Rt Hon Helen Clark – UNDP Administrator
2015 Commonwealth Lecture
"Youth, Innovation, Sustainable Development and
The Commonwealth in a Post-2015 World"
The Guildhall, London
6pm, Thursday 9 April 2015

It is a privilege for me to deliver the Commonwealth Lecture at this prestigious venue this evening. I thank Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma for the invitation to me, and I also acknowledge the presence of Sir Anand Satyanand, the Chair of the Commonwealth Foundation and former Governor-General of New Zealand.

As Prime Minister of New Zealand, I had the privilege of attending four Commonwealth Heads of Government Summits – or CHOGMs as they are known. For a New Zealand Prime Minister coming from the very far south of the South Pacific, CHOGM is an opportunity to meet counterparts not only from one's near region, but from the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, the Indian Ocean, Europe, and Canada.

For the Commonwealth, like the United Nations, spans every region of the world. It constitutes nearly a third of the global population – some 2.2 billion people, and a quarter of our planet's land area. But it has not relied on its size and geographical reach alone in making its mark in a world of many multi-country organisations. The Commonwealth's unique value has been its commitment to development, democracy, and diversity.

Of special note have been the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles in 1971 setting out the core political values of the organization, and the Harare Declaration of 1991. These landmark documents consolidated the Commonwealth's positioning as an organisation committed to peace, equal rights for all, the rule of law, free and democratic political processes, and economic and social development.

At 66 years of age, the Commonwealth is just four years younger than the United Nations, which celebrates its seventieth anniversary this year. To be relevant to our times, both must continually reinvent themselves in a world of many pressing challenges - and in a very youthful world. The global population under the age of thirty numbers more than half the total of over seven billion.

Three in every five Commonwealth citizens are under the age of thirty. That fully justifies the choice of this year's Commonwealth theme: "A Young Commonwealth". And one cannot fail to be impressed by the major focus of the Commonwealth on developing youth potential through its programmes and forums. The Commonwealth Youth Index is an innovative tool which can support governments in designing effective youth policy. I especially welcome the 2013 Declaration of Commonwealth Leaders in which they committed "unequivocally to investing in young people and placing them at the centre of sustainable and inclusive development, thus harnessing their creativity,

leadership, and social capital towards the progress and resilience of Commonwealth countries and a more prosperous and democratic Commonwealth."

With youth comes energy, vibrancy, and optimism – if there is a supportive environment and opportunity. That lays the ground for major positive contributions and a demographic dividend from the largest youth population the world has ever known. Yet a failure to invest in opportunity for youth can quickly lead to the opposite –to alienation and to energy turned in destructive rather than constructive directions. That is a future we invite at our peril.

So, what kind of future is currently on offer for today's children and young people? How could the current global offer be improved through commitment to a transformational, post-2015 sustainable development agenda consistent with the vision and values of the Commonwealth? What role can innovation play in engaging citizens and driving development? These are the questions I will endeavour to address in my lecture this evening.

Let me refer first to just some of the significant challenges our world faces which must be addressed in the post-2015 global development agenda currently being negotiated at the United Nations. The new agenda will supersede the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which run their course at the end of this year. It needs to be big, bold, and transformational to meet the needs of young and old alike for a more just and peaceful world.

1. *Poverty and inequality*

Tremendous progress has been made on lifting people out of abject poverty in the last thirty years. Growth in emerging economies has been driving a process of convergence between what was traditionally regarded as a poor and developing 'south' and a rich and developed 'north' – although clearly very significant gaps still remain.

The MDGs set targets for progress on a range of basic development indicators, using 1990 data as a baseline. Against those targets, we have seen:

- extreme income poverty halved between 1990 and 2010. To a significant extent, this was driven by the incredible decline in poverty in China;
- over the same period the likelihood of a child dying before their fifth birthday was nearly cut in half;
- now nine out of ten children in developing countries are enrolled in primary schooling (net enrolment rate), with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls.
- Many more women are being elected to the parliaments of their countries, but progress in lifting the numbers falls well short of the targeted thirty per cent figure.

