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Following is the message of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the World Social Forum, delivered on his behalf by José Antonio Ocampo, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on 4 February, 2002:

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I wish I could be with you in person today. The wide range of issues you have been discussing in your Forum and its workshops, as well as the variety and number of civil society groups represented, is truly impressive. Yours is the kind of engagement the United Nations relies on to be as effective and responsive as it can be, in the service of the people it exists to represent.

I know that you have come together to voice deep concerns and convictions about the direction in which globalization is taking our world, and about what we should do to remedy it. Some of these I share, some of them I do not. But whatever the case, I respect and share wholeheartedly your commitment to improving the lives of individual men and women on this planet. Indeed, if there is one guiding motto that the United Nations must work under in the twenty-first century, it is to put people at the centre of everything we do.

When I address the World Economic Forum in New York later today, I shall do so because I believe the participants in that gathering should hear some of the concerns that you and I do have in common. I will remind them that they are sharing this small planet with well over a billion people who are denied the very minimum requirements of human dignity, and with 4 or 5 billion whose choices in life are narrow, indeed, compared to theirs.

In fact, our planet seems to many more and more like a small boat driven by a fierce gale through dark and uncharted waters, with more and more people crowded on board, hoping desperately to survive. None of us can afford to ignore the condition of our fellow passengers on this little boat. If they are sick, all of us risk infection. And if they are angry, all of us can easily get hurt.

It is not enough to say -- though it is true -- that without business the poor would have no hope of escaping their poverty. Too many of them have no hope as it is. Those who have the power and means, governments and business, must show that economics, properly applied, and profits, wisely invested, can bring social benefits within reach not only for the few, but for the many, and eventually for all.

A first, vital test will come as early as next month, with the International Conference on Financing for Development, in Monterrey. It offers us the best chance we have had, in many years, to unlock the financial resources that are so desperately needed.

It is essentially up to the governments of the world to make this happen. The Conference must help developing countries to mobilize domestic resources, and attract international private investment. There should be agreement to conclude a comprehensive international convention against corruption, providing, for example, for the repatriation of illicitly transferred funds.

On trade, there must be a commitment on the part of the developed world to open its markets fully and genuinely to developing country products, while removing unfair subsidies to its own producers. At the same time, many of the poorest countries must receive substantial assistance in developing their infrastructure and capacities in order to benefit from trade opportunities. And if we are to reach the Millennium Development Goals -- including the halving of extreme poverty in the world by 2015, to which all the world's governments have committed themselves -- we need an extra \$50 billion of official development assistance each year.

As I will tell the World Economic Forum, these issues can no longer be settled in private conclave among the rich and powerful. The developing countries have as big a stake as anyone in the future of the world economy. Their views should count for something when decisions affecting it are taken. The Monterrey Conference should be the occasion for those who currently wield the greatest influence to show that they are taking this subject seriously.

Another vital test will be the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg this September -- an opportunity to rejuvenate the quest to build a more sustainable future. The Summit must bring the world together, and forge more cohesive global partnerships for the implementation of Agenda 21. It must send out a message that sustainable development is not only a necessity, but also an exceptional opportunity to place our economies and societies on more durable footing.

On all these challenges, the United Nations will depend increasingly on the constructive engagement of civil society. Our ability to improve the lives of the men and women of this planet will depend on the ability of all sectors of society to move beyond ideology, and work together in the search for pragmatic solutions. In that mission, I hope I can rely on you. The United Nations looks forward to an ever stronger partnership with you in the months and years ahead. Thank you all. Muito obrigado!

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