

Opening Remarks for Symposium on “Eliminating World Poverty: Global Goals and Regional Progress”

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Distinguished guests, parliamentarians, friends, colleagues, students, and fellow citizens of New Zealand and the world: on behalf of the Institute of Policy Studies, welcome to the opening of this important symposium on “Eliminating World Poverty: Global Goals and Regional Progress”.

A very warm welcome, in particular, to those who have journeyed many hours or days to join us here in Wellington this evening, especially to our honoured guests and speakers from New York, Port Moresby and the islands of the South Pacific.

A special welcome also to the 30 or so students from local secondary schools who have spent this afternoon here in Parliament in dialogue amongst themselves and with students in Papua New Guinea about the issues of global development and poverty alleviation. We will hear from some of them shortly.

Let me set the context for this symposium:

A little over eight years ago, at the dawn of this new millennium, 189 world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York and adopted the Millennium Declaration. This remarkable document includes the following words:

We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want.

The Declaration also affirmed the following:

“We resolve further:

- To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who

- suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water.
- To ensure that, by the same date, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education.
 - By the same date, to have reduced maternal mortality by three quarters, and under-five child mortality by two thirds, of their current rates.
 - To have, by then, halted, and begun to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the scourge of malaria and other major diseases that afflict humanity. And
 - To provide special assistance to children orphaned by HIV/AIDS.”

Undoubtedly, these are laudable goals. We are now more than half way to 2015. It is thus appropriate to pause and assess what progress has been made to achieving these Millennium Development Goals, what more needs to be done, and what lessons we have learned thus far. And it is especially appropriate for those of us living in the South Pacific to consider the regional dimension – what progress has been made in this part of the world, what challenges remain, what are the barriers to progress and how might these be overcome?

Let us recognize that the road ahead will not be easy. Reliable authorities predict that the global financial crisis will reduce net private capital flows to developing and emerging economies by some 80% between 2007 and 2009 – from nearly NZ\$2 trillion to about NZ\$350 billion. Similarly, the global financial crisis is expected to increase unemployment in developing countries by tens of millions and dramatically increase the number of people living in poverty.

To compound matters, there are many failed states and very fragile states, including several in the South Pacific. Without good governance, accountability and security, as Professor Paul Collier has emphasized in his various books, the Millennium Development Goals will not be achieved. International aid is of course critically important, and New Zealand’s contribution should be much greater, but aid is not enough. Other serious policy challenges must also be addressed: harmful trade barriers, environmental degradation, resource constraints and a growing global population – to name a few.

Sadly, much worse may lie ahead: casting a long shadow over the future well-being of billions of people and countless other species on this extraordinary planet is the haunting spectre of global climate change – with its potential to generate severe water shortages and stronger storms, inflict irreversible damage to key bio-physical systems, and seal the fate of many low-lying island communities, if not whole nations. Without urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and without effective planning and adaptation to the impacts of climate change, extreme poverty will not be eliminated. Indeed, there is a risk that it will be exacerbated.

During this symposium, we will be presented with evidence and insights from an impressive range of people from many different parts of the world – politicians, officials, policy advisers, leading researchers, and representatives of the aid community. All of them both *know* and *care* about the issues of global development. No doubt their views will differ at times, at least on some points. But vigorous debate is important. I thus greatly appreciate their willingness to contribute and I look forward to what they have to say.

But as we listen and learn over the next day, let us remember how privileged and fortunate most of us actually are: we are well nourished and clothed; we sleep in comfortable beds in weather-proof buildings, we have ready access to fresh, clean water; we are educated, and have the opportunity to access excellent health care services.

The circumstances of the bottom billion are radically different. Yet these people share our common humanity; they are of equal worth and dignity; they deserve equal rights and opportunities. Their plight – their needs, hopes, dreams and aspirations – rightly stir our conscience and demand our attention. As President Barack Obama argued in his inauguration address in January, “we can no longer afford indifference” to their suffering – to their cries of despair, anguish and affliction, to their yearning for a better tomorrow, to their quest for justice, and their simple request for very basic things, like safe drinking water and cheap, sustainable ways to cook their food, and the opportunity to learn to read and write.

The brave Old Testament prophet Amos proclaimed almost three millennia ago: “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing or mighty stream”. His proclamation remains as vital today as it did all those years ago.

The aim of this symposium is to contribute, albeit in a modest way, to this ever-flowing stream – not of course a cold, directionless or unthinking stream, but an intelligent, evidence-based and humanely guided stream. It is wonderful to have so many here tonight who have come to participate in the debate on how to build a better world and achieve the ambitious goals enunciated in New York at the start of this millennium.

Before concluding, can I take a moment to offer some thanks:

First, grateful thanks to Dr Jackie Blue MP, for hosting both the schools event early today and this gathering tonight in Parliament. Second, grateful thanks to the various organizations that have helped with the planning and funding of this event: the British High Commission, the Council for International Development, Oxfam New Zealand, Family Planning International, the Global Education Centre, and UNICEF. Your support and involvement is greatly appreciated. And finally, a

special thanks to those who served on the organizing committee. Without your passion, time and efforts, this event would not have been possible.