
ECOSOC Ministerial Review concludes with adoption of the Declaration

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By: Dinisha Fernando The Ministerial Declaration titled "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health" was adopted at the end of the High-level Segment of the ECOSOC on 9th of July 2009. Sri Lanka was referred to twice in the preamble, with appreciative comments regarding its initiative to host a Regional Preparatory Ministerial Meeting and its Voluntary National Presentation.

Earlier in the morning, Dr. H.A.P. Kahandaliyanage, Secretary to the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition, participated and spoke at the High-level segment general debate about the concerns of developing countries as the world copes with a multitude of problems. Today was the last day of the ECOSOC High-Level Segment and thus, the Ministerial Review. The Secretary declared: "In today's globalized world, external circumstances significantly impact on national progress. Against this background, we are concerned that the multiple crises facing the world could even reverse the progress made by developing countries in achieving the MDGs. As a result of the global financial crisis, resources available to the health sector from within national budgets and from international partners are likely to shrink. Simultaneously, other global challenges such as the world food crisis, food insecurity and rising food prices are likely to adversely affect public health, and to aggravate under-nutrition and malnutrition. Similarly, the adverse long-term impacts of climate change are likely to affect human health in multiple ways." Dr. Kahandaliyanage referred to Sri Lanka's own experience in dealing with these challenges and assured its commitment to the Internationally Agreed Development Goals (IADGs) and Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) despite these difficulties: "Development as it is understood today and as embodied in the IADG's and MDG's, encompasses goals related to human well-being, including freedom and empowerment of people, distribution patterns and environmental sustainability. Despite added challenges, such a broader dimension of development is aligned with Sri Lanka's pluralistic democratic traditions and its commitment to a people-centered development. Sri Lanka is committed to the realization of the IADGs and MDGs that we have collectively undertaken." Also discussed were the rewards reaped from this commitment, for while in many other countries, "improvements in people's health conditions followed economic growth; Sri Lanka, however, used its revenues to improve people's health conditions even before attaining such progress. It is said that globally millions are found unable to seek and obtain needed health care because of inability to meet costs. Sri Lanka, however, has developed over the years a very healthcare-friendly system for its people." The Secretary discussed how Sri Lanka's high literacy rate, educational standard, and values in gender equality have contributed to its success in the health sector, listing many healthcare triumphs regarding the infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, immunization program, and life expectancy among other examples and announced that these "health indicators are considered rather exceptional for a developing country with a GNP per capita of US\$ 1970." Yet having attained massive success with the healthcare sector does not give cause for Sri Lanka and other similarly successful countries to rest on their laurels. As Dr. Kahanadliyanage warned, "Given the centrality of health to all aspects of human welfare, we need to be mindful of future challenges related to health, both at national and global levels, so that reaching MDG targets is facilitated." Sri Lanka and the rest of the world still has work to do, with the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases, care for the elderly, regional disparities in healthcare, and under-nutrition due to poverty. Although Sri Lanka's Health Master Plan seeks to ameliorate these problems, Dr. Kahandaliyanage advises the global community to "explore collectively ways and means of ensuring that health systems are protected to the greatest degree possible from the impact of the world financial crisis." Representatives from Libya, Russian Federation, France, Egypt, Cuba, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Norway, are among those who contributed to the General Debate. Also, many leading NGOs including Oxfam International and Global Alliance for Women's Health spoke. Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations Geneva 10th July 2009