Statement by

Rt. Hon. Helen Clark
Administrator of the United Nations
Development Programme and
Chair of the United Nations Development Group

United Nations
MDGs: charting the way forward

In 2000, the Member States of the United Nations agreed on a bold vision for the future which reaffirmed the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for the planet, and shared responsibility. That vision, enshrined in the Millennium Declaration and rooted in the Charter of the United Nations, recognized the need to pool efforts as never before, and to advance simultaneously on the three pillars of the UN’s mandate: development, peace and security, and human rights.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gave practical expression to this vision, and succeeded in placing people at the centre of the global development agenda. Their clarity, conciseness, and measurability provided a unifying framework for policymakers, development experts, and civil society, bringing diverse actors together around a common cause.

Since then, important progress has been made on the MDGs, and some targets, such as those related to poverty reduction and access to improved water drinking sources have been reached at the global level. Progress, however, has not been evenly shared across and within countries, and on some MDGs the shortfalls in global progress are considerable.

At last month’s Special Event on the MDGs convened by the President of the 68th UN General Assembly, we heard clearly from Members States about their priorities for action – as articulated in the event’s outcome document. Leaders conveyed a sense of urgency and determination to accelerate progress by the 2015 MDGs target date.

We also heard that countries remain deeply concerned about the unevenness of progress, the gaps in achievement, and the significant challenges which remain. More than a billion people still live in extreme poverty. Far too many people face serious deprivations in health and education. Biodiversity loss, the degradation of water, drylands, and forests, and the intensifying risks of climate change threaten to reverse achievements to date and undermine future gains. Countries called for acceleration towards the MDGs, emphasizing inclusivity and accessibility for all, and the need to meet commitments already made.

Member States were also decisive in charting the way towards the post-2015 development agenda. They called for crafting a strong, inclusive, and people-centred agenda, which would build on the foundation
laid by the MDGs, and both tackle their unfinished business and address new challenges. This development framework should underscore the central imperative of poverty eradication and the need for integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, as well as being unified in a single set of goals – universal in nature and applicable to all countries.

At this juncture, we have an opportunity for a paradigm shift in international development, which would build on the Millennium Declaration and expand on the strengths of the MDGs. The objective would be to eradicate poverty and its underlying causes within the context of sustainable development. The UN and the World Bank, working collaboratively, can support this process in the years ahead.

**Accelerating and sustaining MDG progress**

The greater the success of the MDGs, the greater the credibility of the post-2015 development agenda will be.

In April 2013, the Secretary-General launched the UN campaign “MDG Momentum – 1,000 Days of Action”, urging countries and their partners to step up efforts to meet the MDGs. This added impetus to the many initiatives underway in response to the call for acceleration made at the 2010 High Level Plenary Meeting on the MDGs.

Under the auspices of the UN Development Group (UNDG), the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) helps national governments accelerate their progress towards MDG targets which otherwise would be likely to be missed. More than fifty countries are currently using this approach to formulate and implement acceleration action plans. A range of MDG targets are being addressed, including some of the most difficult – such as hunger in the Sahel and maternal mortality across the world.

The MAF brings governments and other stakeholders together to identify and overcome bottlenecks constraining MDG progress. This results in collaborative action which cuts across sectors and silos. Last year, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Co-ordination agreed to review and provide joint support to country level efforts for accelerating progress. UN agencies and the World Bank are working together to do this.

**Beyond 2015**

Discussions on the shape of a new global development agenda are well underway. Countries themselves are highlighting the directions in which their own priorities are evolving – through the voices of their citizens, as well as in the aspirations of their governments as expressed in their planning documents and national vision statements.

Countries’ knowledge and experiences of achieving triple wins for development, by simultaneously pursuing objectives of economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity, will inform the agenda. Making the most of such approaches and building resilience to shocks will be a major task of development in coming decades. As highlighted in the World Bank’s 2014 World Development Report, governments have a critical role to play in managing systemic risks at the national level and providing an enabling environment for people and communities.

