Sustainable Visions

NEW YORK – UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is mobilizing global action around the great challenge of our time: sustainable development. It is a call that the world must heed.

It is no longer good enough for economies simply to grow. We must also end extreme poverty, a goal within reach by 2030. We must manage the economy to protect rather than destroy the environment. And we must promote a fairer distribution of prosperity, rather than a society divided between the very rich and the very poor.

We use the term “sustainable development” precisely to mean economic growth that ends extreme poverty, increases social inclusion, and is environmentally healthy. Sadly, the world is way off track.

Many poor countries’ economies are not growing, and extreme poverty remains widespread. Humanity is
dangerously changing the climate, depleting freshwater supplies, and poisoning the air and oceans. Most economies are becoming less fair as well, with widening gaps between the rich and the poor. And violent conflict remains widespread, with the world’s poorest regions the most vulnerable to outbreaks.

With these challenges in mind, world leaders agreed last year at the Rio+20 Summit to adopt Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The world’s governments asked the UN Secretary-General to coordinate the preparation of these goals by the year 2015, in order to ensure a seamless transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which expire that year. A crucial meeting of the UN General Assembly will take place in late September for this purpose.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has put into motion several high-level processes to help devise the SDGs that will have maximum benefit for humanity during the years 2015-2030. First, the UN itself is leading a large outreach effort to generate global discussion. Second, intensive intergovernmental negotiations, as called for by the Rio+20 Summit, are being held. Third, a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons has recently issued its report.

Finally, I am pleased and honored to be part of a new “knowledge network,” the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, created by Ban to bring together
scientists, technologists, businesses, and development specialists from all regions of the world. The SDSN’s Leadership Council consists of dozens of top global thinkers and development leaders from rich and poor countries alike.

The SDSN Leadership Council has now delivered to the UN Secretary-General a new report, “An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development.” The agenda has already received thousands of comments online from around the world, and we eagerly invite further global discussion of it, especially from the world’s young people. This report, after all, is about their future!

In its report, the SDSN has identified ten high-priority goals for sustainable development:

- End extreme poverty and hunger;
- Achieve development and prosperity for all without ruining the environment;
- Ensure learning for all children and youth;
- Achieve gender equality and reduce inequalities;
- Achieve health and well-being at all ages;
- Increase agricultural production in an environmentally sustainable manner, thereby achieving food security and rural prosperity;
- Make cities productive and environmentally sustainable;
- Curb human-induced climate change with sustainable energy;
Protect ecosystems and ensure sound management of natural resources;
Improve governance and align business behavior with all of the goals.
The idea behind these priorities is to combine the four key dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth (including ending poverty), social inclusion, a healthy natural environment, and good governance (including peace). They can thus form the basis for the SDGs that would apply to all countries from 2015 to 2030.

Well-crafted SDGs will help to guide the public’s understanding of complex sustainable-development challenges, inspire public and private action, promote integrated thinking, and foster accountability. Children everywhere should learn the SDGs as a way to understand the challenges that they will confront as adults.

The SDGs will be complementary to the tools of international law, such as global treaties and conventions, by providing a shared normative framework. They will also mobilize governments and the international system to strengthen measurement and monitoring for sustainable development.

The world has at its disposal the tools to end extreme poverty in all its forms by the year 2030 and to address the sustainable-development challenges that we all face.
With rising incomes and unprecedented scientific and technological progress, rapid positive change on the required scale is feasible. Ours can be the generation that ends extreme poverty, ensures that all people are treated equally, and eliminates, once and for all, the dangerous climate risks facing our planet – but only if the world mobilizes around a shared agenda for sustainable development and ambitious, time-bound SDGs.

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