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“UN WEEK” HIGHLIGHTS WIDE AREAS FOR PROGRESS; LAYS FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE ACTION



Photo / Bo Li

Launch of the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health at the MDG Summit

The week of 20 September, or “UN Week” as called by some, gave the world a sense of purpose and progress after years of economic crisis, natural disasters and political discord.

The extended week of summits, linked to the 65th session of the General Assembly, opened on 20 September with leaders reaffirming their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In speeches notable for substance over rhetoric, Heads of State and Government described progress made thus far and where progress is lagging, and then carved out a profile of actions that will be needed to bring the 2015 MDG targets to a successful conclusion, as well as smart investments that will make the biggest difference.

Realistic assessments were delivered on fighting disease, empowering women, establishing decent jobs and green growth, accelerating progress in the least developed countries and responding to rising food prices – and the large number of the hungry – with support for smallholder farmers, who themselves are a mainstay of the poorest populations.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon encapsulated statements by leaders from developing and developed countries, linking development goals to economic growth and capacity

building: “Meeting the Goals is about building self-sufficiency – helping people to help themselves,” he said in a wrap-up to the press. “It is about tapping the potential and dynamism of the emerging economies and developing countries.”

The centrepiece of the **MDG Summit**, 20-22 September, was the Secretary-General’s announcement of a Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health. As significant as the amount of hard pledges for the initiative – more than \$40 billion – is the sourcing. Commitments came from developing countries as well as traditional donors; from non-profits and corporations (with CEOs holding their own **Private Sector Summit** during the week, organized by the UN Global Compact). For many experts, this is the new face of development partnership.

Poor health indicators for mothers and infants have an impact across the entire society. According to the World Bank, deficiencies in the diets of mothers and babies in their first 1,000 days of life alone deprive developing nations of a full two to three percentage points each year in economic growth. This point was driven home at a special event launching the **1,000 Days: Partnering to Reduce Child Undernutrition** campaign organized by the US and Ireland and addressed by the Secretary-General.

The alarming loss of biodiversity occurring across the planet was the focus of the first **High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Biodiversity**, where countries reaffirmed the political will to take steps to reduce rapid biodiversity loss. And the General Assembly, at the **High-level Review Meeting on Small Island Developing States**, agreed that these states required enhanced international cooperation to overcome their vulnerabilities to the global financial crisis as well as to increasing natural disasters and climate change.

An informal ministerial meeting on **climate change** was organized by Mexico, host of the 29 November – 10 December UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun. Significantly, ministers of foreign affairs and of the environment from 50 countries participated – sometimes both from the same country. The meeting was aided by the recognition that what is needed now are steps forward on a balanced array

of measures having to do with adaptation, technology, fast-track finance and deforestation, rather than a focus on a legally binding agreement, according to UN officials.

Working toward connecting the dots between achieving the MDGs and addressing global crises such as finance, food and climate, the Secretary-General met for the first time with the 21 members of his High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability. The Panel has brought together leading global policy-makers, private sector and civil society experts in order to formulate a new blueprint for sustainable growth and low-carbon prosperity for all on a planet under increasing strain; its report will be issued at the end of 2011.

On the peace and security agenda, a key mini-summit on **Sudan** was held just a few months ahead of voting to determine the future of the country after more than 20 years of war. The Secretary-General hosted senior Sudanese officials from both parties to the 2005 peace agreement, a dozen Heads of State and Government, ministers from more than 30 nations, and leaders of the African Union and the League of Arab States, among others.

There was across-the-board agreement that the referenda to determine the status of southern Sudan and the disputed area of Abyei, scheduled for 11 January, must go ahead as scheduled; that efforts in Sudan should be redoubled to prepare for credible, peaceful and timely balloting; and that the results would be adhered to by all parties.

While primary responsibility for the referenda lies with the Sudanese parties, the UN is providing technical, logistical and security advisory support, as mandated by the Security Council. An independent body – the Secretary-General's Panel – will play a good offices role to increase confidence in the referenda process by engaging the appropriate interlocutors if any political trouble-shooting becomes necessary.

The High-Level Meeting on **Pakistan** mobilized new support – at \$2 billion, the largest humanitarian appeal ever filled by the UN. To better coordinate the UN flood relief effort, the Secretary-General appointed Ambassador Rauf Soysal of Turkey as Special Envoy for Assistance to Pakistan.

At the mini-summit on **Somalia**, which faces continuing political, security and humanitarian challenges, Secretary-General Ban told the Security Council that he intended to take steps toward establishing an integrated UN presence in Somalia for the first time in 17 years.

Ahead of a critical period for the **Middle East** peace process, the Secretary-General chaired a meeting of the Quartet (UN, Russia, US and EU), as well as a wider meeting with Arab partners. There was overwhelming support for the current talks between Israelis and Palestinians, as well as grave concern over potential obstacles, such as the fate of the Israeli moratorium on settlements.



UN Photo / Evan Schneider

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) inspects a mosquito net, a key malaria preventer, at Mwandama Millennium Village, Malawi.

A **Security Council Summit** took stock of peacekeeping and peacemaking experience over the ten years since a previous Council summit. A reminder was issued that delivery of aid to earthquake-stricken Haiti is far behind what was promised.

At the **High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament**, leaders fielded ideas on ways to cap a long “lost decade” of 13 moribund years, following the successes of the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Secretary-General will ask his Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to review the issues raised and consider the establishment of a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons.

The annual high-level **General Debate** opened on 23 September. General Assembly President Joseph Deiss (Switzerland) dedicated the debate this year to the issue of global governance.

While many speakers concluded that the UN “is the centerpiece of the global system of governance,” President Deiss said there was also an expressed desire to add more efficacy to its “unique legitimacy.” Speakers referred to the importance of the Group of 20, while some UN Member States that also belong to the G20 said that wider dialogue between the Group and the General Assembly will be necessary if the Group is to retain its relevance.

Along these lines, the General Assembly President announced his intention to seek a practice of informal dialogue between the Secretary-General and the G20 host country before and after each G20 summit. He also indicated the possibility of further Assembly debate in the second half of his term to explore possibilities for more open and representative systems of global governance, including by strengthening the role of civil society and the private sector.