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Official Records

President: Mr. Kerim (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Thematic debate entitled “Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015”

Agenda item 116 (continued)

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Mr. De Palacio España (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as defined in the Millennium Declaration, are a permanent point of reference for Spanish development cooperation policy. Achieving those goals requires the joint effort of the international community.

For Spain, poverty eradication requires an increase in both the quantity and the quality of aid. We are committed to instruments and procedures that guarantee greater effectiveness, such as those embedded in the Paris Declaration, among which I would stress the following.

First is the progressive distribution of labour among donors on the basis of ownership by member countries of their own development processes.

Second is coordination between the traditional and emerging donors, as well as between governmental and non-governmental actors, including civil society and the private sector. In Spain, we try particularly to apply those principles nationally through an active

commitment to and specialization in the involvement of our autonomous communities and cities in development issues.

Third is coherence in policies. Official development assistance (ODA) is only one element of public policy, and it does not help to rely on a commitment to a high-quality development aid if the remainder of public decisions — for example, in trade or debt — does not contribute, restricting opportunities for progress in the developing countries.

Fourth is commitment to active, selective and strategic multilateralism. The increase in Spanish contributions to the United Nations funds and programmes demonstrates that commitment, in particular the establishment of a Spain-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) fund for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the amount of \$710 million. In its first months of operation, the fund is already showing a positive and promising balance, as members of the General Assembly are aware.

Millennium Development Goal 8, the most important in the current circumstances, calls for the creation of a global alliance for development. In that context, Spain is making a significant effort to increase its ODA and to seek innovative mechanisms of additional funding. Spanish ODA has doubled in percentage and tripled in quantity in the past three years, and will reach 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product in 2008, amounting to approximately \$8 billion. We are also keeping our commitment, on the

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one hand, to allocate 20 per cent of ODA to the poorest countries — mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, which is becoming more important in our cooperation — and on the other, to contribute 20 per cent of ODA to basic social sectors. Furthermore, that increase in aid is being carried out without prejudice to our support for middle-income countries.

Building on that firm commitment to development, Spain would like to make some specific comments on our contribution to the actual goals discussed in this thematic debate.

First, with respect to the fight against hunger and poverty, without seeking to be exhaustive, I would underline the basic points of our commitment, such as funding for infrastructure; assistance to small enterprises; development of institutional capacities for the performance and allocation of markets; and special assistance to such organizations as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and funds such as UNICEF, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, as well as the World Food Programme (WFP).

The world food crisis, exacerbated by the price increase in basic products, is one of our main concerns. Thus, Spain has already taken action to respond to the emergency appeal made by WFP on 20 March, announcing a \$47-million contribution for 2008.

With respect to MDG 2 on education, our priority is to support the development of elementary education through the strengthening of public educational systems. Together with our increasing bilateral cooperation and our support to UNICEF, UNESCO and the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture, I would highlight the increase in Spain's contribution to the innovative Education for All Fast Track Initiative. In 2007, Spain contributed €45 million to the Initiative's catalyst fund — making us the third-largest donor — and for 2008, Spain foresees a contribution of €60 million, or approximately \$90 million. Furthermore, we are working to focus increased attention on such special challenges as education in situations of conflict and emergency.

As time is pressing, and as the full text of my statement has been distributed, I will not dwell on MDGs 3, 4 and 6 on health. I wish to note, however, that all Spanish cooperation is inspired by an integrated concept of the Millennium Development Goals. We will not end poverty if we do not strengthen the

education of the children of the world, which is the only way to improve their health and life expectancy. That holistic and transversal concept of development is the basis of the Spain-UNDP fund, with such horizontal thematic windows as "Children, food safety and nutrition" or "Youth, employment and migration", which are among the most important and were recently opened for a second round of projects.

In that spirit, our cooperation also incorporates other essential aspects of development, such as gender issues and environmental sustainability. In that regard, Spain works to place access to safe drinking water and sanitation at the centre of its efforts. An international exhibition on water and sustainable development will be inaugurated in June in Zaragoza, prioritizing water for development in all its dimensions, as a source of health and as a source for agricultural development in the world's poorest regions.

In conclusion, all of the aforementioned measures reflect Spain's contribution towards achieving the MDGs, but there remains a long way to go. We must take specific and effective measures and honour our commitments in a framework of joint responsibility, which is the basis for attaining the MDGs. In that regard, I wish to point out that Spain is keeping its promises and is ready to continue keeping them until 2015.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank the President of the General Assembly for his tireless efforts in the service of the States Members of the United Nations. I also congratulate him on his choice of topic for this thematic debate.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by the heads of State and Government on 13 September 2000, reaffirmed their commitment to and belief in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations as fundamental to the achievement of peace, prosperity and justice throughout the world.

Since it gained its independence in 1971, the main objective of the Kingdom of Bahrain has been to open up and diversify its economy so that it is not overly and solely dependent on oil revenues. As a result, we have become an important financial centre in the Middle East and have expanded our petrochemical and aluminium industries. We also attach great importance to promoting and improving tourism and the living standards of our citizens and have focused on

the promotion and development of human resources as fundamental to the development of a society based on the principles of and respect for individual freedoms, human rights, equality and justice.

In order to implement the Millennium Development Goals, Bahrain has launched a phased policy in which it has taken basic steps to achieve reform and development through national plans, programmes, projects and strategies. In that regard, I should like to focus on three main areas, as part of this thematic debate: eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting education, and improving health and combating diseases.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger has become one of the main priorities of society. Indeed, poverty is a challenge that no society can avoid addressing; the culture and history of all societies require that they address it and reduce its effects. Bahrain is committed to its citizens and has dealt with this problem through many poverty reduction projects and programmes over the years. As a result, the percentage of our citizens who live on less than \$1 a day now stands at zero; thus, none of our citizens suffer from hunger. Bahrain is also working to eliminate relative poverty. According to the most recent data, the average monthly income of a family of five is now 336 dinars, or approximately \$1,000.

In Bahrain, joint efforts are being made by the public and private sectors to implement poverty reduction programmes and projects as a shared responsibility of society. One such project, launched in 1972, provides subsidies to 1,095 needy families with a total of 20,960 members as of 2005. Another, begun in 2000, provides needy families with water and electricity at reduced cost. As of December 2005, 9,020 families were benefiting from that project. Moreover, the Council of Ministers has adopted a national strategy to turn needy families into productive families with increased income, through the establishment of special centres where goods produced by needy families can be sold. An annual commemorative day, March 15, has been established to celebrate needy families' productivity. In addition, a grant for needy families was established in 2007 in the name of Sheikha Sabika bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of the King.

In accordance with article 9 of its constitution, Bahrain has established a public housing fund to assist

low-income families. We also have a programme to assist in rebuilding dilapidated houses, which is implemented jointly by the Ministry of Works and Housing and various municipalities to help homeowners who do not qualify for other benefits. We are currently in the process of promulgating a new social security law to help vulnerable members of society who lack sufficient income, including divorcees, widows, the disabled, prisoners' families, the elderly and those who are unable to work because of disease.

With regard to the second objective, promoting primary education, Bahrain has been a pioneer in the area of education and continues to develop new programmes and projects to promote and develop the educational sector and improve its quality. Our accomplishments in this area include the following. The literacy rate for those aged 15 to 24 is 97 per cent, and 100 per cent of our pupils complete the fifth grade. In addition, the State has initiated projects to improve the educational environment and to promote the teaching of mathematics, sciences, English and subjects related to information technology, environment, communications, services and human rights. The King Hamad Schools of the Future Project enables students to interact with their teachers and to benefit from new technologies and research, which enables them to make use of new electronics. Committees have been established to study the development and promotion of primary and secondary schools, and industrial education is being promoted through new training and engineering programmes and technical establishments. New centres have been established to promote and develop all levels of education, including a centre for the training of kindergarten teachers and a centre for vocational and technical training. In support of education, our Prime Minister has established an annual grant for outstanding schools.

With regard to health, the Kingdom of Bahrain has made efforts in the area of children's health care. In 2005, as a result, the infant mortality rate fell to 8.9 per 1,000 live births and the under-five mortality rate stood at 10.9 per 1,000 live births. Vaccinations against the measles were 100 per cent in 2005 compared to 95 per cent in 1995. We also have a variety of other programmes devoted to children's health and care.

The State has also undertaken activities to improve maternal health through the promotion of prenatal and post-partum health-care programmes. We also sponsor programmes to promote cultural awareness in our campaign to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. A national committee on HIV/AIDS has been established to complement the ministerial committee on HIV/AIDS incorporating the Ministry of Health and others. The committee strives tirelessly to combat that scourge and to promote medical and health awareness.

With respect to the campaign against malaria and tuberculosis, we have not found a single case of malaria in Bahrain since 1980, while registered cases of tuberculosis numbered 23.6 per 100,000 population in 2005. The mortality rate for tuberculosis consequently fell from 1.6 to 0.8 in 2005.

In conclusion, I express our hope that all the MDGs will be achieved by 2015 and that Member States will thereby create a world of security and stability for all.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): My delegation congratulates President Kerim on his efficient, effective and proactive stewardship of the General Assembly. We are indeed very pleased to have him guide our deliberations. In particular, we commend him for convening this debate under the rubric "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015".

It is admittedly a source of pain and anger that, on each of the issues being explored in this debate — poverty and hunger, education and health care — we are still lagging behind when measured against the Goals, and that Africa appears to have made the least headway towards ameliorating its conditions. There have been exceptions, of course, as the background paper notes, especially in the area of food security and particularly in Africa, which appears to have achieved numerous successes.

However, as the paper further notes and explains, those successes have not led to a sustained reduction in the rates of hunger and poverty on the continent. Progress has also been hampered by the failure to recognize and address all the multidimensional causes and effects of poverty.

Perhaps the most basic of all needs is that for food. Here, the situation in Africa and much of the poor world is increasingly dire. As a result, chronic hunger, environmental degradation and the large-scale exodus of desperate populations are in evidence, with the risks of pandemic diseases and conflict.

