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### Keeping our Promises: 2005 and Beyond

*Speech by Mr Hilary Benn MP, UK Secretary of State for International Development, at the United Nations, 16 February 2005*

#### Check Against Delivery

I want to do two things this morning. First, to talk about 2005. And second, to reflect on some longer term questions that I think we in development need to face up to.

All of us know that 2005 is a unique opportunity. It's a year in which we can - indeed, we must - take decisions to help rid our world of the injustice, inequality and indignity that are the mark of poverty. Poverty which still enslaves 4 out of every 10 people on this small and fragile planet of ours.

It is also a year of opportunity for the United Nations. I believe passionately that the UN is our best hope for looking after the world's best interests. It is where, for the last 60 years, the world community - nearly 200 countries now - has come together to discuss security, development, health, education, and much more. But it is action that counts, and that is why we need a UN that works in giving expression to our shared values. And a UN that works better in doing its job on behalf of us all.

We meet this morning just a short distance from the great amphitheatre of the General Assembly, where in November 2000, 189 countries made a promise. A binding commitment to halve absolute poverty by 2015, and to achieve the other Millennium Development Goals. And yet here we are, at the start of this year of opportunity, knowing that we are failing to keep that promise, and failing badly.

By December this year, about 70 countries will have missed the very first MDG, the target to get the same numbers of girls into school as boys. Most of the other MDGs are off-track, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. And we're not just missing them by 10 years, but by 100 and - in some cases and on present trends - even 150 years. We cannot allow it to happen, or else history will judge us all harshly. And that's why we have to act so that - as Bono said last September to the Labour Party Conference - we will be remembered for what we did do, and not for what we didn't do.

So what should we do?

Let's start first, with the obligations on the rich - beginning with aid. And I will be brutally frank.

35 years ago, the UN asked us to commit 0.7% of our income to overseas development. And yet today, of the 24 'donor' countries which sit on the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, only five have met that target. Shall I name them? Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Six more have set out timetables to meet the target. The UK, Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland and Spain.

So the question will be asked: what about the remaining 13? And here's another question: how did the countries that never had a timetable before move towards setting one? Was it a change in analysis? Was it the result of the careful toil of experts? No, it was the result of politics. Political will. Societies, parliaments, peoples and politicians who decided that this is what we will now do. And, lo and behold, what was at one moment apparently impossible, in another moment

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became possible.

The 0.7% will help in the long-term, but - as Jeffrey Sachs has told us - we also need a huge injection of funding right now, front-loaded, to take us to 2015. And there is a proposal on how to get it. It is, of course, the International Finance Facility. The International Finance Facility for Immunisation is set for launch this Spring: we estimate that we can save the lives of five million additional children ahead of 2015. So far, France, Italy and Germany have already announced their commitment to the IFF. That's 3 of the 7 richest nations in the world, plus of course the UK. And Sweden is on board for the GAVI pilot. And the question for others is: if not this way, then how?

Next, the rich world can and must deliver 100% multilateral debt relief.

Five years ago, we promised that we would free the developing world from the shackles of debt. \$70 billion of debt relief later, 28 countries are feeling the positive effects. And yet there is much more to do. We say that 40 countries are 'heavily indebted': but there are a further 24 countries not far behind. We say that we will cancel bilateral debt, but what about the even greater sums owed to the international financial institutions?

Can the next ten years see us take debt relief even further? Again, there is a proposal on the table. From 1st January this year, the UK will pay its share - our share (10%) - of the debt service owed by the poorest developing countries to the World Bank and the African Development Bank. For 20 countries, this could be worth some \$900 million by 2015. We have also proposed that debt service owed to the International Monetary Fund be covered, by revaluing or selling IMF gold.

Canada has now said it will come in to pay its share. G7 Finance Ministers have agreed to discuss further multilateral debt relief. We need to do this, not least because of this simple question: is it really acceptable that any country should be spending money on debt servicing when it does not, at the same time, have enough money to get all its children into primary school, or to reduce the number of children dying - quite needlessly - of treatable and preventable diseases? How exactly would we explain to subsequent generations that we allowed this to happen?

