

# THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR IDLENESS - THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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## Introduction

- "*There is no excuse for idleness*". That's my title today. By the time I stop talking about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), I hope you will agree with me.
- The British Embassy opened a photographic exhibition last week called "*Eight*". Do see it if you can, – either at the Embassy or when it transfers to the Budapest International Business School next week. The photographs, aside from being works of art, are records of individuals whose lives would be transformed by fulfilment of the MDGs. The photographer, Nick Danziger, came to Budapest last week to give a talk at the opening of the Exhibition about the stories behind the photographs.
- Nick has photographed people around the world living in appalling conditions, girls selling their bodies to go to school, children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, children living on the streets. The message his work gives us is that the MDGs are about ordinary people – people like us who just happen to have been born somewhere else – and their lives and hopes.
- I was particularly struck by one photograph of a boy in Niger called Abbas. Aged 15, he has already been working down a gold mine for 3 years – from 6am to 7pm, 363 days a year – he gets two days off. Although his family lives only 12km away, Abbas has only seen his father only once since he started work. He works in dark, cramped conditions with no safety measures. Abbas was sent to the mine to earn money for his family but has never earned enough to send anything home. He mines for gold, but does not know what it looks like. Last year his boss was killed because he fell down the 22m hole leading to the mineshaft. Abbas has no prospect of change – no future in front of him apart from this monotonous and dangerous existence.
- The other messages that I hope you will take away with you today are that the MDGs affect Hungary and that every individual can do something to help. We

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recently sent some journalists from HVG and Népszabadság to Tanzania, in part because it's too easy for all of us in Europe just to focus on the problems, and we wanted them to see projects that are having a visible and positive effect too. They met a Hungarian woman there working for Tanzanian Educational Network as a Policy Officer through an organization called Voluntary Service Overseas. The articles they wrote as a result are on the British Embassy website, for those of you that are interested. I also recently read an interesting article in Népszabadság, about another Hungarian woman working on development in Uganda. It's very encouraging to hear about young people like this volunteering to work in the developing world and to hear about Hungarian NGOs' projects there.

- Let me start on the mechanics – what the MDGs are and progress towards reaching them, say a little about UK development policy and the "*Call to Action*", and end on world trade and the impact of the financial crisis. I am happy to take questions after Professor Simai has spoken.
- So let me start with the MDGs themselves. What are they? Some of you will know already, but please bear with me.

## 1. What are the MDGs?

- The eight MDGs were adopted by 189 nations in September 2000. They represent a shared world vision to reduce world poverty. The overarching goal is to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015.
- Most of the MDG targets were not new. They were first set out in international conferences and summits held in the 1990s and brought together as the International Development Goals. So they have been around for some time. In September 2000 UN member states adopted the Millennium Declaration and the goals were accepted as part of a road map for making this reality and rechristened the MDGs.
- All leading relevant international organisations – over 20 of them – are committed to implementing the MDGs.
- The Eight goals are:
  - i. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
  - ii. Achieve universal primary education
  - iii. Promote gender equality and empower women

- iv. Reduce child mortality
  - v. Improve maternal health
  - vi. Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other major diseases
  - vii. Ensure environmental sustainability
  - viii. Develop a global partnership for development
- Each of the goals – all of which deal with basic human rights to shelter life, health, food, etc. – is underpinned by specific targets and measurable indicators.

## 2. Tracking the MDGs, progress towards reaching them, what needs to be done.

- Since 2000, real progress in implementing the MDGs has been seen: for example there are now 41 million more children in school, 3 million more children are surviving childhood each year, and 2 million more people are receiving treatment for AIDS. But detailed analysis of the targets and indicators shows that there is much more to be done.
- For those of you that are interested in looking at this in further detail, there are several websites that track progress towards the MDGs. I would refer you in particular to relevant work by the World Bank, UNDP, the European Commission and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Links to all of these can be found via the British Embassy website.
- UN assessments show the MDG targets as either "*on target*", "*on track*" or "*lagging*". The only target to merit an assessment of "*on target*" is "*to halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day*" (and sub-Saharan Africa is not expected to meet even this target). Two others "*To reduce the under-5 mortality rate by 2/3 between 1990 and 2015*", and "*by 2015 to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water*" are both assessed as "*on track*". All other targets – a lot – are "*lagging*".
- Rates of progress are not evenly spread geographically. Sub-Saharan Africa has failed to make sufficient progress towards any of the MDGs. Progress towards the MDGs in Asia has been more mixed, with successes in reducing poverty, but remaining challenges in reducing maternal mortality, combating HIV/AIDS and ensuring environmental sustainability.
- In Latin America, the Caribbean and Central Asia, progress towards reducing poverty by half has been slow and the picture is mixed on other targets. For

example in Latin America, HIV rates have remained stable, but are growing in Ukraine, Russia, Central Asia and parts of the Caribbean.

