

## **UN speech address at the 62nd session of the United Nations' General Assembly**

New York, 25 September 2007

Your Excellency, the President of the General Assembly, Sergjan Kerim,  
Your Excellency, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me begin by adding my voice to the many salutations directed to His Excellency, Ban Ki-Moon for being elected as the Secretary-General of the United Nations and wish you, Your Excellency, a fruitful tenure, trusting that through your work the poor of the world would have good reason to increase their confidence in this Organisation of the Nations of the World.

Again, I reiterate the many thanks to Her Excellency, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, for the good work she did as the President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Equally, my congratulations go to His Excellency, Sergjan Kerim on his election as the President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly.

We meet here today under the theme: 'Responding to Climate Change', during the UN Session that would mark the half-way point towards the freely-agreed period in which the nations of the world committed themselves to work, individually and collectively, so as to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Billions of the peoples of the world know as a matter of fact that the consequences of climate change - be it droughts, floods or unpredictable and extreme weather patterns - undermine our common efforts to achieve the MDG's. Today, we all understand that the costs of doing nothing about climate change far outweigh those of taking concrete measures to address this challenge. It is clear that delaying action on this matter of climate change will hit poor countries and communities hardest. Yet the pace of climate change negotiations is out of step with the urgency indicated by science.

I would therefore urge that we collectively aim for a significant advance in the multilateral negotiations when our negotiators meet in Bali in December this year. Together, we must ensure that we build a fair, effective, flexible and inclusive climate regime under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol and we must agree to this as a matter of urgency. Though we have different responsibilities, and developed countries clearly have an obligation to take the lead, we all have a common duty to do more and act within our respective capabilities and in accordance with our national circumstances.

The UN World Summit on Sustainable Development correctly reaffirmed sustainable development as a central element of the global action against poverty and the protection of the environment and identified important linkages between poverty, the environment and the use of natural resources.

To billions of the poor these linkages are real - the combination of their empty bellies, their degraded environment and their exploited natural resources, for which they benefit nothing, defines a hopeless and heart-wrenching existence.

Many of these who are the wretched of the earth, know from their bitter experience how their resource-rich areas were transformed into arid, uninhabitable and desolate areas forcing migration to better-endowed regions thus exacerbating conflicts and struggles for scarce resources. Gathered here as representatives of the peoples of the world we know very well that climate change, poverty and underdevelopment are not acts of God but human-made.

Clearly, the starting point for a future climate regime must be equity. A core balance between sustainable development and climate imperatives will have to be the basis of any agreement on a strengthened climate regime. Any deal on the "fair use of the ecological space" will have to be balanced by a deal on giving all countries a "fair chance in the development space".

Under the United Nations but also within our regional bodies we have adopted many programmes and declarations, with clear implementation targets aimed at addressing the challenges of climate change, poverty and underdevelopment.

As this esteemed conclave knows very well, the many lofty agreements include among others those adopted at:

- The Rio Earth Summit;
- Copenhagen Social Summit;
- Millennium Summit;
- World Summit on Sustainable Development;
- Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development.

In all these and other summits we adopted declarations using moving and solemn words that express our profound understanding of the gravity of the challenges facing the modern world and unequivocally committing ourselves to defeat all and any miserable and dehumanising conditions facing large parts of humanity.

Indeed, this collective asserted in the Millennium Declaration that:

"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want."

Yet, the poor whose hopes have been raised many times as we make declaration after declaration against poverty and underdevelopment and as we are doing today on climate change can be forgiven for thinking that this important global leadership many a times sounds like an empty vessel.

That this collective is able, always eloquently to express the dire circumstances characterising the poor is without doubt. However, this organisation, which should pride itself with visible actions and results in the fight against climate change and poverty, would find it difficult to demonstrate decisive progress in this regard.

The reasons for this are not hard to find. Although the concepts of freedom, justice and equality are universal and fully embraced by the United Nations, this global organisation has not itself transformed and designed the necessary institutions of governance consistent with the noble ideals that drive modern democratic societies.

