

The Honorable
Ann Veneman
Executive Director,
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Help to the Needy: What Hinders UNICEF's Efforts to Assist Children in Need

I would like to give a special welcome to the members of the UNICEF, U.S.A., board who are here today. This is the Los Angeles Chapter that helps raise money for UNICEF and, therefore, helps what we do to help children around the world. Many people don't know that UNICEF is an entirely donation-funded organization. We get no dues as many U.N. organizations do, so the work that they do is particularly important to us.

It is an honor to serve in a role that allows me to advocate for children on a global stage. The past six months as executive director of UNICEF have been nothing short of an incredible and rewarding opportunity. My first field mission was to three countries in Southern Africa where I saw the devastation of HIV/AIDS and food insecurities, along with a lack of government capacity to address those issues. I traveled to the tsunami region of Sri Lanka where our discussions also included child soldiers in that country. I saw the conditions of women and children in Kenya and witnessed the hardships of children in the conflict situation of Uganda. I learned about the rural poor in the western provinces of China and disparities that exist in that country of economic growth. I have traveled to several donor countries that support our programs, and just last week I traveled to northern Pakistan where I saw up close the people who have been so devastated by the earthquake. It was especially difficult to see the schools that had collapsed and to realize how many children had died inside. It is estimated that over 17,000 children were killed in the schools, and many more were injured. I had the opportunity when I was in Pakistan to go to hospitals to visit with many of these children who had been injured when their schools collapsed. Many hospitals also collapsed in the affected region, and in some areas as many as 50 percent of health care workers were killed. There's one town that had seven doctors—all seven of whom were killed.

UNICEF is helping to provide clean water and sanitation, support for children—particularly children affected by trauma—and, very importantly, we are also involved in immunizations to prevent disease outbreaks that could claim additional lives. These vital humanitarian functions remain a core of UNICEF's mission and were, in fact, the agency's sole function at its inception in the wake of World War II. We will

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continue to provide relief during conflicts and emergencies such as the tsunami and earthquake regions. This year UNICEF and our sister U.N. agencies also assisted in areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina. This was the first time the United Nations has provided assistance in the United States itself.

As UNICEF begins its 60th year in existence it is also an opportunity to look towards the future. Over the years, UNICEF evolved into an organization that now plays a central role in international development. Today, we are working towards an agenda of positive change. These are known as the Millennium Development Goals. These goals were agreed on by heads of state internationally in 2000, and they set targets for hunger and poverty reduction, gender equality and educational opportunities, child and maternal survival, combating deadly diseases, such as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and the environment.

At UNICEF we often say that these goals really are all about children, but time is not on our side. There are just ten years left until the deadline that had been set by world leaders to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. While ten years sounds like a long time, our task is not unlike changing the course of a massive ship. Progress in many countries across several of these goals must be accelerated or the world will have failed to deliver on its promise. A prescription for success requires both a diagnosis of the problems as well as the will to pursue

remedies, even if the medicine has a bitter taste.

Now, as we gather in this room in the second-largest city in the most prosperous nation on earth, some might question the relevance of goals that focus largely on the developing world. To them



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I would offer an analogy that I call “the shrinking globe,” and why it means that complacency is not an option. In 1492 Christopher Columbus took 70 days to reach the New World. This was a voyage of about 4,000 miles. Today, a message can travel that same distance at the speed of light, or about 282 million times faster than the *Santa Maria*. In effect, this means that the earth of Columbus’ time has been shrunk to a relative size that is just slightly larger than a golf ball. We are, indeed, inhabitants of the new world, and it is a global world that brings with it both opportunities and challenges. Franklin Roosevelt understood this more

than 60 years ago, in his Four Freedoms Speech, when he said, “The future and the safety of our country and of our democracy are overwhelmingly involved in events far beyond our borders.”

Those who do not see the linkages between the suffering of a child in Africa and Eastern Europe and South Asia, or even in Latin America, and their own security and prosperity simply are not looking hard enough. Issues that were once isolated by country or region are increasingly crossing national boundaries, such as war, disease and pollution. Today’s world is one in which one billion people live on a dollar or less per day. It is a world in which 10.6 million children continue to die each year of causes that are largely preventable. It is a world in which natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation, famine and hunger continue to undermine peace and stability. Poor and unstable nations are not just ill-equipped to serve their own citizens; they create a drag on the global economy and too often they become havens for dangerous ideologies that have no place in a civilized world. But just because the problems around the world are daunting does not mean that change is impossible. In his recent book, *The End of Poverty*, my U.N. colleague Jeffrey Sachs writes, “In circumstances that seem the most hopeless there are ways forward if the right strategies are applied and if the right combination of investments is made.” Sachs rightly argues that international development and poverty reduction are not just moral imperatives but they are in the self-interests of wealthier countries.