### 3. UK development policy

- Let me turn to British development policy. In 1997 the UK government set up a Ministry to deal with development policy – the Department for International Development. (Before 1997 development policy was carried out by an agency under the Foreign Ministry). The Ministry now employs 2,500 people, half of whom work overseas. Douglas Alexander is the Secretary of State – the main Minister – for International Development and a member of the Cabinet. It means development policy is not determined by the foreign policy, though the two are – hopefully – consistent.
- DFID's overall aim is to reduce poverty. Everything they do is guided by the MDGs. DFID works through country programmes but around two-fifths of its money is spent through international institutions such as the UN.
- Douglas Alexander has set out DFID's main priorities for achieving the MDGs as being encouraging growth; ensuring peace and security; combatting climate change; and bringing about change in the international system.
- Between Financial Years 2007/08 and 2010/11 DFID's aid programme will increase by an average of 11% in real terms. This will mean that the UK is on track to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2013 (2 years ahead of the EU's target).
- I want to break off at this point to give you a few concrete examples of DFID's work. I think it's important in the midst of all these facts and figures to keep things real and remember that we are talking about actual people.
- Sometimes a relatively small change can make a huge difference. In primary schools in the northern Indian State of Uttar Pradesh, serving a hot cooked midday meal has transformed attendance. As part of a major government initiative, supported by DFID, the meal not only gives students an incentive to stay at school but for many it will be the only meal they get all day. It has made a significant difference in drawing in girls. As one teacher put it, since there is no additional expenditure on food and their daughters are assured of at least one meal per day, parents are willing to send them to school. As one parent put it "*their health has improved and so has their motivation. At least now they will not remain illiterate like me.*"

- HIV–AIDS has robbed many children of their future. In Zimbabwe 13 year old Life Mbedzi, had to drop out of school at 9 when his parents died from AIDS–related illnesses. He has no money for lunch, but at least a DFID programme has enabled him to return to school.
- In southern India, the DFID–supported "*Education for All*" programme has ensured that hundreds of poorly paid child workers have been able to return to school. Rajesh was orphaned at the age of 10. His uncle took him in but he had to leave school and find a job to earn his keep. "*Education for All*" has provided him with food, clothes and a bed to sleep in. Rajesh is now on a par, academically, with children his own age and has the prospect of educating himself out of the poverty trap.
- Ethiopia has been hit hard this year by a combination of failed rains and rising food prices. In the worst–hit parts of the country people are starving. This summer Nick Danziger, the photographer I mentioned earlier, was commissioned by the British NGO Oxfam to take a series of photographs of them. The results are harrowing, very difficult to look at. But some Ethiopians have been luckier. A DFID–funded programme has provided food and money to some of those at risk in exchange for work in improving public facilities. So communities benefit from better roads and water points, while individuals are able to secure themselves against famine. An example is Aster Kurma, who lives with her husband and 8 children 350km south of the capital Addis Ababa. She works hard on soil conservation and tree planting projects, with the aim of turning parched land into lush green plots. Payment comes in food or money. Aster prefers to be paid in food because its value is more reliable. She says her family now have 2 meals a day.

#### 4. Call to Action

- Back the MDGs – as I indicated, some progress but overall "*lagging*". In his first speech to the UN in July 2007, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, speaking alongside the UN Secretary–General, Ban Ki–Moon launched an international campaign – the Call to Action – to accelerate progress on the MDGs. He called on world leaders, the private sector and civil society to join this effort. (Hungary signed up to the "*Call to Action*" in summer 2008.)
- Ban Ki–Moon has called 2008 a "*critical year for progress..... Let 2008*" – he said, "*be the year of the bottom billion*".
- On 6 May the Business Call to Action (BCA) was launched with an event in London, bringing together business leaders to showcase initiatives to support growth in poor countries. The aim of the BCA is not philanthropy, simply

encouraging businessmen to give money, but to encourage the private sector to implement concrete initiatives that apply their core business skills and expertise to enhance growth and wealth creation to help meet the MDGs.

