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**An Assessment of the UN's Millennium Development  
Goals and its Millennium Declaration**

**by**

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<sup>\*</sup> A draft of this paper was presented in 2006 to a staff seminar at the School of Accounting, Economics and Finance of Deakin University, Burwood Campus. It is also included as a chapter in the forthcoming book *Poverty, Poverty Alleviation and Social Disadvantage* edited by Clem Tisdell and published by Serials Publications, India.

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# **An Assessment of the UN's Millennium Development Goals and its Millennium Declaration**

## **ABSTRACT**

The United Nations' Millennium Declaration, passed by the General Assembly in September 2000, is assessed with particular attention being given to the Millennium Development Goals and associated targets outlined in the Declaration. The focus of the article is not so much on the extent to which these goals are being met but on the adequacy of the Declaration itself. The fundamental values outlined in the Declaration are listed and assessed. The Millennium Development Goals are means for the attainment of these values, along with some other objectives specified in the Declaration. Both sets of objectives are examined, with most attention being given to the Millennium Development Goals and Targets. The Millennium Development Goals aim to reduce social and economic disadvantage globally by the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, by achieving universal primary education, by promoting greater equality, and by satisfying particular health goals. In addition, they include the aim of ensuring environmental sustainability and the creation of a global partnership for development.

# **An Assessment of the UN's Millennium Development Goals and its Millennium Declaration**

## **1. Introduction**

In September 2000, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. This specifies a set of 'fundamental values' which the General Assembly accepted as being important to pursue in the twenty-first century. In order to work towards the realization of these values, the General Assembly agreed that it would make special efforts in relation to:

1. Peace, security and disarmament.
2. Development and poverty eradication.
3. Protecting our common environment.
4. Human rights, democracy and good governance.
5. Protecting the vulnerable.
6. Meeting the special needs of Africa.
7. Strengthening the United Nations.

Its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are mainly specified under the section of the Declaration dealing with development and poverty eradication. This section also specifies targets that should be met, mainly by 2015, in pursuing these goals.

Considerable attention has been given by UN administrators and by scholars about whether these targets are likely to be met. The general consensus seems to be that this is more unlikely, particularly in the case of Africa (Sahn and Stifel, 2003; World Bank 2004). The World Bank (2004, p.xvii) is somewhat pessimistic about the prospects for achieving the MDGs and states that there is a need to scale up action, significantly and quickly.

The *Global Monitoring Report 2004* of the World Bank (2004, p.xvii) states:

“On current trends, most Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be met by most countries. The income poverty goal is likely to be achieved at the global level, but Africa will fall well short. For the human development goals, the risks are much

more pervasive across the regions. Likely shortfalls are especially serious with respect to the health and related environmental goals – child and maternal mortality, access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Few, if any, regions will achieve the mortality goals.’

The purpose of this article is not so much to discuss why the MDGs are not being met and the extent of the possible shortfall in meeting these (addressed for example in UNDP 2005 a,b) but to consider the adequacy of the United Nations Millennium Declaration itself and within this, to examine the specification of the MDGs and their associated targets. I shall, first of all, consider the values and principles espoused in the UN Millennium Declaration and aims not normally listed as part of the MDGs, and the focus on the MDGs before providing a concluding assessment.

## **2. The Values Espoused in the UN Millennium Declaration**

Six fundamental values are identified in Article 6 of the UN Millennium Declaration. It is necessary to repeat the statement of these fully here in order to appreciate their meaning and discuss them adequately. The remaining part of the Millennium Declaration specifies objectives and targets that are believed to be necessary to realize these values. They can be regarded as lower order goals that need to be pursued to achieve the higher order goals or values.

The following are the fundamental values specified in the UN Millennium Declaration:

- **Freedom.** Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights.
- **Equality.** No individual and no nation must be denied the opportunity to benefit from development. The equal rights and opportunities of women and men must be assured.
- **Solidarity.** Global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes the costs and burdens fairly, in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice. Those who suffer or who benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most.

- **Tolerance.** Human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted.
- **Respect for nature.** Prudence must be shown in the management of all living species and natural resources, in accordance with the precepts of sustainable development. Only in this way can the immeasurable riches provided to us by nature be preserved and passed on to our descendants. The current unsustainable patterns of production and consumption must be changed in the interest of our future welfare and that of our descendants.
- **Shared responsibility.** Responsibility for managing worldwide economic and social development, as well as threats to international peace and security, must be shared among the nations of the world and should be exercised multilaterally. As the most universal and most representative organization in the world, the United Nations must play the central role.”

