

The Global Post-2015 Development Agenda

Remarks

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Thank you Peter for that introduction. It is a pleasure to be here with you this afternoon and to share this discussion opportunity with Elliott. I am also pleased to be here at the U.S. Green Building Council again — where I spoke awhile ago at a gathering arranged by UNEP on the “Road to Rio+20.” Today, we are on the other side of Rio+20 and the discussion is all about the post-2015 agenda. “The Future We Want,” the negotiated outcome document from the Rio conference, is a very important piece of that discussion. Also important is the effort underway by governments, organizations, and individuals to review the progress made on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and where progress has been uneven. The world has met two MDGs — reducing poverty by 50 percent and halving the proportion of people with no safe drinking water — well ahead of the 2015 deadline. Progress on many MDGs, however, is lagging, and fragile and post-conflict states are unlikely to achieve any MDGs. A lot of the goals in these states were not met.

So we are at a crossroads. Actually, not just a crossroads, but a convergence. We have the MDGs and all the work to date now converging with the SDG discussion. Ensuring that the global post-2015 development agenda reflects our existing goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, combating disease, achieving gender equality, and environmental sustainability. The agenda ahead is a large and important one and is going to require extensive civil society participation.

We should take full advantage of the time from now to 2015 to achieve the MDGs. As we look forward, the United States envisions a future agenda where eradicating extreme poverty is central; an agenda that genuinely integrates the three aspects of sustainable development — economic, social, and environmental; and an agenda that recognizes that environment is critical to sustainable development — and to lasting poverty reduction. We would like to see a truly integrated agenda.

This is an exciting time, but it is very challenging to integrate perspectives. We know that this is an ambitious undertaking. It is a very important undertaking and meetings like this are foundational. Efforts to end extreme poverty must be at the core of the post-2015 development agenda. President Obama embraced this vision in his 2013 State of the Union speech when he said that “the United States will join with our allies to eradicate such extreme poverty in the next two decades.” (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/speech/sotu-2013>)

The U.S. was active at Rio+20 and the “Future We Want” echoes what President Obama said in his speech. As Diallo was saying, integrating the specificity of each group’s interests will not be easy. We have to remember how concerned people were going into Rio+20 about how groups might come together. Good progress was made then, and now we have a chance to take this to the next level. Having talked a bit about our aspirations in the post-2015 development agenda context, I’d like to switch gears and talk about the practical side. First, the post-2015 development agenda process; second, the U.S. government process for post-2015, and third, civil society and private sector engagement — across all different interests and sectors.

First, let me briefly describe some of the post-2015 process so far. There are many different processes and initiatives that are underway as inputs to post-2015, some of which resulted from the Rio+20 outcome. I will discuss two: 1) UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP); and 2) Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG-SDGs).

In May, the High-Level Panel came out with its report on the post-2015 development agenda, which included 12 illustrative universal goals and targets. For the U.S., John Podesta served on the panel. The report is comprehensive. From the U.S. perspective, we feel it’s a pretty good report and is a good starting point. We support many of the report’s key themes including, focusing on finishing the work of the MDGs, keeping poverty at the front and center while integrating economic growth and environmental sustainability. Also, we support the report’s emphasis on making sure that members of historically marginalized and at-risk groups, such as persons with disabilities and indigenous persons are not left behind. There’s been a lot of discussion so far, but the report pulls it all together in a positive way and provides good insight into how to do it.

The Open Working Group on SDGs has met five times since its first session in March 2013. The November meeting took place last week. There are 30 member seats, each seat shared by groups of countries. So many countries wanted to join the OWG so they had to share seats. This is a good sign as it shows the incredible amount of interest in the process, but it also shows the complexity. The United States shares a seat with Canada and Israel. Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens up in New York is the lead U.S. representative on the group.

During their meetings, member states are stock taking and generating ideas on potential SDGs. The remaining three Open Working Group meetings — in December, January and February — will include issues important to many of us — including my Bureau. Issues include climate, oceans, the Small Island Developing States, biodiversity, forests, sustainable cities, and sustainable consumption and production. Earlier this year, the Open Working Group discussed water and sanitation, desertification, land degradation and drought, food security and nutrition, and health.

The Open Working Group on SDGs has a few remaining meetings. These are not official negotiations, but it is an important formative period for all of us. The Group will produce a report before next September. The Secretary General is expected to produce a synthesis report (taking into account the OWG-SDGs synthesis report, the Expert Committee on Financing Report, the results of global consultations, and the HLP report) for the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly. There will be a UN intergovernmental negotiation process for post-2015 beginning officially in late 2014. Negotiations will conclude with a summit of Heads of State in September 2015 — where countries will adopt the post-2015 development agenda.

There are other formal and informal efforts. And, between now and then, there are a lot of discussions to have. The UN, through country and thematic consultations and the My World Survey web site, is striving to make the post-2015 process open and consultative. The My World Survey asks citizens from around the world to identify which six of sixteen possible issues they think would make the most difference to their lives. High on the U.S. list are some of the issues included such as protecting forests, rivers, oceans, and access to clean water and sanitation. Responses will be gathered until 2015.

To feed into the UN process, the U.S. government has established a post-2015 interagency process — post-2015 cuts across many agencies. We have set up interagency working groups focusing on different topics. Ranging from cross-cutting issues such as rights and inclusiveness and governance to specific topics on energy, health, and the environment. I chair the working group on Environment and Oceans. While we recognize this is a formative period, it is also an important period.

We have begun formulating our approach to these and other issues. One of the things we are trying to do — and would encourage others to do as well — is to use the HLP report as a starting point. It is something we can react to going forward. We are also working to build on past discussions and accomplishments, working to gather and generate innovative approaches on the whole range of possible post-2015 topics and cross-cutting issues. This involves hearing from the much broader community — at meetings such as this one. It's time to think about how to be creative and we want to know what's happening at NGOs and in the private sector.

Over the next two years there will be many post-2015 development agenda meetings and events at the UN and around the world. These are opportunities for civil society, the private sector, academia, the scientific community, and individuals to look for solutions and to engage with the U.S. government. As I've said, this will be a challenging process and we are open to hearing your ideas.

The last point — and one of the most important — is how do we ensure comprehensive engagement with civil society and the private sector in U.S. preparations for the post-2015 development agenda. As you know, the U.S. Government has a long tradition of engagement with non-governmental stakeholders leading-up to and during major multilateral negotiations. This challenge needs everyone — and we are interested in your views on the post-2015 development agenda. We ask you to think about how we can take civil society engagement to the next level.

You have been a part of the United States' efforts in various multilateral negotiations and processes in which we are involved — the UN Climate negotiations, the Montreal Protocol, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and Rio+20, to name a few. During the post-2015 process we will work hard to continue this tradition of engagement. We will be reaching out to civil society, the private sector, and others throughout the next two years and attending events like this one. But we also encourage you to reach out to us as well and to share your creative ideas. The question is how to do this now — it is important to integrate environment and sustainability in every way possible. The greatest opportunity to do this is now.

My Bureau will also continue meeting with and talking with civil society and the private sector regularly on different topics that we engage on every day. For every meeting we have, we will be adding post-2015 as a point of discussion. It is exactly this kind of open dialogue with civil society that the U.S. encourages. I hope you will continue

to share your ideas and perspectives with us as we work together through this process. We are where we want to be, but this is a time of challenge and also a time to think about how to be innovative.

I look forward to hearing your views and questions. Thank you.

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