

ACT Alliance

Key messages for the UN High-Level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals in New York on 20-22 September 2010

UN will organize a High-Level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in New York 20-22 September 2010, where it will be evaluating progress made on the MDGs thus far and seeking to identify an action agenda for achieving the MDGs by 2015. Currently the UN delegations are negotiating an outcome document titled "*Keeping the promise – united to achieve the millennium development goals*".

From the process leading up to the High-Level Plenary Meeting, it is clear that crucial differences of opinion on many important elements of development exist. The international community is not united in some of the needed changes in the global policies and structures and is about to adopt weak commitments on them.

ACT Alliance and its members, representing the churches and faith-based organizations working in almost all countries of the world, want to express their concern to some of the most important issues it considers crucial to achieving the MDGs.

A positive but critical view on the importance of the MDGs

MDGs and the Millennium Declaration are an important expression of the commitment of the international community to overcome poverty and injustice. The importance of the MDGs as such a commitment should be emphasized and safeguarded. As such, however, the 8 MDGs and their quantitative targets and monitoring system fall short of the ultimate objective of ending poverty, fulfilling human dignity and supporting human development in its complexity, that ACT Alliance wants to promote.

As importantly, new solutions to the current multiple crises of the financial and economic crisis, food crisis, climate crisis, gender gap, non-appliance of Human Rights as well as injustices of the global trading system, which are harming – not supporting – the achievement of the MDGs, must be at the core of the discussion in New York.

ACT Alliance suggests that the international community acknowledges the worrying situation of some of the crucial MDGs, such as education, health and hunger, and makes strong commitments to sharpen its actions to achieve the MDGs. At the same time the High-Level Plenary Meeting should see this event as a beginning of a process to set an agenda for change that goes beyond 2015 and to identify steps out of the development crisis. ACT Alliance is willing to engage in this discussion further in the years to come.

- 1. Responding to the Financial and Economic crisis by reforming the financial and economic structures:** In the preparation of the UN Outcome document the views on the need of significant reforms to the international financial and economic architecture vary strongly, with a clear North-South divide. ACT Alliance is promoting stronger implementation of MDG 8, wanting to promote commitments to significantly reform the international and economic institutions and architecture. This would include an accountability framework between developing and developed nations on global commitments such as ODA, scaling up innovative financing mechanisms, specifically the Financial Transaction Tax, international tax cooperation, curtailing illicit financial flows, balancing the responsibilities of lenders and debtors including agreeing measures with regard to illegitimate debt as well as assisting countries facing financial distress including standstill on debt obligations, debt relief and debt restructuring.

2. **Responding to the Food crisis by putting more focus on smallholder agriculture:** The existing crisis of over one billion hungry people in the world requires profound changes in policies. One important key to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger is more support to and investments in smallholder agriculture which continues to be the main source of livelihood for people in poverty, not forgetting the needs of the urban poor. ACT Alliance promotes a change in the global food policy that is based on the right to food and on justice-oriented reforms in international trade bodies, such as the elimination of all forms of export subsidies by developed countries.
3. **Responding to the Climate crisis by agreeing on a fair and binding climate change agreement:** ACT Alliance promotes strong commitments to be made on mitigation, technology transfer and adaptation in the UN framework Convention on Climate Change, which are based on a Greenhouse Development Rights Approach and polluter pays principles. The payments should be new and additional.
4. **Responding to the Gender gap by ensuring recommitment to existing UN commitments as a minimum:** ACT Alliance is strongly promoting women's rights and empowerment as essential to reaching the MDGs, especially those that are yet far from being achieved, such as mother and child health and education. In addition to safeguarding the existing commitments, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, strategies are needed to improve the number and influence of women in political decision-making and to prevent and address violence against women.
5. **Putting Human Rights first by linking the MDGs to Human Rights:** One of the most criticized issues regarding the MDGs approved in 2000 is the lack of reference to Human Rights. There are more references to Human Rights suggested in the draft outcome document than previously, also with more emphasis given to injustice and inequality within countries, including access to social services and protection. ACT Alliance welcomes these and emphasizes that the links between Human Rights and the MDGs and government obligations to meet these rights must to be clearly articulated. The national goals and action plans to achieve the MDGs must be complemented by states' duty to fulfill Human Rights. This would require states to place particular emphasis on Human Rights, including the economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs), as well as social protection of the most marginalized and most affected by poverty.
6. **Responding to negative impacts of liberalized world trade by transformations in WTO rules and agreements:** The draft outcome document has much text on the role of trade as an engine for economic growth and development, including the importance of completion of the Doha Development Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO). There is hardly any critical view on the negative impacts that the current WTO rules and agreements have had on the achievement of the MDGs. ACT Alliance promotes commitments that prioritize flexibility for developing nations to secure people's rights to food and other ESCRs, including agreeing changes in agreements in agriculture and intellectual property rights.
7. **Responding to Peace gap by emphasizing a people-centered approach to conflict transformation and peace:** Conflict and armed violence related sections of the draft outcome document are under much debate, although the interconnectedness of peace, democracy and Human Rights with development and poverty alleviation are crucial. ACT Alliance wants to emphasize the need to focus on conflicts and armed violence, including violence against women. It wants to promote an alternative angle to peace- or state-building, that is community based and people centered conflict transformation, with strong emphasis on capacities of local people and civil society to engage in protection and conflict resolution. Additionally, commitments to channeling resources away from military expenditures towards the implementation of the MDGs should be promoted.