



EMBARGOED

Until 11 September 2008

12:01 a.m. local time

PRESS RELEASE

MDG Report 2008

Northern Africa makes strides towards most Millennium Development Goals

But UN report finds slow progress in achieving gender equality

CAIRO, 11 September 2008 — Northern Africa is the only region where there has been progress on all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), finds a United Nations progress report released today. If current trends are sustained, many of them will be achieved by the target date of 2015.

New estimates of extreme poverty, recently produced by the World Bank and presented in the Millennium Development Goals Report 2008, indicate that the region is approaching the target of cutting extreme poverty by half by 2015. Progress towards the goal of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is also evident from trends in the proportion of children under age five who are undernourished, with a reduction to almost half of its 1990 level, from 11 to only 6 per cent in 2006. But overall progress in reducing hunger might now be undermined by recent worldwide increases in food prices, the report also points out.

Progress was evident also in access to education for both girls and boys, and the region is on track to reach the target of universal primary education by 2015. The region has also made strides in reducing the gender gap — with 93 girls enrolled per 100 boys in 2006 — and if progress is sustained, the region will achieve parity in primary education. Generally, when the gender gap in primary education closes, girls are likely to continue to secondary education, the report shows. This is the case in Northern Africa, where there are 99 girls per 100 boys in secondary school.

At the same time, women have gained some ground in political decision-making, with female representation in parliaments almost tripling between 1990 and 2008, although starting from very low levels. With only 8.3 per cent of seats held by women, progress will have to accelerate for parity to be achieved in this area.

Globally, women have more income-earning opportunities than ever before, the report shows. But this is one area where the region has not shown any progress. The proportion of paid jobs outside agriculture held by women has remained unchanged for 16 years — from 1990 to 2006 — at one of the lowest percentages in the world, only 21 per cent. And overall, only 22 per cent of women of working age are employed in any sector, compared with 49 per cent on average for the developing world as a whole.

The UN report points to progress made in the region in saving mothers' lives — from 250 estimated maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 160 in 2005. The impact of efforts to reduce maternal deaths is also indicated by the larger number of deliveries attended by skilled health care personnel. Attended deliveries rose from 49 per cent of all deliveries in 1990 to 79 per cent in 2006.

Progress in reducing child mortality has also been rapid — from 82 child deaths per 1,000 births in 1990 down to 35 deaths in 2006 — and sufficient for the region to be approaching the target of reducing mortality by two thirds by 2015. Progress is

(over)

also demonstrated by the large coverage of vaccination for measles, a leading child killer, at 96 per cent in 2006, up from 84 per cent in 1990. And the region will also reach its target of halving the proportion of people without access to safe sanitation — with 76 per cent of population already covered, up from 62 per cent in 1990. And there is also a very high proportion of the population using improved sources of drinking water, 92 per cent.

The Millennium Development Goals Report 2008 is produced annually to present a global statistical assessment of progress made towards the Goals. It is published at the request of the General Assembly to inform and focus the debate on the development goals and identify priorities for intervention. The report is based on data compiled by over 25 organizations both within and outside the UN System. The project is coordinated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN Secretariat.

For more information and media contacts, please see www.un.org/millenniumgoals.

