Memo to H.E. John W. Ashe, President of the 68th session of the General Assembly:
Ensuring Stable and Peaceful Societies

Your Excellency

1. You asked me, as an independent expert, to contribute to the General Assembly Thematic Debate on 'Ensuring Stable and Peaceful Societies.'

2. Since receiving your request, I have completed a review of the deliberations of the Open Working Group on this issue and of other relevant contributions to the post-2015 development agenda. I have also consulted informally with representatives of member states, UN agencies, and other stakeholders.

3. While I have found widespread support for the need to foster peaceful, non-violent, and inclusive societies, there is some disagreement as to how this objective can be achieved within the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

4. Rather than repeat material contained in existing reports on stable and peaceful societies, I thought it would be more useful to offer some reflections on the sources of agreement between member states, and the potential to move towards consensus in areas where they disagree.[1]

5. This will, I hope, help all those participating in the thematic debate respond to your challenge to identify concrete ways in which peace and stability can underpin an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future.

Common Ground

6. There is universal agreement that greater international and national efforts are needed if "freedom from fear and want" is to become a reality for all.[2] This is a priority for all countries regardless of their level of development, with people of all nationalities, ages, and income groups suffering from violence. The Rio+20 outcome document frames the mandate to negotiate the Sustainable Development Goals around the three pillars of sustainable economic, social and environmental development. Countries recognized the links between peace and sustainable development, reaffirming "the importance of freedom, peace and security and respect for all human rights" for development.[3]

7. Certain groups, however, are recognized as having an especially urgent need for action to protect their right to life, liberty, and security of person:[4]

   i. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments have a duty to eliminate all forms of physical or mental violence against children. In all countries, however, children continue to suffer serious violence in their homes, schools, and communities, with perpetrators seldom held to account for abuse.[5] In industrialized countries alone, 3,500 children die from physical abuse and neglect each year.[6]

   ii. In 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which recognized that violence against women was a

"manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women" and called on all states to take urgent steps to eliminate it. Despite this, more than one in three of today's women have experienced physical or sexual violence (lifetime prevalence is above a quarter in every region).[7]

iii. In all countries, the <u>poorest members of society</u> tend to be most vulnerable to violence, with exposure to violence one of the most important markers of inequality and powerlessness.[8] Other forms of discrimination (ethnicity, religion, disability, etc.) exacerbate this vulnerability, while poor and marginalized groups are least well served by the institutions that should protect their personal security and provide them with justice. There are also marked inequalities in exposure to violence depending on nationality (in Singapore, for example, citizens are more than *ten times* less likely to be murdered than in more than a hundred other countries).[9]

iv. Finally, the urgent needs of <u>countries experiencing or emerging from conflict</u> are recognized. Many of these have made significant progress in improving the lives of their citizens in recent years, with 20 countries in 'fragile situations' having met one or more Millennium Development Goals and a further six on track to do so by 2015.[10] Conflict, however, can eradicate years of development, as poverty reduction stalls during periods of serious and sustained violence.[*][11] According to some projections, by 2025 82% of the world's poor are likely to live in conflict-affected and fragile states.[12] Conflict-affected states continue to call for greater global support to strengthen personal security, increase access to justice, create jobs, and secure investment in service delivery,[13] and for the fulfilment of commitments made in the Istanbul Programme of Action and other international agreements.[14]

Areas of Disagreement

8. While the importance of peaceful and non-violent societies is unquestioned, their place in the post-2015 development agenda is vigorously debated.

9. All member states agree that the three pillars of the United Nations system – peace and security, development, and human rights – are interdependent, interlinked and mutually reinforcing.[15] Development requires peace, and vice versa, while the right to live free from the fear of violence is fundamental to human wellbeing.

10. Furthermore, no-one challenges the Security Council's "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" as set out under the UN Charter. (And I will therefore refrain from further consideration of 'hard security' issues such as interstate conflict, disarmament, or international terrorism.)