Of particular note is the spreading havoc following in the wake of soaring oil prices. That will be increasingly felt in accumulating the capital necessary to sustain the process of development, which will presumably stagnate, if not decline. Oil price increases have even affected the level and amounts of food flows, now at their lowest since 1973, and most food aid is now provided on an emergency basis. When viewed alongside the mounting effects of declining food aid, the growing impact of climate change is also daunting. From the expansion of arid lands, the increased risk of droughts and floods in response to changing weather patterns, along with other developments, in all likelihood Africa will suffer a decline in food production of at least 20 per cent.

Progress towards Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 — to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and to reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger — is surely behind in projections for many developing countries, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa. While the mobilization of domestic resources is key to attaining MDG 1, we must not lose sight of the need for developed countries to eliminate their unfair agricultural subsidies and practices, which often reach more than three times the level of their official development assistance.

While there has been a significant increase in primary school enrolment in Africa, the greatest challenge remains with regard to MDG 2 on achieving universal primary education. Far too many children remain out of school and the dropout rate is staggering. Additionally, the need for competent, trained teachers remains high. Finally, children must not only learn and be taught; they must be fit to learn, fed, healthy, clothed, protected and encouraged.

With regard to MDG 5, the overall picture for improving health seems disjointed, conflicting and often counterproductive. In that regard, it is important to point out the emergence of new partners seeking to finance the health needs of developing countries. Foundations — and here we must always mention the

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; global funds, such as the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and targeted bilateral programmes, such as the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, are all having a notable impact.

In looking at the MDGs as a whole and the target date set for their achievement, one senses that they are in fact part of a larger phenomenon. Donor financing commitments for health and other goals remain far ahead of actual aid flows. Add to that the unpredictability of external financing, and the difficulty in planning and increasing health services becomes more understandable. As the background paper notes, there is certainly a need to develop mechanisms to hold all partners accountable for their performance against international commitments. It is crucial to address the plight of severely underperforming countries, especially fragile and failed States whose populations are at risk of serious dislocations and social breakdown.

Finally, my country has embarked on a series of programmes designed to improve national capacity, including hunger mitigation; educational and health-care infrastructures; tackling chronic power, water and housing shortages; enhancing and strengthening our communications and rail and road links; and refurbishing our key asset — the port — including the development of a major modern harbour.

Thanks primarily to the commitments of our enlightened leadership, to the efforts of our own people and to the vigorous and encouraging support of our partners. We are making some progress towards meeting the MDGs. We owe it to our own people to confront development challenges with courage and a measure of optimism and confidence.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the President on having taken the initiative to convene this important meeting. Undoubtedly, the constructive debate in which we were engaged yesterday was an additional opportunity to promote solidarity and partnership within the international community and confirm its determination to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly that of halving poverty by 2015.

Allow me at the outset to stress that the State of Qatar is a committed and dedicated partner, which supports international efforts for development,

particularly those geared towards fighting poverty and fairly and equitably distributing the fruits of global growth. The people and State of Qatar support the efforts of developing countries to achieve sustainable development and to respond quickly to humanitarian relief and needs of all. This is based on our belief in international partnership as a vehicle for supporting the efforts of developing countries to attain the MDGs, particularly Goal 1.

The State of Qatar has been on track in implementing the MDGs. With regard to Goal 1, the State of Qatar has undertaken development projects and programmes in rural and urban areas in order to guarantee full and productive employment for its citizens. All of our citizens therefore earn high wages, which allows them to live in dignity and combat poverty. We have also been on track on implementing Goals 2 through 7 within the prescribed time frame.

At the national level, two days ago, the State of Qatar adopted the general national budget for 2008-2009, 21 per cent of which was allocated to education. Health and social services received 9.6 per cent of the total national budget. Those allocations prove Qatar's determination and commitment to achieving sustainable and comprehensive development.

The State of Qatar was honoured to host the fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in 2001, which resulted in the Doha Development Round. Negotiations in the Doha Round are still under way. Qatar was also honoured to host the second South Summit in 2005, in which His Royal Highness, the Emir of Qatar, submitted many initiatives that were entirely designed to galvanize the international partnership for development.

During the 2005 Millennium Summit in New York, His Royal Highness launched a number of initiatives, most prominent among which was Qatar's initiative to host the Follow-Up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus. Preparations are under way for that conference, which is scheduled to convene in Doha from 29 November to 3 December 2008. Qatar also generously and systematically provided relief and bilateral assistance in response to disasters and emergencies beyond its contributions to various United Nations funds and programmes.

We meet today to assess achievements, address challenges, get back on track to achieve the MDGs and forge international partnerships to attain them. In that regard, we recall the report issued by the Department of Public Information in June 2007, in which we were regrettably reminded that despite some progress registered at midpoint in many countries around the globe and in some African countries, sub-Saharan African countries are still lagging behind in realizing the MDGs that called for halving extreme poverty by 2015. The report reminded us that despite a reduction in the proportion of people who live on less than \$1 a day to 41.1 per cent — down from 45.9 per cent in 1999 — achieving that goal by 2015 will require at least doubling this rate.

Furthermore, 30 per cent of children in sub-Saharan African countries are still without access to education, and mortality rates among children under five years of age is double the corresponding rate in developing countries. Two thirds of the women in those countries still earn their wages working in non-agricultural sectors. Mortality rates from HIV/AIDS are still on the increase and have reached 2 million last year. Only 42 per cent of city dwellers have access to clean water, and 63 per cent of the populations of sub-Saharan Africa have no access to sanitation.

The African continent registered a 6 per cent economic growth rate and has witnessed the emergence of some promising trends, but that progress remains meagre, given that it is largely attributable to the boom in basic commodity prices. However, international aid to major sub-Saharan African countries has remained largely unchanged since 2004, with the exception of partial debt forgiveness and occasional humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations believes that the donor community must act faster if it is serious about honouring the commitment it undertook in 2005 to double aid to Africa by 2010. The Organization also called for expediting international trade negotiations in the context of the Doha Round and for establishing rules in foreign trade that are more just.

Globalization poses challenges and opens up opportunities. Yet we must admit that its fruits are not shared by the overwhelming majority of developing countries. That is particularly true for Africa and the least developed countries. Therefore, debt cancellation

and development assistance will be extremely important in jumpstarting the growth of the economies of the least developed countries and marginalized economies.

The goal of alleviating poverty can best be reached by activating international partnerships to assist developing countries in implementing programmes and projects aimed at providing full employment and decent paid work opportunities for all, in urban and rural areas alike. During the 2005 World Summit, world leaders expressed support for fair globalization and the twin objectives of full and productive employment and providing decent work opportunities for all. The 2006 ministerial declaration of the Economic and Social Council stressed the importance of full, productive and decent employment for all as both the objective of the MDGs and the means to achieving them, including the Goal of poverty eradication. Furthermore, in his annual report to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, the Secretary-General proposed to officially include full employment and creation of decent work for all as a new objective in the context of MDG 1.

Mr. Bin Hassan (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to express our deep appreciation and thanks to the President for convening this thematic debate. We are confident that under his wise leadership our work will meet with success. We are also confident that we will be able to identify the challenges and difficulties that hinder the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the required measures to be taken within the determined time frame.

I would like to associate my delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda and of Bangladesh on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the least developed countries (LDCs), respectively.

The Republic of Yemen has undertaken several economic, financial and administrative reforms since the middle of 1995 in cooperation with its regional and international partners. It has laid focus on the MDGs by integrating them into its development policies and its five-year development plan for the period from 2006 to 2011.

We have emphasized the importance of combating poverty by prioritizing investment programmes and small and medium-sized projects as

well as by conducting a review of our economic and financial legislation and laws. We have also tried to reinvigorate our social security network and empower human resources, especially for poor sections of the population, in order to increase their participation and production.

In this connection, the Government of Yemen has set up mechanisms for good governance, which include an important body to combat corruption and another for bids and procurement.

In short, we have three long-term strategic goals for furthering our development: first, advancing the country from low-income to high income, in terms of human development, secondly, achieving high economic growth, and thirdly, reducing poverty by 50 per cent vis-à-vis 1998 levels.

We have been faced with many challenges and difficulties that have hindered the achievement of the MDGs, including the grave demographic problem, the worsening of environmental and financial difficulties, the development of human resources and the limited financial capabilities of the national economy.

Per capita, official development assistance (ODA) is still low, standing at \$13 per annum, whereas the international level of per capita ODA for LDCs stands at \$33 per annum. Worldwide price increases for food staples that we have all witnessed of late will be detrimental to the efforts of developing countries to combat poverty and to achieve the MDGs. We stress the importance of ODA for supporting the limited national budgets of LDCs. National strategies, in this regard, should be the appropriate framework for cooperation and development partnerships.

Currently, however, the level of ODA for LDCs remains beneath the required level, standing at 0.08 per cent of gross national product (GNP) of donor countries. We emphasize the importance of honouring commitments undertaken by international development partners to allocate 0.7 per cent of their GNP to development in developing countries, in addition to allocating 20 per cent of ODA to LDCs by 2010. We believe it is crucial that the distribution of ODA be both fair and equitable for all receiving countries.

The problem of external debt constitutes a great hindrance that restricts our development efforts and national strategies. It is important that further alleviation of debts be considered in order to include

all least developed countries. It is also crucial that debt alleviation not serve as a substitute for other financing sources.

Undoubtedly, mechanisms should be established for the monitoring and follow-up of the fulfilling of the commitments undertaken at international conferences. We look forward to the follow-up of the Monterrey Consensus that will take place this year in Doha. We hope that a consensus will be reached on a new monitoring mechanism for putting into action the commitments of the Monterrey Consensus.

Mr. Staur (Denmark): Denmark welcomes this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is urgent to make 2008 a year of action on the MDGs. We need to do more and we need to do it faster. The key question then is, of course, what can be done quickly and with significant impact? Where do we need to focus when addressing the issue of scaling-up in order to achieve the MDGs?

In our view, one issue that can be addressed quickly and effectively — and which at the same time has great potential for scaling-up and therefore should be of crucial importance in this regard — is the economic empowerment of women.

