

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release
September 22, 2010

Remarks by the President at the Millennium Development Goals Summit in New York, New York

United Nations Headquarters, New York, New York

4:49 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. Mr. Secretary General, fellow delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

In the Charter of this United Nations, our countries pledged to work for “the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.” In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we recognized the inherent dignity and rights of every individual, including the right to a decent standard of living. And a decade ago, at the dawn of a new millennium, we set concrete goals to free our fellow men, women and children from the injustice of extreme poverty.

These are the standards that we set. And today, we must ask: Are we living up to our mutual responsibilities?

I suspect that some in wealthier countries may ask, with our economies struggling, so many people out of work, and so many families barely getting by, why a summit on development? And the answer is simple. In our global economy, progress in even the poorest countries can advance the prosperity and security of people far beyond their borders, including my fellow Americans.

When a child dies from a preventable disease, it shocks all of our consciences. When a girl is deprived of an education or her mother is denied equal rights, it undermines the prosperity of their nation. When a young entrepreneur can’t start a new business, it stymies the creation of new jobs and markets in that entrepreneur’s country, but also in our own. When millions of fathers cannot provide for their families, it feeds the despair that can fuel instability and violent extremism. When a disease goes unchecked, it can endanger the health of millions around the world.

So let’s put to rest the old myth that development is mere charity that does not serve our interests. And let’s reject the cynicism that says certain countries are condemned to perpetual poverty, for the past half century has witnessed more gains in human development than at any time in history. A disease that had ravaged the generations, smallpox, was eradicated. Health care has

reached the far corners of the world, saving the lives of millions. From Latin America to Africa to Asia, developing nations have transformed into leaders in the global economy.

Nor can anyone deny the progress that has been made toward achieving certain Millennium Development Goals. The doors of education have been opened to tens of millions of children, boys and girls. New cases of HIV/AIDS and malaria and tuberculosis are down. Access to clean drinking water is up. Around the world, hundreds of millions of people have been lifted from extreme poverty. That is all for the good, and it's a testimony to the extraordinary work that's been done both within countries and by the international community.

Yet we must also face the fact that progress towards other goals that were set has not come nearly fast enough. Not for the hundreds of thousands of women who lose their lives every year simply giving birth. Not for the millions of children who die from agony of malnutrition. Not for the nearly one billion people who endure the misery of chronic hunger.

This is the reality we must face -- that if the international community just keeps doing the same things the same way, we may make some modest progress here and there, but we will miss many development goals. That is the truth. With 10 years down and just five years before our development targets come due, we must do better.

Now, I know that helping communities and countries realize a better future is not easy. I've seen it in my own life. I saw it in my mother, as she worked to lift up the rural poor, from Indonesia to Pakistan. I saw it on the streets of Chicago, where I worked as a community organizer trying to build up underdeveloped neighborhoods in this country. It is hard work. But I know progress is possible.

As President, I have made it clear that the United States will do our part. My national security strategy recognizes development not only as a moral imperative, but a strategic and economic imperative. Secretary of State Clinton is leading a review to strengthen and better coordinate our diplomacy and our development efforts. We've reengaged with multilateral development institutions. And we are rebuilding the United States Agency for International Development as the world's premier development agency. In short, we're making sure that the United States will be a global leader in international development in the 21st century.

We also recognize, though, that the old ways will not suffice. That's why in Ghana last year I called for a new approach to development that unleashes transformational change and allows more people to take control of their own destiny. After all, no country wants to be dependent on another. No proud leader in this room wants to ask for aid. No family wants to be beholden to the assistance of others.

To pursue this vision, my administration conducted a comprehensive review of America's development programs. We listened to leaders in government, NGOs and civil society, the private sector and philanthropy, Congress and our many international partners.

And today, I'm announcing our new U.S. Global Development Policy -- the first of its kind by an American administration. It's rooted in America's enduring commitment to the dignity and potential of every human being. And it outlines our new approach and the new thinking that will guide our overall development efforts, including the plan that I promised last year and that my

administration has delivered to pursue the Millennium Development Goals. Put simply, the United States is changing the way we do business.

First, we're changing how we define development. For too long, we've measured our efforts by the dollars we spent and the food and medicines that we delivered. But aid alone is not development. Development is helping nations to actually develop -- moving from poverty to prosperity. And we need more than just aid to unleash that change. We need to harness all the tools at our disposal -- from our diplomacy to our trade policies to our investment policies.

Second, we are changing how we view the ultimate goal of development. Our focus on assistance has saved lives in the short term, but it hasn't always improved those societies over the long term. Consider the millions of people who have relied on food assistance for decades. That's not development, that's dependence, and it's a cycle we need to break. Instead of just managing poverty, we have to offer nations and peoples a path out of poverty.

Now, let me be clear, the United States of America has been, and will remain, the global leader in providing assistance. We will not abandon those who depend on us for life-saving help -- whether it's food or medicine. We will keep our promises and honor our commitments.

In fact, my administration has increased assistance to the least developed countries. We're working with partners to finally eradicate polio. We're building on the good efforts of my predecessor to continue to increase funds to fight HIV/AIDS, increasing those funds to record levels -- and that includes strengthening our commitment to the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria. And we will lead in times of crisis, as we've done since the earthquake in Haiti and the floods in Pakistan.

But the purpose of development -- what's needed most right now -- is creating the conditions where assistance is no longer needed. So we will seek partners who want to build their own capacity to provide for their people. We will seek development that is sustainable.

And building in part on the lessons of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which has helped countries like El Salvador build rural roads and raise the incomes of its people, we will invest in the capacity of countries that are proving their commitment to development.

Remembering the lessons of the Green Revolution, we're expanding scientific collaboration with other countries and investing in game-changing science and technology to help spark historic leaps in development.

