

LEGISLATIVE SECTOR POLICY SUPPORT PROGRAMME

2011 CONSULTATIVE SEMINAR

16 MARCH 2011: 09:15-09:30 – Ambassador Roeland van de Geer

TOPIC: MESSAGE FROM THE EU – SUPPORTING THE SA LEGISLATIVE SECTOR IN ENSURING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MDG GOALS

Theme of the Message: Parliaments are essential partners in the development process. It is their responsibility as oversight bodies to hold governments to account for their development commitments both nationally and internationally. It is the role of Parliaments to ensure that commitments such as the MDGs are reflected in national plans and policies, including national budgets.

PART 1: MDGs INTERNATIONALLY

- **With less than 5 year remaining before 2015, the challenge to achieve the MDGs is huge. Though progress has been made, it is uneven, and without a major push forward, many of the MDG targets are likely to be missed in most regions. Old and new challenges threaten to further slow progress in some areas or even undo successes achieved so far¹.**

A number of countries have achieved major successes in combating extreme poverty and hunger, improving school enrolment and child health, expanding access to clean water and access to HIV treatment and controlling malaria, tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases. This has happened in some of the poorest countries, demonstrating that the Millennium Development Goals are indeed achievable with the right policies, adequate levels of investment, and international support².

Encouraging progress has been achieved. Considering their historical experience, some poor countries and even whole regions have made remarkable progress. For example, sub-Saharan Africa has made huge improvements in child health and in primary school enrolment over the past two decades. Between 1999 and 2004, sub-Saharan Africa achieved one of the largest ever reductions in deaths from measles worldwide. Overall, 120 million people moved out of poverty between 2000 and 2005, which corresponds to an annual drop of 2.4%, but there is no time for complacency. The following figures emphasise the challenge:

¹ UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2010. 15 June 2010

² Source: Keeping the promise: a forward-looking review to promote an agreed action agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Report of the Secretary-General. 12 February 2010

- The World Bank estimates that the financial and economic crisis could have pushed around 55 million more people into extreme poverty in 2009, and some 64 million people by the end of 2010
- In 2009, the number of undernourished persons could have topped the 1 billion mark, according to FAO estimates
- Overall, the pace of progress is insufficient to ensure that, by 2015, all girls and boys complete a full course of primary schooling. Large gaps remain in access to education and completion rates, with significant inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, income, language or disabilities. Overall, 69 million children of primary school age were not in school in 2008
- Regarding maternal mortality, although some progress has been made, the rate of reduction is still well short of the 5.5 per cent annual decline needed to meet the MDG target. In Southern Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa, less than half the women giving birth in these regions are attended by skilled health personnel
- Despite the overall decrease in the number of new infections, the total number of people living with HIV worldwide continues to grow (which is partly due to increased survival because of increased coverage with anti-retroviral treatment). Sub-Saharan Africa remains the worst affected region, accounting for 72 % of all new HIV infections in 2008.
- An estimated 2.6 billion people remained without improved sanitation in 2008. At current trends, the world will miss the target by 2015. The lowest sanitation coverage is found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where only 31 % of the population has improved sanitation.

Emerging Issues and Challenges that remain:

- Climate change
- Current crises: finance, the economy and food security
- Intensifying prevention of violence and responses to humanitarian crises
- Addressing the special needs of the most vulnerable

PART 2: EU POSITION & CONTRIBUTION TO MDGs

• THE EU AND MDGs

The High-Level Summit on MDGs in New York in September 2010 confirmed the world's ambition to fight against poverty. It demonstrated that the MDGs are still high on the political agenda, with some 110 Heads of State or Government attending the summit. The European Union was instrumental in making this event a success by shaping and voicing a strong common approach among our 27 Member States. The European Parliament has also played an important role in preparing for, participating in and exercising oversight regarding spending on and achieving MDG targets.

The fight against poverty is high on the agenda in the European Union. It is a central objective of the European Union development policy, as stated in the Lisbon Treaty, and it is also

something that European citizens firmly support, which is equally important.³ It is now essential to make optimal use of the renewed global commitment to the MDGs and to implement what has been agreed. Five years away from the agreed 2015 deadline, the EU remains convinced that all the MDGs are attainable with adequate political will, policy reforms and financial resources/investments.

EU action has already demonstrated tangible results: 9 million children have been enrolled in primary education; more than 31 million households have been connected to improved drinking water; 9.3 million connections to sanitation facilities have been achieved; 10.8 million consultations in reproductive health have taken place; 24 million people have been helped through social transfers related to food security.

However, to reach the MDGs by 2015, EU development spending and policies have to be refocused to increase the impact of EU programmes on the achievement of the MDGs. The Commission recently launched a number of initiatives, including a Green paper on "EU development policy in support of inclusive growth and sustainable development". (The EU Delegation in Pretoria has consulted with the South African Government and representatives of civil society, on this paper at the end of 2010). Another initiative is a Communication on the consolidation of EU-Africa relations, and a green paper on budget support. In addition, and very concretely, the EU has decided to launch a €1 billion dedicated EU-MDG initiative – as stated previously.

During 2010, Europe's leaders helped make the MDGs stronger by agreeing on an ambitious plan and a set of actions. The plan prioritises action on the goals on which least progress has been made and in those regions and countries, that are lagging furthest behind, including those experiencing conflict and fragility. The plan also confirms development partners' commitment to meeting the 0.7% GNI target by 2050, despite the difficult economic and financial context. The EU agreed on a series of concrete actions aiming at: increasing ownership by developing countries; focusing efforts; improving the impact and coherence of policies; mobilising more and predictable financing for development; and making more effective use of development resources.

