Launch of the Human Development Report 2003
Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union
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Statement by Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator
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Mr. Chairman, your Excellency President Chissano,
Excellencies, Heads of State and Governments,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

It is a great honour to be able to address this distinguished Assembly of Africa on such an important topic at such a critical time.

As the UN Development Programme’s new Human Development Report that we are formally launching here today makes clear, the world - and Africa - is at a turning point.

We have the global means, the know-how and the record of development success here in Africa as well as other regions, to state categorically that if today Africa and the world make the commitment of will and resources, then tomorrow, 2015, we can reach the Millennium Development Goals of halving poverty, removing hunger, putting every boy and girl in school and stemming the crisis in our health and environment.

The message of this report is that poverty is no longer inevitable, yet we face a development crisis, with more than a billion people - one-third of them on this continent—languishing in absolute poverty, most of them without clean water to drink or enough food to eat, beset by diseases from HIV/AIDS to tuberculosis, lacking access to schools and healthcare, and living in an environment that by nearly every measure is rapidly degrading.

It does not have to be this way. While worldwide, at least 54 countries got poorer in the 1990s — largely because location, economic structure, and other unaddressed handicaps kept them from overcoming their development challenges — at the same time, literally hundreds of millions were lifted out of poverty in other countries.

Africa, however, is in real danger of being left behind.

Nearly one in every six African children die before age five — unchanged from a decade ago. Overall primary school enrolment is still below 60%, and on other indicators too the news is grim. On current trends, the goal of halving poverty will not be met until 2147.
For most on our watch list of almost 60 “priority countries”—of which, again, nearly half are in Africa—lack of progress is not about lack of trying to put good institutions, policies and growth in place. It is about supplementing those necessary steps by addressing deeper structural handicaps such as geographic isolation, undiversified commodity-dependent economies, impractically small, unjoined markets, conflict, exclusion of women and a deterioration of Africa’s top soils that is undermining the agricultural base.

With this report, UNDP seeks to help answer that question. It argues that recent formulas of good governance and open markets are necessary— but not enough.

This agenda is clearly reflected in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) — as is the acknowledgment that the primary responsibility for making this happen clearly lies with the developing countries themselves.

This approach is now spreading across Africa. And here it is the MDGs good fortune to be undermined by a phenomenon where Africa has become a leader, with more and more countries holding credible democratic elections. It is these enfranchised millions who are the key stakeholders in these Goals with the power to hold governments to account for their MDG performance. In that way we can rebuild the political debate and the accountability of leaders around development success.

But there is a second side to the MDG compact.

At the Millennium Summit, at Monterrey and again at the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development last year, donor countries committed to grow their public investment in and other support to developing countries when developing countries did their part.

This is because the kind of structural barriers this report describes are in many cases too entrenched to be tackled by developing countries alone. As Africa discovered during the 1990s, when development assistance plummeted by a third, trade barriers remained high and debt relief elusive, achieving the MDGs without this side of the deal is like competing with one hand tied behind your back.

For the Millennium Development Goals are our collective responsibility—and within our collective power—to achieve. It can unite us all, rich and poor, North and South, developed and developing not in rhetoric, but at an extremely practical level, where we can hold each other to account for shared goals and, together, change Africa and the world.

Thank you.