But despite these and other areas of progress on MDG targets, many inequalities have become starker:

- eight per cent of the world's population now earns fifty per cent of the world's income;
- the richest one per cent owns 48 per cent of the world's assets;
- in some developing regions, children in towns and cities are up to thirty per cent more likely to complete primary school than are those in rural areas;
- gender inequality is stark by virtue of the fact that it remains pervasive in the 21st Century, and is upheld variously by law, culture, and/or custom. Sexual and gender-based violence blights every nation on earth. By not tackling these issues decisively, nations are limiting their potential. Pursuing gender equality and women's empowerment is not just the right thing to do; it's also the smart thing to do, as Hilary Clinton has aptly observed; and
- countries in conflict or facing significant insecurity have been unable to reduce poverty because of the disruption they suffer to the course of human life and to their infrastructure and institutions. They fall behind as the world develops around them and without them.

Overall, inequalities have grown in the majority of the world's countries, with very few exceptions. Wealth, opportunity, and ultimately power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few. High levels of inequality limit the political will to address poverty, and they tear at the very fabric of our societies. Political exclusion, and a lack of hope for young people, has contributed to the rise of sectarianism and violence.

2. *Conflict, insecurity, and shocks*

The seeming magnet in ISIS which is attracting young men and women from countries rich and poor threatens to destabilise parts of our world for years to come. Alas, ISIS is far from unique as an extremist group – just within the past week, a Commonwealth country, *Kenya*, has experienced a horrific massacre of young people on a college campus carried out by another terrorist group, and from *Nigeria* to *Pakistan* and beyond such organisations are destroying lives and prospects. The crimes being committed by members of these groups are at a level of depravity which can only be described as grotesque.

Whether born from greed, grievance, or ideology, conflict can dissolve human development in an instant. Conflict and protracted insecurity reverses decades of progress, stranding generations of young people without education and the opportunities for decent jobs and livelihoods. The impact on women and girls is typically abhorrent.

Often 'conflict' is put in a separate box from 'development' but that makes little sense in the real world. Take the example of the *Syrian* crisis which has seen nearly four million refugees dispersed largely across five countries in the neighbourhood, and over seven million people internally displaced within Syria itself. This is not only a very serious humanitarian crisis; it is a development crisis for Syria and its neighbors. Many children are out of school; people have lost jobs and livelihoods; essential services are under huge pressure; homes have been destroyed – the list goes on.

One story: last year I visited an informal campsite where Syrians had taken refuge in *Lebanon*'s Beqaa Valley. Our group sat in a makeshift shelter with a family. Mum, Dad, and all but one child were present. That one child was a twelve-year old girl. She was out at work in the fields as the only family member who could find a job. I have no doubt that countless thousands of Syrian children are in such situations – and worse if they are trafficked and/or sexually exploited.

Then there is the impact of *natural disasters* wherever disaster risk reduction has not been undertaken – or has not been sufficient in the face of new challenges like climate change, and like rapid urbanization which is placing more people in vulnerable locations. Severe floods, droughts, cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis still cause great loss of life, livelihoods, and infrastructure. *Vanuatu*, a Commonwealth country, suffered extraordinary damage from an unprecedented cyclone just last month. Big investments are needed to make communities more secure from such threats.

Other shocks also flow from under-development. Take the *Ebola* outbreak in West Africa – where one of the three epicenter countries, *Sierra Leone*, is a Commonwealth country. A functioning health system could have stopped the disease at the outset. But there wasn't one, and nor was there an adequate, early international response. The outcome is now measured in thousands of lives lost, thousands of children orphaned, many more widow-headed households, economies struggling, jobs and livelihoods lost, months of missed schooling, and the collapse of basic services.

3. *Climate change and other forms of environmental degradation*

The number of extreme weather events is increasing dramatically around the world. Sea level rises will lead to displacement of people, and to increasing stress on land, water, and food. Changing rainfall patterns will affect agriculture and livelihoods. Tropical diseases will become more persistent. These impacts will increasingly challenge development. They threaten to erase past, present, and future development gains in all countries, and especially for the poorest.

Our current patterns of consumption are generating levels of pollution with which our planet cannot cope. Our overuse of the world's resources for 'wants' rather than 'needs' is threatening ecosystems and will affect our very way of life. This is particularly evident with climate change. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."

