

19th March, 2010, United Nations - Despite numerous factors that threaten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 - a global financial crisis, a food crisis, climate change, natural disasters – U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said this week that his main concern is "political will".

Ban addressed U.N. member states and media following the release of his report, "Keeping the Promise", on Mar. 16. The report "reviews successes, identifies obstacles, and suggests ways to accelerate progress," according to the secretary-general.

At a meeting of the General Assembly, he warned that, "We are off course because of unmet commitments, inadequate resources and a lack of focus and accountability."

"We do not need new pledges," Ban said later that day at a media briefing. "If nations deliver on the financial commitments they have already made, we can achieve the goals. There is clearly a lack of political will."

The secretary-general added that he is optimistic that the MDG Summit (formally, the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly), which will run Sep. 20-22 at United Nations headquarters in New York, will reinvigorate the commitment to meeting the goals.

"There is a need for a push," Francesca Perucci of the U.N. Statistical Planning and Development Division, told IPS, "especially because with the financial crisis you have the sense that donors might be more careful." The push is hard. Nine meetings are scheduled leading up to the summit. They will focus on specific MDG goals.

These include a June conference on maternal and reproductive health, a July gathering of government ministers at the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to examine gender equality, and a mid-September report of the MDG Gap Task Force, which will present data and recommendations on how to meet the 8th goal on Global Partnership, which includes international commitments on aid, trade, and debt relief.

The secretary-general strongly emphasised that these goals will not be met if the donor community doesn't deliver on its promises of official development assistance (ODA). For example, his report notes that 154 billion dollars (in current value) was pledged at the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit.

However, the flow of monies has not been steady since 2005. Therefore, 35 billion dollars a year would be needed by 2015 to achieve that target.

While there is no finalised data to assess the impact of the financial crisis on fulfilling the MDG goals, the report estimates that in 2009, 55 to 99 million more people lived in extreme poverty than had been projected before the economic crisis. The numbers are staggering, given that the goal of MDG 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) was to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

In fact, the number of hungry has been rising since 1995 and the proportion of hungry people in the global population has been rising since 2004-2006. The latest figures show that in 2005, 1.4 billion people, or one quarter of the population of the developing world, lived below the international poverty line, on less than 1.25 dollars a day.

Perucci notes that the food crisis puts the poor in far more dire straits than the economic crisis.

"Looking at the most recent data, food security is one of the targets more at risk of not seeing as much progress," she told IPS. That's because economics are not the lone factor affecting its success.

"Food availability doesn't just have to do with economic growth, but how food reaches developing countries," Perucci told IPS. "Factors such as natural disasters, poor food distribution policies and lack of social safety nets are contributing to the crisis. That's the area where the international community will have to work the most."

Ban is not only rallying member states around the fulfillment of the MDG goals, he's hoping to rally the world.

"The United Nations will strengthen our efforts to raise public awareness," he said. "People everywhere must see that reaching the goals is in everyone's common interest. The September Summit must reinvigorate a sense of moral solidarity. If we don't, if we fall short, all the dangers of our world will grow more perilous still."

Source: IPS