Let me discuss what I view as some of the impediments to international development and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. A major threat that was not even in the public’s consciousness 25 years ago is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In 2004 alone it is estimated

that more than three million people died of AIDS around the world, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa, for a total of more than 20 million since 1981. If a natural disaster had produced that kind of death toll, the global reaction would have undoubtedly been swift and massive. Economies and government capacity of entire nations are being crippled as parents, farmers, teachers, healthcare workers and others succumb to the disease. In the hardest-hit countries, life expectancy has plummeted from the mid-sixties to the low-thirties. Yet far too little is being done, especially where children are concerned. On October 25 UNICEF and UNAIDS launched a global partnership called “Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS” to help portray the child’s face of this pandemic, to marshal resources and to achieve results. Right now only a tiny fraction of children who need pediatric AIDS treatment are getting it. There are an estimated 15 million children who have lost one or both parents to this disease and they need support. The mothers who are at risk for transmitting HIV to their infants need proper medical attention.

Our ambitious new campaign is meant to change that, because if we do not address the scourge of AIDS, many other intractable problems around the world might simply become unsolvable. One of those problems and another impediment to development is food security. The growing economic power of many Asian countries can be traced in large part to the success of the Green Revolution, which was led by Dr. Norman Borlaug, a personal hero and friend of mine. When a country has the ability to feed itself, a spark is lit that can transform an entire nation, labor is freed up for other productive purposes, the economy diversifies, and additional goods and services become available for export and the cycle of aid dependency is broken. A rising middle class becomes a self-sustaining engine that helps propel additional growth and innovation.

But too many countries, particularly in Africa, did not benefit from the Green Revolution, and greater food security

African and Caribbean countries to just four nations – the U.S., the U.K, Canada and Australia. Jamaica has reportedly lost 41 percent of the doctors it has educated, while the loss is 35 percent in Haiti, 30 percent in Ghana, and between 14–19 percent in South Africa, Ethiopia and Uganda. This crumbling health care infrastructure will make it especially hard to respond effectively to the growing AIDS pandemic and to emerging threats such as avian flu. UNICEF is working with many partners to deal with the potential bird flu outbreak and the best defense is a strong

2015 is one of those goals, along with a target of gender parity in education by the end of this year, a target that unfortunately will be missed. Clearly, strong educational systems and universal primary access are indicators of economic success but they are important in so many other ways as well. For instance, there is a strong correlation between education and the health of a population. We know that for every additional year of education per 1,000 women, two maternal deaths will be prevented. Girls who complete their primary educations are less likely to become HIV-positive and their children are more likely to survive infancy and be healthy.

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must be a focus.

A related impediment to development is the exclusion of nations as fuller participants in international trade. Africa has emerged from an era of colonialism only to continue to confront outdated ideas about its capacity to more completely integrate into the global economy. Today, it is estimated that Africa's share of global trade is only two percent, even though its share of world population is about 14 percent. By some estimates, increasing Africa's share of world trade by just one percentage point will yield an additional \$70 billion in exports for that continent. That is more than the amount of total international aid that goes to Africa.

Factors that make it more difficult for countries to address their own development issues are compounded by yet another impediment—the out-migration of intellectual capacity, or the so-called “brain drain.” Countries that are most in need of talented and capable professionals, whether they are healthcare workers, teachers or others, are losing them to industrialized countries through a combination of factors. The *New York Times* recently reported on a study that found high numbers of doctors emigrating from

response at the country level. The brain drain is not something that is easily solved by industrialized countries simply educating more of their own doctors. The *New York Times* article points out that there are barriers within developing countries, such as lack of adequate compensation for health care physicians in the country.

This brings me to the next impediment to development, and that is corruption and lack of good governance. Increasingly, the international community is demanding that aid for the developing world focus on countries where there are stronger democratic institutions and accountability. Development cannot truly be sustainable where there is little or no respect for the rights of individuals, of a vigorous and independent judiciary, and other guarantees such as private property rights. These all provide underpinnings of stability and predictability that are prerequisites for investment in our increasingly global world.

Lack of education is also an impediment. That is why education is a central focus of the Millennium Development Goals. Universal primary education by

This brings me to another impediment to development and that's gender inequality. I have just touched on a few of the ways that gender equality in education can better benefit development. Common sense and experience both tell us what an extreme case of gender inequity, such as that under the Taliban in Afghanistan, can do to a country. Enforced ignorance and exclusion of women from the work force causes as much as half of the human potential of nations and societies to go unrealized.

Finally, conflict is a major impediment to sustainable development. War and

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conflict divert precious resources, both human and economic, and reinforce the cycle of poverty. They create a climate that makes it harder for other countries to engage with a nation, economically and politically, and they rob children of

their proper development and of childhood itself. Earlier I mentioned the issue of child soldiers. It is hard to imagine a practice that is more damaging to a country's future than denying its own children an education while also using them as pawns on the battlefield. While I was in Northern Uganda I met with several children who had been abducted. I heard about their horrifying stories of lost childhoods and the indignity and abuse experienced by these children while they were in captivity by rebels.

In this role, I have seen the depths of misery and suffering, but I have also seen the pinnacle of potential and hope. Our ancestors invented the wheel and brought light to the darkness. Our peers have been to the moon and harnessed the power of both the atom and the gene. Surely those of us in this generation, in this room, are also capable of great things that will benefit our fellow human beings.

Thank you all very much.

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