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VIVAT INTERNATIONAL AND THE UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

On September 8, 2000 heads of States and Government of all the then 189 UN Member States adopted the Millennium Declaration, which contained a group of goals and targets, some of which were later refined and have

since become known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are the culmination of the development goals agreed on by the Governments in the UN Conferences and Summits held in the 1990s.

The MDGs, to be achieved by 2015, taking 1990 as the base year, include (quoted from 'Frequently Asked Questions': www.undp.org/mdg/faqs.html):

- halving extreme poverty and hunger
- achieving universal primary education
- promoting gender equality
- reducing under-five mortality by two-thirds
- reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters
- reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB
- ensuring environmental sustainability
- developing a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief

The year ending 2002 is exactly at the half way mark between 1990 and 2015. At this stage, the picture looks grim. Though some of the countries like China are on target as far as poverty reduction is concerned, it is the sub-Saharan Africa that rings the bell, where it is said that some of the key target indicators are actually getting worse.

Some of the key factors that may contribute to the possible achievement of MDGs would be:

1. Finding a balance between the developed and developing countries in terms of achieving MDGs. The goals refer to what needs to be achieved and not what needs to be done in order to achieve those goals. While the poor countries need to tighten their belts, reduce corruption, and have good governance, the rich countries will have to set targets in terms of helping these countries to achieve those goals. In this regard, it was heartening to note that the Commonwealth Summit in Abuja, Nigeria,

on December 8, 2003 endorsed the repatriation of illegally acquired public funds and assets to their countries of origin in accordance with the UN Convention against corruption. The 'Aso Rock Declaration', as the outcome of the meeting was tagged, also advised member countries to sign and ratify the UN convention against corruption, noting that systemic corruption, extortion and bribery undermine good governance.

2. Cancellation of Debt of some of the poorest countries and using the money meant for debt repayment to achieve MDGs in those countries. Humanly speaking, it makes no sense when a country spends more on external debt than on basic social services.
3. Fulfilling Official Development Assistance (ODA) targets of 0.7 per cent of the combined Gross National Income of developed countries to Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The LDCs are mostly situated in Africa.
4. Enhancing the political will of the politicians and the Governments of both rich and poor countries to commit to MDGs.

Agreeing to targets is one thing and actively working to achieve them is another. Civil Society, from the poor and developed world, will have to cooperate in this process and motivate their politicians to achieve it. In order to do this, there must be a balance between the needs of the poorest of the poor and the need to widen the constituencies to support an action plan that would address concerns of developing countries, developed countries and the people in general.

5. Removal of trade barriers so that the poor countries would have better market access in the developed countries.

Civil Society/Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can play an important role in realizing the MDGs. Some of the ways could be:

1. Integrating the MDGs into the main programs and activities undertaken by the Civil Society or NGOs.
2. Translating MDGs into national realities so that they are understood and accepted by all countries. It could help setting national

poverty lines and strategies towards poverty eradication.

3. Helping to develop national indicators and accountability mechanisms, and monitor the achievement of MDGs in one's country.

VIVAT International (VI) has taken the UN MDGs and integrated them into its four main issues of focus: Poverty Eradication, Women, Sustainable Development and Culture of Peace. This is done at two levels: 1. Efforts towards grass-roots project implementation and 2. Advocacy/lobbying at local, national and international/UN levels.

Some of the activities and programs covered by VI's four issues of focus, in relation to MDGs, at the grass-roots level are:

Poverty Eradication: adult education towards employment-oriented programs, focus on Africa and its LDCs, alleviation of HIV/AIDS and other health related services in our hospitals, clinics and community social service centers.

Women and Girls Issues: empowerment of women, elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women, in particular, working against trafficking in of women and girls, promoting women's participation in decision-making processes in local and national levels, working for the inclusion of girls at all levels of education.

Sustainable Development: concentration on accessing fresh water as a human right, advocacy for the landless and for organic farming, protection of biodiversity and

programs of alternative medicine, supporting the development and the formation of indigenous peoples, upgrading curricula that supports sustainable development in all our schools and at all levels in line with UNESCO EFA (Education for all) Program.

Culture of Peace: ensuring that culture of peace is well integrated in all formation programs, particularly in schools and community organizations, encouraging members and others to support and sign on to the PEACE Manifesto 2000 and the Global Movement for Culture of Peace; supporting disarmament in countries in post-war transitions like Angola and Timor-Leste, and, in general, advocate for peace at all cost.

REALIZING THE UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AT THE GRASSROOTS

Our long-time endeavors in the grassroots to promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) are indeed valuable contributions to the global effort of realizing the UN Millennium Development Goals. In this light, VIVAT International, New York (VINY) wishes to thank in a special way our members who have been sending in reports of their projects in response to the situation in their locality. The most recent projects received at the Central Office are posted below.

