
Madam Chairperson,

With your permission, I am circulating the full text of my statement as I have to limit the spoken word.

We are two-thirds of the way down in time towards the Millennium Development Goals - but hardly two-thirds of the way down to the achievement of its goals.
In terms of the principal goal of the MDGs, which was the halving of the number of those earning less than $1.25 a day, we should have gone over 15 years from 1.8 billion poor to well under a billion poor. It would appear, however, that the reduction over ten years has been of the order of under half a billion; so, we will have to achieve another half billion in the remaining time - five years or half the time that has already elapsed - for the MDG of 0.9 billion at 2000 population levels to be reached by 2015. In fact, the task is even more daunting because the global population has soared and so has the absolute number of those to be rescued from poverty if the number of poor is to be halved by 2015. This is the key challenge we have to address as we move into the last lap of our race towards the Millennium Development Goals. In other words, yes, of course, there has been progress but we need very much more progress for the MDGs to retain their credibility among the poor of our lands. We acknowledge that India has a special responsibility in this regard for we and our South Asian neighbours are home to the largest number of the poor in the world.

Thus far, and into the foreseeable future, our principal instrument of poverty alleviation has been and will remain the stepping up of the rate of growth of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In this, we in India have been singularly successful. Our annual GDP growth rate steadily rose to 9.4% in 2007 before the global economic crisis the following year adversely impacted on our impressive growth rates. Yet, we weathered the crisis so well that we never fell much below 6%-7% and are now well on the way to returning to the 9% growth trajectory and are, indeed, confident that we will attain double-digit growth early in the coming decade and perhaps become the fastest growing economy in the world before the decade is out.

Yet, that is not a boast because we are deeply conscious that growth must be accompanied by the improved distribution of income and wealth, and the direct attack on poverty intensified, if growth is to include the people at large - and, in particular, the poor at large. Hence, the overarching objective of our Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-2012) has been the goal of "Inclusive Growth". We need, as the world needs, not only an India that prospers but also Indians who prosper. With this in view, we have initiated a series of major tax reforms that have substantially augmented Government revenues and deployed a substantial proportion of these enhanced revenues on social sector and anti-poverty programmes, complemented by special attention to the agriculture and allied activities sector which, in the accelerated growth scenario, have, in relative terms, been lagging behind. Our national goal is an annual average rate of growth of agriculture of at least 4%.

But [Therefore,] in addition to accelerated growth, we have also long recognised -the imperative of inclusive growth. We owe this awareness above all to
Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, who put before independent India the task of "wiping every tear from every eye" - in other words, not just accelerated growth but, more importantly, inclusive growth. Again, as the Mahatma foresaw, inclusive growth requires inclusive governance. The people cannot be left merely the beneficiaries of Governmental and international largesse. Their involvement in governing themselves, of being active participants in the processes of growth and governance is of the essence in enabling peoples and communities to spring the trap of poverty. The dream of an India where her people are empowered to develop themselves instead of waiting upon the charity and good will of others was given Constitutional sanctity, status, and sanction when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi initiated over two decades ago the steps that led in 1992 to Parliament amending the Constitution to provide for "institutions of local self-government" as the third tier of governance below the Union and State Governments. If Abraham Lincoln had defined democracy as government of the people, for the people and by the people, our Constitution now aims at development of the people, for the people and by the people: grassroots development through grassroots democracy. In consequence, following several rounds of free and fair elections, supervised by independent State Election Commissions, we now have close to 300,000 institutions of local self-government to which we have elected some 3.2 million representatives. They include 1.2 million women, about 86,000 of whom serve as chairpersons or vice-chairpersons of their respective units. We are proud to inform this distinguished committee and, through you, Madam Chairperson, the entire international community, that there are perhaps more democratically elected women in India alone than in the rest of the world put together in units of local self-government at village, block and district level and in the municipalities and metropolitan corporations of urban India.