Gender equality is a basic human right. But it is also smart economics and one of the most important driving forces of economic growth. It is also a key factor in the fight against poverty. Providing women equal opportunities to educate themselves and actively participate in productive economic activity on equal terms with men is imperative in order to achieve the MDGs.

If our generation is to ensure that each woman has the chance to develop her potential, we must ensure the establishment of a level playing field that increases women's economic opportunities. That also means increased access to business opportunities, access to land and resources and access to credit and essential infrastructure.

The task is tremendous, but we must at the same time also focus on the women of tomorrow. We must ensure that girls get the opportunity not only to be enrolled in primary school, but also to complete their full education. They should be given the means to plan their own future and to make their own choices.

However, political commitment to gender equality and to the empowerment of women takes more

than words. It takes concrete actions and priority of resources. A recent World Bank report clearly states that a substantial resource gap exists. If we are to achieve MDG 3 on gender equality, it is estimated that a doubling of resources is needed.

At the same time, investment in gender equality pays off and therefore should be a national priority primarily financed by domestic resources in each country, but increased official development assistance targeted at women is, of course, also essential, and Denmark has committed to doubling its assistance focused on gender equality over a three-year time frame from 2008 through 2010.

The Danish Government has initiated a MDG 3 call to action. One could argue that a special MDG 3 call should not be needed. Gender equality is far too often treated as a so-called cross-cutting issue. It sounds very nice, but in reality a cross-cutting issue all too often means that no deeds follow the words. Rather, the empowerment of women should be at centre stage as the goal in itself that it rightly is in the form of MDG 3. Without empowered women, the MDGs will not become a reality in Africa and we will therefore have failed in our common responsibility.

To ensure that MDG 3 is kept at the forefront of development efforts at all levels and by all actors, we propose a global coalition of Governments, international organizations, private sector actors and civil society that are all committed to making gender equality and women's economic empowerment a key issue. We need to have that coalition established in the run-up to the United Nations high-level meeting on 25 September, and we need to maintain its operation all the way to 2015.

That global coalition on MDG 3 should strive to guarantee the needed leadership and, among other things, work for three things: first, a substantial increase in resources to gender equality and the empowerment of women; secondly, strengthened accountability in relation to MDG 3 efforts at both the international and national levels; and thirdly, a strong and active involvement by the private sector.

On 17 April, in two weeks' time, Denmark will host a conference in Copenhagen on the empowerment of women. The ambition is to establish a catalogue of tangible and replicable interventions and commitments with a focus on how to create economic options for women that put poverty reduction on a faster track.

Denmark also sees the United Nations high-level meeting on 25 September as an important opportunity to send a strong signal of true commitment to the empowerment of women across the world. It is time to act. We have clearly demonstrated that it pays to invest in women. It is an investment in not only one, but in all of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Muburi-Muita (Kenya): I take this opportunity to express appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for the background papers on the three MDG issues under focus during this discussion: poverty and hunger, education and health.

Kenya associates itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda and Cape Verde on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the African Group, respectively.

Kenya, like many other developing countries, recognizes that the MDGs offer a great opportunity to address human welfare in the world. The adoption of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs in 2000 was a laudable initiative of the international community to fight poverty, accelerate human development and facilitate the gradual but more effective integration of the developing world, especially Africa, into the global economy. The reaffirmation of the MDGs in subsequent international conferences was an additional indication of the commitment of the international community to address poverty and inequality and to end the marginalization and exclusion of the poor and disadvantaged.

In Africa, the challenges of eradicating poverty, achieving rapid and sustainable socio-economic development and integrating the continent into the mainstream of the world economy have increasingly been taken seriously by the African leadership, as evidenced by some recent important development policy initiatives. Those include the transformation of the Organization of African Unity to the African Union and the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development as the strategic programme to bolster Africa's efforts towards meeting the MDGs, among other things.

In recognition of the special needs of Africa, the Millennium Declaration called upon the international community to support the consolidation of peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development. The

continent's development partners were called on specifically, *inter alia*, to take special measures to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development on the continent, including debt cancellation, improved market access, enhanced official development assistance, increased flow of foreign direct investment, and the transfer of technology. Africa was also to be assisted to build capacity to tackle the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. Indeed, that recognition and commitment of the international community to the special development needs of Africa, coupled with Africa's own initiatives in that direction, raised hopes of achieving the MDGs on the continent by 2015.

However, in spite of those initial high expectations, the latest reports generally affirm that Africa has not made sufficient progress towards meeting the MDGs by the target date. That most countries in Africa are far off track to achieve most if not all of the goals is now a forgone conclusion.

To reflect on Kenya's MDGs situation, may I start by informing the General Assembly that some uneven progress has been made. During the final two decades of the last century, my country's economy experienced declining economic growth rates, reaching its worst in 2002 at just above zero per cent of real gross domestic product (GDP) growth. That depressed economic situation had spill-over effects on other sectors; hence, the bad performance of MDG indicators, including declines in access to safe drinking water and sanitation, child nutrition and health services, increased pressure on environmental goods and services, and a large number of people living below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption.

The situation began improving five years ago due to efforts by the Government to resuscitate the economy through the Economic Recovery Strategy of 2003. The implementation of that policy has enabled the economy to grow from a GDP of 0.5 per cent in 2002 to one of about 6 per cent in 2006 and an estimated 7 per cent last year. Those gains have impacted positively on MDG indicators across the economy. For instance, the percentage of Kenyans living in absolute poverty fell by 10 per cent between 2002 and 2006. As a result of the introduction of free primary education in 2003, the national gross enrolment rate in primary schools rose from 93 per cent to just over 100 per cent.

Kenya has long implemented development programmes that focused on the MDGs. As a result, the adoption of MDG-based planning in response to the Millennium Declaration served to sharpen the focus and also to rally all stakeholders behind the MDGs. Since the launch of the MDG-based planning in 2004, several milestones have been realized. Those include a cabinet directive in March 2005 requiring all ministries and sectors to mainstream MDGs in their specific policies, plans and budgets. That led to increased budgetary allocations for MDG-related programmes; further, MDGs have become key criteria for allocating resources for development. Education, health and agriculture have been the greatest beneficiaries of that directive.

A national MDGs needs assessment study was undertaken in 2005, and it indicated that a total of nearly \$6 billion would be needed annually to implement the MDGs. Since that time, this report has continued to inform the planning and budgeting process in Kenya.

The Millennium Villages concept has been introduced, leading to the establishment of two such villages, while nine districts have been declared Millennium Districts. The two Villages and the nine Districts are being set up as models for best practices that can help achieve the MDGs in the country. There have also been district MDG capacity-building exercises to entrench MDG-based planning at the district level and to identify quick-win projects for implementation.

Finally, the Government's efforts to address the MDGs have been faced with a number of challenges, which have included inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, inadequate capacity and weak policy frameworks. It is in that respect that the international community is called upon to review and meet its commitments — particularly in the areas of resource provision, technology transfer and capacity-building — to fast-track the implementation and achievement of the MDGs by the target date. For its part, the Government has prepared the Vision 2030 plan of action to replace our economic recovery strategy as the blueprint for economic development. Vision 2030 has been prepared to embrace the MDGs and will be implemented through five-year medium-term strategies that the Government has begun to develop.

Let me point out that achievement of the MDGs requires that the assumptions behind the MDG agenda hold at all times. Thus, achieving the MDGs requires the implementation of commitments by all stakeholders. All parties must live up to the challenge bestowed upon them by the Millennium Declaration. If that is done, regardless of how far off track countries are, there will still be hope. With adequate donor support and MDG-friendly policies in the recipient countries, we can all be optimistic about these goals.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today's meeting to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the result of the awareness of Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, concerning the dangers that could arise from delays in their achievement. In that connection, we should like to commend Mr. Kerim and to express our appreciation for the Secretary-General's observation that 2008 should be a year for addressing the needs of the poorest and least developed countries.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We believe that it is still possible to achieve the MDGs by 2015 if the members of the international community are mobilized to that end and if all stakeholders fulfil their commitments towards eliminating poverty and hunger. Nevertheless, we are aware that we face myriad challenges as a result of the negative impact of globalization on developing countries, the effects of climate change and the widening gap between rich and poor within many countries.

Since 2000, Lebanon has worked hard to implement the MDGs. Our efforts have produced many successes, the most important of which is the fact that the number of those living under the poverty line fell from 27 per cent in 1995 to 20.6 per cent in 2000. In addition, the number of students completing their primary-school education rose from 95.3 per cent in 2001-2002 to 96.3 per cent in 2006. Illiteracy among women has also declined, and the percentage of girls enrolled in primary schools has increased, with the percentage of girls enrolled in secondary schools reaching 79 per cent in 2002. However, a sufficient number of women are still not participating in political decision-making: no more than six women were elected to parliament in the last elections. That is why

the National Commission for Electoral Law Reform, established by the Council of Ministers in 2005, proposed a quota for women candidates to ensure that every ballot includes women.

In accordance with the MDGs, Lebanon has reduced its child and infant mortality rates. With regard to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other deadly diseases, the number of those living with HIV had been reduced to 15 per 100,000 in 2007, and the number of tuberculosis cases to 9 per 100,000.

Finally, as of the beginning of the second quarter of 2006, Lebanon had achieved remarkable accomplishments in the area of environmental sustainability, as verified by environmental indicators, ranking thirty-sixth among more than 133 countries.

However, the destructive war waged by Israel against Lebanon in the summer of 2006 was devastating both to the environment and to sustainable social and economic development in our country, putting an end to nearly all our efforts in those areas. With regard to the war's ecological effects, it must be recalled that, on 13 and 15 July 2006, Israeli aircraft intentionally struck Lebanese fuel plants. This resulted in the worst environmental disaster in the eastern Mediterranean, with the spread of an oil slick along 150 kilometres of Lebanon's coast.