11. Beyond this, positions diverge. Some member states favor a prominent role for peace and stability in the post-2015 development agenda. They make three principal arguments:

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[*] Defined as battle deaths or excess deaths from homicides equivalent to a major war.

i. <u>People place a high value on their own safety and that of their families</u>, especially when they feel their basic security needs are not being met.[16] The MY World survey shows respondents believe "protection against crime and violence" is a priority for global action through the UN.[17] Research suggests those who receive international assistance are eager for it to improve their physical safety by reducing mistrust and conflict.[18]

ii. <u>Other global goals cannot be delivered without greater peace and stability</u>. In particular, a commitment to end absolute poverty will remain out of reach while many of the world's poorest people experience extremely high levels of violence.[19] This would replicate the experience of the MDGs, where conflict and instability has tended to reduce the pace of poverty reduction.[20]

iii. <u>Effective, inspiring and measurable goals and targets</u> can be set for promoting peaceful and non-violent societies that will be relevant to all countries and can be tailored to national circumstances. These will lead to substantial improvements in people's lives, with the greatest impact on the most vulnerable.

12. Three concerns are raised by those who take a more cautious view on this issue:

i. <u>The new universal development agenda could be diluted</u>. At Rio+20, governments agreed to develop goals that would be concise and limited in number, and that would address the economic, social, and environmental pillars of sustainable development in an integrated and holistic fashion. Some member states argue that peace and stability, while vital, is neither a self-standing focus area nor core part of the concept of sustainable development agreed at Rio+20.

ii. <u>National sovereignty could be compromised</u>. Some governments are concerned that peace and stability goals could be used to reduce their freedom to agree and implement domestic policies, or that new aid conditions linked to peace and security will be placed on their relationship with their international partners. Countries are also aware that they may be called to account for actions and policies that have driven instability in other parts of the world, while the poorest regions of the world could also be disproportionately singled out as posing threats to international peace and security; whereas a far wider set of global factors drive conflict and responses to it.

iii. <u>Resources could be diverted from development to security</u>. All countries accept the need for investment in institutions that provide justice and security, and for policies that confront values and norms that support violence, but some are worried by the 'securitization' of development, with development taking a back seat to national security objectives.[21] This could potentially result in international aid being diverted to tackle security concerns first in lieu of economic, social and environmental priorities. There are also concerns that international assistance will be directed away from poor, but peaceful, societies towards less stable, but possibly richer, countries. As a self-standing focus area, the universality of the development framework could also be diluted.

13. While there is an appetite to reach consensus, opposing positions may prove hard to reconcile. Before turning to options for goals and targets in this area, I therefore think it is useful to broaden the debate, by creating a more nuanced view of relationship between peace and development, making greater efforts to listen to the voices of victims of all types of violence, and learning from existing national and international models for building peaceful societies.

Rethinking the Relationship between Peace and Development

14. The relationship between peace and development is complex, with stability both an enabler and an outcome of sustainable development. While instability is an important, and sometimes dominant, factor in the lives of the poorest people and poorest countries, we should also remember that:

    i.   Development brings new challenges to stability. Rapid social and economic change, uncontrolled urbanization, and rising inequality create new risks of conflict and can lead to an increase in levels of violence, even as overall prosperity increases. These risks are exacerbated if institutions are weak or have failed to adapt to changing needs and where growing numbers of young people fail to find work.[22] In the future, the world will be more urban and will have seen a further growth in an aspirational, demanding, but sometimes insecure, middle class (see figure 1). Those countries that have the greatest opportunities for development over the next generation are also those that will have to adapt fastest to emerging risks to their stability and sustainability.
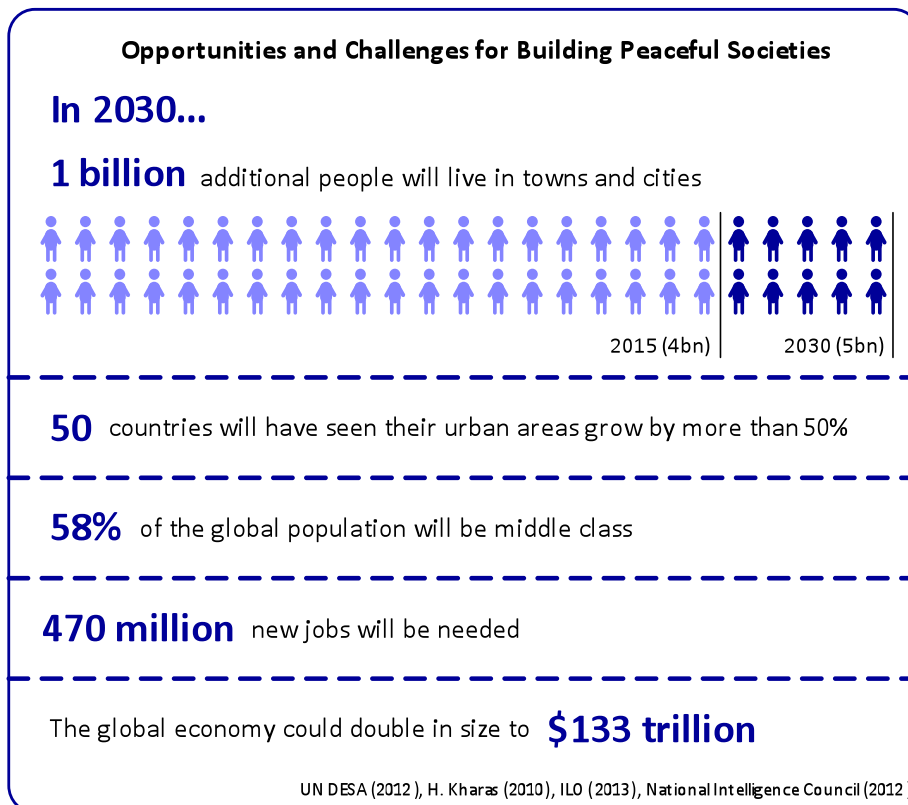