In the consultations on the post-2015 development agenda led by the UN development system, people have called for strong leadership from governments, business, and the UN to change course before it is too late. That course correction has been a long time coming, which leads me to my fourth and last point about challenges.

4. *Glacial multilateralism*

The challenges of poverty and inequality, environmental degradation, and human insecurity are sadly not new, but effective responses to many challenges, old and new alike, have been slow in coming. The architecture of key multilateral institutions from the UN Security Council to the International Monetary Fund is frozen in time.

Yet my sense is that we don't have a lot of time. The scientific consensus is that we don't have time to delay on tackling climate change. The economic evidence in heavyweight reports like that of Lord Stern prepared for the British Government in 2006 is that the longer action is delayed, the more costly it will be to try to avert catastrophic and irreversible climate change impacts.

With high rates of criminal violence in many countries; with nations from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa and from the Maghreb to Iraq and Yemen blighted by conflict; with youth -and the not so youthful too - rallying to join terrorist groups; one could paraphrase an old proverb and ask: are we reaping what we have sown? Have too many people been too marginalised and too excluded for too long from the economies, societies, and politics of their nations? And isn't the biggest development challenge our world faces the need to address the root causes of all these problems? So, I ask:

- How can our world utilize its great global knowledge, technology, and wealth to build a better, fairer future?

- How can we engage youth as agents of development, innovation, and change – building on good principles like those in the Commonwealth Declaration on Investing in Young People?

- How can we fulfil our destiny of being the first generation able to eradicate extreme poverty and the last generation able to prevent catastrophic climate change?

The opportunity of 2015 – a new global development agenda

The good news is that 2015 offers a unique opportunity to reset the compass. This is a "once in a generation" year for development, with four major global processes and summits related to development taking place. Their outcomes will set priorities for the next generation. Ambition needs to be high, given the magnitude of the challenges.

The first of these events, the *Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction*, has already taken place in Sendai, Japan, in March. UNDP's tagline for that conference was that "if it's not risk informed, it's not sustainable development". So often we see gains which have been painfully made literally swept away by floods, cyclones, and landslides, or destroyed by severe droughts, earthquakes, or tsunami. There are development solutions to these challenges. We can build greater resilience to these shocks and reduce risk.

The last of the four 2015 events will be the vital UN *climate change conference* in Paris in December (COP21), where a new global agreement is due to be reached – and must be reached if there is to be any credible chance of stopping the worst impacts of climate change.

In between Sendai and Paris are the *Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa,* Ethiopia, in July, and the *Special Summit on Sustainable Developmen*t in New York in September.

At the *September Summit*, UN Member States are due to agree on a successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals. This will build on the MDG experience. The focus and funding driven by the MDGs has undoubtedly played a role in the increased school enrolment and decreased mortality among children to which I referred earlier. Action on MDG targets also played a role in improving access to drinkable water, reducing maternal mortality, and tackling HIV, malaria, and TB. Around the world, the MDGs guided budget decisions and legislative priorities.

The post-2015 development agenda therefore has large shoes to fill. Even so, it is also shaping up to be a bigger, bolder, and more transformational agenda than the MDGs were – and that is needed. It will be a universal, sustainable development agenda, requiring commitment from all countries, developed and developing, to build a better shared future. Poverty, inequalities, and environmental challenges exist in rich and poor countries alike. Poverty eradication, lifting human development overall, and environmental sustainability will be at the heart of the new agenda.

The Commonwealth, its associated organisations, and its Member States are engaged in the discourse about the new agenda, as they have long been with the MDG agenda and with all major development-related processes. The Commonwealth plays a unique role in the strength of its advocacy for Small Island Developing States. Its voice is loud and clear on the need for fair and equitable outcomes to world trade negotiations. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum has been a strong advocate for taking the MDGs to the local level, and will be a key partner in ensuring that the new SDGs are localized. And the Commonwealth's deep commitment to democratic governance is a constant reminder of the importance of that as a driver of the sustainable development agenda.