Lebanon is aware that public debt poses a major problem for its national economy. We continue to endeavour to reduce our budget deficit, which is due mainly to debt servicing. Lebanon managed to reduce the level of debt servicing from 18 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2000 to 13 per cent of GDP in 2006. We have also begun to promulgate laws aimed at attracting foreign investment and promoting economic growth. Furthermore, the Lebanese Government succeeded in securing \$7.6 billion in international financial assistance at the donor conference held in January 2007 in Paris. We believe that the Lebanese crisis has also had very negative effects on our economic growth, which stood at 1.7 per cent during 2007 and is expected to fall this year if the crisis continues. That is why we emphasize the need to hold presidential elections and implement the Arab initiative in that connection.

Developing countries are called upon to implement needed structural reforms, build their institutional capacities, devise development strategies that can create decent employment opportunities,

achieve economic growth and put an end to extreme poverty.

The developed countries are called upon to help in that effort through appropriate financial and technological assistance to developing countries' economies and to promote international partnerships, which are essential for the achievements of the MDGs. The cornerstone of the international partnership for development is the political will of the developed countries to honour their commitments so that those commitments do not remain mere hopes and wishes of the poor of the world, mirages that recede ever further on the horizon, condemning them to continued poverty and alienation.

Mr. Ehouzou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): Benin, like previous speakers, would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his excellent initiative, which we believe will enable us to promote the international community's heightened awareness of and support for the ideals of peace, justice, equality among peoples and sustainable development for all countries.

As a least developed country and a party to the Millennium Declaration, Benin has committed itself to implementing significant policies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the representative of Bangladesh on behalf of the least developed countries. Benin also aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the African Group.

Faced with inadequate financial resources and suffering from a downward trend in the price of commodities, particularly cotton, which results from unfair international trading practices and the difficulty of accessing international markets, Benin has adopted several development policies and strategies with a view to creating a favourable environment for achieving the MDGs.

By way of example, I would like to refer to the most important documents. Benin 2025: ALAFIA is a planning and analysis document for long-term development strategies covering a period of 25 years.

The Strategic Development Guidelines for Benin for 2006 to 2011, a Government document based on the aforementioned document, takes into account the MDGs and the commitments that are contained in the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. The Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction for 2007 to 2009 has a mainly socio-economic character and will help to implement the second document — and, by extension, the first — over a period of three years.

The measures taken by the Government of Benin since the adoption of the MDGs are reflected in considerable progress in many areas and, at the same time, in very modest progress in other areas. Indeed, an analysis of the results of the strategies that have been implemented over the first five-year period of 2000 to 2005 for achieving the MDGs has shown that, despite some progress, all the targets have not yet been achieved. Thus, poverty persists and is even worsening. Given current trends, the achievement of the MDGs is very much in question.

One of the actions that has resulted from that assessment has been the drawing up of a second-generation poverty reduction strategy, which has allowed us to assess what needs to be done to achieve the MDGs in eight sectors: education; health; water; sanitation; energy; transport; roads; and gender. That shows the determination of the Government of Benin to ensure that the MDGs become a reality by 2015.

However, we should stress that the introduction of the use of statistics in macroeconomic planning for the strategy for 2007 to 2009 has revealed a significant funding gap that must be bridged, both for the period of the implementation of that plan and during the follow-up period.

This is the appropriate time and place to repeat my Government's thanks to the international community for the efforts that it has continued to make to promote democracy and governance and to improve the living conditions of people in the urban and rural areas of Benin. Despite those praiseworthy efforts, we hope that significant progress will be made to ensure that we are able to complete all our activities to overcome poverty.

The size of the budgetary deficit relating to assessed needs suggests that tough measures must be taken to heighten mobilization and ensure better use of financial resources. For that reason, the international

community must substantially increase official development assistance to my country. In that context, the reference point for any development assistance for Benin by the agencies of the United Nations system or by any other technical and financial partner must be the Strategic Development Guidelines for Benin for 2006 to 2011.

For its part, Benin is committed to continue, together with the private sector and civil society, to improve our national macroeconomic framework and to improve mobilization of the necessary resources for achieving the goals that have been set. We will base our work on the principle of mutual commitment between donor countries, including the multilateral institutions, and developing countries, a principle which is set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, in order to increase the effectiveness of official development assistance.

Finally, Benin's membership in regional and subregional bodies represents a major benefit, which will allow it to draw up and implement integrated regional development policies.

Following the statements that were made by the panellists invited by the President of the General Assembly to consider this important issue that we are dealing with this morning, I would like to close by appealing to the Bretton Woods institutions and to all development partners, in both the public and the private sectors, to provide the necessary resources or to increase those resources within the framework of the agreed international commitments regarding financing for development. I thank them all for their commitment. I would also like to pay tribute to Mr. Jeffrey Sachs for his personal commitment to the poor and the disadvantaged, who are the main focus of the MDGs.

Ms. Graham (New Zealand): I thank the President of the General Assembly for hosting this thematic debate. I also thank those participating in the stimulating panel discussions earlier this week.

New Zealand fully endorses the statement made by the representative of the Kingdom of Tonga on behalf of the Pacific small island developing States.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are one of the global pathways to a better future. For the first time in history, there is an international consensus to close the poverty gap. Poverty on the scale we know

it today, and in a world that has the capability of reducing it dramatically, is a moral offence. It has a huge opportunity cost on societies and on the global community through the productivity and the creativity that are forgone. Working to eliminate poverty and to remove inequalities addresses fundamental rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in related treaties. Finding pathways to do that is a global, regional and national challenge.

At this halfway point, the development challenge has never been higher on the international agenda. New Zealand recently signed up to the MDG Call to Action, and we look forward to participating in the Secretary-General's high-level event on MDGs, scheduled to take place on 25 September.

We have heard throughout this week's debate about some success stories, but while good achievements have been made, there are troubling signs that the global community has not made sufficient progress with the MDGs. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific are two subregions that are most off track. The stakes are high, especially for the millions of people trapped in the cycle of extreme poverty, dying of hunger and tropical diseases, and the millions that lack access to basic education. We can and we must do better. That requires a truly global effort across a range of issues that the panellists raised earlier this week, including peace and security, governance, economic growth, trade and investment, particularly in the agricultural sector, and development assistance.

My delegation wishes to focus on MDG 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment. New Zealand stresses the importance of MDG 3 for achieving all the Millennium Development Goals. Gender inequality and poverty are inextricably linked, but continue to be among the most persistent and pervasive global challenges. It is critical that Governments recognize the negative impact and the opportunity costs of gender inequality and that we step up the pace to achieve positive development outcomes, particularly at the country level.

Girls' access to education has undoubtedly increased as a result of the impetus provided by MDG 3, but not fast enough in some countries and regions. Progress has been especially uneven in the Pacific, which faces a particular challenge in achieving gender equality in education. Significantly less global attention has been directed towards supporting the

other MDG 3 indicators relating to the elimination of gender disparity in non-agricultural employment and in parliamentary representation.

New Zealand recognizes that sexual and reproductive health rights, including those related to HIV and AIDS, are also crucial for the achievement of the MDGs. Access to services, safe motherhood, prevention efforts and the treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and the elimination of gender violence would improve the lives of many people in the Pacific, and would also improve economic and social development.

The United Nations system has a critical role to play in advancing MDG 3, and New Zealand therefore attaches particular importance to working for a strengthened, coherent and adequately resourced United Nations gender architecture. There is an urgent need to revitalize the commitment and responsibility of the entire United Nations system to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

Let me now turn to health and basic education. New Zealand contributes about 10 per cent of its total official development assistance (ODA) budget to health programmes and 20 per cent of its total ODA budget to education programmes. We prioritize support to basic education for the achievement of universal primary education and equal access at every level. Our support for health is guided by primary health-care principles as the most cost-effective and equitable way to improve health status and eliminate poverty.

New Zealand acknowledges that no gains will be made with respect to poverty and hunger, education, health, gender parity or any of the other MDGs without strong global partnerships. Partnerships and alignment, expressed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, allow us to combine New Zealand's support with others' larger contributions. At the same time, greater coordination among development partners can help to achieve the MDGs. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that attention to gender equality and women's empowerment remains central to those efforts.

Mr. Kaludjerović (Montenegro): At the outset, let me congratulate the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Kerim, for organizing this important and timely debate. Montenegro aligns itself with the statement made yesterday by the Minister of Growth of

the Republic of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union (EU).

I would like to focus on the Montenegrin perspective on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to add some remarks relevant to our views on poverty-, health- and education-related goals.

At the midpoint between the adoption of the Millennium Declaration and 2015, some parts of the world remain off track to achieve the MDGs. As we all agree, significant progress has been made in the implementation of the Declaration, but some areas still need a significant scale-up of investment and coordinated action at the national and international levels in order to achieve the set goals.

The achievement of all eight MDGs is closely interlinked. Investment in one MDG has a significant impact on the achievement of the other Goals and is further linked to the overall economic and social development of a country.

Since regaining its independence, Montenegro has undergone numerous reform processes and adopted several strategic documents that define its overall development path towards EU integration and represent significant tools for the full achievement of MDGs. The most important documents are the development and poverty reduction strategy, the agenda of economic reforms, the national action plan for children, the national strategy for sustainable development, and numerous other strategies, laws and action plans.

As a result of sound economic policies, Montenegro has achieved macroeconomic stability, while the prospect of economic growth remains strong. Also, comprehensive activities are being conducted to strengthen the rule of law and good governance as main preconditions for the creation of an enabling environment for the full implementation of the MDGs.

Poverty has a broad definition that goes beyond the realm of economy and affects people's lives on multiple other levels, including access to social services, health, education, access to the labour market, gender equality and so on. Empirical data for Montenegro show that significant progress has been made, and recent analysis indicates that the percentage of people living below the absolute poverty line is relatively small at 10.9 per cent, while at the regional and local levels the value varies from 8.4 per cent to

13.6 per cent. It is also important to note that the unemployment rate dropped to 11.8 per cent this year. However, one third of the population is still considered to be economically vulnerable.

A recent increase in income levels and vigorous economic activity in Montenegro are expected to lead to a proportional reduction in poverty and relative poverty, but despite favourable economic conditions and pro-poor economic and social policy, some challenges remain. Regional distribution of poverty is uneven, and particular efforts need to be made to improve the situation of vulnerable groups.