- The private sector has the technology, skills and expertise for wealth and job creation that, if properly mobilised, will help meet the MDGs. It is in their best business interest to help poor countries develop to create businesses and jobs in the new economies and ensure stability and growth.
- September 25 saw the UN Secretary General's High Level Event in New York, which brought together a wide coalition of governments, civil society, businessmen, faith leaders, city leaders, NGOs and celebrities to discuss ways of taking forward work in various sectors. The event generated new commitments totalling \$16 billion. Again, you can access the details via our website. Bob Geldof said, "*it was a moment of great civilisation when the Millennium Goals were set. To fail would be a great failure of our civilisation. The steps made this week may seem unspectacular, but they did inject much needed new urgency into this bold project. Somebody's life just got better.*"
- The next major international meeting will be the *Doha Financing for Development conference*, starting on 29 November, where donors and developing countries will discuss next steps. There are also mechanisms in place to take forward work on particular sectors e.g. the Fast Track initiative on Education; health plans; and various food security meetings are planned for later this year.
- The UK believes strongly that we must not let the momentum generated by these events drop off. We want to see continued improvement of international tracking of and analysis of the MDGs and ensure that the commitments made at the UN High Level Event are delivered. With this in mind the UK also supports the Secretary-General's proposal for a 2010 MDG Review Summit.

## **5. WTO talks**

- What about the link with trade? In contrast to the momentum of development generated by the High Level Event, the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Doha Development Agenda failed to make any significant progress this year.
- Trade is an integral part of development policy. There are clear linkages between trade, development and poverty reduction. Evidence shows clearly that trade liberalisation and openness has a beneficial impact on economic growth. So no surprise that countries which have seized the opportunity offered

by more open world markets to increase exports and attract inward investment have made the greatest strides in reducing poverty.

- The share of the poorest countries in global trade has declined from 0.8% in 1980 to 0.4% today. So to make real progress in reducing extreme poverty, those poorest countries need to be drawn into the global economy and increase their access to modern knowledge and technology.
- The UK remains strongly committed to the multilateral trade system and to preserving the strength and openness of world trade. A successful conclusion to the Doha Development Agenda remains our main current trade policy priority.

## **6. The impact of the financial crisis**

- The other recent major issue inevitably affecting development issues has been the financial crisis. This has left almost no country unaffected but the poorest countries will be hardest hit. We estimate that 100m more people were pushed into poverty this year and 850m cannot afford enough to eat as a result of the high oil and food prices. Falls in oil prices will take a long time to filter through to these people. And reductions in global access to credit are likely to have a direct effect on local industries and firms. Evidence suggests that while African Banks are not vulnerable to contagion from Wall Street, they are vulnerable to local economic downturn.
- Economic downturn in Europe and the USA will reduce demand for imported goods and services, and for foreign direct investment. Tourism is also likely to suffer. And decreased remittance flows from workers in developed countries to families at home (and the return of some migrants if jobs are not available at all) will only make things worse. The Mexican Central Bank for example reported a 12% yearly fall in remittances in August.
- As a result of all this, the IMF has identified 22 highly vulnerable countries, 8 of which also face debt sustainability issues.
- In times of crisis it is tempting for countries to become inward looking, focusing on domestic priorities and problems. However the urgency to act to achieve stability and prosperity for all has only increased.
- Following the recession of the early 1990s many donor governments let aid efforts decline, which impacted very negatively on developing countries in

areas such as agricultural production, infrastructure, social welfare and political stability. We must not make this mistake again.