In an eighteen month process culminating in a report last July, an *Open Working Group* set up by the UN General Assembly developed seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs) and many associated targets. The numbers are large, but so are the challenges. Later, in a *synthesis report* on the post-2015 discussions to date prepared for the General Assembly, the Secretary General suggested framing the seventeen proposed SDGs in six "*essential elements*". That could help simplify the presentation of the broad agenda, and thus raise awareness of what it is all about.

The first element would cover the proposed SDGs which deal with the urgency of eradicating poverty and fighting inequality of all kinds, including gender inequality. That is defined as an agenda for human *dignity*.

The second element covers goals and targets related to employment, social protection, health and education –classic social development goals making up an agenda for *people*.

For states to afford and advance a social agenda, they need to have economic growth, develop their infrastructure, including for energy, and enhance their capacity to trade and attract investment. That is an agenda for *prosperity,* and is well covered in the proposed SDGs.

But growth should not come at the cost of destroying vital ecosystems. This is the agenda for the *planet*. The proposed SDGs have strong environmental content.

Governments cannot build such an agenda alone. The participation of citizens, their organizations, and civil society is needed, along with the input of science and academia and the dynamism of the private sector. Post-2015 is an agenda for *partnerships*.

And finally, and for the first time explicitly, the proposed new global development agenda declares that development requires peaceful and inclusive societies, justice for all, and effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. This is an agenda for *justice,* and is covered in what is well known in development circles simply as Goal Sixteen.

Dignity, People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnerships, and *Justice:* these are six essential elements of an agenda for human and sustainable development which would enable nations to grow and develop in inclusive ways within the boundaries set by nature. This is a transformative agenda, and it is badly needed.

But such agendas remain mere words on paper unless they can be implemented. Capacities need to be built. Governance needs to be improved. Citizens need to be engaged. And, while money isn't everything, it certainly helps.

That's why the *Addis Ababa conference on financing* for development in July is vital. Indeed, negotiations at the UN on the post-2015 agenda will go into recess after their June meeting until after that conference. To get agreement on the new global development agenda, Addis Ababa must go well.

On finance, *official development assistance* will remain vital for low-income countries, and can play a catalytic role in middle-income countries too. Achieving sustainable development as envisaged in the new SDGs, however, is estimated by UNCTAD to require investments of $3.3 to $4.5 trillion dollars per annum –vastly more than the current $135 billion per annum available in official development assistance. Developing countries will need to grow their tax revenues, be bankable, and be able to attract

significant private sector investment. Enabling environments for that need to be built more broadly.

Beyond finance, achieving sustainable development also requires *significant policy, legislative, and regulatory change.* It requires changes in the way we live, work, produce, consume, generate our energy, transport ourselves, and design our cities. This is an *all-of-society* endeavour in which governments, citizens, civil society, the private sector, and academia and research institutions must all play their part.

Does this agenda seem too big, too bold, and too broad to be implemented? Yes – often it does. It will require vision; it will require finance; it will require access to new technologies; and it will require innovative approaches to development which engage citizens.

Already there has been wide outreach to the global public – more than seven million people have voted on what their priorities for the post-2015 agenda are in the UN-sponsored *MY World Survey*. Sixty per cent of the respondents were from Commonwealth countries, and over eighty per cent of them were aged thirty or younger.

The top four priorities consistently registered were *education, health care, jobs, and having an honest and responsive government*. These are huge priorities for *young people* – they are disproportionately numbered among the unemployed; often lack access to quality and affordable education and other services; often face barriers in exercising their sexual and reproductive health choices and rights; and often are excluded from meaningful participation in the decision making which impacts on their lives. Simply put young people deserve a better deal, and have everything to play for in the post-2015 development agenda.

In national consultations across 88 countries, and in major thematic discussions on and offline, citizens across all regions of the world have made it clear that they don't want their engagement with the new global agenda to be limited to providing input at the outset. They expect to be informed participants in development, and to be able to monitor progress and hold governments and other actors accountable for the commitments they make. We must enable youth to be fully part of this action.

This call for engagement is one of the reasons why a *"data revolution"* must go hand in hand with the new agenda. Progress must be measured. Data must be available, be of good quality, and be easily accessed. Capacities to analyse it are needed for good policymaking and for effective monitoring by parliaments, citizens, and media. Building national statistical capacity and all these associated capacities is a development function too.