Thirdly - more important, even, than aid or debt relief - it is trade that will allow developing countries to work and earn their way out of poverty. The WTO Hong Kong Ministerial in December must deliver progress on export subsidies, market access, rules of origin, and allowing developing countries the time and space to adjust while they build up their trading infrastructure, laws and skills.

So much then for what the rich world needs to do. But more aid, alone, will not be enough. It must be better aid.

Our aid should support rather than control development. For too long, we have micro-managed aid and decreed how funds should be spent - sometimes with disastrous effects. That's why I have commissioned a review of the conditionality which the UK applies in its aid funding. It will be published at the beginning of March, and it will set out a significant shift away from policy conditionality and towards agreeing benchmarks to monitor progress on reducing poverty.

Aid also needs to be properly managed and effectively used. Next month, we meet in Paris at the OECD to discuss this. Every year, the UK already publishes an indicative 3-year programme which tells partner countries exactly how much money they will get. If all donors could do the same, it would really help predictability.

Out of the Paris meeting, I'd like to see three commitments:

- to establish long-term donor funding targets
- to cut down on both donor red tape and duplication
- to agree on a monitoring framework which can hold us all accountable.

Now - what about the obligations of the developing world? Just as we have to tell the truth about ourselves, so our partners have to do so the same about themselves, especially on governance and on conflict.

Wherever people live, they want effective governments. States which are not at war within themselves, or with their neighbours. States which administer the rule of law. States which allow lively and independent media and civil society. States where Ministries and local administrations operate transparently, efficiently and justly. States which uphold democracy, with government which guarantees that a vote is a right worth having.

Building better political and economic governance is the responsibility of developing country governments. And they are starting to respond. In Africa, within NEPAD we see the Africa Peer Review Mechanism in which states commit to look at each other and be looked at, and to share best practice on the business of government and economic development. 23 countries are signed up to the Mechanism, and four Reviews are already underway.

Facing up to the challenges of good governance means facing up to the challenges of conflict. Conflict protects the vested interests of the few, at the expense of the many. Of the world's 200 or so states, the 45 weakest - those in or near conflict - contain roughly 1/7th of the global population, and about 1/3rd of all the people who live in absolute poverty. These states account for 40% of all child mortality. Their HIV infection rate is worse than that of other developing countries by a factor of four; and their death rate from malaria by a factor of thirteen. Developing countries' first realisation has to be that 'conflict equals poverty'. Just look at Darfur.

Let me turn now to our global system for development - the 'development architecture', if you will - and why it needs to change in the next ten years up to 2015.

The UN is the world's best hope, and yet it has never been under quite so critical a spotlight: for the wrong reasons, like the oil-for-food and the sex scandal in the DRC, and for the right reasons, like the High Level Panel report and Jeffrey Sachs' Millennium Project Report, both of which I welcome and support.

I think there are three areas in which the international system needs to change: humanitarian reform, development reform, and in recognising that poverty and conflict - or their opposites, security and development - are inextricably linked.

In December, I set out how I think we can improve the UN humanitarian system, in the interests of the world's most vulnerable people. And I did so with feeling, after I visited Darfur last June and left with an overwhelming sense that we could and should be doing better. Not for a minute do I think that anything about that crisis is straightforward, but that doesn't exonerate anyone, including the UN. We did too little too late, and we didn't act as one.

That's why I am calling for a new humanitarian fund of \$1 billion a year, administered by OCHA, to enable the UN to deploy funding early, the moment a crisis develops, without having to wait for donors and their bureaucratic processes to raise new money. The Fund would also allow the UN to spend on 'forgotten' emergencies - the ones that bilateral donor programmes are failing to reach. And I offered £100 million a year of UK funds for 10 years to start the ball rolling.

We also need improved leadership and coordination in countries. In the worst crises, the Secretary General should be able to authorise his Humanitarian Coordinators to direct the different UN agencies, on the basis of one assessment of need, using one common plan and drawing on one source of funding. I have now offered £40 million of DFID humanitarian funding for the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan, for him to deploy it where he judges it is most urgently needed.

Two months later, I have some further proposals, because if we are to strengthen the UN's planning and its financial resources, we must also strengthen its human resources.

First, leadership. I would like to see OCHA open up the recruitment process for Humanitarian Coordinators beyond the UN family, to include experienced people from NGOs.