Of course, income poverty is only one dimension of poverty. Poverty is multi-dimensional, as the United Nations Development Programme has long recognised in its construction of the Human Development Index. The MDGs themselves, with their focus on not only income but also health, education, the removal of gender bias and several other aspects of the development process are evidence of the increasing sophistication and understanding of poverty in all its diverse dimensions on the part of the international community here represented.

So far, I have been talking mostly of India, the principle justification for which is that nearly half the world’s poor live in my country. But we are more than conscious of poverty elsewhere, particularly in the Last Developed, Landlocked and Small Island Developing countries and most of Africa. These countries, badly affected by the global economic crisis for which they hardly responsible, bore the brunt of an estimated 60 million people, slipping back into poverty in 2009 alone, feared to be followed by an equal number this year, a major set back to the global war on poverty. We, therefore, welcome the decision to pay special
attention to the development needs of these countries in the coming years. India will be an active and concerned participant in working out strategies to assist these countries to take their due place in the global economic sun. The restoration of economic normalcy in the developed world is, of course, a key requirement for the world to attain the MDGs and, in particular, for these specially disadvantaged nations to move in tandem with growth in the world as a whole.

The coincidence in time between the target period for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the objectives of the Second Decade for the Eradication of Poverty provide a significant conjunction for promoting an integrated and holistic approach to problems of poverty eradication, now threatened by the simultaneous onset of financial, food and energy crises. The High-Level MDG Review undertaken about a month ago provided the United Nations with an opportunity to address in the totality the measures at national and international level that need to be taken to face up to these crises and return the world economy to the path of universal, accelerated and inclusive growth. There is some cause for satisfaction in the outcome of that High-Level Review. But it falls to this Committee to work out in detail the direction and content of what next needs to be done. India declares its willingness to sincerely cooperate with others, and, indeed, where required, to take the lead itself in working for the greatest good of the largest number in terms of the provision of adequate food, education, shelter and health services, as well as other basic minimum human needs through the empowerment of the poor and the marginalised, and according priority to the political, economic, social, cultural and administrative empowerment of half our population, women who have so long been deprived in all our societies of the opportunity to contribute in full measure to nation-building and poverty eradication in all that diverse dimension.

I mentioned a moment ago that we in the developing world are the hardly responsible for the global economic crisis but large parts of the world have become the principal if unwitting victims of the crisis. This only underlines the extent to which global governance issues are central to globalisation as vehicle of global prosperity. In this context, it is imperative that we look to the framework and institutions of international economic cooperation to see what needs to be done at the international level to pave the way towards the smoother and more rapid achievement of the MDGS.

These institutional measures would include the reform of the Bretton Woods Institutions; an ambitious and comprehensive outcome of the Climate Change negotiations; and a development-oriented outcome of the Doha Round on the multilateral trading system. These would put in place an improved international architecture that provides enhanced policy space to developing countries to pursue their development goals, including, above all, the eradication of poverty.
For decades now the undertaking made by developed countries of meeting the ODA target of 0.7% of Gross National Income has remained a paper commitment, with the honourable exception of some countries. With international cooperation having been inscribed as one of the MDGs, it is imperative that ODA targets be fulfilled at the earliest so that the lack of financial resources for development, especially in specially disadvantaged and least developed countries, be overcome. Equally imperative is the need to undertake the transfer of technology and capacity building in developing countries generally, but least developed and other disadvantaged countries in particular.

We are happy that today India’s development partnership with countries in the South goes beyond technical cooperation. Our annual outlay on concessional lending and grants is over US$ 1 billion, covering countries in our region, in Africa and beyond. In addition, we have extended lines of credit worth more than US$ 5 billion since 2003 to spur growth in developing countries.

We are committed to doing more in the coming years with our partners in the South and stepping up our support to South-South Cooperation, both on the development side as well as in support of humanitarian needs.

The quantum leap in South-South Cooperation has significantly complemented global resources targeted at development agenda, but cannot be a substitute for North-South cooperation.

Thank you.