While one might agree in general with all of these values, their closer examination suggests that they are to some extent rhetorical and incompletely defined. Furthermore, there is no hint that it may be impossible to achieve all these fundamental goals or values simultaneously. Nevertheless, these values do seem admirable and are intended to reduce social and economic inequality globally. Let us consider some possible problems in satisfying the fundamental values.

One can agree with the freedom objectives of the Millennium Declaration in principle. However, it is not clear that democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people will always assure that the rights of individuals are respected. The United States is widely regarded as a strong democracy with participatory governance but the Bush Administration has not applied the fundamental principle of *habeas corpus* in the case of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba held as ‘enemy combatants’<sup>1</sup>. Some nations still

continue as one-party states but consider themselves to be democratic, and maintain that they have participatory governance. Are they really democratic?

Regarding equality, it would of course be nice if everyone and every nation could benefit from development. But this could happen and gross inequality could still emerge because those who are already better off gain much more than those who are worse off. There is also the possibility that the desired level of growth of all nations will not be sustainable environmentally (Tisdell, 2001) and will conflict with the goal involving respect for nature. There is no hint of such a conflict in the Declaration nor any indication about how such conflict is to be resolved. The objective of promoting gender equality seems more straightforward. The solidarity value has to do with the distribution of costs and burdens of meeting global challenges. In general, it implies that the better off should help those who are less well off. The extent to which this should be done is not indicated but it is an important social principle that those who are better off should assist the disadvantaged. Nevertheless, views differ about what is socially just and equitable as far as economic distribution is concerned. Divergent views exist about the principles of social justice and equality (Rawls, 1971; Tisdell, Ch.6, 1993). For example, Rawls (1971) argues that income should be distributed equally between individuals unless inequality is in the interests of all, but others disagree.

Tolerance also seems a desirable value but there are limits to how much tolerance is desirable and about what we ought to be tolerant of. Clearly, for example, one should not be tolerant of genocide, child abuse and so on. To what extent should one be tolerant of the denial of civil rights of individuals? Could one be held responsible for human abuse in certain circumstances by failing to take any action? The UN Declaration provides no guidance in this regard.

Again in principle, one can agree with the view that there should be respect for nature. The Declaration mentions, however, that this respect should be exercised in accordance with “the precepts of sustainable development”. This advice is not straightforward because different concepts of sustainable development exist. Most are centred on the meeting of human needs and wants. In that regard, they are anthropocentric, and pay little attention to the rights of other species to exist independently of human wishes. The Declaration, however, does state that present patterns of economic production and consumption are unsustainable and must be



changed in the interest of future generations. Nevertheless, as more and more nations seek to foster their economic growth and as higher income nations continue to pursue ever continuing economic growth, there are few signs that patterns of resource-use are being radically altered to sustain economic development. For example, global emissions of greenhouse gases continue to rise substantially and no end to this process appears to be in sight, despite the Kyoto Protocol. Furthermore, the declaration provides no specific guidance on how economic production and consumption should be altered in order to achieve economic sustainability and so as take adequate account of the needs of future generations.

The Declaration's vision of global responsibility for meeting worldwide economic, social and security challenges and the view that this should be coupled with multilateral action, seems desirable. However, many nation states still continue to act unilaterally, or in concert with a few supporting nations, when it suits their own self-interest. The attack on Saddam Hussein's Government in Iraq led by the United States is a relatively recent example of international action that lacked complete multilateral support.

### **3. Objectives of the Millennium Declaration other than the MDGs**

Adam Smith (1776) pointed out that peace, order and good government are prerequisites for the creation of national wealth. Many of the objectives of the UN Millennium Declaration not usually listed amongst the MDGs are concerned with the securing of peace, order and good government globally. Without these objectives being satisfied, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to meet the MDGs, particularly in countries ravaged by war, armed conflict and civil unrest. Iraq has in recent times experienced all these traumas, and Nepal and parts of Sudan have, for example suffered from insurgency and civil unrest.

The UN Millennium Declaration lists a number of objectives that the UN would like to pursue to promote peace, security and disarmament. Progress on some of these fronts has been slow. One of the objectives, for instance, is "to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons..." Many major powers, including the United States and Great Britain, appear to have been unwilling to reduce their stock of nuclear weapons, and proliferation of nuclear weapons capability seems to be occurring, with Iran and North Korea being cited as potential producers of nuclear weapons.

