

**Address delivered by Mr. John R. Gagain Jr., Executive Director of the
Presidential Commission on the Millennium Goals and Sustainable
Development (COPDES)
Official Launch of the COPDES
National Palace, Las Cariátides Room
October 20, 2004, 10:00 am**

His Excellency, Dr. Leonel Fernández Reyna, Constitutional President of the Republic;
Honorable Dr. Margarita Cedeño de Fernández, First Lady of the Republic;
His Excellency, Dr. Rafael Alburquerque, Vice President of the Republic;
Distinguished Guests, Ministers, Officials of the United Nations Millennium Project
Friends

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are the result of the commitment made by more than 150 Heads of State and Government who, meeting at the Millennium Summit, signed the Millennium Declaration. Fulfilling the Millennium Goals positions the Dominican Republic in keeping with the expectations of the United Nations; more so, with the Millennium Summit which was attended by the largest number of Heads of State and Government throughout the history of the Organization.

The Millennium Goals grant a point in favor of multilateralism and its ability to solve the problems of the peoples of the world. We are very proud that the Dominican Republic played a key role in its making. Evidence of this is that out of the 192 Member States of the United Nations, the Dominican Republic is one of the eight countries that Organization has designated as a priority, together with countries of Africa and Asia.

Because it has been selected as one of the priority countries, the Dominican Republic will have the privilege of receiving technical assistance from U.N.'s Millennium Project, currently directed by the renowned economist and professor, Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, who will accompany us today, thanks to video-conferencing technology. This assistance is consistent with preparing an inventory of the Dominican Republic's needs in order to meet the Millennium Goals. After today, the inventory will be more commonly referred to as the "Needs Assessment"; a fundamental step and opportunity for other countries and intergovernmental institutions to become acquainted with them and interested in lending their assistance to promote the development and modernization of the country while ensuring a better future for the next generation.

The invaluable technical assistance that the Millennium Project will provide us in the course of the workshops held as part of the official COPDES launching, combined with the financial assistance of friendly developed nations, and of international monetary institutions such as the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), among others; which will liaise with us to conduct a Needs Assessment; together are part and parcel of what the Dominican Republic needs in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development (COPDES) will make available to every citizen the tools necessary to monitor government actions. Thus, it will be able to measure, in real terms, the specific initiatives led by each Ministry in meeting the Millennium Goals, which include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, among others.

The Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development (COPDES) shall serve as a multistakeholder institution, led by President Leonel Fernandez, which will guide government collaboration with the Millennium Project and the United Nations, while promoting close multistakeholder collaboration among national governmental institutions, the private sector, civil society and local authorities with the goal of coordinating interactive public consultations among such entities, and maintaining close and proactive relations with the Dominican people—all with the intent to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The Dominican Republic is the first country to create a Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals, setting an example for other countries to follow. Over the last months, several individuals as well as Heads of State and Government have commended the vision of President Fernandez for having created COPDES. Highlighted among these is the Brazilian Chancellor who commented to President Lula that Brazil should pursue the Dominican Republic's initiative and create a Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals. Thus, President Lula recently announced at the World Summit for Action against Hunger and Poverty, that Brazil had created an entity tasked with setting in motion a process to acknowledge the Brazilian cities that have implemented successful mechanisms to comply with the Millennium Development Goals.

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A strategy to eradicate poverty and comply with the Millennium Goals needs to rely on the support of all sectors, ranging from the President of the Republic, Ministers, local government, civil society to the private and entrepreneurial sector; whose members are represented here today.

The multistakeholder and inter-agency nature of COPDES needs to be underscored. Pursuant to documents brought to light by different Agencies of the United Nations that deal with issues such as sustainable development and the Millennium Goals; the pledges and undertakings of the 2000 Millennium Summit are not being respected by governments, mainly for two reasons: the lack of sufficient investment in basic social services and; secondly, for the ongoing failure by public institutions to make use of opportunities, synergies and cross-sectoral linkages.

To address the country's problems with the collaboration of different actors of society, is not only good government practice but, in fact, one which will, to a great extent, preclude unnecessary expenses. Thus, the Needs Assessment will serve to determine the best forms of association and cooperation.

Several examples evidence the foregoing, namely:

- Providing school lunch or breakfast is a contribution geared towards improving school attendance; while concurrently complying with Millennium Goals numbers 1 and 2 on education and reducing hunger and malnutrition, respectively.
- Making investments outside the scope of the health sector, such as supplying freshwater, clean indoor stoves and building streets in small towns with access to major cities; building emergency obstetrician clinics, coupled with appropriate community education, can dramatically reduce the incidence of child diarrhea, acute respiratory infections and maternal deaths—all consistent with Millennium Development Goals numbers 4 and 5.
- Sanitation facilities at schools can serve multiple purposes. They can act as a key entry point for other water and sanitation interventions at the community level, serve educational purposes to promote better hygiene, and increase incentives for girls to attend school.
- Energy, especially electricity, is also a critical input for productive activities and income generation. Without adequate energy service investments, time wasted gathering fuel wood—particularly by women and young girls—will suppress income-generating opportunities and air pollution from unhealthy cooking fires will debilitate the workforce and continue to kill more children each year than malaria. And it has been proven that women that are better educated are more likely to practice safe sex, protect themselves from violence, and better care for their children.

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Mr. Nitin Desai, Secretary General of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in the course of the opening ceremony where he addressed the need to work cross-sectorally and emphasized the multistakeholder dimension when he said:

“A basic constraint is that we have not truly grasped what it means to bring these things together. Many people turn around and tell me: why is the Summit Agenda so broad? Why do you cover so many things?” The reason is that we have, so far, been working along sectoral lines. And that, simply, does not work. I could give you lots of illustrations, but let me give you only one very telling example: getting girls into school—girls’ education. In many parts of the world, one of the most useful things you can do for this is to improve water supply. Quite simply, if you improve the water supply, you reduce the time girls take to go collect water for their house, and that improves their attendance in school. Now, imagine an education department going to a finance minister and saying that for the Education Program, they need money for water supply.... .” “What we need to do is to connect.... .”

We will translate the words of the Secretary General into a live example from the Dominican Republic. Our example is *Doña Celestina*.

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To conclude, I would like to share with you that recently, at U.N. Headquarters in New York, while attending the Annual DPI - NGO Conference, entitled “Millennium Development Goals: Civil Society Takes Action”, with the participation of more than 2,000 participants from 80 countries worldwide; I had the pleasure of presenting, together with Ms. Lenora Suki, of the Columbia University Earth Institute; the work and vision of the Dominican Republic regarding compliance with the Millennium Goals and to inform on the establishment of the Presidential Commission on Millennium Goals and Sustainable Development (COPDES).

I have the utmost certainty that, on the way to the Millennium Summit +5, to be held in the course of the upcoming version of the United Nations General Assembly, concurrent with the 60th Anniversary of the Organization, the Dominican Republic will serve as a stepping stone for the remaining countries of the world which struggle each day to meet fully the Millennium Development Goals.

Thank you very much!