

STATEMENT BY MR. DEREK O'BRIEN, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION AT THE JOINT DEBATE ON AGENDA ITEMS: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL [9] INTERGRATED AND COORDINATED IMPLEMENTATION OF AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE OUTCOME OF THE MAJOR UN CONFERENCE AND SUMMITS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS [14] AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE OUTCOME OF THE MILLENNIUM SUMMIT [113] AT THE 67TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 22, 2012

Mr. President,
Excellencies and distinguished delegates.

I am privileged to address the General Assembly.

In Bengali: I bring you greetings from India. We are in the midst of our biggest festival of the year in Bengal, the state of India that I come from, and on behalf of its people, and the people of India, I would like you wish you a happy and prosperous Durga Puja.



Mr. President,

At the Rio+20 Summit in June this year, the global community made a solemn promise to craft a future that would truly and really - and not just in some clichéd manner - belong to all; to all of us, every child of Mother Earth. It was a promise to the marginalised to deliver a life of dignity, a life of hope. It was a pledge to us to fight poverty as the greatest global challenge.

With just three years to go to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) finish line, where do we stand? The task at hand remains a daunting one. More than a billion people in developing countries continue to live in extreme poverty, hunger and hopeless desperation. We need to do much more.

On MDGs, we can take some comfort in collectively having made progress on poverty eradication, primary education, gender equality and sanitation. However, when we introspect, our record on maternal mortality, infant mortality and malnutrition remains a matter of deep and abiding concern. We will have a more populous planet in the 21st century than ever before in human history. Yet, are we doing enough to harness this demographic dividend?

In India, we have pursued the path of inclusive growth for achieving poverty eradication. We have brought down poverty numbers significantly as compared to the 1990 levels. But we continue to be challenged by more than 300 million people living below the poverty line of US\$ 1.25 a day. This is equivalent to the population of the United States, Mr President, Excellencies and distinguished delegates; and that should emphasise the enormity of the crisis and the moral obligation that still confronts us.

In primary education, India has achieved near 100% enrolment. In part, this has been due to the Right to Education legislation, which makes eight years of schooling a legal right that the Indian state must ensure to every citizen. The challenge now is to focus on the quality of learning in our schools, and to further narrow the gender gap in secondary and primary schooling. We have for the first time in our history added more female literates than males in the past decade, an achievement that deserves appreciation and of which we are justifiably proud.

However, India is conscious of the health and social development gaps that are yet to be addressed. Our commitment to tackling infant and maternal mortality and augmenting women's empowerment remains absolute and unflinching. It is part of our nation-building tradition. As Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, one of the foremost minds of 19th century Bengal, a pioneer of modern India and among our country's great champions of gender rights, female emancipation and girls' education, wrote, "How sad! The country, whose male population is unkind, unreligious and unaware of the distinction between the good and the evil and don't care about justice and fairness and where abiding the rituals is the chief preoccupation of religion, should not give birth to girls!"

This philosophy, which Vidyasagar explained in the 1850s, 150 years ago, anticipated the enlightenment of the MDGs. The MDGs, Mr. President, represent the most cherished chapter of multilateralism. There should be no let-up in our efforts to achieving them. And the unfinished agenda of the MDGs must find a pivotal place in our work ahead. An inclusive Post-2015 development agenda can only be built if equity and poverty eradication remain its defining contours.

Mr. President,

At the Rio+20 Summit, we discussed practically every aspect of human endeavour and came up with a blueprint for action on sustainable development, one that rightfully integrates economic growth with social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

And to do so we agreed to establish several institutional frameworks: a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), developing a Financing Strategy and a Technology Mechanism, strengthening the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and setting up a High-level Political Forum on sustainable development. Time is of essence and putting these building blocks in place in the months ahead must be our priority. We have just begun this century, but let us not postpone its most efficacious and necessary achievements to too late in the century. We did that in the 20th century and look how our world suffered.

As we sit down to fashion the SDGs, we must do so with a clear idea that they would form the crux of the Post-2015 development agenda. Dealing with challenges related to poverty, food, energy and livelihoods issues should be our priority. The MDG framework has given us valuable lessons as to what works and what does not. There is little value in trying to reinvent the wheel. The framework of MDG goals should be replicated in the new set of goals.

Mr. President,

Our commitment to the MDGs and the Rio+20 is unwavering. But the global economic situation does not seem to favour us. Slackened growth, high inflation - particularly food inflation - a mounting debt burden and high youth employment are undercutting the development gains made in developing countries. Therefore, it is of fundamental importance that we, as a global community, are able to pull the world economy back on track. Nothing can be more helpful as we do our best to put more resources into and bring greater focus on our development goals.

We must also redouble our efforts to push for urgent progress on the Doha Development Round. Those who profess “more trade and not aid” is the answer to the developmental gaps of our era need to put their words into action. Shibboleths alone cannot do. It is equally imperative to fashion a comprehensive and balanced outcome to Climate Change negotiations, based on the principles of common but differentiated responsibility and equity.

South-South Cooperation must also contribute and it must be allowed to grow within its own space and its own ecosystem, and in accordance with its own principles. It cannot, however, be a substitute for North-South Cooperation. The two processes are complementary. As a world community, we have to avoid limiting “either-or” choices.

Mr. President,

An issue of great import today for sustainable development is the deficit in global governance. Without addressing this, we cannot restructure the 21st century comity of nations as an equitable matrix that serves the cause of all. Decisions by the self-selected few can hardly provide the solutions we seek for the many.

It is crucial, therefore, that developing countries are given due voice and participation in the decision-making structures of the global economic and financial institutions, especially the Bretton Woods Institutions. And, here at the

United Nations, it is critical we move urgently on reform of the Security Council by expanding it in both categories, permanent and non-permanent, revitalise the General Assembly and strengthen the ECOSOC.

Mr. President,

The Convention on Biological Diversity, born out of the Earth Summit, remains a seminal global compact on development. Movement on biodiversity goals and actions remains vital to integrate sustainability and equity into our development paradigm.

This past week in India, we successfully concluded the 11 Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. We hope its outcome will help us achieve our collective commitments. I wish to thank all the delegations for their support in making the event a success.

Feeding our people and providing them with sustenance is a challenge that we, in the developing countries, grapple with daily. We are hopeful our biodiversity resources and conservation efforts will help us find new solutions to food security and livelihoods issues.

Mr President,

Space scientists call our Earth the Goldilocks planet - not too hot, not too cold, just right for life. Indeed, in keeping with that imagery, humankind's evolution and prodigious attainments in the millennia that have passed have been nothing short of a fairy tale. A true miracle, I may say. True, our challenges are many. But given what we have achieved, given the diseases and scourges we have beaten back, given the disasters and calamities we have learnt to protect ourselves against, what we are left with is, frankly, only the last mile.

With our collaborative effort and collective will we can do it. We can fashion a better world for ourselves - and as a legacy for our children and succeeding generations. Acting multilaterally, through institutions and agencies such as the United Nations, we represent hope for millions around the world. This is a hope that seeks only basic necessities of life. This is a hope we cannot betray.

As the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore put it in his eloquent words:

“I slept and dreamt that life was joy/
I awoke and saw that life was service/
I acted and behold, service was joy.”

Let us, as a global community, awaken to service. And to joy.

I thank you.

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