

17 October 2002

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty allows us to reflect on the single most important and challenging goal of the Millennium Development Goals as stated in the Millennium Declaration. Events of 11 September 2001 underline the fact that peace and security are closely linked to issues of poverty. In the Millennium Declaration, Member States unanimously resolved to try to half the number of some one billion extremely poor people in the world by the year 2015. Current reports, however, indicate that this issue needs to be addressed pragmatically and rigorously at all levels to achieve substantive results. The United Nations General Assembly and I personally, will continue to maintain our focus on this complex and difficult objective and request Member States to review their progress on this matter. In the fight against poverty, action by the United Nations can only be part of the solution. Action by governments is crucial to achieve this goal.

To eradicate poverty, one of the main areas of focus is the agricultural sector, where over 70 percent of the world's poor live and work. The strategic importance of agriculture, in breaking the rural poverty traps, has to be renewed and revived. Wherever appropriate, governments and private sector should jointly allocate enough funds to create basic social infrastructure at the village level such as water, sanitation, schools, clinics, counseling and training centers and a micro credit facility. Stimulating and increasing agricultural production would result in affordable food prices, improve nutrition and health, generate employment and empower farmers with purchasing power. This, in turn, would create a demand for goods produced by other sectors, thus benefiting the overall economy of the country.

The second powerful factor in eradicating poverty is to recognize the role of women and promote their empowerment through educational and health facilities in the villages, training, micro credit schemes and most importantly in involving women in the planning and implementation of such programmes at the community level. Lessons learned from pilot projects around the world confirm that success has been achieved where local communities were directly involved in decision making and defining their priorities. Such community-owned projects have motivated stakeholders to launch and expand homegrown initiatives leading, eventually, to sustained self-sufficiency.

An important catalyst to this process of eradicating poverty is the effort and collaboration among the South - South group of countries in sharing best practices and supporting implementation of pilot regional projects within their countries that may be emulated elsewhere. International financial backing for projects that are well conceived, I believe, would be forthcoming from

private and or official sources. It is also acknowledged that crucial factors such as good governance are key to sustained eradication of poverty.

The United Nations, for its part, will continue to support capacity building and other programmes to promote international awareness of, and assistance to, extremely poor communities around the world.