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UN World Summit 14-16 September **US wants changes to UN document on aid to third world**

Daya Gamage – US Correspondent for Asian Tribune

New York, N.Y., 10 September (Asiantribune.com): Just days before the UN World Summit, attended by 170 Heads of State and Government, the United States is seeking changes to a significant document on economic assistance to the developing world, drafted by the UN Secretariat in keeping with the UN adopted Millennium Development Goals.

The US envoy to UN John Bolton's pressure to make amendments has brought severe criticism, not only from a top advisor of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan but from a report released by the World Body on eve of the 191-member gathering in New York which singles out the United States as the 'least generous donor'.

To coincide with the UN Summit, another UN report, jointly authored by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Development Program and the Asian Development Bank, released in Bangkok, Thailand on September 7, gives a dismal picture of the Asia-Pacific Region, home to 71% of the total number of people in the world.

The debate between the United States and the United Nations is about the approach, fulfillment and commitment of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

The MDGs were established in 2000, following the Millennium Summit in New York, when the world's governments committed themselves to a series of development targets to be reached by 2015.

There are eight MDGs: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development.

On 14-16 September, world leaders will reconvene in New York to assess progress toward the goals and future actions required to ensure they are achieved. The Bangkok released report 'A Future Within Reach' will be a key input to this meeting.

Objectives of the UN Document on Development for placement before the World Summit covering poverty, hunger, education, health, the environment and humanitarian intervention are the areas that have centered in the United States objections. The Development Document will be the framework of the summit.

John Bolton, who assumed duties as the United States ambassador to the United Nations on August 1, has told Secretary General Kofi Annan that he objected to the manner in which the UN secretariat codified the Millennium

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Development Goals into numerical targets and timetables, like the pledge that countries devote seven-tenth of one percent of gross national product (GNP) to development assistance. He recently told reporters "Quite some time ago the president said unequivocally we support the development goals in the millennium summit declaration. Now that's different from the goals that were actually written by the (UN) secretariat. There is no backing away by the United States in the support for the millennium summit declaration."

But Jeffrey D. Sachs, special advisor to Secretary General Kofi Annan on the millennium goals, criticizing US intervention, said "The United States came in a few days ago essentially to try to gut this document. Their purpose is clear: to try to eliminate the momentum behind the millennium development goals and to wriggle free of the commitments they have made."

Nevertheless, the United States says, in a document researched by the *Asian Tribune* that it is the largest single contributor to the overall UN budget. The regular biennial budget for the UN in 2004-05 was \$ 3.608 billion. For the year 2003, the US contribution to the UN regular budget was \$362 million. In addition, the US contribution to UN specialized agencies amounted to well over \$400 million. The US also contributed \$1.1 billion to the peacekeeping budget in 2004; \$72 million for the support for the international war crimes tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia; and, nearly \$5million for preparatory work relation to UN Capital Master Plan. In total, the United States' contributions to the UN system in 2003 were well over \$3 billion.

It has been announced that, after George Bush took over the presidency, the US contributions to foreign economic assistance has been nine fold.

The annual Human Development Report, released by the United Nations on Wednesday, September 7, a week before the UN World Summit to set the course for combating global poverty, names the United States and Japan as among "the least generous donors". The UN report was very critical of American and European trade policies, which it says, are hypocritical and contributed to impoverishing African farmers.

The UN report further says that wealthy countries must significantly increase foreign economic aid if the Millennium Development Goals are to achieve in 2015.

The report accepts the United States continuous reiteration that it is the world's largest donor, but points out that among the richest countries, the United States is second to last in overseas economic assistance as a portion of its national income. Japan was third from the bottom. Aid per capita from donors ranges from more than \$200 in Sweden to \$51 in the United States.

"Industrial countries are locked into a system that wastes money at home and destroys livelihoods abroad," says the report noting that they emphasize the importance of open economy, open markets and free trade while they practice protectionism and give billions of subsidies to benefit their large-scale farmers advocating to Third World countries to do away or reduce farmer subsidies.

The topography of the battle ground between the United States and the United Nations Secretariat was made even clearer with the release of the Asia/Pacific report 'A Future Within Reach: Reshaping 2015' jointly by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UN Development Program and the Asian Development Bank this week in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Asia and the Pacific Region, home to 71% of the total number of people in the world, the report says is without access to improved sanitation; 58% of those without access to safe water; 56% of the world's undernourished; 54% of those living in slums; and the region accounts for 43% of the world's child mortality.

The UN report reminds, "What must emerge now is a stronger, more comprehensive partnership among all stakeholders to achieve our shared

aspirations for a poverty-free Asia and Pacific. Without such partnership, the grand promises set out in the Millennium Development Goals and broadly committed to around the world will remain just that – promises – with hundreds of millions of people still imprisoned by poverty.”

“This region has made rapid progress toward many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But not all the developing countries in Asia and the Pacific are making sufficient progress; indeed none are currently on track to meet all the goals by 2015.”

The report notes that one of the most direct ways Governments can address poverty and meet the MDGs is by ensuring adequate basic services, either providing them directly or sustaining a framework for provision through the private sector or civil society.

The report talks of increased attention and participation of industrial wealthy nations to improve conditions in the Asia and the Pacific Region, which is home to 71% of the world population.

The United States takes a different approach to achieving the MDGs to that of the United Nations Secretariat goals, and when the World Body meets at the Summit on 14-16 September, 191 nations are in attendance to seek out the battleground.

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