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MDGs SLIPPING AWAY: HAVE OUR LEADERS UNDER-PERFORMED?

Since the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched in September 2000 at the Millennium Summit (attended by various heads of state and prominent business leaders), one pressing question has to be asked regarding the reasons why -- ten years later -- the MDGs are under threat of not being universally achieved by 2015? Surely, with the political will between 189 nations and 147 heads of state, the message should have been significantly different? Was the political will there in the first place? Maybe not, and in the meantime many developing nations have arguably regressed as the leaders of various countries have continued their political debates, and made poor excuses for not meeting the MDG targets.

In many instances, the MDG targets which give rise to critical concern -- and being far behind schedule -- most notably in sub-Saharan Africa are; poverty and hunger, increasing access to education, boosting maternal health and combating disease. At the recent meeting held in New York in September 2010, alongside the General Assembly of the United Nations, the MDG Summit reported that circa 32% of Africans are still undernourished and that this figure has hardly changed since 1990. This in spite of the lofty discussions by world leaders who appear not to have the same sense of urgency as that of the people they are meant to be protecting. Whilst over 900 million people currently suffer worldwide from chronic hunger, child mortality under the age of five years shows that one in seven children are still dying. How much more must be said in order that the politicians and other leaders *understand* that action must be taken now. Africa still has one of the highest mortality rates for women in childbirth and measures 900 deaths per 100,000 births (2005). This figure has only marginally improved since 1990 when the death rate was 920 per 100,000 births.

According to The Globe & Mail, areas where no progress has been made in Africa to reach the MDGs by 2015 include the issues of productive and decent employment, reducing maternal mortality by three quarters and the halting and reversing of tuberculosis.

Indeed, the call for *yet a further* and special MDG Summit Assessment of what our leaders should have done by 2013, is absolutely critical. However, one needs to question whether this action is not 'a little, too late' and whether it is not prudent to have more regular reviews between now and 2013, and then again prior to the MDG deadline of 2015?

It appears that the world recession (and locally the energy crisis) has been used by politicians and leaders for non-performance against the MDGs. Surely if finances (among other reasons) were the problem, why were bailout packages to commercial risk taking businesses seen as appropriate and more important of the continued funding of genuine development opportunities? Why are business and political leaders still rewarded for failure? Why do government continue to prop up and protect trade barriers resulting in inefficient and ineffective use of resources. In this light, there seems to be no attached accountability, neither moral consciousness against many of the goals found within the MDGs? When will the nonchalant and protective attitudes and behaviour change - and will the change which is needed to get the MDGs on track be delayed further whilst millions of people suffer at the expense of the apathy found within the few elite and so-called leaders?

We have elected this leadership to take our country into the future and have entrusted them to ensure the future of generations to come. Indeed, leaders across the world need to act with haste to ensure that they have fulfilled their fiduciary obligations and most basic function to serve and protect the poor and vulnerable. Ironically, many leaders talk with a 'head-knowledge' of the wide scale destruction which is ravaging millions of people's lives and their communities. Yet there is seemingly little, if any, connection to the *actual* people and their problems. If there were, why then don't we see and hear from the people themselves, who suffer this inhumane plight, speaking from the MDG podiums so that the leaders can shamefully explain their non-performance?

Of course, notably missing is not only the people who are the subject of the abject living conditions that necessitated the MDGs in the first place; but also the fact that the MDGs do not address the world's population growth rates or access to family planning. Currently, there is no focus being placed on this area and at the current trends of increasing population in developing countries, the existing MDG challenges can only worsen and derailment is quite imminent given the status quo. Whilst many African and Asian countries have high population growth rates of circa 4% to 5% per annum (as compared to their first world counterparts at circa 1.10%), it is clear that the urgency to get the MDGs back on track is critical in order that the developing countries can become less dependant on developed countries.

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According to the UN's Population Division, in early 2010 it was estimated that Asia accounts for over 60% of the world's population, while Africa is representative of some 14% of the total. Understandably, where there are exceptional population growth rates, there is proportionally a strain on the country's infrastructure, health and educational resources – worse so in under-developed regions where the infrastructure is weak or the resources are scarce. Where the population growth rates exceed 3% p.a., this means that the total number of people is doubling every 20 years or so. In March 2010, the UN Human Settlements Programme revealed that providing these extra people with housing, water, electricity, sewerage, hospitals and schools would be a major challenge. Moreover, the programme showed that 227 million people had escaped the slums in the last 10 years, however that the people subject to this lifestyle, had increased from 776.7m to 827.6m. This growth is mostly due to an increasing population.

In conclusion, there *is* cause for great concern; leaders must be held accountable for their tardiness to perform and act hastily to prevent what may become the biggest collective humanitarian disaster in the history of mankind. The Globe & Mail reports that there are almost 1,000 women per 100,000 dying in childbirth each year and over a billion people starving. We need leaders who are committed to action in order to save the MDGs, and positively cause the change needed avoid certain disaster - and words alone are not sufficient.

For the success of the MDGs, countries and their leaders must all work together, which is epitomised in the last of the eight MDGs and encompasses a "global partnership for development". The eighth goal includes four specific targets, these being:

1. an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system
2. specific attention to the needs of the least developed countries
3. assistance for landlocked developed countries, and
4. national and international measures to deal with developing countries' debt problems.

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About CGF Research Institute (Pty) Ltd

CGF specialises in conducting desktop research on Governance, Risk and Compliance (GRC) related topics. The company has developed numerous products that cover GRC reports designed to create a high-level awareness and understanding of issues impacting a CEO through to all employees of the organisation.

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