The role of innovation

Innovative approaches to development using a wide range of new technologies and media to engage citizens and improve services are increasingly being used in the UN

development system, and will play a big role in implementing the broad sustainable development agenda. We are already tapping directly into the insights of youth, communities, and small entrepreneurs to help define challenges and implement solutions. UNAIDS has used *crowdsourcing* to get wide input into the development of its youth strategy.

In *Rwanda*, a Commonwealth country, UNDP in partnership with the Government, created an online platform, YouthConnekt. It uses Google hangout technology together with other social media and text messaging to link young Rwandans to role models, resources, knowledge, skills, internships and jobs. The youth participating can showcase their innovative ideas and projects through the platform to potential partners.

In Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, UNDP and UNICEF are supporting social venture incubators which have been conceived and designed by and are now led by young people. The Social Innovation (Kolba) Lab in Armenia is helping young social innovators become social entrepreneurs through the provision of training, mentoring and specialist advice. It aims to incubate home grown solutions to pressing social challenges.

Then there's the role of "*big data*" generated by mobile and online communications in helping to design responses to crises and reduce the risk of disasters and conflict. The UN's Global Pulse initiative has been a leader in conceptualizing the use of big data, and UN organisations are already utilizing big data in their work. In *Mexico,* for example, the World Food Programme worked with the Government and a major mobile provider to see whether analysis of mobile phone traffic patterns could provide insights into how people communicate before and after flooding, and then to use those insights to guide response planning. Correlations were found which helped direct relief to where it was needed.

Especially influential is the "Ushahidi" platform, which developed as an early warning system in Kenya to support efforts to defuse outbreaks of violence after the 2007 elections. In effect the innovators behind it encouraged live reporting of incidents by text messaging or other means, and then were able to map what was happening and where help was needed.

Ushahidi's open source software is now being applied to other settings and circumstances around the world, including to track violence against immigrants, violence associated with elections, and pharmacy stock-outs. In *Afghanistan*, the platform has been used to develop Watertracker, a community-based, crowdsourced tool which empowers citizens to monitor the functioning of wells and other water points. An estimated thirty to fifty per cent of all water points in Afghanistan are not functional after two years, so the potential of this new technology to improve service delivery is huge.

Conclusion

The last two decades have seen remarkable social and economic progress. Within a generation, hundreds of millions of people rose out of extreme poverty, and many developing countries have seen rapid economic growth. Yet, inequality has been on the

rise, including within rapidly growing developing countries, and through a set of very poor and/or conflict-stricken countries being left behind other fast developing countries. We are living in turbulent times where volatility has become the new normal.

The challenge of the SDGs will be to lift all people in extreme poverty out of it within a generation, and keep them out of it. It will be to turn the tide on rising inequality and to tackle entrenched marginalization and exclusion. Environmental degradation must be addressed decisively, including by acting now on climate change. Better and more inclusive governance, the rule of law, and effective conflict resolution leading to peace and stability are needed too. Broad coalitions committed to transformational change are needed.

Tackling these huge challenges is what the post-2015 agenda is all about. It is an agenda for current and future generations. Young people have been engaged in the design of the new development agenda. And it is young people, the leaders of the future, who will see it through.

The Commonwealth, home to a third of the world's people, combines the strength of its youth, its values of democracy and diversity, and a deep commitment to development. Over the past 66 years, the Commonwealth has shown a capacity to reinvent itself continually. It would have been all too easy for a voluntary association of nations drawn from where the same imperial flag once flew to lose its relevance. The triumph of the Commonwealth is that it hasn't. It has developed a shared vision and set of values which aim to shape our common future

That's why the Commonwealth is well positioned to support both the design and the implementation of the post-2015 agenda. For the agenda to succeed, it must seize the imagination of peoples, governments, civil society, and business, and big partnerships must be built around its vision and goals.

The UN and the Commonwealth are both institutions which can nurture citizens' aspirations for peace, progress, prosperity, and justice and catalyze collective action. In this "once in a generation" year, we have the opportunity to put global development on an inclusive, sustainable course. The UN at age seventy and the Commonwealth are essential allies in making that happen.