Opportunities and Challenges for Building Peaceful Societies

In 2030...

1 billion additional people will live in towns and cities

2015 (4bn)   2030 (5bn)

50 countries will have seen their urban areas grow by more than 50%

58% of the global population will be middle class

470 million new jobs will be needed

The global economy could double in size to **$133 trillion**

UN DESA (2012), H. Kharas (2010), ILO (2013), National Intelligence Council (2012)

Figure 1[23]

ii. <u>Wealthier countries can destabilize poorer ones</u>. International drug trafficking and organized crime are driven by demand from rich countries, but have had a catastrophic impact on development, peace, and human rights.[24] The General Assembly has recognized that international crime networks and illicit drug flows are excessively destabilizing and have been major impediments to the achievement of the MDGs.[25] Furthermore, nearly $6 trillion in illicit financial flows is estimated to have left developing countries between 2002 and 2011, with these flows growing 10% per year in real terms.[26] At present, it is unclear whether the developed world has the political will or institutional capacity to respond effectively to these and other destabilizing forces.

iii. <u>Patterns of global development bring *both* prosperity and instability</u>. In many developing countries, instability has roots in the social and economic inequalities that are a legacy of colonialism.[27] In recent decades, globalization has created new stresses. In the 1990s, the Asian financial crisis led to social unrest in some developing countries (with impacts well beyond Asia).[28] Since 2008, another global financial crisis has hit many countries, while volatile global markets for food and energy have threatened the living standards of both the poor and the middle classes.[29] The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change expects climate change to continue to exacerbate the risks of violent conflict (and for conflict to erode resilience to climate threats).[30] In all these cases, instability is a potential consequence of a lack of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.[31]

15. These universal challenges are reflected in different ways in societies at different levels of development, but they break down the distinction between 'stable' and 'fragile' states, and promote an honest assessment of what all countries can do to secure peace. They also encourage us to look forward to the risks inherent in a continued failure to develop sustainably and the impact these may have on peace and stability in the 2020s.

Giving Survivors a Voice

16. I have been struck by the fact that the voices of <u>survivors of all forms of violence</u>, and the families and friends of those who have lost their lives, are yet to be heard in the debate on the contribution that peaceful societies can make to sustainable development.

17. This perpetuates a cycle of disempowerment that, itself, increases vulnerability to violence, and limits willingness to provide survivors of violence with justice.[32] It also makes it less likely that the needs of victims and survivors will be met within the new development agenda, or that our response to violence will be commensurate with its serious physical, psychological, and economic consequences.

