



BELGIUM

**HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING
ON THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

**Intervention of H.E. Yves LETERME,
Prime Minister of Belgium**

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Check against delivery

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President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of my country, Belgium, I would like to convey to you four messages which we consider to be essential.

First of all, the core objectives of our common efforts for development are and should always be : human development and poverty eradication.

For indeed, this is what the Millennium Development Goals are about: human development and poverty eradication. Human development is much more than a matter of economic growth. It is about putting people at the centre of development. It is about the empowerment of human beings, so that they can realize their potential, enhance their choices and enjoy the freedom to lead the lives they want. And poverty is much more than a lack of income and material wealth. It also relates to social and cultural exclusion and denial of fundamental rights. Putting people at the centre of development, is giving access to education, to culture in the broad sense.

Our second message today is an alarm signal: a major stumbling-block on the road towards achieving the MDG's is growing inequality.

Inequality between countries, indeed, but also inequality within the countries themselves. There is now plenty of evidence about growing disparities within a majority of countries. Unfortunately, reporting on the MDG's often

does not reveal this, as the targets and indicators have been designed for measuring progress by means of averages. This can lead to the paradox where a country globally progresses while some population groups – the underprivileged, women, rural populations – are worse off in relative and even in absolute terms.

Mrs. Gracia Mandela-Machel denounced this when she pointed out, and I quote : “the obscene gap between the many struggling poor and the few who are rich.”. She added: “ The first world also exists in the southern hemisphere. There are rich people in Africa amidst abject poverty.” End of quote.

United Nations reports show how gender disparities are at the very heart of the inequality issue. Inequality in education, inequality in access to decent work, inequality in the benefits of health care, with this alarming fact that only one out of three rural women in developing countries receive the recommended care during pregnancy.

Tackling inequalities therefore is the priority amongst priorities. This is not only a matter of fairness. It is also a matter of sound economic management. For, indeed, low levels of inequality tend to be correlated with higher rates of economic growth.

This leads me to a third message: concrete progress in the field of MDG's is not only a matter of financial means, but also and foremost a matter of political will and good governance in each country.

Policies geared towards reaching the MDG's must be policies geared towards inclusive development, policies that aim at the wide participation of citizens in wealth creation and at providing opportunities to the poor. This necessarily requires accountable, participatory and efficient governance, governance that enables people to have their say in the way they are governed, in the way decisions are made and implemented, in the way resources are allocated.

To quote the Zambian agronomist and lecturer Tamala Tonga Kambikambi: "An effective, stable and accountable government is essential in the fight against poverty. It should protect human rights, provide security, promote economic growth and deliver essential services."

Finally, my fourth message is of course one of collective responsibility and of the global partnership which the Millennium Declaration calls for.

This logic of global partnership has brought, decades ago, most donor countries to commit themselves to increase their aid volume to 0.7% of their gross national income. In spite of the financial and economic crisis, the Belgian Government has reconfirmed this target in its 2010 budget.

Moreover, the solution to global problems not only requires a global

government but also global financing. As a member of the leading group on the issue of innovative financing, we work hard on raising awareness and forging consensus, not only within the European Union but worldwide.

Beyond quantities of aid however, we should, more than in the past, look at aid allocation and aid modalities. Aid policies should, in the first place, help countries to cope for themselves, to make them less dependent on aid.

The partnership we wish is one between countries being aware, more than ever, of their responsibilities and conscious of their duties, the ones being in a position to help, the others realizing that that they can only be helped if the help themselves.