The comprehensive reform of the educational sector has been ongoing since 2000, and Montenegro has adopted a wide range of education legislation. The Montenegrin Government has recognized the significance of education for the sustainable economic and social development of the country. Quantitative indicators show that reform implementation has yielded positive results and that the education-related MDGs are achievable.

Nevertheless, despite favourable trends, there are certain issues that still need to be addressed. The most significant improvements in that regard are connected with the quality of education itself and the level to which required skills in the educational system reflect the needs of the labour market.

The Millennium Declaration attaches great importance to health, and I am pleased to state that Montenegro is on track to achieve related targets. For example, reports on the vaccination and immunization of children are positive, ranging between 92 and 98 per cent depending on the immunization group, and the proportion of births attended by a skilled health professional is at 100 per cent.

However, because of the political, social and economic situation in the 1990s, a reduction in the quality of health services was evident, leading the Government to introduce broad health sector reforms. Primary health care is being strengthened at the local levels to ensure quality access, especially with respect to vulnerable population groups; proper care for all children, but particularly for children with special needs; and the increased effectiveness and efficiency of health care.

In respect to Goal 6 on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, Montenegro regards

combating HIV/AIDS as a priority due to the increase in risk-associated behaviour among young people. Because of the strong need for coordinated action to prevent the spread of the disease, the Montenegrin Government has founded the National HIV/AIDS Commission, which cooperates closely with governmental and non-governmental actors, international organizations and the donor community.

The concentrated efforts of the international community and national institutions are required in order to achieve the MDGs globally and at the national level. Aid quality can be improved, as can donor coordination. Furthermore, the achievement of the MDGs will not be possible without sound partnerships among the public sector, the private sector and civil society. The support of the United Nations system and its coordination are also of the utmost importance.

In conclusion, Montenegro is committed to the full achievement of the MDGs by focusing on the strengthening of institutions and the implementation of the overall set of economic and social reforms that emphasize accelerated, sustainable and inclusive growth. Enhanced efforts at all levels, national and global, are indispensable if the MDGs are to be achieved by 2015.

Mr. Vilović (Croatia): First of all, allow me to thank the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for convening this important and timely debate.

Croatia has aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, but allow me to make a couple of additional remarks on this issue, to which my Government attaches a great importance.

We have gathered today to exchange views on the achievements and challenges of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but let us not forget that the acronym "MDG" hides the Goals that were agreed by all the world's countries and by all the world's leading development institutions. The crucial question is: Can we, the world's representatives gathered in the General Assembly, be satisfied with our achievements? As has already been stated yesterday and today, the answer is: only partially.

Have we halved extreme poverty? Have we provided universal primary education? Have we reduced child mortality and improved maternal health?

Encouraging answers to those questions have been registered throughout the world, but on an uneven basis. Although parts of Africa have attained good results in achieving food security for their people, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia suffer from the lowest rates of progress, and there has not been a sustainable reduction in the rates of poverty and hunger. We have to ask ourselves: Have we done enough?

In order to achieve the MDGs not only in Africa but throughout the world, official development assistance must be strengthened. However, developing countries also need to ensure that those commitments are reflected in each key national development and poverty reduction policy and that the multidimensional causes and effects of poverty are being equally addressed.

We do understand that agriculture and infrastructure are the keys for economic development and that a country lacking the means of developing those, combined with a burden of debt, cannot be expected to move anywhere. Without forgetting the overall development agenda, and striving to promote equitable and efficient distribution systems, the international community has to put the focus back on improving access to agricultural land and resources for people living in poverty, since it is their essential tool for survival.

Croatia attaches significant importance to the implementation of the MDGs in our country. We provided our first national report on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in 2004 and an interim report in 2006, wherein we modified some indicators accompanying specific national needs. The MDGs are incorporated into various Government strategies. Let me also stress that Croatia will fulfil its obligations emerging from the official development assistance commitment scheme.

Croatia is saddened by the fact that, in the twenty-first century, there are still around 72 million children who are not enrolled in primary school and are therefore destined to grow up without the basic right to education and deprived of hope for a better future. We are aware that children in conflict and post-conflict situations need to pursue their education and that effective action by the international community is needed.

We hope that the United Nations and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia will find ways to change the opportunities for their children, especially by abolishing primary school user fees and ensuring safe and equal access to schools for boys and girls. The investment in education that we make in children today will shape our future tomorrow. Therefore the Croatian Government has gone one step further, in accordance with the aforementioned modified indicators, by introducing mandatory secondary education for all.

It is not acceptable that, every year, over 500,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth. High priority must be given to achieving universal access to reproductive health services in national health and poverty reduction frameworks, especially through budget allocations. Laws and awareness-raising campaigns against various forms of harmful traditional, cultural and religious practices cannot be neglected if we want to change the rates of maternal mortality and morbidity.

Is the HIV infection, especially among young people, preventable? It is, but only through a comprehensive approach. The decision to build a functional health system is a political decision in each donor country and in each concerned country. We cannot heal the people without healing the system. The will to make drastic changes in the system must be pledged at the highest political level, and that pledge must be effectively fulfilled on both sides.

Every year, we witness 1.7 million new HIV infections in Africa — a fact that has already resulted in more than 13 million AIDS orphans. It is of the utmost importance to make investments in health systems, to train health personnel and to create cooperation between the State and civil society. The existing coordination mechanisms need more support, and a common framework for monitoring and evaluating progress has to be formed.

Ms. Bethel (Bahamas), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The world has come a long way since the days when people used to steal land from each other and kill each other in the name of survival. We now have human rights laws, humanitarian aid and civil society movements, and we continue to face huge development issues. But we also have the will and the determination to make this world a better place for all. Our efforts to

meet the needs of the world's poorest are a legacy for our children — a legacy of seeking to create a better world for them.

Mr. Mahiga (United Republic of Tanzania): As we begin the second half of the period set for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we thank Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, for convening this timely thematic debate, focusing on achievements, challenges and getting back on track in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We commend his strategic choice of the MDGs related to poverty, education and health, where progress is most needed, because of their positive impact on other Goals.

I should also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his ongoing efforts to involve key international financial institutions in focusing on scaling up the achievement of the MDGs in Africa, by establishing the Millennium Development Goals Africa Steering Group. Tanzania appreciates that initiative and is encouraged by the demonstrated commitment of the leadership of the United Nations and by the Organization's system-wide engagement in mobilizing the international community to support timely achievement of the MDGs.

Tanzania is, however, concerned by the overall slow progress towards achieving the Goals in Africa by 2015. But we are also encouraged by the spirited efforts of African States to achieve some Goals with respect to which political determination prevails and assistance from development partners is forthcoming. Most developing countries have undertaken economic and governance reforms inspired by the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and agreed upon in the Monterrey Consensus of 2002.

The 2005 World Summit reaffirmed those commitments, but there remain significant gaps and bottlenecks, which need to be urgently addressed at both the political and the implementation levels by all parties in the developed and the developing countries. The commitments made by the developed countries at Gleneagles and Heiligendamm need to be honoured urgently and predictably as part of that mutual obligation. In the meantime, there have been negative trends globally, which are militating against progress in achieving the Goals and which need to be collectively addressed by the international community.

The mixed economic indicators set out in the World Economic Outlook reports for 2007 and 2008 show that the world economy is slowing down. The stalled negotiations of the Doha Development Round on trade preclude any prospects for fair trading practices for developing countries. If this trend regarding outlook and the impasse on trade continues, our efforts to fight poverty and achieve the MDGs will be adversely affected.

In addition, the current energy crisis is depleting the foreign exchange reserves of developing countries, as well as domestic savings. Similarly, climate change is crippling agricultural production and accelerating environmental damage, with far-reaching consequences for economic growth and sustainability. The combined effects of the energy crisis and climate change on Africa are pushing up food prices for countries that depend on food imports and frustrating efforts to fight food shortages and hunger.

The United Nations should continue to show robust leadership on how to address the negative effects of climate change and should, with urgency, assume leadership in spearheading action on the global energy crisis. Without such comprehensive measures, efforts to achieve the MDGs will be seriously behind schedule in many developing countries. It should also be emphasized that investments aimed at achieving the MDGs must be linked to the long-term infrastructure and growth sectors in order to sustain the results of the Goals achieved.

Poverty and hunger are the most visible indicators of human deprivation and insecurity. Halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 is, appropriately, the number-one Goal among the MDGs and is probably the most difficult to achieve, but experience has shown that hunger can be alleviated through policies geared to promoting productivity and growth in the economies of developing countries both in urban and in rural areas. In addition, growth in gross terms should be accompanied by equity measures to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor if poverty reduction is to be effective in real terms.

In Tanzania, the 2005 and 2006 reports on poverty reduction indicated modest progress, but also the need to scale up interventions in that area. Tanzania has formulated its second generation of poverty reduction strategies on the basis of MDGs focusing on results accomplished in achieving goals related to the

reduction of poverty and hunger. The latest figures indicate an average annual growth rate of 6.5 per cent of gross domestic product. However, that increase is minimized by population growth, which stands at 2.9 per cent. The daunting challenge is to translate economic growth into poverty reduction as measured by household income.

Accelerated economic growth is needed in order to enhance the domestic resource base and improve the Government's ability to provide public services. In Tanzania, several development partners have resorted to budget support as a way to enhance aid harmonization and effectiveness. That strategy, coupled with debt relief measures, is enhancing national MDG-based policies to reduce poverty. Further, in February this year the Governments of the United States of America and Tanzania signed a compact worth \$698 million from the Millennium Challenge Account to stimulate sustainable economic investment in key economic sectors, such as infrastructure and energy, and to contribute to poverty eradication efforts. We believe that that historic intervention will support national efforts to achieve the MDGs and to accelerate the country's overall economic development and enhance overall performance in all economic sectors.