The pursuit of human rights, democracy and good government is seen as important<sup>2</sup>. The UN Declaration states (Article 24): “We will spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.”

It can be observed that the rule of appropriate laws and good governance are important to promote economic development. However, there are differences of opinion about whether democracy and what forms of democracy are most conducive to economic development. It is possible that different forms of political institutions may make for the social stability of nations at different times in their history or evolution. Therefore, prescribing democracy for all nations irrespective of their culture and social traditions and their evolutionary stage may be misguided. Furthermore, democracy alone does not ensure respect for human rights.

Protecting the vulnerable, meeting the special needs of Africa and strengthening the United Nations are also recognized as important in the UN Declaration. Regarding the strengthening of the United Nations, no radical suggestions for reforming world governance are made. For example, the possibility of moving away from national states as the sole means of representation in the UN is not considered. In fact, the approach in the Declaration is to reinforce state-based government representation. For example, in Section 31, an aim is said to be “to strengthen further cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments through their world organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union...” Should there be representation of regional bodies such as the European Parliament on the UN? Is there a case for direct election of some members of the UN? Should the UN evolve towards a world parliament in this millennium? These are difficult questions but requirements for global governance have moved on in the 50 years or so since the creation of the United Nations.

On the other hand, greater emphasis than in earlier times is also put in the Declaration on the involvement of non-government entities in the programme of the United Nations. In Section 30 of the Declaration, it is stated that it is desirable:

“To give greater opportunities to the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society, in general, to contribute to the realization of the Organization’s goals and programmes”.

This appears to be a step towards involvement of bodies or agencies other than the representatives of national governments in the affairs of the UN, even if not in the General Assembly.

The UN's institutional apparatus and its functioning are currently locked into a system involving representation of national governments. It is difficult (almost impossible) for it to escape from this constraint because its funding depends on financial contributions by national governments. It displays path-dependence and it has become a platform for pursuing national ambitions. Possibly there is a need in this millennium for the United Nation's General Assembly to involve some members that are not representatives of national governments and for the UN to have some sources of funding independent of the financial contributions of individual nations.

Clearly there is a need for a better system of global governance, not just improved governance at the national level.

#### **4. The Millennium Development Goals and Targets**

As a step towards satisfying the fundamental values outlined in the Millennium Declaration, eight MDGs are stated. In order to make these goals more concrete and to monitor whether they are being achieved, eighteen targets for their realization are specified. This specification is at least the usual practice of UN administrators who appear to have taken some liberties in interpreting the Declaration. Table 1 contains a relatively comprehensive statement of goals and targets as envisaged by UN administrators monitoring progress in meeting the MDGs.

**Table 1. UN Millennium Development Goals and Targets as stated by the World Bank.**

<b>Goal 1</b>	<b>Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger</b>
Target 1	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day
Target 2	Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
<b>Goal 2</b>	<b>Achieve Universal Primary Education</b>
Target 3	Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
<b>Goal 3</b>	<b>Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women</b>
Target 4	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015.

<b>Goal 4</b>		<b>Reduce Child Mortality</b>
	Target 5	Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate
<b>Goal 5</b>		<b>Improve Maternal Health</b>
	Target 6	Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.
<b>Goal 6</b>		<b>Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases</b>
	Target 7	Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
	Target 8	Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
<b>Goal 7</b>		<b>Ensure Environmental Sustainability</b>
	Target 9	Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
	Target 10	Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.
	Target 11	Have achieved a significant improvement by 2020 in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.
<b>Goal 8</b>		<b>Develop a Global Partnership for Development</b>
	Target 12	Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system (including a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction, nationally and internationally).
	Target 13	Address the special needs of the least developed countries (including tariff-and quota-free access for exports of the least developed countries: enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to reducing poverty).
	Target 14	Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states (through the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the outcome of the 22 <sup>nd</sup> special session of the General Assembly).
	Target 15	Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term.
	Target 16	In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth
	Target 17	In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries.
	Target 18	In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication.

