



International IDEA

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**General Assembly Thematic Debate on the
Millennium Development Goals**

**“Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenge
and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015”**

Statement by
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Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,

In 2000 the Millennium Summit and the consensus on the MDGs created for the first time the conditions for a concerted long-term action to bring about lasting impact on the lives of the poorest. The eight MDGs are interdependent and interact with other areas for action laid down in the Millennium Declaration. Peace and security, equal and guaranteed rights of all citizens to political participation and equal access to resources, infrastructure and public services, are key factors for the achievement of the MDGs.

There are many examples of the linkages between the achievement of some MDGs, broad political dynamics and democratic processes. On MDG-1, data show that poverty reduction has been accompanied by rising inequality. The UN MDGs Report 2007 states that “the benefits of economic growth in the developing world have been unequally shared, both within and among countries”. “Widening income inequality is of particular concern in Eastern Asia, where the share of consumption among the poorest people declined dramatically” in the period 1990—2004. “Still, inequality remains the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean and in sub-Saharan Africa, where the poorest fifth of the people account for only about 3 per cent of national consumption (or income)” (UN, *The MDGs Report 2007*, page 8).

MDG-3 on gender equality and empowerment of women includes a specific indicator on the number of women elected to national parliaments. This indicator shows that women gained ground politically, though men still wield control (UN, MDGs Report 2007, page 13). Globally, as of March 2008, women represented 17.7 per cent of single and lower houses of parliament, up from 13 per cent in 1990 (IPU and UNDAW, *Map of Women in Politics 2008*). However, women represented at least 30 per cent of parliamentarians in only 20 countries. Rwanda is still leading the way, and is close to parity with 48.8 per cent of parliamentary seats occupied by women, followed by Sweden (47%), Finland (41.5%), Argentina (40%) and Costa Rica (37%). And women are underrepresented at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies.

The links between MDGs and the political environment can be made even more explicit. The choice of Mongolia to adopt a national MDG-9 on promoting human rights, fostering democratic governance and fighting corruption, shows that democratic institutions and practices, in addition to contributing an enabling environment for the achievement of the MDGs, can constitute an objective tailored to addressing country-specific needs.

Mr. President,

The rich discussion of these days highlighted the importance of two principles:

- Ownership of the strategies aimed at the achievement of the MDGs; and
- Mutual accountability within the global partnership envisioned by the MDGs, which emphasizes the responsibilities of the international community in honoring its commitments, including in terms of ODA volume and predictability.

I wish to underscore two additional elements emerging in many countries and regions that play a role in the achievement of the MDGs.

The first one is the very concept of ownership, as related to the importance of the strengthening and consolidation of democratic institutions. While the responsibility of defining and implementing national strategies remains with governments, the concept of ownership has gradually widened so as to encompass other actors, like civil society organizations and legislatures, which constitute an arena for dialogue on national priorities and exercise an indispensable oversight of the implementation of national strategies. This implies that an exclusive emphasis on the executive branch may undermine the functions of other actors in political systems, parliaments and political parties in the first place.

If support to parliaments has a long and established tradition, only over the last years the importance of strengthening political parties as democratic actors that can play an important role in fighting poverty has been recognized. Despite the very low public trust in political parties consistently reported across all the regions of the world by the Global Barometers, strengthening such institutions is crucial for an effective work on poverty reduction by legislatures, and political systems at large. For this reason, in the Andean Region International IDEA has been carrying out a programme on political party systems and dialogue among political parties on poverty reduction strategies that addressed issues of empowerment of the poor, inclusion, and equality.

The second element is represented by the inter-linkages between the promotion of broad-based, equitable growth, on one hand, and democratic practices, on the other. In fact, the time horizon utilized for the definition of the MDGs – 15 years – presupposes the creation of long-term visions of national development that can only be effectively pursued if they are shared beyond the lifespan of an executive, so as to be supported over time even in case of a change of government. Experience shows that countries that have succeeded over time, have invested in developing such long-term visions, in building capacities for an effective functioning of democratic institutions, and in creating and consolidating the mechanisms to translate long-term visions into reality (IDEA, World Bank, ECLAC, *National Visions Matter: Lessons of Success*, Santiago 2004).

This is particularly challenging in highly polarized political environments, not least in post-conflict situations, since the space for dialogue is reduced and the scope for the definition of nationally owned, broad-based visions for development is

limited. And yet, as many interventions recalled in the debate, there is a need for long-term engagement and support by the international community in such contexts.

Mr. President,

In International IDEA's Strategy 2006-2011, the links between democracy and development are a prominent cross-cutting dimension. In June IDEA will organize a Round Table on democracy and development in Delhi, back to back to the 2008 meeting of the Council of its 25 member states. The Delhi Round Table will be an opportunity to address the relations between democracy and development, including from the angle of the MDGs agenda.

Let me conclude by stressing International IDEA's support to the MDGs and commitment to continue collaborating with member states, the UN system and other regional organizations in the pursuance of effective approaches to their achievement.

I thank you for your attention.