In the area of education, net enrolment rates in primary education had risen to 94.8 per cent by 2006. There is near gender parity with regard to the enrolment of girls and boys at the primary school level. Primary school retention rates improved from 71 per cent in 1997 to 79 per cent in 2004 and continue to improve steadily. Tanzania is therefore on track and is sure that it will achieve MDG 2 by 2015. The retention rate for boys in school is slightly higher than that for girls, and there is also major concern regarding the average performance of girls, owing to interruptions in attendance. Equally, there has been a national campaign to expand secondary school enrolment and to correct the gender imbalance in enrolment and retention at the secondary school level.

The target of eliminating illiteracy by 2015 remains a challenge. The Government is committed to enhance the quality and standard of education at all levels through programmes that focus on increasing the number of qualified teachers and improving school facilities and other social amenities that improve the learning environment in school. The overall spending in education has been considerably increased. Eighteen

per cent of the annual national budget currently goes towards education.

With regard to health, the Government has developed strategies aimed at reducing infant and child mortality, especially malaria-related morbidity and mortality. Programmes include improved vaccination coverage, availability of services, including drugs at the time of need, integrated management of childhood illnesses rolled over to all districts, efficient implementation of planned programmes and malaria control through use of mosquito nets, particularly insecticide-treated nets. Five out of 10 mothers and children sleep under treated nets.

Under-five mortality decreased from 191 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 133 in 2005. Infant mortality also declined from 115 in 1990 to 68 in 2005. There is steady progress in MDG 4, but it is not as significant as that in the area of universal primary education. Data show that the maternal mortality situation has not changed much in Tanzania and therefore requires significant scaled-up investments and intervention.

The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased by only 5 per cent between 1999 and 2004 and the proportion of births taking place in health facilities by only 3 per cent in the same period. The negative trend in maternal mortality, especially in mainland Tanzania, is compounded by the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, sustained efforts to combat the pandemic in Tanzania have reduced HIV infection rates from 9.1 per cent to 7.7 per cent between 2001 and 2004, and the downward trend is continuing.

The experience of Tanzania shows that a national MDG-based development framework and strategy, combined with timely and predictable resources, can make a significant difference in the progress towards the MDGs. For example, debt relief and reinvestment in education has led to greater expansion and improvement in the education MDG, which will be achieved before 2015. In contrast, MDGs 4 and 5 are lagging behind despite the existence of an elaborate national strategy. It is for this reason that we welcome the five-nations global initiative led by Norway to mobilize additional resources for scaling up investments in the two health related MDGs.

In conclusion, Tanzania calls for more coordinated international and national arrangements for

tracking and speeding up pledges and commitments. The private sector and international financial institutions should also be encouraged to become more involved with MDGs directly and indirectly, in a way similar to the initiative of the Secretary-General with the MDG Africa Steering Group. To this end, we look to the high-level events on 22 and 25 September this year here at the United Nations to refocus attention on the mobilization of resources and to provide fresh momentum in achieving the MDGs in Africa.

Mr. Al-Fayez (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made at the 88th meeting by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on this subject.

The thematic debate entitled "Recognizing the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015" means we should enhance our efforts to achieve the objectives that have been set. In this context, Saudi Arabia, convinced of the importance of the Millennium Development Goals, gives great importance to the issue of development and efforts to combat poverty and support education and health. Those issues are the building blocks of the eighth development plan for 2005-2009 in Saudi Arabia, which plan emphasizes the importance of stepping up efforts for encouraging economic growth through macroeconomic policies, creation of employment opportunities and improving living standards.

The cornerstone of all those efforts is the reduction of poverty. The 2005-2009 plan emphasizes the most disadvantaged populations by adopting a national strategy to overcome poverty. It allows the poor to have the material and human resources necessary to undertake economic activities and employment while reducing factors of vulnerability such as disease, the economic impact of changes in the market and natural disasters. This plan, in short, helps the poor to confront those challenges.

We have sought to ensure a fair distribution of the fruits of economic growth among regions by improving the methods of production, helping families and small and medium-sized enterprises, improving health and education and municipal services, social security and housing as well as in other ways.

We have sought to strengthen social institutions and charities for combating poverty. Education is the main basis of social and economic development and one of the main factors in sustainable development. Prosperity is the aim of development, and it cannot happen without the full participation of educated and productive individuals who respect high human values and ideals. Therefore, favouring access to all levels of education for all is the basis of development and the best way to combat poverty.

That is why Saudi Arabia emphasized education for all by increasing expenditure on it from its gross national product to 6 per cent by 2004. By 2005, that proportion reached 10 per cent. The number of students enrolled in primary schools, grades 1 to 5, reached 95 per cent in 2005. Our overall goal is to reach 100 per cent enrolment for all children of these grades during the period of the eighth plan.

With regard to health, our health services have seen considerable progress over the last 20 years. That is reflected in the health indicators, including childcare. Under-five mortality rates have decreased to 20 cases per 1,000 live births in 2005. There is a network of health infrastructure with nearly 364 hospitals built by 2004.

We have taken measures to ensure the development of health services by adopting a general health system in 2003 and implementing that programme to ensure health services for the whole population. A public body has been set up to ensure the safety of food and medical, biological and chemical products.

With regard to achieving the MDGs, Saudi Arabia has exceeded the targets set in a number of areas and is on track to meet other targets before the established deadlines. Saudi Arabia is among the developing countries that are participating in most international commitments, chiefly in order to reduce poverty and assist the least developed countries in creating infrastructures for the future.

Achieving development and combating poverty are human and moral responsibilities. In that connection, Saudi Arabia has been assisting poor countries in their efforts to reduce poverty by participating in a ministerial conference of medium-income countries held in Spain in March 2007 in collaboration with the United Nations. The Saudi Fund for Development has allocated part of its budget to

poverty reduction efforts in 28 developing countries, which represented 49 per cent of all assistance during the period 1975 to 2006, and which amounted to \$7 billion. We have also contributed to the establishment of a poverty reduction fund under the auspices of the Islamic Development Bank. Our assistance is provided through bilateral cooperation with other developing countries and with the assistance of specialized regional and international multilateral agencies. Between 3.5 and 4 per cent of our gross national product (GNP) is allocated to foreign aid, and in 2007 we ranked ninth in terms of donors.

Saudi Arabia has provided a total of \$6.6 billion to fund 369 development projects and economic programmes in 68 countries. Every year, Saudi Arabia contributes to the programmes of agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. We have also contributed to the financing of United Nations assistance programmes, together with other Gulf States, and to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. For the period 2008 to 2010, we intend to allocate \$18 million to that Fund for a three-year period, and we have already allocated \$10 million for it.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has given \$24 billion to more than 14 international financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and the African Development Bank Group, which has received \$25 million. As a member of the African Development Bank Group, Saudi Arabia has contributed to its funding as well as to that of the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa.

Saudi Arabia, given the importance that it attaches to sustainable development, is in the vanguard of those countries that have striven to achieve the MDGs, allocating more than half of its public expenditure to social and educational services. We stress the importance of the role of the United Nations and in particular of the Economic and Social Council in enhancing international cooperation to achieve the MDGs. Promoting ownership by developing countries of their own projects, enhancing their role in the development of financing mechanisms, promoting gender equality and universal education, the advancement of women and improving health

services — all these issues should be at the forefront of United Nations efforts.

The success of such efforts will require that we respect the cultural specificities and traditions of developing countries and adopt modes of development that are suited to those countries. Ensuring transparency in the global economy and combating increases in the prices of the basic necessities of the poor are important in that regard. However, none of that can be achieved without international peace, equality and respect for the sovereign rights of developing countries, universal compliance with international law and the settlement of conflict by peaceful and diplomatic means.

Mr. Borg (Malta): Malta associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Slovenia at the 88th meeting on behalf of the member States of the European Union.

Three of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are fundamental to the achievement of the MDGs by 2015 — the eradication of poverty and hunger, universal primary education, and health for all — are subjects of scrutiny and timely analysis by this Assembly. Indeed, at the halfway point towards 2015, those three issues are of primordial importance in our challenging quest for a better future for present and future generations. In fact, we are being confronted with what the 2007 United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report called predictably uneven results. In the same report, the Secretary-General clearly points out that there have been some gains but that much remains to be done, particularly in those areas where problems are compounded by widening income inequality, unemployment, warming of the climate, increased urbanization and internal migration, which all are having negative impacts on the socio-economic fabrics of our societies.

Malta believes that the eight Millennium Development Goals are interrelated components forming one whole and that they should be considered and achieved as the universal framework for development. In that regard, notwithstanding its size and its limited resources, Malta has, in line with the commitments made by the European Union, undertaken to reach a ratio of official development assistance (ODA) to gross national income (GNI) of 0.17 per cent by 2010 within its respective budget allocation

processes and to endeavour to increase its ODA/GNI ratio to 0.33 per cent by 2015.

Fully aware of the urgent need for a concrete application of its declared adherence to international solidarity, Malta has likewise earmarked commitments in its 2007 Overseas Development Policy Document, which, among other things, highlights the notion of combating poverty through development. All references to development in the Policy Document are linked to the concept of sustainable development — a precondition for true progress and long-lasting improvement in humankind's standard of living and quality of life.

Furthermore, Malta views development as a fundamental catalyst for ensuring that globalization is a force for good, narrowing the wealth gap and ensuring that the human being and human dignity remain at the centre of economic and political action. That is why poverty eradication and the achievement of all the MDGs are to be priorities for our times. They should be addressed in a multidimensional way, both through the conduct of political and economic decision-making and through social and environmental factors related to different facets such as culture and gender equality, geography, the climate and energy.

Education and training have an overarching relevance to human capacity-building and therefore precondition various aspects of development. At the national level, various targets have been achieved so far in Malta in the areas of universal primary education, including free access to kindergarten; an increased awareness of environmental and gender issues; equal opportunities for all; and promoting acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity through multicultural activities.

In the wider sphere, Malta is contributing educational formation and training programmes for nationals from developing countries through measures such as scholarships at the tertiary level in such areas as democratization and human rights, ageing, information technology and maritime law and through various Commonwealth Third Country Training Programmes, targeting in particular nationals from small island developing countries.

