

## UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITIES

UN/GA

### Millennium Summit Sets Targets

The United Nations Millennium Summit, which convened from 6–8 September 2000 in New York, was conceived as a “working session” of the General Assembly, where in addition to addressing the plenary, the heads of State and Government would participate in one of four interactive round tables. It was the largest ever meeting of heads of State in history.

The Summit concluded with a Declaration (see page 263), adopted by consensus, which sets out principles and objectives for the international agenda at the beginning of the 21st century and includes resolutions to make the United Nations more effective in maintaining peace and security, by giving it the resources and tools it needs.

With regard to environmental issues, the Declaration clearly states countries’ support for the principles of sustainable development. It resolves to make every effort to ensure the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, preferably by Rio+10 in 2002. It supports measures to push for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

There is a focus on the special needs of Africa, and the Declaration resolves to take measures to address poverty and achieve sustainable development, including debt cancellation, improved market access, increased official development assistance, foreign direct investment and technology transfer.

With regard to strengthening the United Nations, the Declaration resolves to intensify efforts to reform the Security Council and to ensure adequate resources for the UN to carry out its mandates.

#### Secretary-General’s Report

In the Millennium Report of the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan notes that the Summit affords an opportunity for reflection both on the achievements of the United Nations and the challenges it is facing. He notes that “entirely new dimensions of globalisation have emerged. While transborder pollution has been on the international agenda for decades, once the cumulative effects of industrialisation were understood to affect global climate, the world entered – literally, became enveloped by – a wholly new context in which conventional institutional remedies fare poorly.”

The Secretary-General states that now, more than ever, the United Nations is needed to broker differences among states in power, culture, size and interest, serving as the place where the cause of common humanity is articulated and advanced. “More than ever, a robust international legal order, together with the principles and practices of

multilateralism, is needed to define the ground rules of an emerging global civilisation within which there will be room for the world’s rich diversity to express itself fully.”

As well as listing the achievements in the areas of environment and development, human rights, population, human settlements and food security, Kofi Annan listed the challenges, clustered into three broad categories where, in his view, a real difference can be made in helping people to lead better lives. Two, he notes, are founding aims of the United Nations whose achievement still eludes us: freedom from want and freedom from fear. However, no one dreamed, he said, that when the Charter was written, that the third – leaving to successor generations an envi-



ronmentally sustainable future – would emerge as one of the most daunting challenges of all.

In 1999, Gallup International sponsored and conducted a Millennium Survey of 57,000 adults in 60 countries. In the section concerning the environment, the Secretary-General said that two-thirds of all the respondents stated that their governments had done too little to redress environmental problems in their countries. Further, respondents in the developing countries were among the most critical of their government’s actions in this respect.

In section V of the Millennium Report “Sustaining our Future,” Kofi Annan said that the founders of the United Nations could not have anticipated the urgent need we face today to realise the freedom of future generations to sustain their lives on this planet. “We are failing to provide that freedom. On the contrary, we have been plundering our children’s future heritage to pay for environmentally unsustainable practices in the present... We must face up to an inescapable reality: the challenges of sustainability simply overwhelm the adequacy of our responses. With some honourable exceptions, our responses are too few, too little and too late.”

The Secretary-General stated that section V was intended to convey that reality to the Millennium Summit

with a particular sense of urgency. "The fact that environmental issues were never seriously considered in the nearly 18 months during which the General Assembly debated which subjects to include in the Summit's agenda makes it plain how little priority is accorded to these extraordinarily serious challenges for all humankind," he said.

The 10-year follow-up to the Conference on Environment and Development will be held in 2002, and Kofi Annan hoped that the world's leaders "will take advantage of the time remaining to revitalise the sustainability debate, and to prepare the ground for the adoption of concrete and meaningful actions by that time."

The Report calls upon the Millennium Summit to promote the adoption and implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. "Specifically, I urge those States whose ratifications are needed to bring it into effect to take the necessary action in time for entry into force by 2002, as a fitting celebration of our progress since Stockholm in 1972 and Rio in 1992."

The report speaks of several other areas where there are severe challenges "for which we still lack remotely adequate responses." One of these is to confront the water crisis, where the most serious immediate challenge is the fact that more than one billion people lack any access to safe drinking water, while half of humanity lacks adequate sanitation. Unsafe water and poor sanitation cause an estimated 80 per cent of all diseases in the developing world. "Specifically, I urge the Summit to adopt the target of reducing by half, between now and 2015, the proportion of people who lack sustainable access to adequate sources of affordable and safe water."

Soil was another area highlighted. The distribution of good soils and favourable growing conditions does not match that of populations. Increasing land degradation exacerbates this problem. The Secretary-General notes that advances in agricultural biotechnology may help developing countries by creating drought-, salt- and pest-resistant crop varieties. But the environmental impact of biotechnology has yet to be fully evaluated and many questions, in particular those related to biosafety, remain to be answered. "I intend to convene a high-level global public policy network to address these and related controversies concerning the risks and opportunities associated with the increased use of biotechnology and bioengineering," the Secretary-General said.