Because the nations of the world are defined by the dominant and the dominated, the dominant have also become the decision makers in the important global forums, including at this seat of global governance. Accordingly, the skewed distribution of power in the world - political, economic, military, technological and social - replicates itself in multilateral institutions, much to the disadvantage of the majority of the poor people of the world.

Indeed, even as we agree on the important programmes that should bring a better life to billions of the poor, the rich and the powerful have consistently sought to ensure that whatever happens, the existing power relations are not altered and therefore the status quo remains. The results of this situation are that the United Nations can and does correctly identify problems and appropriate solutions necessary to make

the world a better place for all of humanity. Naturally, the dominant and the powerful very often respond positively to agreed programmes if these would advance their own narrow interests.

At the same time, the poor will continue to strive for the improvement of their wretched conditions. They therefore see the UN as the natural instrument that would help accelerate the process of change for the better. Hence, they correctly see implementation of all UN programmes as being central to the efforts around climate change and the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment.

Yet, the cold reality is that it will be difficult for the UN in its present form fully to implement its own decisions and therefore help the poor achieve urgently the MDGs. Indeed, until the ideals of freedom, justice and equality characterise this premier world body, the dominant will forever dictate to the dominated and the interests of the dominated, which are those of the majority of humanity, would be deferred in perpetuity.

Thus, noble statements would continue to be uttered on all matters facing the majority of the people of the world such as the need to successfully conclude the Doha Development Round, while little is done to implement this and the many critical agreements necessary to pull the poor out of the morass of poverty and underdevelopment.

President, We are of the firm belief, in my country, that we will achieve the development goals. Having emerged from more than three centuries of colonialism and apartheid, we inherited two inter-linked economies that we characterise as the First and Second economies. The two economies -one developed and globally connected and another localised and informal, display many features of a global system of apartheid.

As South Africans, we sought to strengthen the First economy and use it as a base to transfer resources to strengthen and modernise the Second economy and thus embark on the process to change the lives of those who subsist in this Second economy.

Indeed, without the requisite resource transfers it would not be possible to achieve the MDGs because on its own, the Second economy in our country cannot generate the resources needed to bring a better life to millions of poor South Africans.

I am mentioning this because, as we all accept, central to the attainment of MDGs globally, is the critical matter of resource transfers from the rich countries of the North to poor countries of the South.

Many developing countries, especially those from my own continent, Africa, do not have the material base from which to address and attain the MDGs on their own. Accordingly, there is an urgent need for massive resource transfers through development assistance, investment, trade, technology transfers and human resource development to these poor countries if we are to achieve the development goals and successfully adapt to the devastating impacts of climate change.

If we do not succeed in building a climate change regime that balances adaptation and mitigation, underpinned by the transfer of technology and financial resources, we will place an unmanageable burden on future generations.

In this regard, given Africa's specific and dire challenges, we believe it is important to enter into a partnership with Africa using the African Union's programme of NEPAD, which this assembly has adopted, so that the measures that the continent has undertaken, with limited resources for the regeneration of all the African countries, are strengthened by support from the international community guided by the programmes of UN.

As history teaches us, it was because of the massive resource transfers in the aftermath of the World War II that Western Europe recovered and was set on its development path. A similar intervention helped put a number of Asian countries onto their own development trajectory. The question we should ask is why is there an absence of the same resolve to assist poor nations today?

The global village to which we constantly refer should encourage us to expand human solidarity. Thus would we build a durable bridge over the river that has divided our common global village and ensured that one human being lives a fulfilling life while another experiences a miserable existence.

Representing the citizens of the world, we have set for ourselves programmes that are central to all of us working together to create better living conditions for humanity and ensure that we achieve that which is necessary for our mutual prosperity. Together, rich and poor, developed and developing, North and South can and must truly hold hands and address the challenges of climate change and sustainable development; work together to defeat poverty and underdevelopment and ensure that every human being is saved from the indecencies and humiliations that are attached to the poor.

But to do that, we need first and foremost, to implement the decisions that we have adopted freely in this eminent house of the representatives of the global community. And so let our actions speak louder than our words.

Thank you.