Source: World Bank, 2004, p.xxii

Different summaries of the MDGs produced by different UN bodies often emphasize or leave out some targets. This may be due to the needs of brevity and decisions about what aspects of

the MDGs will interest different audiences. For example, the United Nations Department of Public Information issued in October, 2002, the summary of MDGs given in Table 2. In relation to the environmental sustainability goal, it chose to concentrate on only one feature - access to safe water and sanitation. It did not mention the principle of sustainable development. This suggests increasing emphasis on human needs and less on ecological concerns compared to the 1990s as typified by the UN Summit on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

**Table 2. Millennium Development goals to be achieved by 2015 according to UN Department of Public Information**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>HALVE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER</b></li> </ul>
<p>1.2 Billion people still live on less than \$1 a day. But 43 countries, with more than 60 per cent of the world's people, have already met or are on track to meet the goal of cutting hunger in half by 2015.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION</b></li> </ul>
<p>113 million children do not attend school, but this goal is within reach; India, for example, should have 95 per cent of its children in school by 2005.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>EMPOWER WOMEN AND PROMOTE EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN</b></li> </ul>
<p>Two-thirds of the world's illiterates are women, and 80 per cent of its refugees are women and children. Since the 1997 Microcredit Summit, progress has been made in reaching and empowering poor women, nearly 19 million in 2000 alone.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>REDUCE UNDER-FIVE MORTALITY BY TWO-THIRDS</b></li> </ul>
<p>11 million young children die every year, but that number is down from 15 million in 1980.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>REDUCE MATERNAL MORTALITY BY THREE-QUARTERS</b></li> </ul>
<p>In the developing world, the risk of dying in childbirth is one in 48. But virtually all countries now have safe motherhood programmes and are poised for progress.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>REVERSE THE SPREAD OF DISEASES, ESPECIALLY HIV/AIDS AND MALARIA</b></li> </ul>
<p>Killer diseases have erased a generation of development gains. Countries like Brazil, Senegal, Thailand and Uganda have shown that we can stop HIV in its tracks.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY</b></li> </ul>
<p>More than one billion people still lack access to safe drinking water; however, during the 1990's nearly one billion people gained access to safe water and as many to sanitation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CREATE A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT, WITH TARGETS FOR AID, TRADE AND DEBT RELIEF</b></li> </ul>
<p>Too many developing countries are spending more on debt service than on social services. New aid commitments made in the first half of 2002 alone, though, will reach an additional \$12 billion per year by 2006.</p>

*Source:* United Nations Department of Public Information (2002)

The UN sees the MDGs as a useful means of co-ordinating the efforts of the agencies of the UN. The UN Department of Public Information (2002, p1) states:

“The MDGs provide a framework for the entire UN system to work coherently together towards a common end. The UN Development Group (UNDG) will help ensure that the MDGs remain at the centre of those efforts. On the ground in virtually every developing country, the UN is uniquely positioned to advocate for change, connect countries to knowledge and resources and help coordinate broader efforts at the country level.”

There is evidence to indicate that the UN agencies do take account of the MDGs in their decision-making but since the weights to be placed on the various goals are not specified, the framework they establish is relatively open-ended.

The UN has encouraged individual countries to set their own priorities taking account of the MDGs and has been active in persuading and assisting countries to monitor their progress towards meeting the MDGs. The UN is also playing a major role in monitoring regional and global progress towards meeting the MDGs.

## **5. Discussion of the MDGs and Targets**

The fact that several of the MDGs and targets are relatively specific is useful for monitoring purposes. In practice however, they are also subject to interpretation and to variation. For example, the UN Millennium Declaration does not mention the base year against which progress in meeting the millennium targets should be judged. At first sight, because the Declaration was adapted in 2000, one would imagine that 2000 would be the base year against which to judge progress in meeting the millennium targets. In fact, 1990 has been set as the base. Because some countries, particularly in Asia, such as populous China, made substantial progress in reducing their incidence of poverty in the 1990s, it means that on a global scale, significant progress had already been made by 2000 towards meeting the MDGs poverty reduction target.

On the other hand, those countries making little progress in reducing poverty in the 1990s, such as many Sub-Saharan African countries had greater hurdles to overcome to meet the MDGs, and effectively a shorter time-period in which to meet the MDG targets. The use of the retrospective base year 1990 introduces distortions into the monitoring of progress towards meeting the MDGs. Furthermore, none of the progress in reducing the incidence of poverty and meeting other targets in the decade prior to the UN Millennium Declaration can

be ascribed to it. It seems anomalous that progress in meeting goals in this millennium should be judged in relation to the situation in 1990 rather than 2000. It should be kept in mind that this may produce distortions in the levels of achievement in this millennium and exaggerate some recorded achievements.