The Report acknowledges that the ecological crises we confront have many causes. They include poverty, negligence and greed – and, above all, failures of governance: crises without easy or uniform solutions. Although "technological breakthroughs that are unimaginable today may solve some of the environmental challenges we confront... It would be foolish to count on them," the Report states. So the question remains, the Secretary-General said, of what should our priorities be? He recommended four. First, major efforts in public education. Second, environmental issues must be fundamentally repositioned in the policy-making process. Third, only governments can create and enforce environmental regulations, and devise more environment-friendly incentives for markets to respond to. Fourth, it is impossible to devise effective

environmental policy unless it is based on sound scientific information. While major advances in data collection have been made in many areas, there remain large gaps in our knowledge. In particular, there has never been a comprehensive global assessment of the world's major ecosystems. The planned Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, a major international collaborative effort to map the health of the planet, is a response to this need. "I call on Member States to help provide the necessary financial support for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and to become actively engaged in it," Kofi Annan said.

## General Debates

The urgent necessity of enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations to cope with the challenges of the new century was a dominant theme in the statements by world leaders addressing plenary sessions of the Summit.

Many of the 70 speakers stressed the need to invest in the United Nations, giving it the strength and resources to accomplish its tasks and empowering it to deal effectively with the changing nature of conflict and with post-conflict rehabilitation.

The President of Poland, noting that the role of the assembled leaders was to provide clear guidelines, political support and adequate resources for the UN, said that the Organisation should be reformed into one capable of facing the global challenges, and at the same time able to protect the rights of every person.

In urging further reform of the UN, some speakers pointed to the need for a more equitable and democratic institution. US President Bill Clinton said the responsibility of the assembled world leaders was "to make sure the United Nations is up to the job" and to provide it with the tools to do it. This was echoed by the French President Jacques Chirac, who stressed that Member States must provide the needed resources, support the reforms undertaken by the Secretary-General and modernise the methods of the General Assembly.

The importance of streamlining the work of the General Assembly was also underlined by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who argued that it should concentrate on a few areas to reduce its annual agenda.

For many speakers, the UN stood to play a key role in helping to redistribute the benefits of globalisation through its capacity for bringing together the challenges posed by a globalising world. But to do so, the UN would need to be significantly strengthened, most leaders agreed.

The Foreign Minister of Egypt called for a "new international contract," and stressed the importance of linking legislative bodies with civil societies, to allow for decisions to be taken not only on matters pertaining to international peace and security, finance, economy and trade but also on matters related to women, children, population, social development, health and disease.

However, there was no sustained debate on the environmental challenges posed in the Secretary-General's Report. Any mention of actual environmental problems came only very briefly in conjunction with the discussions concerning globalisation – the one overriding theme of the Summit. —

Several speakers claimed that multinational corporations and international financial organisations held the power to reduce the exclusion of poor countries from the benefits of globalisation. The cause-and-effect relationship between globalisation and poverty was highlighted by many speakers.

The tendency for globalisation to overflow from the realms of technology and finance into the areas of culture and national traditions was a serious concern for many of the speakers, particularly those from smaller countries.

A number of delegates voiced concern about the growing income gap and stressed that not all countries were benefiting from technological advances.

### Round Tables

The leaders of Algeria, Poland, Singapore and Venezuela chaired the four round tables. At the first interactive round table discussion, leaders from 50 countries expressed their concerns about the impact of globalisation and sought ways to cope with it.

Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore told a UN news conference that he had planned for the first hour to be devoted to globalisation, the second to peace and security and the third to whatever the assembled leaders wished to discuss.

"But as the discussion went on, I could sense that the preoccupation of the leaders was with the first item – the challenges of globalisation, the impact of globalisation, and how they are going to moderate the forces of globalisation on their own countries' economies," he said.

The Prime Minister said that the participants of the round table described globalisation as "a force that we can't fight" and focused their comments on how to moderate its impact, since the process of globalisation was widening the income gap and in some cases could overwhelm national economies. "Private sector companies are much bigger than some economies," he noted, adding that large corporations with huge capital flows had the potential to destabilise those economies.

The round table also tackled the question of how the UN could be used in the effort to channel the forces of globalisation towards positive ends. Among the suggestions put forward was a call for strengthening the UN in order to make it capable of monitoring the impact of volatile financial flows.

At another round table, 34 world leaders shared their viewpoints on issues ranging from violence to poverty. After the discussion, Polish President Kwasniewski told a UN press conference that many leaders took a different approach to the search for solutions to global dilemmas. For some, the developed countries had a crucial role to play. For others, it was a shared responsibility. According to the Chairman, it was not easy to find a "simple recipe" for such complex global problems. But the main outcome of the discussion, he said, was that the participants had defined a common list of problems on which to focus and had reaffirmed their belief in the UN's role in helping countries to reach compromise on global dilemmas. The round table ended with the question of how to share the benefits

of globalisation among the entire world's peoples – and how to control its negative effects.