Health is another indisputably important aspect of long-term development. In Malta, monitoring is ongoing, with cases of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria being reported to the Department of Health

Promotion and Disease Prevention. The number of cases is still relatively small, and treatment for all three diseases is available to all free of charge. Furthermore, the Government of Malta has launched various educational programmes that increase awareness of sexually transmitted diseases. An example is the Sexuality and Relationships Education Programme for Parents with children in primary schools, which has been ongoing since 2002. The main objective of that programme is to provide parents with basic sexuality and relationships education information and tools, which will consequently help them in the parenting of their children. Another case in point is the personal and social development syllabus, in which subjects such as sexually transmitted diseases, personal health and safety and hygiene are tackled, with the aim of helping students to build a positive, healthy lifestyle.

The need for development does not only arise from a moral imperative. A decisive contribution to the eradication of poverty not only creates a more equitable world; it is also a major contribution towards a more peaceful and secure world. We have passed the midpoint between the adoption of the MDGs in 2000 and the target date for the implementation of those Goals in 2015. As stated by the Secretary-General in his foreword to the Millennium Development Goals Report 2007, there is a clear need to take urgent action in order to address the challenges and get back on track to achieve those fundamental goals.

In that regard, Malta looks forward to the high-level event on the MDGs to be held on 25 September 2008 and to working with other Member States in achieving the MDGs by 2015. That achievement is still possible, but only if concrete and joint actions with development partners are immediately increased and sustained. Together we can succeed and truly make a difference.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this thematic debate on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We would like to align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. As a developing country, China knows full well the importance of achieving the MDGs. China highly values the vital role played by the United Nations in promoting the implementation of the Goals.

To keep poverty and disease at bay and develop the full potential of all has, for generations, been humanity's pursuit. The MDGs represent the most basic development goals; they are time-bound and can be monitored. It has been eight years since the MDGs were adopted, but progress in meeting the Goals is uneven and too slow.

As 2015 approaches, the international community needs to undertake integrated and effective measures with commitment and a high sense of urgency to accelerate the implementation of the MDGs. In that connection, the Chinese delegation wishes to make the following points on how to implement the MDGs.

First, we must focus on priorities while bearing in mind the overall picture. China appreciates the President's decision to make poverty eradication, education and health the themes of the debate. Those three aspects, which are both mutually reinforcing and mutually constraining, are indeed at the core of the MDGs. It is China's view that, in implementing the MDGs, poverty reduction should remain at top of the agenda and should be used to promote development in other areas. As the majority of the poor live in rural areas, it is imperative to give preference to the rural poor.

Secondly, we must strengthen the capacities of developing countries. Economic globalization presents new opportunities, but many developing countries are caught in the poverty trap. It is therefore imperative for developing countries to strengthen their capacity and accelerate development by taking advantage of the opportunities that come with globalization. To achieve such a goal, developing countries' efforts are very important, but external support is also indispensable.

Thirdly, we must expand the partnership among all stakeholders to support the efforts of developing countries. For most developing countries, achieving the MDGs on time will require strong financial and technical support. Developed countries should show sincerity in fulfilling their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of gross national income to official development assistance. Developing countries have a fine tradition of helping each other. Looking forward, they should further expand South-South cooperation, increasing support to the least developed countries and African countries in particular. In addition, flexible means should be employed to encourage the

involvement of civil society and the private sector and to mobilize all of society to promote development.

Fourthly, we must give full play to the role of the United Nations. We have always advocated the establishment of an MDG monitoring and evaluation mechanism to gauge the progress made by specific countries and monitor the fulfilment of international commitments. The United Nations system has unique advantages vis-à-vis developing countries. United Nations agencies should bear in mind the priority areas of individual developing countries and help them resolve the most pressing problems through financial and technical support and capacity-building.

As the most populous developing country, China has worked vigorously and earnestly to implement the MDGs. China is the first country to reach the target of halving the number of people living in extreme poverty. The target of achieving universal primary education, among others, was met ahead of schedule in China.

Of course, China's economic foundation is not strong, and the fruit of its development must be shared by 1.3 billion people. China's per capita gross domestic product still ranks lower than one hundredth in the world. There is still a long way to go to ensure that development is shared by all.

China attaches great importance to South-South cooperation and has done what it can to support other developing countries in achieving common progress. Over the years, through grants and interest-free and preferential loans, China has assisted more than 100 developing countries in developing various projects that have had a direct bearing on the lives and work of local people. China has also sent medical teams to developing countries: 48 medical teams with over 1,200 medical personnel are now working in 47 countries. That assistance has helped improve the life of the local people and promote economic development and the achievement of the MDGs in recipient countries. As China's economy and abilities grow, we will continue to engage in and expand, as appropriate, South-South cooperation in order to bring benefits to more people.

Our experience shows that the MDGs are not only imperative, but attainable targets. Opportunities await us. China will continue to work with all other countries to make it happen.

Ms. Sene (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): There could be no better or more appropriate time than the one the Assembly President has chosen to bring us together to discuss the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a subject of great importance to our country. The time is appropriate because the deadline of 2015 is fast approaching. Therefore, we should assess what has been achieved as we come around the final bend. It is also appropriate if we consider the current difficult international environment, characterized by increases in energy and food prices, as well as by the threats posed by climate change to the productive capacities and security of poor countries.

Before going any further, allow me to align my delegation with the statements made by the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the least developed countries, and the Group of African States, respectively.

I would also like, on behalf of my country, to thank the United Nations for having selected Senegal as one of the eight pilot countries for the Millennium Project. This highly appreciated assistance has enabled us to enhance the effectiveness of our sectoral strategies in achieving the MDGs.

We particularly welcome the debate on this theme, since the MDGs offer improved prospects for well-being and development and reflect the hopes of millions of human beings in poor countries.

This is why I will limit my statement to briefly touch upon a few indicators illustrating Senegal's progress in achieving the MDGs.

In regards to poverty, the implementation of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), covering the period 2003-2005, resulted in a significant drop in household poverty. It dropped from 48.5 per cent in 2002 to 42 per cent in 2005. At this rate, projections put the number of poor at 33.6 per cent in 2015, as opposed to the 33.5 per cent target.

If Senegal has been able to achieve such a reduction in the poverty index, it is due to a large extent to macroeconomic performance. Economic growth has been on a positive track, averaging 5 per cent annually in recent years. This has been in the context of improved public finance management, control of inflation, which is now less than 2 per cent a

year, and the consolidation of other macroeconomic aggregates, with a 21 per cent rate of investment.

With regard to combating malnutrition, the halving of the incidence of underweight by 2015 could still be achieved with implementation of programmes such as the integrated children's health-care strategy, the integrated package of activities for nutrition and the nutrition enhancement programme. Thus, there was a drop in the incidence of underweight from 20 per cent to 17 per cent between 1992 and 2005.

As for education, we note that more than 90 per cent of Senegalese children are now enrolled in school, compared to 72 per cent in 2002. Gender equality has been achieved. This being said, efforts still need to be made to ensure faster improvement in graduation rates, which rose from 36 per cent in 2000 to a mere 45 per cent in 2006.

With regard to health indicators, the installation of properly equipped operating rooms and subsidies to help with the cost of caesarean births in the poorest regions with high maternal mortality rates have led, *inter alia*, to a drop in infant mortality from 150 per 1,000 births in 1992 to 121 per 1,000 in 2005. Maternal mortality has fallen from 510 deaths per 100,000 live births in the period 1986-1992 to 401 per 100,000 in the period 1998-2005. However, despite these positive developments, at this rate, we will not be able to achieve the goal of a two thirds reduction by 2015 and additional efforts are therefore required.

Finally, in terms of diseases, HIV/AIDS prevalence is now 0.7 per cent — less than 1 per cent. This is paired with a drop of approximately 90 per cent in the cost of antiretroviral treatment. At the same time, malaria represents 35 per cent of all medical visits and it continues to be a major cause of mortality and morbidity among the vulnerable groups of pregnant women and children under five. Tuberculosis is still a priority for Senegal, whose objective is to cure 80 per cent of smear-positive cases of pulmonary tuberculosis.

As can be seen, despite these achievements, the challenges that remain are enormous. This is why Senegal decided to emphasize four main areas in its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for 2006-2010. These are: creating wealth for a pro-poor growth strategy; improving access to basic social services; protection from and prevention and management of the risks of natural disasters; and good governance and decentralized and participatory development.

In closing, I would like to join other delegations in emphasizing that there can be no miracle cure here. Far from a foregone conclusion, poverty is the result of man-made inequalities and injustices. It must and can be eradicated. In order to do so, we need to follow up our words with action. It is not too late to take action if tomorrow we do not want to carry the burden of responsibility of having failed to meet the MDGs deadline of 2015 on behalf of the thousands of women, children and others who live and suffer in want.

Let us act together, then, to meet the primary challenge of achieving the MDGs: the challenge of honouring the commitments undertaken as part of our partnerships.

Mr. Desta (Eritrea): Henry Ford, a great American industrialist and a name known to us all, once said, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success". The coming together of our leaders in September 2000, when they declared the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), was the beginning of a noble commitment to do good for human society. The subsequent years kept us together to make progress on our goals: the goal of halving poverty; achieving universal primary education; reducing the deaths of our children under five years of age and the maternal mortality of their mothers by two thirds; and reversing the spread of the killer HIV/AIDS and eliminating malaria and other diseases.

Have we made progress by keeping together in the past seven and a half years? That is a question that all of us must ponder. But the more important question to ponder at this mid-life crisis of the MDGs is the last part of Ford's wisdom: "Working together is success". That makes this debate and the current presidency of the General Assembly so important. I should commend the President for bringing us together to address the challenges and get back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015, as the theme of this debate states.

The MDGs should remain the priority of the United Nations and that of the international community's development agenda. The MDGs are the most unifying and cross-cutting goals in the United Nations system. I believe we can do it with renewed commitment and partnership at this midway point. The 2007 Millennium Development Goals Report gives us a sense of optimism by stating on page 4 that:

"The MDGs will be attained only if concerted additional action is taken immediately and sustained until 2015. All stakeholders need to fulfil, in their entirety, the commitments they made in the Millennium Declaration and subsequent pronouncements."

