half.

Last month, in New York, the United Nations hosted a high-level meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, in which His Highness the Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait Sheikh Nasser Al Mohammad Al Ahmad Al Sabah, personally participated, in which leaders around the world recommitted to the importance of supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, despite the current turmoil in the world's financial markets.

Eight years ago, world leaders convened at the United Nations in New York and set ambitious goals to free humankind from hunger, illiteracy, disease, disempowerment and environmental degradation by 2015. Today, we have many successes on which to build. Measles vaccinations that have prevented 7.5 million deaths. Inroads against HIV/AIDS. Surging school enrolment in several African countries, following the abolition of school fees. Millions of poor households have risen out of extreme poverty, not just in China and India, but in many countries, including some of the poorest. We are on the way to cutting extreme poverty and hunger in half by 2015, as the Millennium Development Goals had summoned us to do.

But, while we are moving in the right direction, we are not moving quickly enough.

Sub-Saharan Africa in particular actually saw the number of poor increase between 1990 and 2005. Women and girls suffer persistent bias and neglect, evidenced by disturbing gender gaps in health, education, employment and empowerment. The current financial crisis threatens the well-being of billions of people, none more so than the poorest of the poor. This only compounds the damage being caused by much higher prices for food and fuel.

We must rise to all of these challenges immediately. We must inject new energy into the global partnership for development.

We are the first generation to possess the resources, knowledge and skills to eliminate poverty. Experience shows that where there is strong political resolve, we see progress. And where there is partnership, there are gains. The United Nations' recent campaign against malaria is proof. Malaria kills a child every 30 seconds. Yet we are getting closer to containing this scourge. With enhanced efforts we may achieve full coverage by 2010 and virtually end malaria deaths by 2015. How is this happening? With a path-breaking public-private coalition. With solid science, better statistics and precise financing. With coordination and the right mix of countries and partners. And above all, with leadership. This is a new kind of problem-solving. Now, what we are doing with malaria, we should do with education, maternal health, climate and agriculture.

We must repeat this positive story and ensure that all of the 8 Millennium Development Goals are achieved throughout the world by 2015.

Poor people around the world look to their governments and to the United Nations for help and solidarity. We are accountable to them. In the United Nations, everyone counts, and we must collectively keep our promises to the world's poorest citizens.

We need to make sure to promote public awareness and support for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially in the world's poorest countries, and we've provided you with some information on that in the END POVERTY 2015 handouts. I will now introduce my UN Country Team colleagues, who will each speak for about 5 minutes on the activities of their organization in Kuwait, and then we will have a question and answer session in which you are welcome to ask your questions. So first, let me introduce my Deputy Mr. Mohammad Naciri. Mohammad is the Deputy Resident Representative of the UNDP office (United Nations Development Programme). Then we will hear from Mr. Wahid Ben Amor - Wahid is the Head of the UNHCR office in Kuwait - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Then we will hear from Mr. Thabet Al Haroun - Thabet is the head of the ILO office, which stands for International Labour Organization. And finally we'll hear from Mr. Fawzi Al-Zioud, who is the Officer in Charge of the IOM office - which is the International Organization of Migration.

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After we hear briefly from all of my colleagues, we'll open it up to a question and answer session in which you are welcome to ask any questions.
So Mohammad, the floor is now yours.