

New York, 5 April 2006 - Secretary-General's remarks at the first meeting of the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment (as prepared for delivery)

Your Excellencies, distinguished co-chairs, Prime Ministers Luisa Diogo, Jens Stoltenberg and Shaukat Aziz, distinguished members of the High-level Panel.

Thank you again for accepting to take part in this High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment. The extraordinary experience and clout that you all bring to this effort are a measure of the importance and expectations that I attach to the Panel's work.

We are meeting at a time of great global challenges – uneven progress in poverty reduction in many parts of the developing world, natural and manmade disasters that vastly outstrip our capacity to respond, and increasing environmental degradation that threatens the sustainability of our future well being.

However, most recently during the World Summit, the Member States outlined and confirmed a compelling and achievable framework for the international community, with a strong United Nations system at its core, to address these challenges, especially the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) --and other internationally agreed development goals stemming from recent Summits and conferences.

The establishment of this Panel stems from the mandate, given to me by heads of States and Governments at the World Summit, to strengthen the governance, management, coordination and coherence of the UN system to help address these challenges placed before the United Nations.

There is a real expectation that your Panel (the highest of its kind ever constituted in the history of the United Nations) can help make a decisive breakthrough in realigning and revitalizing the United Nations in these crucial areas of our work, so that the Summit's political goals are translated into real action on the ground.

Indeed some influential member states have even mentioned that this Panel provides a "Chance of a generation". Since its establishment, the engagement of member states and other stakeholders has grown exponentially. I count on you to ensure that this level of engagement will continue.

As we are operating in a changing global political, economic, ecological and social environments, my first suggestion is that you develop your own sense of how the related challenges and opportunities affect efforts to realign and revitalize the United Nations system.

The impact of these challenges on the United Nations' political legitimacy, strengths and weaknesses, financing, and the emergence of new competitors should also be examined.

Moreover, the work of the Panel should complement other ongoing UN reform efforts in the areas of management, humanitarian support, peace-building, human rights, the environment and other spheres –e.g., establishment of the CERF, the Peace Building Commission, the HRC, etc.

While your approach should be broad and comprehensive, the expectation is that your primary focus should be the UN system's international development cooperation work. But while reviewing humanitarian assistance and development related work and structures, the issues of transition to development and peace building should also be looked at. And one of the dimensions which should be reviewed when looking at the environment sector is how to better mainstream it into development decision-making.

The Panel needs to address these issues, head-on, with a clear sense of responsibility and understanding of the comparative advantages of the United Nations System, especially with regard to how it relates with the rest of the international multilateral system.

I have established a Secretariat of competent staff from inside and outside the United Nations System to support your work. They have prepared for your consideration a Concept paper to help initiate your discussions, as well as a series of proposals for future research and consultation. A consultative and inclusive approach by the Panel as it pursues its work will, I am sure, elicit the necessary support and participation by key constituencies.

I wish you luck and thank you for making available your valuable time in the service of the United Nations. I count on your personal and collective leadership and efforts, to help produce bold but implementable recommendations that will lead to a UN system that is greater than the sum of its parts in the areas of development, humanitarian support and the environment. A UN that is better able to ensure that these areas are much more closely and effectively integrated and coordinated with its other key pillars: peace and security, human rights, norms and standards, etc.