Goals are not predicted; they are promised. If we do not deliver on those promises, we would be terribly disappointing the people who are looking up to us, and we would be judged by history. Failure to achieve the MDGs will adversely affect the credibility of our multilateralism. The same report further states, on page 5, that:

"Success in achieving the MDGs in the poorest and most disadvantaged countries cannot be achieved by these countries alone. Developed countries need to deliver fully on long-standing commitments to achieve the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income by 2015."

My country, Eritrea, is committed, and is doing its best, to achieve the MDGs, some earlier than required and others at the appointed time, 2015. It has invested hundreds of millions of dollars, especially in infrastructure for food security, to make hunger history. It is encouraging to note, in its first national Millennium Development Report of November 2006, the executive summary of which has been circulated with my statement, that:

"Eritrea is on track to achieve the MDGs relating to gender equality in primary education, child health, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases, and access to safe water."

At independence in 1993, Eritrea inherited a devastated economy and infrastructure, a large exiled population and an empty treasury. The Government then began to rehabilitate and reconstruct the nation and the economy. Its efforts paid dividends. For the period from 1993 to 1997, the economy grew by 7.4 per cent; inflation was kept at below 5 per cent; and Eritrea had accumulated foreign reserves that covered seven months of imports. As Eritrea's economy was just moving towards a sustainable level of steady growth, the border war in 1998 and successive droughts during the past years prevented smooth development. Perhaps the single most important

constraint to its development today is the no-peace no-war status.

Despite those challenges, it is gratifying to witness that Eritrea is projected to achieve most of the relevant MDG targets by 2015. We realize, however, that this is no cause for celebration, for three reasons. First, Eritrea is off-track in two crucial areas: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; and achievement of universal primary education. Secondly, the general consensus is that the MDGs, even if they were to be fully achieved, represent only minimum benchmarks rather than the culmination of full development itself. Thirdly, the road map to 2015 is based on crucial assumptions, including the resolution of the no-peace no-war status; the absence of drought; robust performance of the economy; and the successful mobilization of the resources — both domestic and international — necessary for the achievement of the MDGs.

Achieving the MDGs requires human, material and financial investments in economic, social and physical infrastructure. An important part of the exercise is the additional cost assessment exercise: that it will cost Eritrea approximately \$1.47 billion over the period from 2004 to 2015, an average of some \$134 million a year, to achieve the MDGs. That cost is in addition to the core development expenditure that the Government of Eritrea allocates from its own resources and the contributions of its development partners.

In conclusion, it is this delegation's hope that Member States, United Nations agencies and the international community gathered here will work together, in true partnership, to make the MDGs a success. Then and only then will we be able to see accomplishments that we can all be proud of. Let us go to work and make it happen.

Mr. Khaleel (Maldives): At the outset, let me convey my delegation's sincere appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this important debate and for the leadership that he has been demonstrating.

The exceptional levels of interest, commitment and dedication on the part of the entire international community are slowly but surely starting to bear fruit. The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007 is a clear report card of the work that we have accomplished over the span of seven years. Much

indeed has been achieved, but much more needs to be done.

While the number of people living in extreme poverty may have declined, nearly half a billion people are still living in poverty below the line of less than \$1 a day. While progress has been recorded in school enrolment, nearly 72 million children are still deprived of primary education. While efforts to bridge the gender gap are finally taking hold in many countries, millions of women are still continuing to die in childbirth and are marginalized. While measures to control and reverse communicable diseases are starting to work in some regions, it is alarming that there are still an estimated 1.7 million new infections of HIV per year in Africa alone. And while conditions in sanitation may have improved in some countries and regions, we cannot ignore the fact that there are millions who do not have access to basic sanitation and safe drinking water.

Despite the setbacks that the Maldives suffered owing to the Asian tsunami in 2004, thanks to careful planning, prudent policies, strong leadership and the hard work of our people, together with the generous assistance and cooperation of our development partners, we are back on track to meet most of the MDG targets by 2015.

We have already achieved Goal 1, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and Goal 2, achieve universal primary education. Today, 98 per cent of our children are in school. We are also on track to achieve Goals 4, 5 and 6 — reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and combat communicable diseases, respectively. Over the past decade, the maternal mortality rate dropped from 258 to 69 per 100,000 live births, and child mortality decreased from 48 to 16 per 1,000 live births. While challenges remain, significant progress has also been achieved in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and concerted efforts are being made to meet the nutrition targets for children. The MDGs are fully integrated into our seventh national development plan.

Sustaining the remarkable progress that we have achieved is, however, proving to be a formidable challenge. As development assistance and favourable market access dwindle owing to our impending graduation from the group of least developed countries, and as global environmental degradation escalates, adapting to those new realities will not be easy for a

country with a fragile economy that depends solely on the sustainability of its environmental resources. Although the destruction caused by the tsunami may not be directly linked to the threats posed by global climate change, it certainly has given us a glimpse of the extent of the vulnerabilities that we face and of the serious effects that climate change and rising sea levels could bring to our shores.

The frequency and strength of the extreme weather patterns that we have recently been experiencing are slowly eating away at our islands. The surrounding ocean, which had sustained life on our islands for centuries, now seems more foe than friend. Frequent flooding due to storm surges and coastal erosion is now becoming a permanent feature on our islands, forcing us to divert our limited resources from strategic development to a cycle of destruction and reconstruction. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has projected a rise of 2 degrees Celsius in global temperature and a 90-centimetre rise in mean sea level by the end of the century. Not only would that threaten our development; it also would without a doubt kill our prized coral reefs, the very lifeblood of our economy, and even threaten the very existence of our island nation.

Therefore, in our view, achieving Goal 7 — ensure environmental sustainability — remains central to the success of our work. For us, climate change is not a future possibility; it is present, it is real, it is ongoing and it is directly linked to our development. It is also an issue of human security and survival.

We are therefore absolutely convinced that it is important for the international community to be conscious of the human dimensions of climate change as we continue our quest to find solutions. It was on the basis of that firm conviction and belief that we submitted a draft resolution at the recently concluded seventh session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The draft resolution, entitled “Climate change and human rights”, co-sponsored by more than 75 countries, is aimed simply at giving a human face to climate change. I should like to take this opportunity to formally thank all the sponsors of that important draft resolution and all those who supported us.

As we embark on the second half of the 15-year target period, let us learn from the past and prepare for the future. The door to achieving the goals that we have set for ourselves is still wide open. However, we

do not have the luxury of time, nor can we survive by speaking hollow words. What is needed now is swift and targeted practical action — action to fulfil the commitments that we have made at various summits and conferences to protect and preserve the global environment, to reduce and eliminate poverty and hunger and to achieve sustainable development.

Most important, we need to properly fund the various action programmes upon which we have agreed for the most vulnerable groups among us — the small island developing States, the least developed countries and the landlocked developing countries. The partnership envisaged in Goal 8 is the key. Indeed, we have the capacity and the resources to do this; all that we need is concerted political will on the part of all.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to thank the President for taking the initiative to hold a thematic debate of the General Assembly to discuss progress made in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda at the 88th meeting on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the 89th meeting on behalf of the Group of African States. We should like to make a few specific observations.

At the halfway point to the date set for achieving the MDGs, our thematic debate comes at a decisive stage in fulfilling the commitments made. Algeria, which has fully supported the MDGs, is well on the way to attaining most of the objectives set for 2015. Every effort has been made to combat poverty, illiteracy, hunger, inequalities between the sexes, child and maternal mortality and environmental degradation. Despite the progress made in several areas by developing countries, achievements remain mixed, since several countries where extreme poverty prevails among large sectors of the population, particularly in Africa, are not firmly on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

The MDGs offer a distinct opportunity to developing countries, the international community and the United Nations to improve the effectiveness of development actors. Implementing the MDGs also provides an opportunity to give effect to the principle of shared responsibility and obligations. That principle is at the heart of the MDGs and must be given effect

through concrete measures, principally in the area of financing for development.

It is true that progress has been made at the global level with regard to some development objectives, particularly those related to the fight against poverty. That progress, which has been made essentially through national efforts, should be supported with concrete actions by the international community.

The examples of success in Africa and in other regions encourage us to undertake robust efforts to implement the commitments made at the national and international levels, particularly by supporting national policies and increasing investment. We reaffirm the importance of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a framework for development. The implementation of NEPAD is undoubtedly contributing to the achievement of the MDGs. Indeed, it should be among the priorities of United Nations development programmes.

The international community should redouble its efforts to follow up on the commitments made, in order to support development. To that end, we must make more rapid progress in achieving the MDGs, by linking initiatives aimed at achieving the Goals to national development strategies. It is also important to create a national and international environment conducive to economic growth, to the strengthening of human development and to an increase in development assistance.

While it is widely acknowledged that it is primarily up to the developing countries themselves to achieve the MDGs, it remains no less true that the international community has a very important role to play in the implementation of the MDGs, particularly

by reducing the pitfalls and the impact of systemic asymmetries. That can be done by resolutely finalizing and implementing a comprehensive global partnership for development in order to avoid the drawbacks inherent in a fragmentary approach.

We should draw every possible lesson to ensure the viability of the MDGs, because we are convinced that success in their implementation will depend not only on national and international contributions, but also, and in large part, on coordination among local, national and international actors. The MDGs should not be limited to technical assistance, but should also emphasize indicators of long-term development.

Most of the MDGs can be achieved if we redouble our efforts and adopt a holistic and non-selective approach. To that end, to consolidate the progress and accomplishments in achieving the Goals, the same attention should be given to establishing an international partnership for development.

Achieving the MDGs is still possible with a redoubling of efforts and with support from the international community so that we can take advantage of new opportunities, in close coordination with international institutions responsible for development and in partnership with the private sector and civil society. We hope that our debate will lead to renewed national and international efforts to better meet needs so that we can achieve the MDGs and to emphasize the pertinence of international support for development.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this morning's meeting. We will hear the remaining speakers this afternoon, beginning at 3 o'clock.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.