- When the domestic revenues of developing countries are decreasing; there are limited options for increasing taxation; and food and energy prices are biting hard, there is a risk that countries will try to borrow to meet their needs or to sell off national assets. This risk is compounded if we cut the amount of aid we have promised.
- There is a clear moral case for helping those most badly affected by the financial crisis. But ensuring stability is also in our own interests. We know that poor countries face heightened possibilities of conflict and insecurity in times of economic and social stress. The cost to the international community of failing to respond to conflict or rebuilding failed states is far greater than trying to ensure economic stability by maintaining current aid flows. And we need to involve developing countries in dealing with global problems.
- **As PM Gordon Brown, put it at the UN High–Level Event on the MDGs, in September:**

*“Some say this time of financial turbulence is the time to put our ambitions on hold, to cut back or postpone the dream of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, but this would be the worst time to turn back.*

*Every global problem we have requires global solutions, involving all the continents of the world. We cannot solve the food shortages that face many continents without involving Africa and developing countries. We cannot solve climate change without involving Africa and developing countries. We cannot solve the pressure on resources and energy without involving Africa and the developing countries. And Africa and other developing countries are not the problem – they are part of the very solution to today's problem”.*

- The British Government has made clear that the UK's pre–existing aid commitments will be honoured and we continue to encourage other donor governments to deliver on their commitments and ensuring that the world's richest countries – of which Hungary is one, although it may feel under pressure now – do not renege on their promises to the world's poorest. We remain committed to accelerating progress towards meeting the MDGs and fighting global poverty.
- The Doha meeting in November will bring together donors and developing countries and the meeting needs to send a strong message on development financing in light of the current climate. The UK wants to see countries reaffirm global commitments to development and acknowledge the need to maintain aid levels; increase efforts to improve aid effectiveness; and find

appropriate ways to support developing countries in addressing new challenges such as climate financing.

- The UK also believes that the current financial situation increases the case for looking again at the rules for a globally integrated financial sector and for reform of the international system as a whole. This is too big a topic for me to venture onto today. If you are interested, there are materials on the Embassy website setting out my government's position on this.

## **7. Why do the MDGs matter to the EU and Hungary?**

- Let me end by saying something about why the MDGs should matter to the EU and Hungary. The fact is that the impact of poverty is not confined to geographically-distant countries. It is knocking on our front door already.
- Poverty in the developing world leads directly to economic migration – legal and illegal – into Europe as people seek better lives and opportunities. It undermines democratic systems leading to failed states, conflict and radicalisation, which in turn fuels terrorism.
- Unemployment and no prospect of securing a reliable legitimate income leads to increased criminal activity – the flourishing international drugs trade is one symptom of this.
- Businesses cannot operate in countries where the infrastructure is poor, the potential workforce malnourished, there are few consumers and there is no effective rule of law. So large parts of the world cannot develop their way out of poverty and potential markets are limited. Hungary does not have many markets in the developing world. But Hungary's trade partners do. So expect an indirect economic impact.
- Greenhouse gas emissions do not respect national boundaries, nor do international diseases.
- If we are to solve these and other global problems, and do so in a sustainable way, we need to act to make ordinary people's lives in the developing world prosperous, peaceful and stable.
- Hungary is an EU partner, member of the UN and member of the OECD; it supports the MDGs and has signed up to the "*Call to Action*". Hungary is a relatively developed and wealthy country. For all these reasons it has an important role to play and commitments to uphold.

- Hungary is also the front line of the Schengen region and therefore also in the front line for many of the problems I have mentioned above.
- With its work in its Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Baghlan Province in Afghanistan which has involved your military contingent there in infrastructure projects, and work on education and primary health care, the Hungarian government has shown that it can make a good and effective contribution to development outside of its neighbourhood.
- And, as the "*Call to Action*" states, it's not just about what governments do. Hungary and Hungarians have a fantastic contribution to make. The Hungarian Association of NGO's for Development and Humanitarian Aid (HAND) is an association of NGOs working on development issues with the support of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Members include the Hungarian Inter-Church Association, whose work covers community-based reconstruction programmes in Sri Lanka and Thailand; social development programmes aimed at assisting the disabled in Uzbekistan; and the Foundation for Africa, which deals with educational, social and medical issues. Its work includes supporting a school and orphanage in the Congo.
- Individuals may feel powerless to influence world events. But in reality all of us can make a personal commitment and have an effect. We cannot all work as volunteers in Africa but we make a difference by finding out more and becoming better informed; by supporting the work of NGOs; by buying fairly traded goods; by doing what we can to go "*Green*" and protect the environment; and by asking relevant questions and putting pressure on our governments to honour their commitments and do more.

It's a small world these days and no country can live in isolation. We need to work together so that for example a child does not die of poverty every 3 seconds somewhere in the world. That's the situation now. It's intolerable.