As part of future EU efforts on the MDGs, the Commission has set up the €1 billion "MDG Initiative," designed to spur the policy dialogue on MDGs with the ACP countries and to increase impact and boost tangible progress on the most-off track MDG targets, taking into account national performance and needs, as well as existing policies and capacities. The EU has also renewed its commitment by adopting an ambitious 12-point Action Plan to support the MDGs.

Development Aid and MDGs

We know that aid alone will not be sufficient to attain the MDGs, particularly the goal relating to poverty eradication. To meet the goals, it is also of paramount importance that we are more creative in enhancing the impact of our aid, in promoting more sustainable and more inclusive growth, and in mobilising other and additional sources of finance for development. Equally important are the quality and effectiveness of aid, including through more

³ Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, reported to the European Parliament on the challenge of poverty and development policy, October 2010.

transparency and accountability, as well as ensuring that non-aid policies are supportive of the MDGs.

Development aid must be conceived as a catalyst, not as a cure. No country has ever been transformed by aid alone. Sustainable progress depends primarily on developing a country's capacity to generate inclusive and sustainable growth. Development can only come from within developing countries, not from outside, so it is on this 'within' that development efforts must be focused. In the end, this is what the principle of 'ownership' means.

PART 3: SA AND MDGs

• SA ACHIEVEMENT ON MDGS

Overall SA has shown mixed progress in its achievement of MDG targets, as evidenced by the latest MDG country report presented by SA at the September 2010 MDG summit in New-York. In many instances, SA has fixed for in itself "domestic targets" slightly different from the MDG ones, but said to be more adapted to the SA context. SA's latest reporting exercise has been characterised by a wide and inclusive consultation process, where civil society organisations (very active in SA) have fully participated. For the first time, national CSOs have not presented to the UN an "alternative" report on SA but have endorsed the national one.

Poverty reduction (MDG1) and education (MDG2) are areas where SA has shown most compelling progress, while progress on Health/HIV (MDG 4,5,6) is still very much lagging behind, mainly due to the difficulty to reverse the spread of the HIV epidemic. Progress on gender equality (MDG3) is satisfactory.

South Africa has "domesticated" the MDGs, by incorporating these into the Government's medium term policy and strategy to halve poverty and unemployment, and reduce inequality. The EU provides development assistance in many socio-economic sectors in South Africa, thereby supporting the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) for 2009-2014 and the Outcomes Approach of Government. In this way, the Government's development outcomes and MDGs are supported.

PART 4 - ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS

Parliaments have a crucial role to play in fulfilling the MDGs. As the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted in an address to the 122nd IPU Assembly (Bangkok, April 2010), "Parliaments provide the enabling national legislative framework for achieving the MDGs and are at the forefront of fighting for improved livelihoods and access to basic services."

The oversight, legislative and budgetary functions that are the exclusive preserve of Parliament find a strong and clear application here. Parliaments must hold governments to account for their MDG commitments by monitoring what the executive does, or fails to do, ensuring that adequate funding is mobilized, and listening to citizens to make sure that their concerns are fairly reflected in government policies.

Indeed, as the elected representatives of the people, parliamentarians provide a link between the electorate and the government. They are a conduit for new ideas and approaches learned through direct contact with constituents. In their oversight and legislative capacity, parliamentarians can help amend or introduce legislation that may also produce change in both policy and in the general political culture. In short, parliamentarians have a special responsibility to be attuned to initiatives such as the MDGs and to develop a transformational process in its own right.

The 2006 IPU resolution on the role of parliaments in overseeing the achievement of the MDGs is critical: It calls for parliamentary oversight of government action and for more direct involvement of parliaments in the preparation and implementation of development strategies, including through reports to monitor progress in the achievement of the MDGs and other development goals. Parliamentary involvement in development plans, commonly driven by the executive with donor support, is crucial to national ownership. In this resolution as in many others, parliaments reiterate the importance of good governance as an underlying condition of development and call for more capacity building and resources to strengthen their role.

Parliamentarians are particularly concerned with official development assistance (ODA), debt relief and trade reforms as means of creating resources for development (MDG 8). This is reflected in several resolutions. The 2008 resolution on parliamentary oversight of foreign aid is a milestone that provides important guidance to parliaments on what they can do to improve the effectiveness of aid while stressing that aid commitments should be scaled up. It provides important insight into the interlinkages between aid and development policy, showing how a better aid architecture can also help improve the way development policies are formulated and implemented.⁴

PART FIVE: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND MESSAGE

- **Development is about more than just reaching the MDGs, rather it should be "MDG Plus".**
- **The MDGs do not cover all critical developmental aspects, for example: infrastructure, energy and quality of education, and access to land.**
- **South Africa has set an example by domesticating MDGs into its national development goals and policies with a developmental focus, which is broader than the 8 MDGs.**
- **A critical aspect in this picture is the importance of good governance. The recent developments in North Africa and the Middle East demonstrate that development policies fail without the appropriate governance framework. In this regard, the role of the Executive is critical, but so is the role of the Legislatures. It is the responsibility of Parliaments to ensure that the development goals of a country (be it**

⁴ 3rd WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT United Nations, Geneva, 19-21 July 2010

MDGs or otherwise) are reflected in the national policies and budgets. Oversight is critical in this process. The executive must be held to account by the Legislatures to ensure delivery on development policies and targets.

- **It is therefore commendable that the South African Legislative Sector has taken the initiative to arrange this consultative seminar with participants from Government and civil society and sharing this experience with other Parliaments and parliamentary bodies.**
- **The EU is very supportive of this initiative to strengthen the Legislative Sector's capacity to engage on the issues of development and oversight. The EU has been a long-standing partner of the South African parliament and provincial Legislatures, currently collaborating in a third programme with the sector through the Legislative Sector Policy Support Programme. This event is yet another example of how the sector is moving forward, consolidating the sector approach, and strengthening its oversight responsibility.**