

The role of the European Union in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals MDGs

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In September 2000, world leaders from 189 nations agreed and signed the UN Millennium Declaration, binding them to a global project to decisively reduce extreme poverty in all its key dimensions. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that derive from this Declaration provide an agenda for global action. This agenda and the outcomes of the World Social Summit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Doha Development Agenda and the Monterrey Consensus are mutually supportive processes and essential building blocks of a worldwide partnership for sustainable development.

Over the last four decades, EC development assistance has evolved from a fragmented focus on countries with which EU Member States had strong colonial or other traditional links, to a set of regional co-operation and partnership frameworks providing almost global coverage. During the 1990s, the policies and practices of EC development cooperation gradually integrated into a new global development framework aimed at poverty eradication, promotion of gender equality, access to primary education, improving health and provision of other basic services, as well as sustainable development, and the establishment of global partnerships. The EU has been a major force in this process, and has expressed on numerous occasions its full commitment to ensuring a successful conclusion.

In the Council conclusions of 26 April 2004, the General Affairs Council once again confirmed that achieving the Millennium Development Goals is a key objective for the European Union. In September 2005, the UN General Assembly will take stock of the progress made by UN Members in the implementation of this global development agenda. In preparation for this event, the Commission has compiled this report on the EC contribution towards achieving MDGs.

The report provides information on the extent to which the EC has focused its strategies, procedures and instruments on the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It outlines how the EC contributes to progress towards the MDGs, and lists the further actions that are currently foreseen to promote the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

The report does not address in detail the progress made in and by developing countries, which is the subject of the progress reports drafted by the countries in question. Nor does it look at the performance of EU Member States, as this will be carried out at national level in the Member State reports. The Member State reports, together with the EC report, will provide the basis for an EU synthesis report, due in early 2005. In contrast with the forthcoming synthesis report, the EC report will not propose new measures, but instead limits itself to an inventory of areas where further action may be considered.

Over the coming months, the European Commission will prepare, in close dialogue with the EU Member States, proposals for an EU contribution to the MDG stocktaking event. The level of our ambition can only be high. The EU claims leadership that, in turn, requires political courage and commitment. The EU has expressed the will to make a difference. This implies that the gap between theory and practice needs to be bridged and that words are backed up with resources and action.

The EU synthesis report shall give an answer to the question of how to finance the MDGs, and how funding can be channelled and used more effectively to accelerate impact. It shall look into new actions on

other policy areas captured by MDG8, such as policy coherence, trade and debt sustainability. Finally, the EC shall consider using the UN 2005 Major Event platform for the launching of a major new EU initiative on Africa.