The need for UN Member States to unite their efforts emerged as a central theme of another round table discussion. "The United Nations must be united in the great effort to combat poverty, hunger, marginalisation – otherwise we will continue to sink into inequality and it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for us to achieve peace in the world," the Chairman, President Hugo Chavaz of Venezuela, said.

Concerning further reform of the United Nations, some speakers pointed to the need for a more equitable and democratic institution. The President of Venezuela issued a strong appeal for democracy in the UN, stressing that the Security Council in particular needed to be democratised and expanded. Stressing that democratic practice and equal opportunities should be extended to international organisations, the Emir of Qatar said the Council should be expanded to all regions of the world, and the Arab world should have a permanent seat.

Noting that Africa represented 53 out of the 189 Member States of the United Nations, and more than one-third of Security Council debates deal with Africa, the President of Togo said it was time to review the composition of the Council to allow new permanent members. These should be chosen from among the new economic powers that have emerged since World War II and from the regional powers from the developing countries. The President of Zambia said it was a contradiction to champion democratisation across the globe while not democratising the Council. The President of Moldova said the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council should be moderately increased, including new members from both developed and developing countries.

### Instruments of International Law Signed

In an "unprecedented demonstration of commitment to the international rule of law," leaders from some 84 countries signed, ratified or acceded to a wide range of multilateral treaties deposited with the United Nations Secretary-General.

In his Millennium Report, Secretary-General Kofi Annan had called on Member States to use the Summit to undertake those legal commitments. He stressed that it is only possible to free all people from the scourge of war through strengthening respect for international law, "in particular the agreed provisions of treaties on the control of armaments, and international humanitarian and human rights law."

A special treaty ceremony was scheduled during the three-day Summit. During subsequent treaty-signing ceremonies, some 40 instruments of international law were signed, ratified or acceded to by the leaders of at least 85 countries, in an action which significantly advanced the rule of international law.

Two new instruments – both "Optional Protocols" to the Convention on the Rights of the Child – received the most signatures. They deal, respectively, with children in armed conflict and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The international effort to ban landmines gained momentum, with Bangladesh and Colombia ratifying the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. And the advent of the International Criminal Court drew a step nearer as the Rome Statute was ratified by four countries and signed by twelve. The Statute now has a total of 110 signatures and 19 ratifications. It will enter into force following the sixtieth ratification.

Among the many other treaties that received support, were several on the protection of the environment, including the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which seeks to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases.

In addition, actions were taken on a number of conventions and treaties concerned with the suppression of terrorism, nuclear testing, landmines, chemical weapons and other weapons that have excessive or indiscriminate effects.

The Republic of Korea signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Altogether there were more than 300 different actions on treaties, conventions and additional protocols that ranged from the defence of human rights through measures to circumscribe the use and proliferation of deadly weapons to the protection of the environment.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in his closing statement that by their actions, the heads of State had "reaffirmed the vital importance of international law, which is the common language of our international community." In their Millennium statement, the Member States resolved to "strengthen the rule of law in international as in national affairs."

One of the first pillars of international humanitarian law, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, was further strengthened during the three days, as several countries added their names. The Covenant, which forms part of the "International Bill of Human Rights," defends basic human rights such as freedom from torture, enslavement and arbitrary detention, and freedom of movement, expression and association.

Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, underlined that "ratification of treaties will be the first indicator of State willingness to embrace a rights-based order in the new millennium."

## Final Sessions

Heads of State, speaking on the last day of the Summit, continued to focus much of their attention on ways of turning globalisation into a positive force for solving such problems as poverty, marginalisation and inequality.

In a statement released before the final session, the co-chairs of the Summit praised the "frank and constructive" spirit demonstrated by the world leaders attending the forum and called on them to translate agreed commitments into action.

"Both in their speeches in the plenaries of the Summit and in their interactive round tables, the heads of State and Government again and again stressed the relevance and the importance of the United Nations in a global society," said President Tarja Halonen of Finland and President Sam Nujoma of Namibia.

With regard to the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General in his report, a first, positive development could be announced regarding the initiatives on a high-tech volunteer corps, which is already in operation. According to the UN Volunteers (UNV), 23 information professionals have taken up their assignments in developing countries as part of the corps.

Speaking after the Summit, the UN Environment Programme's Executive Director, Klaus Toepfer, welcomed the Declaration's comprehensive chapter on the environment and highlighted the call by Heads of State to intensify cooperation on reducing the negative consequences of natural and manmade disasters. He also expressed the hope that the Declaration will give added momentum to the adoption of a new ethic of global environmental stewardship and responsibility.

This was the hope voiced by many delegates at the end of the session, who were interested to see how their deliberations would be reflected and implemented in the day-to-day business of the General Assembly. (MJ)

