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Good Morning

His Excellency Dr. Leonel Fernandez, President of the Dominican Republic;
His Excellency Dr. Rafael Alburquerque; Vice-President of the Dominican Republic Honorable Chancellor, Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs, Engineer Carlos Morales Troncoso;
Executive Director of the Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development, Mr. Sr. John Gagain;
Mr. Fernando Ferran,
Secretaries of State,
Governmental Officials
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Colleagues, Friends, Ladies & Gentlemen

It is a great privilege and high honor for me to address these brief words and actively participate on behalf of the United Nations Agencies at this meeting, which gathers us to present to the nation the preliminary results of the first serious and thorough Needs Assessment of the Millennium Development Goals the nation has, to move forward with firm steps towards obtaining the Millennium Development Goals.

This assessment which was requested, sponsored and strongly supported by the President of the Republic and which is coordinated and encouraged by the Presidential Commission led by the Secretaries of State and which has constantly received the enthusiastic participation of hundreds of Dominican technocrats and the organized civil society, as well as the partnerships and counseling of the Millennium Project and the United Nations Agencies System, has as its main objective to identify the most urging needs of the Dominican people to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the Dominican Republic, suggest the most adequate interventions to satisfy these needs and establish the expenses related to these interventions, as they will allow the country to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

For the time being, this effort, where we need to highlight both the widely participative process followed to date, as well as the results we are all aware of, has been carried out with the technical support of hundreds of Dominicans, the leadership of the President and the effective coordination of the Presidential Commission.

Such concern has brought about the magnificent results we see today in the country. I think that no one has the slightest doubt that this assessment is an essential input to reach the well being of the Dominican people and constitutes a compulsory reference and a fundamental pillar for a project of the nation with which all political parties and citizens will have a close rapport, one in which all Dominicans will feel duly represented, as well as protagonists that are both included and protected.

I want to cover this issue, but first allow me to briefly refer to how much the country has advanced in a very short period of time to then present for your consideration some ideas on how to continue to move forward towards a more promising future for the Dominican people.

Some will recall that a little over a year ago, on February 2, 2004, within the magnificent framework of the National Assembly, I had the opportunity to address the members of Congress and the high local national authorities to advocate for the MDGs and request the Dominican Congress to adopt a valid and ideal platform to drive and measure national development and to use these as a strategic and objective framework when approving the assignment of state resources and requesting the rendering of the accounts regarding the use given to these resources.

At that time I highlighted the fact that these objectives are not the objectives of the United Nations or of the industrialized nations or of the international banks. Specifically, these objectives are not being imposed by anyone foreign to the country; these are the objectives of the Dominican people. And so it was manifested and the commitment was assumed by your representative at the Millennium Summit in the year 2000, former president Mr. Hipólito Mejía. I also pointed out that these objectives allow us to very easily measure the progress or wellbeing of a country in a qualitative and quantitative manner. That is important because it allows the country to examine itself and see how the nation is progressing, or to look at itself in a mirror to see its reality regarding issues that are really important to its people, to its citizens, their health, their education, employment, income, to lead a life of dignity, its food requirements, gender equality and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, this allows a comparison to be made with other countries of the region and the world, enabling the nation to establish where the country is doing well and where it has lagged behind and also learn from those who, with less, may be accomplishing more.