Integrated Livelihood Project SSpS Philippines North

Responding to the extreme poverty among the Aetas, an indigenous tribe in the Philippines, the SSpS members decided to assist LABAY KU, a federation of 10 Aeta communities in putting up an Integrated Livelihood Project. This project seeks to develop integral and self-reliant strategies in sustaining community plans and programs. Considering sustainable agriculture as the most viable way to improve people's livelihood and living condition, the federation offers financial and technical assistance in farming to its qualified members. The representatives of the 10 communities help in managing the project according to the policies set up by the members. In the process it is heartening to see leaders and active members giving way to those who are more in need for capital to develop their land. Further accomplishments also include timely collections of loan payments from beneficiaries, promotion of sustainable agriculture, decreased dependence on lowlanders for capital, and expanded links to buyers and bigger markets. **(Maria Lourdes Santos, SSpS, Nov. 13, 2003)**

Project IRENE SSpS Techny, Illinois, USA

Dubbed as Illinois Religious Engaging in Non-violent Endeavors, Project IRENE was established in 1994 as a more organized way of promoting the welfare and empowerment of women and children in the State of Illinois. This was necessitated by the situation of poverty, where 15.25% are children, 10.2 % are women; housing problem where 40% of the homeless are women and children; and low education wherein 21.7 % of birth mothers are without a high school diploma. Through this project, the women religious of Illinois continually search for better ways of walking with these women and children, and strengthening their voice and force in seeking for change. Among other things, the program addresses legislation for the purpose of curbing violence affecting women and children. Due to the influence of Project IRENE, which represents the collective voice and effort of around 40 congregations of women, a number of bills have been passed or not passed in the State of Illinois. **(Rose Therese Nolta, SSpS, Dec. 9, 2003)**

In connection to the consideration of VI application for accreditation to ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) on December 15–19, 2003, VI New York had requested the JPIC coordinators/contact persons in the grassroots to send in their reports on their respective JPIC activities. VI New York acknowledges with deep gratitude those who have promptly responded.

AFRICA. The SSpS members in Ethiopia, Ghana and Togo are all actively involved in Health Care Programs especially among people living with HIV/AIDS, lepers, mothers and children. The program includes family visits, education in health, sanitation and nutrition, immunization and free feeding for malnourished children. They are also engaged in the empowerment of the poor, especially women

and children through literacy program, skills training and assisting them in putting up small-scale income generating projects. The SVD members in Madagascar are actively involved in organizing people, especially the youth, for the reforestation of the area to help prevent soil erosion. **(Edita Vera, SSpS, Ethiopia, Maria Vilma Espinosa, SSpS, Ghana, Zacharias Lusi, SVD, Madagascar and Neeta Chakiath, SSpS, Togo)**

VI commends the effort of our SSpS members in Germany North to live out JPIC through their ethical investment and by patronizing FAIR TRADE PRODUCTS in support of small-time producers in developing countries and of the environment.

AMERICA. SVD and SSpS members in Argentina, Brazil and Colombia are assisting poor communities: Indigenous Peoples, landless farmers, fisher folks, and urban poor in their continuing struggle for land ownership and other basic services for community development. This involvement includes education and training, helping them in putting up small-scale income-generating projects and alternative health care program. Our SVD and SSpS members in the US and in Antigua are involved in bridging the racial divide in their multi-ethnic communities. They also accompany immigrants from Africa, Middle East and other parts of Asia, assisting them in finding housing and work. They also network with other organizations in advocacy on issues of poverty eradication, peace and women. *(Arnoldo Ederle, SVD, Argentina North, Ferdinandinus Beki Doren, SVD, Brazil Central, Maria Ruth Christian, SSpS, Brazil North, Julio Plaza, SVD, Colombia, Margaret Anne Norris, SSpS, US, Mark Weber, SVD, US Central)*

ASIA. Among others, our SVD and SSpS members in Asia are active partners in poverty eradication and sustainable development. They organize poor communities among Indigenous People, fisher folks, farmers, urban poor and migrants towards integral community development. They also work for the promotion of women, gender justice, dialogue, culture of peace and the integrity of creation. Members from India and South Korea also accompany other vulnerable groups like lepers, orphans and people living with HIV/AIDS. *(Rosina Thekkel,*

SSpS, India Central, John Barwa, SVD, India East, Felix J., SVD, India Mumbai, Isao Kikuchi, SVD, Japan, Esteban De Leon, SVD, Philippines North, Victricia Pascasio, SSpS, Philippines North, Brigido Odtohan, SVD, Philippines South, Estela Parmisano, SSpS, Philippines South and Eleonora Cichoń, SSpS, South Korea)

EUROPE. The priority of our SVD and SSpS members in Europe includes accompanying migrants and refugees, offering them assistance in learning the language, in seeking job and shelter, and other legal matters. Moreover, they are also active members of the Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network and other networks involved with women and children especially the victims of trafficking. *(Christophera Petschenig, SSpS, Austria, Christel Daun, SSpS, Germany North, Josef Rieger, SVD, Germany North, Charlotte Irmeler, SSpS, Germany South, John Feighery, SVD, Ireland, Imaria Niessen, SSpS, Netherlands, Celina Wojciechowska, SSpS, Poland, Tadeusz Panek, SVD, Poland, Valentim Gonçalves, Portugal, Jozef Daniš, SVD, Slovakia, Macario Villalón, SVD, Spain, Margret Theresa Driessen, SSpS, Steyl Province, Walter Strassman, SVD, Switzerland)*

OCEANIA. Responding to the priority needs in Australia, the SSpS members network with other established groups in the accompaniment of refugees and migrants and of Indigenous People, training them in cooking, sewing and other crafts and supporting them in their ongoing struggle for recognition as a people. *(Claire Cooke, SSpS, Australia)*

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