

Dear Leader,

We know You are a most busy person and this letter may arrive to your hands when You are preparing to go to New York to attend the United Nations summit that will review the minimum goals on social development that You and Your Colleagues promised back in 2000 to achieve by 2015.

Yet, even knowing how busy You are, dear Leader, we dare ask You to go on reading, first because it is good for compassionate rules like Yourself to stop every now and then to hear the voiced of the ruled, and second because it might help You avoid the temptation to claim a victory that is not there.

Remember when one of Your Colleagues claimed “Mission Accomplished” eight years ago? And then the war he claimed had been won went on and on and the guy who had dared to say he was wrong won the next election by a landslide? Yes, of course nobody is putting a similar “Goals Met!” sign at your back when You will address the General Assembly, but many spin doctors want you to add your voice to the “glass half full” theory and You will be tempted to argue that an extra final effort will suffice to achieve in the next five years the task of eradicating poverty that has not really started during the last ten.

This report will help You think twice. The public and the press have a good memory, Your Excellency, and to make matters even more difficult, everybody can now read on the internet the Millennium Declaration, where ten years ago 189 World Leaders like yourself committed to “spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected” and set 2015 as the target for reducing that proportion to half.

As your advisers may have warned You, in 2008 one of your ministers signed into the Accra Action Agenda stating that “1.4 billion people – most of them women and girls – still live in extreme poverty” and the World Bank, which is the source of those estimates (and of the delusionary idea that poverty can be described by income alone, when we all know it is complex and multidimensional) well that same World Bank has estimated in January this year that “64 million more people may be living in extreme poverty by the end of 2010 due to the crisis.” It will defy your mathematical abilities to try to explain to the press how on earth 1.5 billion people currently living in extreme poverty can be shown as being on track to reducing “over a billion” to half.

In fact, the issue is not even whether or not the world is going to meet the targets five years from now. The MDGs were never intended as planning targets, but they are still political commitments, made by leaders like You to define priorities. They are valuable because they can be used as benchmarks

in evaluating progress. And many evaluations show that progress in social indicators has actually slowed down since the year 2000 instead of speeding up!

Not that we doubt your abilities to address and convince the public, of course. Without that gift, You wouldn't have been popularly elected. (If You haven't been popularly elected, please correct us and we will apologize publicly for our mistake.) But even for a speaker as eloquent as Yourself, it will be difficult to argue that “no effort was spared” when the world military expenditures last year were 15 times larger than the total aid received by developing countries and 49 per cent larger than in 2000 when Your Colleagues promised “to establish a just and lasting peace all over the world.”

On top of preventing You from concurring in those blatant mistakes, the reading of this 15th annual Social Watch report will help You stay in tune with the concerns and the mood of your citizens. This report is, in fact, the result of a bottom-up process. It is not an opinion commissioned from consultants but the conclusions of hundreds of organizations and movements that are active year-round on social development issues. Their objective in contributing to this effort is, precisely, to draw the attention of leaders like You to the issues that concern them and to help You meet your promises and design more equitable, gender-sensitive and pro-poor policies.

Each of the national Social Watch coalitions that contributed to this report decided on their own priorities and themes and each one raised its own funds and defined its own ways to consult with the grassroots to gather evidence and validate their findings. They did not shy away from criticizing You and Your Government, the policies in place, the powerful elites in your country or the governance systems whenever they felt it was necessary. We hope You agree with us that the voicing of critical views helps strengthen democratic processes. But even when the reports find that much can (and needs to) improve under Your Leadership, we also know that other 191 leaders share the responsibility with You and thus, on average, only 0.5% of the blame corresponds to You personally.

Collectively, though, when You and Your Colleagues come together in the General Assembly of the United Nations, You will have all the responsibility for your deeds as well as for your inaction, as there is no other world governance mechanism with a higher authority. Yes, we know that some specialized agencies and organizations are in charge of finances or trade and those bodies have their own decision-making processes, but who sits in their respective assemblies if not ministers that You choose and command?

We know your attention span is short and You have multiple demands and little time to spare. You may argue that, yes, poverty is a priority for You and equal rights for women is a cause that You and Your Spouse are committed to, whatever your respective genders might be. In fact we have never found any leader taking the opposite view and defending poverty, slavery or the denial of education to girls. But there are other urgencies requiring Your Time and even if You have read this letter so far You may feel tempted not to read the entire report and perhaps some adviser might summarize its summary in a few bullet points for You. It might spare You that effort to just go on reading a few more lines. The final message emerging from this report is simple: as everybody understands that promises made need to be kept and that it is fair that You are reminded of them, citizens everywhere adhere to the “polluters pay” principle. Those that created the problem should pay for the cleanup and the damage they caused. And that is valid for oil spills, for climate change and for the financial crisis.

If basic principles of justice are applied, the resources and the political will could be found to create the “more

peaceful, prosperous and just world” that all of You Leaders promised to us a decade ago. We may even be tolerant with Your Shameful Delay in that task, same as we expect You to be tolerant with some of the impatient and maybe disrespectful wordings included in this report. As You may understand, after a decade of not seeing words matched with actions, some among us expect You to “kick some ass,” if You pardon the expression. Actually, that is precisely what we expect You to do. The sooner, the better. We promise to applaud loudly. ■

Yours respectfully,

ROBERTO BISSIO
on behalf of Social Watch

PS: If You need any assistance in finding out precisely where to kick, please go on reading this report.