For example, instead of just treating HIV/AIDS, we've invested in pioneering research to finally develop a way to help millions of women actually prevent themselves from being infected in the first place.

Instead of simply handing out food, our food security initiative is helping countries like Guatemala and Rwanda and Bangladesh develop their agriculture and improve crop yields and help farmers get their products to market.

Instead of simply delivering medicine, our Global Health Initiative is also helping countries like Mali and Nepal build stronger health systems and better deliver care. And with financial and

technical assistance, we'll help developing countries embrace the clean energy technologies they need to adapt to climate change and pursue low-carbon growth.

In other words, we're making it clear that we will partner with countries that are willing to take the lead. Because the days when your development was dictated by foreign capitals must come to an end. (Applause.)

This brings me to a third pillar of our new approach. To unleash transformational change, we're putting a new emphasis on the most powerful force the world has ever known for eradicating poverty and creating opportunity. It's the force that turned South Korea from a recipient of aid to a donor of aid. It's the force that has raised living standards from Brazil to India. And it's the force that has allowed emerging African countries like Ethiopia and Malawi and Mozambique to defy the odds and make real progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, even as some of their neighbors -- like Cote d'Ivoire -- have lagged.

The force I'm speaking about is broad-based economic growth. Now, every nation will pursue its own path to prosperity. But decades of experience tell us there are certain ingredients upon which sustainable growth and lasting development depends.

We know that countries are more likely to prosper when they encourage entrepreneurship; when they invest in their infrastructure; when they expand trade and welcome investment. So we will partner with countries like Sierra Leone to create business environments that are attractive to investment, that don't scare it away. We'll work to break down barriers to regional trade and urge nations to open their markets to developing countries. We will keep pushing for a Doha Round that is ambitious and balanced --one that works not just for major emerging economies, but for all economies.

We also know that countries are more likely to prosper when governments are accountable to their people. So we are leading a global effort to combat corruption, which in many places is the single greatest barrier to prosperity, and which is a profound violation of human rights. That's why we now require oil, gas and mining companies that raise capital in the United States to disclose all payments they make to foreign governments. And it's why I urged the G20 to put corruption on its agenda and make it harder for corrupt officials to steal from their own people and stifle their nation's development.

The United States will focus our development efforts on countries like Tanzania that promote good governance and democracy; the rule of law and equal administration of justice; transparent institutions with strong civil societies; and respect for human rights. Because over the long run, democracy and economic growth go hand in hand.

We will reach out to countries making transitions from authoritarianism to democracy, and from war to peace. The people of Liberia, for example, show that even after years of war, great progress can be achieved. And as others show the courage to put war behind them -- including, we hope, in Sudan -- the United States will stand with those who seek to build and sustain peace.

We also know that countries are more likely to prosper when they tap the talents of all their people. And that's why we're investing in the health, education and rights of women, and working to empower the next generation of women entrepreneurs and leaders. Because when mothers and

daughters have access to opportunity, that's when economies grow, that's when governance improves.

And it's why we're partnering with young people, who in many developing countries are more than half the population. We're expanding educational exchanges, like the one that brought my father here to America from Kenya. And we're helping young entrepreneurs succeed in a global economy.

And as the final pillar of our new approach, we will insist on more responsibility -- from ourselves and from others. We insist on mutual accountability.

For our part, we'll work with Congress to better match our investments with the priorities of our partner countries. Guided by the evidence, we will invest in programs that work; we'll end those that don't. We need to be big-hearted but also hard-headed in our approach to development.

To my fellow donor nations: Let's honor our respective commitments. (Applause.) Let's resolve to put an end to hollow promises that are not kept. Let's commit to the same transparency that we expect from others. Let's move beyond the old, narrow debate over how much money we're spending, and instead let's focus on results -- whether we're actually making improvements in people's lives.

Now, to developing countries, this must be your moment of responsibility as well. We want you to prosper and succeed -- it is not only in your interest, it is in our interests. We want to help you realize your aspirations as a nation and the individuals in each of your countries.

But there is no substitute for your leadership. Only you and your people can make the tough choices that will unleash the dynamism of your country. Only you can make the sustainable investments that improve the health and well-being of your people. Only you can deliver your nations to a more prosperous and just future. We can be partners, but ultimately you have to take the lead.

Finally, let me say this. No one nation can do everything everywhere and still do it well. To meet our goals, we must be more selective and focus our efforts where we have the best partners and where we can have the greatest impact. And just as this work cannot be done by any one government, it can't be the work of governments alone. In fact, foundations and private sector and NGOs are making historic commitments that have redefined what's possible.

And this gives us the opportunity to forge a new division of labor for development in the 21st century. It's a division of labor where, instead of so much duplication and inefficiency, governments and multilaterals and NGOs are all working together. We each do the piece that we do best -- as we're doing, for example, in support of Ghana's food security plan, which will help more farmers get more goods to market and earn more money to support their families.

So that's the progress that's possible. Together, we can collaborate in ways unimaginable just a few years ago. Together, we can realize the future that none of us can achieve alone. Together, we can deliver historic leaps in development. We can do this. But only if we move forward with the seriousness and sense of common purpose that this moment demands.

Development that offers a path out of poverty for that child who deserves better. Development that builds the capacity of countries to deliver the health care and education that their people need. Development that unleashes broader prosperity and builds the next generation of entrepreneurs and emerging economies. Development rooted in shared responsibility, mutual accountability and, most of all, concrete results that pull communities and countries from poverty to prosperity.

These are the elements of America's new approach. This is the work that we can do together. And this can be our plan -- not simply for meeting our Millennium Development Goals, but for exceeding them, and then sustaining them for generations to come.

Thank you very much, everyone. Thank you. (Applause.)