



United Nations

Opening Remarks

by

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at the

**Launch of the Global Media Compact: Creating Global Awareness on
Poverty, Disease and Hunger**

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It is a great pleasure for me to address you at a time when much needs to be said about the critical role the media has come to play in shaping our view of the world as we know it.

In an increasingly interconnected world, the importance of fighting global poverty has never been more important. Building a safe, secure, prosperous and healthy existence for everyone is not only the right thing to do - it is the smart thing to do. Ambitious targets to halve poverty by 2015 have been embraced by the global community as guideposts in this effort.

There is no doubt that global media plays a critical part in creating awareness of the myriad challenges facing millions of impoverished people in the world's 50 Least Developed Countries. Indeed, journalists around the world are hailed for doing that. Through their interminable campaigns, the spotlight has been shone on many emergencies which may have been forgotten were it not for their dogged determination.

But while I would congratulate the media for their commitment to sharing with the world the daily hardships of nearly 800 million people living in the LDCs, I would like to call for a greater effort to dismantle stereotypes.

By this I am referring to issues of unbalanced treatment of LDCs, often distinguished by crisis-led news coverage, which only fuel a sense of perpetual desperation. It is hardly a secret that a significant portion of international media coverage of the world's LDCs may be referred to as 'disaster journalism'. In recent times we have seen how the downtrodden are pejoratively reduced to nothing by a simple stroke of a journalist's pen or a television image.

These "universal" but powerfully subliminal messages, beamed at global television audiences connote something perennially problematic, notably that these underdeveloped countries are essentially bastions of war, famine, poverty, and disease.

This, I strongly believe, should change and the global media needs to improve its ability to reflect situation in LDCs in a more balanced and constructive way.

This is not to say that the media ought to sanitise their coverage of the harsh reality of poverty. On the contrary, I believe that until poverty is finally eradicated, we must be consistently reminded of its presence. And of course, one cannot always expect ‘sunshine journalism’, but it is important to remember that under insurmountable difficulties, even the most downtrodden amongst us attempts to succeed.

I find that little is said or seen about the importance of the LDCs for industrialized nations; their relevance to world development; and their intellectual contribution to the wealth of nations.

Even less is communicated via the media or anywhere else about the progress and achievements in these countries.

The recently-concluded High-Level Meeting of the United Nations to review the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for LDCs last month revealed that despite serious obstacles, a number of countries have made remarkable strides. Economic growth is up, as well as an improvement in their governance record.

Today the launch of the ‘Global Media Compact’ is a small step, I believe, in the right direction. The initiative aims to create a valuable partnership between the media and stakeholders who share a common objective: to end the blight of poverty.

The Compact calls for sustained, balanced coverage of the LDCs to enable the inhabitants of these countries to make decisions grounded in truth.

At this point I would also like to underline that media in LDCs can and should take a lead in producing accessible and vital information, in giving voice to their populations.

I believe the role of free and independent local media is often overlooked by international agencies as a central tool of development. Yet it is clear that role of the media goes beyond simply providing news to a wider role of empowering local people, with information to improve

their health, education and livelihoods, and, as a channel for their own opinions, debates and solutions.

However, I must point out that the full potential of LDC media to advance local and national development will not be realized without a significant increase in assistance from development partners to help strengthen, train and reform existing media.

While numerous and respected efforts to train journalists exist, the overall picture is fragmented and under-resourced.

I would recommend that the number and quality of available training opportunities for the LDCs be increased; better coordination is ensured between both new and existing efforts among current donors and service providers; and an increase in technical assistance for the reform of state broadcasting.

I congratulate the MediaGlobal for its partnership with the United Nations in launching this promising initiative. My Office is very enthusiastic about the seven-point programme that has been identified as part of the Compact for specific efforts by the media companies of the world. We need your encouragement, guidance and support to make this worthwhile initiative produce results.