The vision and insights of a range of stakeholders are available to UN Member States considering the new agenda. *The Secretary General’s report to the 68th session of the General Assembly*, ‘A life of dignity for all’, emphasized the integration of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship in the future development agenda. *The High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda* has called for a universal agenda driven by transformative shifts, based on leaving no one behind,
putting sustainable development at the core, transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth, building peace and accountable institutions, and forging a new global partnership.

Reports by the United Nations Task Team (comprising sixty UN agencies); the World Bank; the Sustainable Development Solutions Network; UN Global Compact business partners; and the UN Regional Commissions have also provided analysis and important recommendations for the design and content of a new agenda.

The commonalities among these contributions far outweigh their differences. Together with publications from a range of civil society and academic partners, these reports are important inputs to the ongoing discussion in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and the Expert Group on Financing Sustainable Development.

As well, the UN development system has facilitated an unprecedented global conversation on what citizens of the world would like to see in the post-2015 agenda. More than a million people have contributed to this process through 88 national consultations, eleven thematic consultations, and through an on-line platform which includes the MY World survey. Their perspectives have been incorporated in a major report.

In common with other inputs to the discussion on post-2015, those engaged in the global conversation have called for finishing the business of the MDGs and keeping poverty eradication at the core of the future agenda. They also want to see new challenges facing people and the planet addressed, including by integrating sustainable development in all its dimensions into the agenda. People also want more ambition on tackling inequality, including in incomes, persistent discrimination against certain groups, and growing vulnerability and insecurity stemming from inequalities and lack of opportunity.

The analysis coming from the consultations shows that better governance takes center stage in people’s hopes for a better world. It is seen both as a development outcome in its own right, and something which makes it possible to achieve the MDGs and future development goals. People also want the new development framework to address violence, conflict, and disasters as constraints on development. The consultations reveal a clear understanding that there can be no development without peace and security.

The UN will continue to do its utmost to ensure that the voices, views, and ideas of people from all over the world are brought to the debate, making it a true “we the peoples” process. But it shouldn’t stop there. More than anything else, the consultations have revealed a huge appetite for engagement, not only in the design of the development agenda, but also in its future implementation. People want not only to articulate the problems, but also to help find solutions, and be involved in implementing them.

Echoing the Secretary General’s High Level Panel, there is a call for a data revolution — so that regularly updated, reliable, and disaggregated data is available to ordinary citizens about their communities, countries, and the world. People see this as the foundation for achieving greater accountability.

**Addressing climate change**

For the post-2015 agenda to be successful, the level of ambition on addressing climate change needs to be raised. Low-emission and climate-resilient development pathways need to be promoted, as is already being done by a number of developed and developing countries. All avenues need to be explored in the endeavour to keep the global temperature rise to below two degrees Celsius.
The United Nations is working towards a high-level climate change summit in September 2014 to lay the groundwork for an ambitious, legally-binding, global climate change agreement to be reached in 2015. It is our hope that the Summit will generate support for agreement to be reached in this timeframe.

UN and World Bank collaboration

The scope for collaboration between the UN and the World Bank is great – and it is needed. Both institutions are drawing similar conclusions from their analysis of global trends. We see potential for growth and development, but also considerable dangers posed by rising risks from multiple sources. We are converging on the shared view that eliminating extreme poverty within a generation is possible – and that this can be achieved in sustainable ways. We each acknowledge that we cannot do things on our own: partnerships are pivotal to development success. We understand that our respective Member States want greater access to knowledge, better advice on development options, and improved efficiency and agility in our operations. The considerable efforts towards creating a ‘One UN’ in the field have been driven by some of the same considerations underlying the concept of ‘One World Bank Group’.

This common ground between the two institutions is apparent from the dialogue unfolding in the UN on the post-2015 development agenda, from the strategic planning processes of several UN agencies, and in the World Bank Group Strategy which will be discussed at the Development Committee.

With fewer than 820 days to go until the MDG target date of 31 December 2015 is reached, the opportunity exists now for pragmatic UN-World Bank collaboration which delivers solid results for developing countries. Now is the time to step up our efforts to build a more just, secure, and sustainable future for all.