Second, can we fund OCHA to have at the ready a highly experienced

Emergency Humanitarian Coordinator and a team of experienced staff, who could be deployed immediately to lead the UN response when an extraordinary crisis strikes? And not just people, but equipment and transport. That's one of the big lessons from the tsunami.

Third, measuring performance. I'm co-funding Jan Egeland's current review to establish benchmarks that the humanitarian system can be expected to deliver against. We need to be held to account.

I think we must also work together to make the UN development system more effective. Already, progress has been made under Kofi Annan's leadership on old challenges – such as competition for scarce resources, jostling over responsibilities, inflexible procedures, fragmented decision-making, bureaucracy. The UN can point to the establishment of UNAIDS, for instance, as an example of how its different parts can agree to adapt and modernise when the changes needed are clear – and where the external pressure is great enough.

But the UN development system and its agency programmes can also do more to harmonise with national development plans, such as Poverty Reduction Strategies. And I welcome Jeffrey Sachs's proposals that the UN itself should be on hand to assist in developing 10-year plans, through to 2015, for meeting the MDGs.

I am also keen to see greater harmonisation of individual UN agency programmes, both with other parts of the UN and with other development partners, and the removal of the remaining obstacles to UN agencies participating in pooled funding initiatives, such as sector-wide approaches like that seen for education. We should ensure that funds are channelled through those agencies best able to deliver results.

I would also like to see the UN take on a more active role in monitoring development progress, and helping to ensure that no country falls between the funding cracks. We talk of 'orphans and darlings': some countries have more donors than they can count, while others are forgotten. At the moment, the world has no system for looking at the sum total of all the decisions taken by all of the donors, and then asking, 'have we got it right?' Do some countries need more? I think we do need a body to keep a watchful eye over every country that needs development support. And I think that that body should be the UN. Beyond the Millennium Review Summit, these are the sort of issues we need to start thinking about: the question of what sort of UN development system we want to see in 2015, and how it can work most effectively with other parts of the multilateral system.

Third and finally, the international system's work on development must now be explicitly linked to its work on security. The High Level Panel has said as much: and it's right. Our role in the development community is to promote the security of the poor. To do this, we need an international system that addresses poverty, and conflict, and the links between the two.

In January, the UK published a paper on fragile states, committing ourselves not to shy away but to do more with them, to be proactive and not to react, to find new ways of getting help on the ground in traumatised or embattled places; and above all to use our development programmes to look at the root causes of conflict. That means dealing with social and ethnic tensions, and looking at the other triggers for conflict, like poor health and education, and low levels of economic activity.

The truth is that neither security nor development is sustainable without the other. I support the Panel's recommendation for a UN Peace-building Commission linked to the Security Council. There is clearly a gap in the international system for helping states before they fall into actual conflict – and for bridging the period immediately after hostilities, and before countries move towards longer-term recovery. Remember: many don't recover: 50% of countries slide back into conflict within 5 years.

There are also other issues we need to address: about the quantity and the quality of UN peacekeeping troops (and the need for more training), about the quality of the leadership of peacekeeping missions, and about the clarity of UN security forces' mandates. And how can we collectively support the UN's efforts

to take small weapons out of circulation – and in so doing end a vicious cycle of conflict, violence and fear; and give former combatants, and the communities in which they live, real alternatives to the way of the gun.

I want to finish with this last thought. Just under two months ago, on Boxing Day, the world woke up to a terrible natural disaster that took the lives of just under 300,000 of our fellow human beings. And yet amid all the grief and pain and suffering, we saw the world community at its best. We learned - if we didn't already know - that our neighbours are not just the people who live in our street or in our community. They are also people whose names we do not know and whose faces we have never seen, but with whom we feel an instinctive common bond of humanity, especially when they are in distress. And the world responded with compassion, money, practical help and determination.

And if we could do that - and we did - in response to a natural disaster, then as a human being I refuse to believe that we are not equally capable of showing the same compassion, money, practical help and determination in responding to the deadly 'silent tsunamis' of poverty, want, ignorance, squalor, and disease. Diseases like AIDS, TB and malaria, which - every two months - kill as many people as died on the morning of 26th December. It was because we had the will to do it that it happened; and 2005 must be the year in which we find the same will to help billions of our fellow human beings to change their own lives - and that of the generation that will come after them - for the better.

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