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G8 must offer leadership for a fairer world

By Kofi A. Annan

This year's summit of the G8 – the leading industrialised countries – is particularly well timed. It comes just two months before the 2005 World Summit in New York, at which leaders from all member states of the United Nations will take decisions affecting the future welfare, security and dignity of human beings everywhere.

Five years ago, world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration, offering their peoples a hopeful vision of a new century of security, prosperity and freedom.

As far as development is concerned that vision has since become even more tantalisingly clear. We now know in detail – thanks to the Monterrey and Johannesburg summits in 2002, and the detailed work of scholars in the Millennium Project – what is needed to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). That means that, if we have the political will, we can, by 2015:

- halve extreme poverty and hunger in the world, as well as the proportion of people without safe drinking water;
- achieve universal primary education;
- eliminate gender disparity in education at all levels;
- cut child mortality by two thirds, and maternal mortality by three quarters;
- turn the tide against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases;
- and halt the depletion of our environmental resources.

We know what is required from each developing country: a national strategy, which must include stronger governance and an implacable war against corruption, as well as policies to stimulate the private sector, generate employment and maximise domestic resources.

And we know what is required from donor countries such as those in the G8: increased development aid, wider and deeper debt relief, and a trade deal giving developing countries a real chance to compete on a level global playing field.

Some decisions announced in the past two months have rekindled hope that the developed world will indeed stretch out its helping hand and enable poorer countries to share the opportunities of globalisation. Now it's up to the G8 to fulfil that hope.

It is good that they will focus on Africa. I hope they will give a much-needed boost to investment in that continent's human resources, infrastructure, health systems, capacity to govern and, especially, food productivity.

And it's good that they are making climate change – one of the greatest environmental and development challenges of this century – a priority issue. We badly need an international framework for stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations beyond 2012, with broader participation by all major emitters from both developed and developing countries, combined with intensified research into new technologies that can reduce emissions and alleviate their harmful effects.

But prosperity will not be achieved without peace and security. Events since the Millennium Declaration have blurred this part of the vision that it offered, making an alternative future of chaos and conflict seem all too plausible. A global strategy to defeat terrorism and contain the spread of deadly weapons – nuclear, biological and chemical, but also the small arms that take so many lives in the developing world – is needed more than ever. So is a shared understanding of the rules governing the use of force, and a collective effort to build lasting peace and stronger states in countries ravaged or threatened by civil conflict.

And neither prosperity nor security will be meaningful – or, in the long run, sustainable – unless they are enjoyed by individual human beings everywhere. Human dignity and freedom must be protected, both against arbitrary violence and oppression and against the constraints of extreme poverty, which deny people any real choice in their lives. No security agenda, and no drive for development, will be successful unless they are based on respect for human dignity.

The temptation to curtail human rights in the interest of either security or development is self-defeating, and must be resisted. Protecting civilian populations against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity is one of the most sacred obligations of every sovereign state. And when states are unable or unwilling to perform this duty, the international community, represented by the United Nations, has a shared responsibility to take action.

Finally, the United Nations itself must be strengthened and equipped to perform effectively the mandates given to it by its members, whether in the field of development, of peace and security, or of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In particular, I believe it is vital to replace the present Commission on Human Rights with a new, more credible and authoritative Human Rights Council.

Earlier this year, in my report *In Larger Freedom*, I placed before the UN's member states an agenda of concrete decisions that are needed in all these areas. That agenda has now been refined by the President of the General Assembly, after intensive consultations with the entire membership, into a draft outcome document which shows clearly how the desire of the world's peoples to find common solutions to their common problems could be translated into effective action when their leaders meet in September. All that is needed now is the leadership to make it happen. The G8 countries are clearly among those that the world expects to provide such leadership. I earnestly hope that they will do so.

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