The nature and size of the bias arising from the use of 1990 rather than 2000 as a base for meeting the MDGs is evident from the following statement in the World Bank's *Global Monitoring Report 2004*. It indicates that within about 4 years of the UN Millennium Declaration, the poverty reduction goal was virtually met globally.

“At the global level, the world will likely meet the first goal of halving income poverty between 1990 and 2015, thanks to stronger economic growth spurred by improvements in policies – especially in China and India, the world's two most populous countries. With current trends, most regions will achieve or come close to achieving the goal. East Asia has already met it. However, Sub-Saharan Africa is seriously off track; just eight countries, representing about 15 percent of the regional population, will likely achieve the goal. Within other regions that will likely meet the goal at the aggregate level, a number of countries will not. Low-income countries under stress (LICUS), about half of which are in Africa, are especially at risk of falling far short. The trends are broadly similar with respect to the target of halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, also part of Goal 1. The target will likely be met at the global level, but Sub Saharan Africa and a number of countries in other regions will likely fall short.” (World Bank, 2004, p.2)

Doubts have also been raised about the adequacy of some of the socio-economic indicators adopted in specifying MDG targets. For example, it has been suggested that the criterion of less than \$1 per day as a measure of extreme poverty, needs to be higher in parts of the world which experience considerable coldness during the year. This is because heating is essential for survival in these regions. In some countries, shortcomings in statistical information may also make it difficult to measure actual progress towards meeting the goals.

As mentioned above, no specific weighting is put on the individual MDGs. However, it is possible that the order in which the individual MDGs are mentioned in the UN Millennium Declaration is indicative of their relative importance. In that case, eradication of extreme



poverty and hunger would have top priority. But achievement of many of the other goals, such as attaining universal primary education is not independent of reducing the incidence of extreme poverty; a reduction in the incidence of poverty should assist poor families to send their children to school. Furthermore, child mortality is likely to fall and national health to improve as poverty is reduced.

Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that all MDGs are entirely consistent. For example, the goal of environmental sustainability may be imperilled if economic growth is stressed as the only way to achieve the MDGs. There is still a strong tendency to see economic growth as the key to attaining the MDGs. It is true that most countries experiencing significant economic growth have made progress in achieving the most of the MDG objectives and those that have failed to obtain economic growth have retrogressed in this regard.

Yet we cannot be sure of the sustainability of continuing economic growth, particularly on a global scale. For example, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise as a result of global economic growth. Predicted climate change and sea-level rises could make it difficult to sustain economic growth. Furthermore, depletion of natural resource stocks as a result of economic growth could eventually limit economic growth (Tisdell, 2005, Ch.11). The fact that this has not occurred yet does not mean that the problem can never arise. Hence, a cautious approach is required in assessing the desirability of economic growth as a means for attaining the MDGs.

There is a difference of views amongst economists about whether economic growth driven by man-made capital formation (that is investment in man-made physical capital) provides a suitable bequest to future generations. It involves the conversion of natural resources to man-made goods and may degrade the environment. Therefore, the cost of it is likely to be a reduced environmental and natural resource stock. There are concerns amongst ecological economists that this conversion could become an obstacle to future economic growth and productivity and could consequently impoverish future generations if carried too far, (Tisdell, 2005, Ch. 11).

This group of economists would suggest that economic growth ought to be subject to constraints on the economic use of the natural environment and resources. On the other hand, the more orthodox economic view is that man-made capital formation provides a suitable

bequest to future generations, and constraints on natural resource-use are unnecessary, (Tisdell, 2005, Ch.11). Supporters of this optimistic view believe that scientific and technological progress will be adequate to overcome natural-resource shortages and environmental problems that may emerge as a result of continuing economic growth. This progress may be sufficient for some time to come but is necessarily based on faith in the ability of science to provide the needed solutions and a belief that socioeconomic systems will always function in a manner that ensures the necessary flow of invention and innovations are sustained. This optimistic view was forcefully stated by Frederick Engels (1959) in criticizing the theory of Malthus Engels claimed that nothing was impossible to science in raising food productivity and therefore, he rejected the view of Malthus that there could be a population problem. These optimistic views about technological progress are, for example, discussed in Tisdell (1981, Section 1.7)

## **6. Concluding Comments**

The UN Millennium Declaration and associated MDGs outline a global vision and state objectives for achieving this vision. On the whole, the goals that the Declaration expresses are positive and desirable but not without limitations as is pointed out in this article. For example, one detects a naïve view that democracy can be expected to result in good governance and protection of human rights. Unfortunately, it does not always do this. The consequences of political systems are much more complex.