18. It is important to remember that:

i. <u>Violence is a serious public health emergency</u>. The World Health Organization estimates that as many people die from violence as from tuberculosis.[33] Injuries (both intentional and accidental) account for 10% of the global burden of disease, with interpersonal and

collective violence leading to nearly the same loss of 'healthy life' as lung cancer.[34] Given that much violence is hidden, it is possible that these figures underestimate the scale of the problem.

   ii. <u>Its mental health consequences are largely hidden</u>. Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)[†] have been found to be as high as 37% in conflict-affected communities, while suicide, self-harm and depression add to the burden of disease.[35] Women are twice as likely to develop PTSD as men.[36] We also now understand that, just as children do not grow normally if they are poorly fed, their brains fail to develop normally if they are repeatedly exposed to stress and violence during childhood. [37]

   iii. <u>Its impact is extremely expensive</u>. The global cost of violence has been estimated at $9.4 trillion, with the costs falling heavily on the poorest *countries*.[38] Even a rich country such as the United States is thought to lose more than 3% of its GDP to violence, with a disproportionate impact on its poorest *communities*.[39] Serious conflict leads to massive displacement of people,[40] disruption of livelihoods,[41] destruction of infrastructure,[42] and a loss of skills.[43] Impacts are often felt across a region, while a failure to prevent conflict imposes substantial costs on the international community.[44]

19. Many countries, however, have demonstrated that giving survivors a voice is a first step to tackling violence. They have also taken concerted action to remember those who have lost their lives (after apartheid in South Africa, for example, or genocide in Rwanda and Cambodia). Colombia recently held its second National Day of Memory and Solidarity with the Victims and has emphasized that sustainable peace is impossible without a voice for victims.[45]

20. In these and other countries, survivors have helped shape policies that promote peace and reconciliation. There have also been growing moves towards providing restorative justice to victims of violence,[46] with member states collectively recognizing the importance of responses that provide "an opportunity for victims to obtain reparations, feel safer and seek closure."[47]

21. These models demonstrate the importance of placing the needs and wishes of the people affected by instability at the heart of the new development agenda, and of ensuring that the most vulnerable people receive the greatest benefits from more sustainable patterns of development.

Start Talking about Solutions

22. It is also time to intensify <u>discussion of solutions</u>. As Nelson Mandela wrote in 2005, when calling for international action to prevent violence, "safety and security don't just happen: they are the result of collective consensus and public investment."[48]

[†] PTSD is a serious, long-lasting, but treatable anxiety disorder that can develop in those who have been exposed to serious violence. Symptoms include nightmares, flashbacks, isolation, aggressive, or self-destructive behaviour, and an inability to live a normal life. PTSD sufferers are more likely to suffer from depression and are at a higher risk of suicide and self-harm.

23. While violence can seem intractable, it is not (see figure 2). There has been a substantial decline in both interstate and civil conflict (despite a worrying recent uptick in some parts of the world), a testament to the power of international cooperation.[49] A growing number of countries have also experienced extremely steep falls in violent crime, while the murder rate has declined in three regions.[50] Some post-conflict countries have also made extremely fast progress. In Rwanda and Timor Leste, life expectancy has almost doubled in just a generation.[51]

Declining Conflict and Battle Related Deaths, 1990-2012

UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5 (2013), UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4 (2013)

Figure 2[52]

24. We can also draw on models from across the world that demonstrate change is possible.

   i. Recent years have seen a number of post-conflict states take important steps towards <u>rebuilding their societies, governments, and economies</u>, while also directly reducing violence (e.g. the multi-country program which reintegrated around 280,000 combatants in the societies of Great Lakes Region of Africa);[53] increasing access to justice (Sierra Leone's reconstruction of its justice system);[54] rapidly resettling internally displaced persons (Timor Leste);[55] and demonstrating the importance of an inclusive political settlement to peace (South Africa).[56] Countries have experimented with innovative programs, such as *Vive Colombia, Viaja por Ella* which aims to "give people back their country" by making it safe for them to travel again.[57] Developed countries with a recent history of internal conflict have also reconciled survivors with perpetrators of political violence (in Northern Ireland, for example).[58] Most significant, however, has been a growing willingness of conflict-affected countries to assert strong ownership of

the development process, setting out conditions for the support they need from the international community.[59]

ii. <u>Non-violence is actively promoted in countries across the world</u>. Examples, taken just from the Americas, include programs that use the media to promote social inclusion and reduce violence (Brazil);[60] support victims of domestic violence (Nicaragua);[61] including within aboriginal communities (Canada);[62] tackle violence in the education system (Bolivia);[63] support at-risk adolescents and confront social norms that support violence (Jamaica);[64] and provide gang members with an opportunity to opt out of violence (United States).[65] The region has also made strides in strengthening child protection systems and addressing the poverty and marginalization that make children vulnerable to violence.[66] Innovation is often strongest at sub-national level, with both local government (Mayors in particular) and civil society playing an important role in increasing resilience.[67] Similar lessons can (and should) be drawn from policies and programs developed elsewhere in the world.

