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PRESENTATION OF THE REPORTS ON THE PANEL DISCUSSIONS

(a) "COUNTDOWN TO 2015: KEEPING OUR COLLECTIVE PROMISE ON THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS"

Rapporteur: Hon. Meira Kumar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha of India

We had a very lively debate that followed an interview format and did not allow formal presentations. Attendance was high and many interesting ideas came out of the exchange. The following is a brief summary of the discussion.

There is palpable progress on the MDGs - enough to justify a more upbeat mood than in the past. The numbers do not tell the whole story. Case after case shows that the MDGs are perfectly doable if there is enough political will and if governments exercise true leadership. By increasing social investments by just a fraction of GDP, for example, even some of the poorest countries have been able to provide free primary education and other essential services. It is the job of parliaments to make sure that the right decisions are made and acted on.

Yet there are also many challenges, some of which have grown as a result of the global economic and financial crisis. Fragile states that may have experienced genocides or been targets of terrorism are in an even weaker position: development needs stable governments and institutions to take root. And a well functioning parliament is a key element of that.

In helping define and in overseeing MDG-related policies, it is important to remember that there is no one-size-fits all: the MDGs must be localized to the development realities of each country. In some cases it is more important to focus on making progress instead of achieving absolute results.

Aid is important to the success of the MDGs, though it ultimately amounts to just a small share of most country's financing needs. Internal resources are more important. Additionally, the trade regime must change. The terms of trade are still against developing countries and unfair subsidies and rules in the industrialized countries limit the export potential of weaker economies.

Yet, to the extent that aid matters, it must be made more effective. There are still countless stories of waste and expensive overheads. NGOs, and not just governments, must be held accountable for their development work and for funds which are not necessarily aligned with national development plans. More aid should be in the form of budget support, though this is not a panacea either unless government systems are dramatically improved.

South-South cooperation can also help achieve the MDGs.. As more and more countries transition from developing to developed, they should share their experiences and practices with other developing countries in the region. At the same time, new donors from the South should channel their funding through the multilateral system to prevent waste, reduce transaction costs, and avoid fragmentation of aid.

Excessive policy conditionality remains an issue in many countries. Good governance remains key to the success of the MDGs. Corruption in particular continues to divert development funds away, undermining confidence in the institutions by both citizens and donors. Yet, the record shows that good governance correlates positively with development results.

There are several ways in which parliaments can integrate the MDGs in their work. No matter which way a parliament goes, it will be important to support those efforts with capacity building. Parliaments must also enter in closer relations with the international institutions such as the World Bank, demanding more accountability of their governments for decisions they make on the Boards of the Bank. Likewise, parliaments must carefully scrutinize loan agreements between governments and the bank.