

Millennium Summit of the United Nations

An Earnest Commitment to Improving State of the World

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The news headlines will report contradictory stories these days, some filled with hope for our common destiny, and others carrying ominous signs of what could well be the road ahead.

The United Nations Millennium Summit will convene more democratic leaders than ever before. Halving the number of people living in extreme poverty by the year 2015, reversing the spread of HIV / AIDS, advancing basic education to all girls and boys, and bridging the digital divide, are concise objectives that constitute their working agenda. And while the tackling of these goals may raise the hope in many of us, actions to achieve these objectives are cast in a reality of uncertainty.

Despite the enormous creation of increased wealth produced mainly by what is being called the "new economy" thriving in the developed world, foreign assistance of the richest nations to the developing world is close to its lowest point ever. Information societies are empowering citizens in advanced countries, and yet 42% of the world's population under the age of 15 has never made a phone call. Scientists travelling two weeks ago to the North Pole found water, instead of the accustomed two or three meter thick ice

cap. And 25% of the world's population is barely surviving on income of under a one dollar a day.

The opportunity to reconcile these contradictions lies precisely in the fact that never before as in the present, our actions today will beyond a doubt shape our future fate. So what do we expect of our political leaders assembled in New York? an earnest commitment to improving the state of the world!

Such a commitment - not from the lips but from the heart - must begin by recognizing three realities:

1. The challenges facing us today have increased in number, complexity, and interdependence.
2. We are witnesses to a tremendous compression of time, imposing a reduced reaction time to deal with issues.
3. Governments and international organizations have lost ground because of the inappropriate structures and procedures they adhere to.

The past has been one where in the best of cases development scenarios had two prevalent dimensions: an economic and social perspective. The present is telling us that besides the connectivity between both, the environment can no longer be considered an externality. If development is going to be sustainable - a major paradigm shift from our present course - we must consider with equal relevance its economic, social, and environmental components, as well as the many linkages between them. This would have a positive impact on the quality of our lives.

Such a holistic approach to development - a much needed change - is best served by the realization that the players have also multiplied, and their weight has shifted. No longer can governments be the sole trustees of our future, nor is it in their best interest to be so. The business sector with an increased societal responsibility can play a strategic role. Other representations of civil society can help address the complex and systemic challenges we face.

It would therefore seem that relevant to our present and future problem solving ability, is the emergence of competent frameworks for bringing all the interested global stakeholders together for a collaborative, ongoing effort to deal with the global agenda. The new attitude must be cooperation and partnership between the many actors, engaged in a constant constructive dialogue that integrates our tremendous collective resources, towards improving the state of the world.

Therefore the good news for the world, is that the Millennium Summit can be the launching pad for such a differently fresh and needed approach to our wellbeing. And the good news for our assembled political leaders, is that by deciding to support such an approach, they no longer need to tackle the challenges by themselves!