iii. <u>Action has been taken to reduce external stresses</u>. Aside from collective action on security (which is outside the remit of this note), there is evidence of accelerated international efforts to tackle external threats to stability, as developed countries recognize their responsibilities to eliminate illicit financial flows and tax evasion (through improved exchange of financial information);[68] reduce resource stresses (the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative);[69] address the proliferation of illicit arms (the UN Programme of Action to prevent the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons);[70] and improve standards of international investment in areas such as land. Developing countries have supported, or in a growing number of cases led, these initiatives. There is also increased South-South cooperation to build peaceful societies.[71]

iv. Many countries have also accepted the need to understand the <u>scale and distribution of violence</u> within their societies. At least 23 countries conduct regular victimization surveys that provide data on levels of exposure to violence, with half of these repeated on a regular cycle and some providing data back to the 1970s.[72] Twelve countries have participated in the International Violence Against Women Survey, which provides gender-disaggregated data on the prevalence, nature, causes and consequences of violence against women.[73] Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography, which conducts the country's own survey of victimization and perceptions of public safety, has led international efforts to promote victimization surveys, working in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and for research that increases our understanding of those who are perpetrators of violence.[74]

25. These success stories help us understand, in concrete terms, what action might be taken to build peaceful societies after 2015, and provide a basis for exploring the partnerships, funding, and knowledge-sharing that must be brought to bear if the international community's commitment to non-violence is a serious one.

Options for the Post-2015 Agenda

26. In the Millennium Declaration, the world's leaders declared freedom a fundamental value that was essential to international relations in the 21st century (alongside equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility).[75]

27. "Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice," they said, and also that "a culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted." It was on the platform provided by these ideals that the Millennium Development Goals were agreed.

28. I think it is highly likely that a similar commitment to peaceful societies will be included in the post-2015 agenda in some form. At the very least – and as was the case with the Millennium Declaration – it will form part of the broader post-2015 'narrative', with member states recognizing the need for the interdependence between peace, development, and human rights to be reinforced.

29. The question is whether to go further than this. While many member states are yet to reach a final position on this issue, there are three main strands of opinion:

    i. Those in favor of a standalone goal for peaceful and non-violent societies, with associated targets.

    ii. Those who oppose a standalone goal, but would like to see some targets integrated holistically into other goals.

    iii. Those who oppose a goal and targets altogether.

30. The first group of member states support a peaceful societies goal, either as a standalone or as part of a goal that would also cover governance, rule of law, and capable institutions. These countries also emphasize linkages between a peaceful societies goal and other economic, social, and environmental goals, including gender equality and women's empowerment, inclusive economic growth, sustainable cities and human settlements, and climate change.

31. Supporters of a stand-alone goal have proposed targets in areas such as the right to safety (a reduction in levels of violence) and to justice (performance and accountability of, and public confidence in, justice and security institutions). Targets have also been suggested for external stresses (such as organized crime and uncontrolled investment in natural resources) and illicit flows (weapons, money, wildlife, stolen assets). Special consideration has been suggested for women and children, and for the rights of forced migrants (internally displaced persons and refugees), and for victims of human trafficking. A target for promoting a culture of non-violence through education and information has also been suggested, as has one for increasing participation in dispute resolution mechanisms.

32. These targets are typically presented alongside others that support governance, the rule of law, and resilient, capable, accountable, and inclusive institutions (either as part of the same goal or in a parallel goal). While broader governance and institutional issues are outside the remit of this

note, member states stress the important contribution made to peaceful societies by targets in areas such as legal identity, access to information, and representation in decision-making.

33. The second group of member states argues that a holistic approach should be taken to integrating targets for peaceful societies across other social, economic and environmental goals. For example, it has been proposed that a target on violence against women and children should be included under a gender goal, or that education on non-violence should form part of an education goal. Supporters of targets, but not a standalone goal, believe that integration will be most effective in ensuring a holistic approach to universal sustainable development.