The UN's monitoring of progress towards achieving the MDGs helps to assure that political consideration of these goals is not lost sight of. However, as pointed out in this article, it seems anomalous that progress in achieving the MDGs is measured in relation to the situation in 1990 not 2000. Furthermore, achievement of the goals continues to be hampered by political instability and wars in several parts of the world.

Furthermore, monitoring of the UN of progress by individual countries in meeting their MDGs as well as its assessment in formulating their MDGs should help their achievement of their MDGs. On the other hand, this assistance by the UN may also be regarded by some nations as an intrusion on their national sovereignty and to some extent a costly exercise. While the UN brings some resources to engage in this administrative exercise, it also makes use of the scarce resources of the public service in the countries involved in undertaking its missions. The UN's assistance is not entirely costless to the recipient nation. In addition,

taking into account the theories of Niskanen (1971), we should not dismiss the possibility that some of the actions of the UN are motivated by the selfish interests of its bureaucracies which on occasions may complement the interest of national bureaucracies. The institutional structure and performance of UN bodies should not be beyond criticism. Hopefully, on the other hand, the self-interest of the UN's bureaucracies may mostly serve a wider social interest than their own.

The pursuit of the MDGs is seen as a way to help achieve the fundamental values outlined in the UN Millennium Declaration. These goals certainly highlight the plight of the disadvantaged both by countries, regions and globally. The UN's actions have ensured that the needs of the disadvantaged are not lost sight of at these various geographical levels. Without the vision of the UN, worldwide policies for assisting the disadvantaged would be less co-ordinated and most likely would have a lower priority than at present. The UN's initiative has assisted many countries in formulating development goals. These may not have been articulated, or may have been poorly specified, in the absence of the UN's MDGs<sup>3</sup>.

While the World Bank (2004, p.13) reported that there are signs that official development assistance to less developed countries is rising, having previously fallen, it also warns that the statistics could be, to some extent, deceptive. It states:

“While aid volumes are rising again, there is some concern that much of the increase may be dominated by strategic considerations - the war on terrorism, conflict and reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq. Large amounts have recently been committed for these purposes, but it is unclear whether all of these commitments represent an increase in total aid or are in part a reallocation of aid from other countries. In the period ahead, it will be important to ensure that development aid is not crowded out by aid influenced by such strategic objectives” (World Bank, 2004, p.13).

The UN Millennium Declaration only provides limited guidance about actions that should be taken to achieve the MDGs. Its main purpose is to specify a vision rather than to outline means to realize this vision. It has been left to bodies such as the World Bank and the IMF to formulate policies that may enable this vision to be achieved. Policies, such as those outlined by the World Bank (2004), favour liberal economic policies and advocate institutional reform in developing countries to improve their governance. However, institutional change is difficult to engineer and institutions cannot be altered quickly because cultural embeddedness

is a barrier to change, as for example, seems to be underlined by recent experiences in the Solomon Islands and in East Timor.

It is interesting to note that the World Bank (2004, p11) not only supports liberalization of international trade in goods and services and capital flows but also of migration. The geographical location and structure of some countries and their available resources are so poor that there is little prospect of free trade and capital movements alone eliminating their current economic disadvantage. In such cases, international migration provides the best prospect for increasing the economic welfare of their residents. Some small island countries in the South Pacific may, for example, be in this situation (Tisdell, 1990, Ch.10; 2007)

## **7. Notes**

1. More information about *habeas corpus* may be found, for example in *Wikipedia*, the Free Encyclopaedia. This states (2006, p.4) that during the War on Terrorism *habeas corpus* is suspended by the US for persons declared to be enemy combatants. More specifically, “The September 18, 2001 Presidential Military Order gives the President of the United States the power to declare anyone suspected of connection to terrorists or terrorism, as an enemy combatant. As such, that person can be held indefinitely, without charges being filed against him or her, without a court hearing, nor is this person entitled to a legal consultant”.
2. It has been claimed that democracy promotes economic growth but empirical evidence provides conflicting results (Sirowy and Inkelos, 1990; Przeworski and Limongi, 1993). The hypothesis is unproven (Chand and Tisdell, 2006, p.42).
3. Kumar and Prasad (2006) argue, for example, that poverty would have been given much less attention by the Government of Fiji in the absence of the UN’s MDGs.

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## **9.**

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