



WORLD POVERTY DAY COMMEMORATION
MATSANJENI INKHUNDLA : 17th October 2009

Remarks by the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Musinga T. Bandora

Your Excellency Prime Minister Dr Sibusiso Dlamini

Royal Highnesses, Chiefs

Honorable Cabinet Ministers

Regional Administrators

Honorable members of both Houses of Parliament

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we stand together for action on the Millennium Development Goals, we recall that in 2000, 189 countries including, Swaziland pledged to take action to end extreme poverty and to stand up against injustice and inequality. Today we join more than 100 million other citizens standing up around the world to reiterate that commitment.

I wish, on behalf of the UN and other international partners, to commend the government for leading the week-long activities at Mhlangatane, Bulunga, Lomahasha Tinkhundla and here in Matsanjeni- mobilizing national awareness for action to meet the national target of ending poverty by 2022.

Indeed the challenge of meeting MDGs in the country is still enormous. The situation in the country remains precarious as poverty rates-currently estimated at about 69%, show no sign of abatement. For meeting the country's target of halving poverty by 2015 and ending it by 2022, the challenge will be to address some of the structural issues including rural-urban, gender-based, inter-regional and personal income inequalities.

Although the country has made laudable progress towards promoting gender equality, much remains to be done. There remains substantial gender difference in rates of poverty and HIV infection, with women being the most adversely affected.

The HIV prevalence rate among the productive population of between 15-49 years of age, in 1992 was estimated at 3.9%, and according to the Demographic Health Survey for 2007 it is now at 26%, with women indicating a higher prevalence at all levels. HIV infection and the emergence of resistant strains of TB are the single biggest factor responsible for the sharp decline in human development indicators that the country has witnessed since the 1990s.

Although access to primary education has been revived through the 'education for all' and OVC grants initiatives, many children are not in school due to poverty as well as high repetition and drop-out rates. The high death rate of parents and guardians from HIV and

AIDS also poses serious challenges for the country in attaining the goal of universal primary education by 2015.

Poverty and HIV and AIDS among others are constraining progress in meeting child mortality and maternal health targets. The majority of the rural population still lacks access to safe drinking water and sanitation-making them vulnerable to water-borne diseases such as diarrhea that contribute to high child mortality. Maternal mortality also remains high, currently estimated at 229 per one hundred thousand live births. Women still die from preventable and treatable diseases.

Our environmental sustainability is facing a bigger challenge of climate change -which in the country experiences in the form of drought, wildfires and flash floods. The projected El Nino condition next year will mean decreased rainfall with consequences to agriculture and food security.

Honorable Prime Minister

While challenges remain, we note that there is equal determination on the part of the government to meet them. In this respect, I wish to commend the work being done by His Majesty's Government to hasten progress towards MDGs. The investments being made in building the health systems including meeting the Abuja Goal of allocating 15% of the national budget to health, the roll out of the free primary education beginning next year, the decision to boost food production through granting agricultural inputs and extension services support to peasants, the allocation of resources to the

fight against HIV and AIDS and to supporting those affected, as well as fast tracking the implementation of the national constitution through the establishment of the Human Rights and Integrity Commission and enacting laws that reinforce gender equality -are some of the key markers of the government's steady march to the MDGs.

We also note the determination of government to go beyond rhetoric to results. In this respect I wish to commend you, Honorable Prime Minister, for the "business unusual", approach to governance. Those who have been in the country longer than I have, confirm that they already see the difference. Clearly, focusing on transparency and accountability and promoting efficiency in public service stands to yield dividends in terms of improved services to the citizens.

Honorable Prime Minister

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we stand up to take action for MDGs we are also commemorating the World Food Day and reminded that millions upon millions of the world's poor will go to bed hungry tonight. In fact, the FAO 2009 annual report on global food security indicates that more than one billion people - a sixth of the world's population - are undernourished- with 265 million of those being in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this country too hunger is still a serious problem. And it is bound to exacerbate- as the impact of HIV and AIDs, of climate change, of deepening poverty and of increasing food

prices, take their toll. As we stand up for MDGs, let us re-dedicate ourselves to the eradication of hunger and ensuring food security in the country.

The United Nations will continue within the framework of Goal eight to reinforce its partnership with Swaziland in supporting its development effort in the country-working with government, other international partners such as the European Commission as well as Civil Society. It is in this respect that only last week, with the support of government and partners, we launched the UN Swaziland Civil Society Advisory Committee. The committee will, advise on the partnership with civil society and facilitate its effective participation in the work of the UN in the country. The committee will also be the advocate and champion of the Millennium Development Goals in Swaziland as well as provide advice on capacity development for NGOs and civil society organizations in the country.

Honorable Prime Minister

Ladies and Gentlemen

As part of the more than 100 million people commemorating the eradication of poverty today, let our actions shout louder than the words which are spoken today. Let the planting of trees be a sign to the community that together we are rekindling our commitment to sustained action to end poverty. Let us practice 'business unusual',

with a call for better services, greater accountability and a pledge to end poverty now.!

Allow me now end by reading the message of the UN Secretary General

“Today we recognize the daily struggles and contributions of those living in poverty and resolve to intensify efforts to eliminate the scourge once and for all.

At a time of multiple global crises, the poorest and most vulnerable have a special claim on our attention. We know that, in any recession, those hurt first—and worst—are the poor. According to recent estimates, the global economic crisis has claimed at least 50 million jobs this year. As many as 100 million more people are expected to fall below the poverty line in 2009. Climate change further compounds the problem.

The theme of this year’s observance, “Children and Families Speak Out Against Poverty”, coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We recognize that investing in children and securing their rights is one of the surest ways to ending poverty.

Despite our world of plenty, children’s basic needs are still being sidelined. Millions of children continue to be deprived of an education, with many more at risk of dropping out of school. This is particularly true for girl children.

Yet we also know that common sense investments to meet the Millennium Development Goals can make a profound difference. In areas where global investments have been scaled up – such as AIDS, TB, and malaria and vaccine-preventable diseases – we are seeing heartening progress. There has also been notable success in reducing under-five mortality. These gains suggest how we can accelerate progress toward those MDG targets where the world is still far behind – by investing in key areas such as primary education, basic infrastructure and maternal health.

The United Nations system is responding to the crisis on a number of fronts -- promoting food security, building a greener economy, ensuring stronger safety nets and putting forward a Global Jobs Pact. We are also developing a Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System—GIVAS—to create a networked capacity for real-time data collection and analysis. Policies must be driven by a solid picture of developments on the ground.

We are at a critical juncture in the fight against poverty. Now is the time to amplify the voices of the vulnerable and ensure that the world follows up on its pledges. With the right investments and concrete action, we can build upon the gains, fulfill our commitments, and ensure that every man, woman and child has the opportunity to make the most of their potential.” Ban Ki Moon

Thank you