34. Finally, there are member states who believe the post-2015 agenda can best be supported by strengthened action to secure lasting peace through other multilateral fora, in particular the Security Council, ECOSOC, and the Peacebuilding Commission, and through the efforts of UN agencies, funds and programs. They would like global governance reform to be considered alongside the post-2015 negotiations and recommend strengthening these bodies, and improving their coordination, in order to secure sustainable peace. They believe that if peaceful and stable societies are to be achieved, the international community should consider all the drivers and international responses to conflict.

Building Consensus

35. As I have made clear, there *is* common ground between these three strands of opinion. All member states accept the need to redouble national and international efforts to build peaceful and non-violent societies in order to ensure peace supports sustainable development, and *vice versa*. The question is not *whether*, but *how* this should be done.

36. In order to move towards consensus, I think it would be helpful if member states who have taken opposing positions on goals and targets take further steps to explain how their preferred option will ensure the peace needed to underpin sustainable development.

37. Some member states believe action to promote peace and non-violence should be taken elsewhere in the international system in a way that supports the post-2015 agenda. They could now:

   i.   Develop more detailed proposals for reforms they believe are necessary to strengthen the links between peace and development in a way that enables post-2015 goals to be delivered.

   ii. Respond to concerns that, without a specific commitment to building peaceful societies within the new development agenda, many people around the world will continue to experience unacceptable levels of violence and that poverty eradication will prove impossible.

38. Other states support targets on peaceful and non-violent societies, but not a standalone goal. They could provide more detail on which targets they believe will be most effective in promoting

peace within the context of other development goals, and what implementation they think will be necessary to ensure these targets are delivered.

39. Member states who favor a standalone goal have an opportunity to work towards consensus by continuing to advance proposals that:

    i.   Are based on research into the <u>needs</u> of victims of all forms of violence and the communities in which they live, and into the <u>drivers</u> of conflict and instability.

    ii.   Draw on a detailed and systematic review of <u>what has worked</u> in the past to build stable and peaceful societies, drawing on the diverse experience of countries from across the world.

    iii.   Set out credible plans for tackling <u>measurement questions</u> and building the capacity for collecting data needed to underpin proposed targets.

    iv.   Begin to develop the <u>international partnerships</u> that can pilot new approaches and demonstrate their effectiveness.

    v.   Explore appropriate <u>means of implementation</u> and how a new goal can be delivered in full as part of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development in ways that respect the sovereignty of Member States.

    vi.   Explain in detail what contribution new goals and targets will make to their own <u>national priorities,</u> what policies and resources will be used to implement them at home, and how they plan to help reduce stresses that increase the vulnerability of others.

40. In particular, I would like to emphasize the final point. The principle of universality within the post-2015 development agenda rests on a commitment to domestic implementation. Richer countries also have both the ability and the responsibility to demonstrate leadership in reducing the global risks to peace and stability that are created by unsustainable and inequitable patterns of growth.

41. Some countries – usually those with a recent history of conflict – have already done a great deal to explain how a new goal will help them strengthen their societies. It is time for others to follow their leadership and engage in national debate about how to reduce violence over the next generation, sharing the results of these consultations with others. Developed countries should also explain how fragmentary, but important, international initiatives can be turned into a coherent program for the reduction of external stresses.

The Next Generation

42. Mr President, I would like to thank you for your invitation to offer independent input to the thematic debate on stable and peaceful societies.

43. I have attempted to provide a balanced overview of current debate on this issue and, to the best of my ability, have reflected a range of opinion from member states, supplemented where appropriate by input from other stakeholders.

44. I would like to conclude with a few reflections. I think it is essential to be clear on why goals and targets are important.[76] They provide a focus for debate, advocacy and policy development. They offer a common strategic language that allows partners to work together. And they focus and direct resources, while driving higher standards of delivery.

45. A new goal should only be considered if there is the will to turn it from an aspiration into action that will help free humanity from fear and want. That is why it is important that we all respond to your challenge to discuss concrete solutions.

46. It is also why any targets will require a commitment to collecting better data. As is the case with other proposed post-2015 goals, we do not yet have the evidence to understand whether we are making progress or not, or to understand who is being left behind and why.

47. Finally, I would like to return again to the importance of putting people at the heart of this debate. Above all, we should think of the needs of children and young people, too many of whom lead insecure lives that are blighted by violence.[77] This is the 'next generation' on whom the success of a new global development agenda depends, and for whom it must be designed.

David Steven
14 April 2014

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