



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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Statement

By

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Thematic Debate:

“Recognising the achievements, addressing the challenges and getting back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015.”

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines aligns itself fully with the statement made by Antigua & Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. We wish to add the following supplementary statement:

French writer Antoine de Saint Exupéry once said that “a goal without a plan is just a wish.” Today, midway through our 15-year quest to realize the Millennium Development Goals (“MDGs”), and faced with the increasing likelihood that these goals are not on track for achievement, we must ask ourselves a fundamental question: are the MDGs indeed goals, or are they simply an exercise of wishful thinking on a global scale? If the international community is serious and committed to achieving the MDGs by 2015, we must demonstrate the political courage to tackle the structural changes necessary to allow for meaningful global development.

This thematic debate cannot be an occasion for either international hand wringing or backslapping. The twin outcomes of this debate must be a concrete multilateral plan for progress and an agreement on the areas of focus going forward.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is justifiably proud of its recent progress toward achieving and surpassing of the MDGs. In the field of education, we have universal access to both primary and secondary schools. Indeed, between 2001 and 2006, St. Vincent and the Grenadines went from having only 39% of eligible children attending secondary school to achieving universal access to secondary education. We are implementing a many-sided Poverty Reduction Strategy that includes policies to stimulate growth, trade and investment; increase employment opportunities; invest in human capital; and improve social and physical infrastructure.

On the health front, infant mortality continues its downward trend, and we are on track to meet our 2015 target. A multifaceted “Wellness Revolution” is underway to combat a host of preventable lifestyle diseases, and the Government has also instituted comprehensive programmes to combat HIV/AIDS, although the challenges posed by this deadly disease remain daunting.

But the successes and challenges of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, much as those in our sister states throughout the developing world, cannot be viewed in the context of individual national plans and discrete examples of progress or failure. We have reached the point in our progress towards the MDGs that future plans for their attainment must take on global and structural dimensions. Developing countries, with very few exceptions, have worked assiduously, and in relative isolation, towards their MDG targets. The uneven progress to date has shown the limitations of these disjointed, individual approaches.

In that regard, St. Vincent and the Grenadines wholeheartedly echoes the calls made yesterday by India, Jamaica, Morocco, Pakistan, the G-77 and many others to emphasize the critical importance of Goal 8 – developing a global partnership for development. This neglected and unappreciated Goal is indeed a prerequisite, and the fulcrum of further meaningful development.

Six years ago, and very early in the MDG process, world leaders gathered in Monterrey and stated that “[o]ur goal is to eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth, and promote sustainable development as we advance to a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system.” Part and parcel of that noble goal was a renewal of developed states’ longstanding pledge to give 0.7% of their GNPs as Official Development Assistance. Today, we are no closer to that modest assistance target, which was first mooted in 1969 – before the challenges of climate change, the digital divide, or the special developmental issues of the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world.

Our global partnership for development has also failed to extend to the realm of substantive and far-reaching forgiveness of debts that have been paid many times over. Nor has it fashioned ways in which a debtor nation can satisfy its obligations to creditors by reallocating its debt servicing dollars toward mutually agreed domestic development projects. Further, our global partnership has yet to meaningfully tackle the imposition of trade distorting barriers and subsidies, which short-sightedly serve the gods of local political expediency.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines urges renewed consideration and emphasis on Goal 8, not in the context of welfare colonialism or conditionality, but in a manner that empowers developing states and dismantles the mechanisms of underdevelopment.

The developing world is not underdeveloped because we were waiting for the UN to enumerate eight MDGs for our collective benefit. We are underdeveloped because of complex structural processes and norms that reinforce systemic inequalities. It is impossible to meaningfully address development without having the political courage to tackle these structural biases.

Mr. President,

Achievement of the MDGs has become a Holy Grail at the UN, even though the MDGs themselves – while vital – are minimal benchmarks that will not close the yawning developmental gap between core and peripheral states. Indeed, as the developing world has moved haltingly towards the MDGs, our developed partners have consolidated their advantages in health, wealth, education, technology and productivity.

For example, no one in this room can seriously suggest that a primary education or mere literacy can be the basis upon which states' populations compete in a globalized economy. Without universal secondary and widespread tertiary education, and without technological and information literacy, developing states will continue to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, and will remain trapped in entrenched inequality.

The MDGs are therefore not final goals, but merely an essential first step in attaining the minimal basis for meaningful development. In that regard, we must begin to envisage the next 15 years of developmental goals, even as we wrestle with our current targets.

Mr. President,

We in the UN cannot simply speak the MDGs into existence. Our words must be accompanied by action. Our endless graphs, charts and MDG projections must result in paradigm-altering structural adjustments in trade, assistance and cooperation. With all the ink, paper and words that have been expended on the MDGs, we must collectively accept their achievement as a measure of the credibility and effectiveness of the UN to tackle global ills. The last steps toward realizing the MDGs cannot be taken merely on an *ad hoc* basis by states acting individually. We must have the vision to plan, and the courage to act, in a manner that fulfills our moral, ethical and human obligations to our fellow citizens.

I thank you.