Mr. President, Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

I am honoured to be present at this august gathering and to speak on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), an aspiration which so fittingly captures the global vision and promise for humanity in the 21st century.

Allow me to begin by thanking you for your stewardship, guidance and support to the expansive development agenda of the United Nations including the MDGs.

Mr. President,

In his message on the UN World Public Service Day five years ago, our Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh said

"The Millennium Development Goals that we have set for ourselves cannot be met unless governments are pro-active. No government in any civilized society can ignore the basic needs of people. The goal of the development process must be to include every last member of our society in that process".
As we take stock of the MDGs, we note that the world as a whole has made substantial gains but the progress is uneven and short of expectations.

This is particularly visible in the so called forgotten MDGs, MDGs that deal with women and children's health. We are, therefore, happy that the Secretary-General has set out a Global Strategy on women and children's health.

Natural disasters have also taken a toll on MDG achievements. The death and destruction in Haiti and Pakistan have been on an unprecedented scale.

As a fellow developing country that has itself taken a huge toll from such disasters, we responded duty-bound in solidarity to assist the Governments and people in the affected countries to the best of our ability and in keeping with their priorities.

Mr. President,

A growing concern is the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities and regions in our country. Rain-fed agriculture accounts for sixty percent of crop area in India. Climate change has aggravated the situation in traditionally drought and flood prone regions in the country. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was designed to provide relief to affected farming communities in the country.

We in India are alive to the challenges of climate, and remain committed to mounting appropriate national and regional responses. Our national action plan on Climate Change will increase the share of clean and renewable energy in our energy mix, increase energy efficiency across the economy and expand our forest cover.

Mr. President,

With just five years to go for the MDG target year and our record of mixed success, it is imperative that we significantly step up our individual and collective commitments and efforts for the realization of the MDGs.

Mr. President,

Our collective efforts have certainly borne fruit on the goal of poverty eradication at the global level.

But, more than 60 million people slipped back into poverty in 2009 following the economic and financial crisis of 2008. This has certainly had a regressive impact on the MDGs.
It is, therefore, important that we ensure that global economic recovery is durable, balanced and sustainable. This is also critical for achieving the MDGs and for us to be able to effectively address the challenges of food and energy security, climate change and natural disasters.

In so far as India is concerned, our economy has shown resilience and is expected to grow by 8.5% in 2010-11, and over 9% in 2011-12.

The UN Secretary General's report on MDGs notes that India's efforts on poverty reduction have been a major contributor for reduction in global poverty levels and some 188 million people in India would be out of poverty by 2015.

We need to, however, be cognizant that the largest concentration of poor in the world continues to remain in India and South Asia. The long distance we still have to travel to put poverty behind us in India should not be underestimated.

Our efforts, therefore, are to push for growth while at the same time ensuring that the fruits of growth reach out across our society, i.e. inclusive growth. This, indeed, is the main objective of India's ambitious socio-economic development programmes.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, with an annual budget of US$ 8 billion, is the largest "cash for work" poverty alleviation programme in the world and has benefited 50 million rural households in India so far.

By law, all Indian children in the age group of 6 to 14 years must now receive free education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a universal elementary education programme with an annual budget of US$ 3 billion has dramatically increased primary school enrolment.

To ensure that children remain in school and that this also benefits them nutritionally, we also run the largest school-lunch programme in the world.

This is being supplemented by Saakshar Bharat a special programme focused on female literacy launched in 2009.

Enormous strides have been made in the empowerment of women.

India has embarked on perhaps the most ambitious affirmative action ever by mandating that one-third of all elected positions in local government be reserved for women. We are striving to raise this figure even higher. More than a million women
representatives already hold elected positions. A legislation to extend reservation of seats in Parliament is under consideration.

Mr. President,

India faces enormous challenges in the areas of women's and children's health. The Government of India has adopted a multi pronged strategy under the National Rural Health Mission in 2005 to provide health care in the rural areas which is accessible, affordable, accountable, effective and reliable. This Mission is fully focused on improving our standing on maternal and child health indicators. Under the umbrella of this Mission, recently, in order to accelerate progress, new initiatives have been identified, namely, Name Based Tracking of Pregnant Women, Maternal Death Review, Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health, Differential Planning, and Annual Health Survey. Our JANANI SURAKSHA YOJANA, a dedicated safe motherhood programme, has so far benefited 28 million women.

As a result of on-going efforts, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in India has come down from 301 over 2001-2003 to 254 over 2004-2006, a decline of 47 points over a period of three years. Though, we are still some distance away from the target of 109 by 2015, going by the rate of decline in the past and comprehensive efforts being made across the country, it appears that India is on the right track with regard to MDG-5. We are also trying to take similar strides on Infant Mortality Rate (IMR).

India has made notable progress on combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. The HIV epidemic has reached a plateau in India and we now have a prevalence rate down to 0.34 %.

Mr. President,

India has made valuable use of technology to bring benefits of development to our people. The tele-density in India has increased from 0.67% in 1991 to 37 % in 2009. Our innovative and low cost technology solutions in the field of IT and telecommunication have brought development benefits, not just in India, but also to people in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere.

In August 2010, we launched the second phase of the Pan-African e-Network project. The network project will link all the 53 countries in Africa with centres of excellence in India for telemedicine and tele-education services. More than 1700 students from African countries have already registered with different Indian universities for various courses and regular tele-medical consultations have also started between African doctors and Indian specialists.

Mr. President,
The lack of progress on building a robust global partnership needs to be urgently addressed. Unmet financial commitments by developed country partners have widened the financing for development gap. We call upon them to fulfill the long made 0.7% of GNI commitment.

Equally urgent is the need to transfer technology and undertake capacity building in developing countries.

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

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, US$ 5 billion has been extended as lines of credit since 2003.

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.

Mr. President,

India is seized of the MDG challenges that lie ahead of us. Our commitment remains resolute.

Our national goal of inclusive growth and the larger idea of a more humane and just global society that underlines the Millennium Declaration would continue to inspire us to work untiringly to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

In the final march towards the attainment of the MDG, let us be inspired by the belief of Mahatma Gandhi in the limitless potential of human achievement, he said:

"A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history."

This should be the driving force for nations across the world and to this we dedicate ourselves.

Thank you.