Finally, in this speech I want to put aside a central idea, which is the fact that the Millennium Development Goals are neither the patrimony of any particular political party, nor of the government, nor of a President. They belong to all the political parties. This fact, together with its simpleness, is the element that makes the Millennium Development Goals extremely powerful as a platform and instrument to streamline negotiations and agreements orientated towards forging a project of the nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, the country can and must work eagerly in pursuit of agreement for a project of the nation or a development agenda shared by all the political parties and the active forces who are interested in the progress and well-being of the nation. This is a task for all and should not be postponed. However, I am not in agreement with those who proclaim that the country has no project for the nation. I ask myself, reaching the Millennium Development Goals, what is that? Obviously, those who think that way may interpret it to mean that a real project of the nation is something more complex, more elaborate, but there is something we do know: Any project of the nation would invariably include the Millennium Development Goals as a fundamental ingredient. Therefore, and until a great national agreement that can crystallize into a project of the nation can be reached, and one that probably includes constitutional reforms, state reforms, fiscal reforms and reforms in the productive system, while the country eagerly works to formulate this more advanced and modern project of the nation which is agreed upon and supported by all, as well as the political forces of the country, no citizen should decide or feel that the country does not have a project of the nation because reaching the Millennium Development Goals constitutes in itself the nucleus of any project of the nation that the Dominican Republic may adopt.

Since that speech of February 2004, the country has changed a great deal both in this ambit and in many others, and I believe that change is the correct course.

Today, the country has a President that is genuinely interested in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the country now has a Presidential Commission that has, in a very short period of time, and with the support of the United Nations Agencies System published the first Millennium Development Goals National Report and it has, with the support of the Millennium Project and the arduous work carried out by all of you, been able to present to the country the information you have provided today.

Lastly, it seems important to me to point out the launching of the “Investing in Development” Report which was developed yesterday; an event of utmost importance for the country, because the President attended, as did the President of the Lower House of Congress. Unfortunately, today’s newspapers did not cover this event but I think this occasion should not go by unnoticed by the nation. I believe it is a clear testimony of the desire of two leaders of important political parties of the nation and at the same time, leaders of two state powers to support and work jointly in the benefit of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

These events make me feel very optimistic about the future of the Dominican Republic. Based on what I have just commented, this optimism gives us the strength and faith in that we can achieve success. However, there is a path to follow and there are important challenges that must be endured during the coming years.

I would like, because of the limited time, to only make reference to some of these: Obviously, reaching the MDGs requires a combination of systems, policies and resources and there is a very important issue, it is not just a matter of discussing resources, in other countries this could be the main issue, but in the Dominican Republic there are resources, perhaps not sufficient but there are resources and then the issue goes on to speak of systems, policies and resources. I think a first important issue has to do with maximizing the use of the resources which are already available in the country. Resources cannot be wasted under any point of view. In this sense, I call to reflect on considering the lack of stability of the public officers. The country should work eagerly with the political parties on an issue that is so delicate for the country. Each time there is a period of government transition, the country loses qualified technicians; there is a loss of important resources and so I feel that a main priority should be to work to ensure what I would call conditional immobility of public officers, because although it is not good to have a great lack of stability, it is not prudent to have a public servant who is sure of his/her job without a performance assessment, which will enable us to ensure that we can depend on effective and efficient civil service.

A second challenge I believe is of great significance for the country is the need to establish a different way of considering politics and especially among the youth, those that are young in terms of age and those that are young in spirit. Politics cannot be perceived as a means to grow socially or to benefit from state resources. Politics, true politics, should be seen as a way to be able to serve our fellow men, to be able to serve citizens and, therefore, I believe it is of utmost importance to declare zero tolerance when it comes to corruption and impunity.

We advocate a streamlined and efficient justice, one that is blind to political pressures and capable of applying the full weight of the law to those who have swindled the trust given to them in their position.

Thirdly, I believe that governing with established objectives and goals as we have been discussing here today is the correct manner and by redefining the assignment of resources which implies complying with what has been promised.

I believe that these three changes I have pointed out, if properly consented to by all the political parties, will launch the country towards the path of growth, and undoubtedly foretell a successful future for the Dominican Republic; and I also believe that they will undoubtedly move international interest, attracting more productive investments and a greater level of cooperation.

Lastly, to close these brief words, I would like to congratulate the President for his leadership and commitment with this issue, express my gratitude for all the support we have received from the Millennium Project and Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, recognize the work of the Presidential Commission, as well as the work groups led by the Secretaries of State and my colleagues from the United Nations Agencies.

Thank you.