

# Foreword

EVENTS of the past five years since 189 member countries of the United Nations (UN) committed to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have underscored the urgency of meeting those objectives. As democracy was taking a beating in both the First and Third World with the thrust of governments to meet the challenges of terrorism, many of the goals that brought together the nearly 200 heads of state in New York City in that autumn, just a year shy of 9/11, have suffered from attrition.

They have been sidelined in the course of the frenzied preoccupation with physical security—as if the more encompassing concept of human security would not be better served if the MDGs were given prime attention; the goals have been sidelined as countries struggled to keep up with the unwinnable race against debt and thus put “fiscal health” above their citizens’ physical and mental health; and in many instances, they have been sidelined by sheer benign neglect, the bane of all those lofty ideals regularly churned out by development experts in and out of the UN, but never quite pursued as fervently as necessary.

This September, the UN hosts another session right in 9/11’s ground zero, New York City, to allow its members to take stock of their progress in meeting the MDGs. To be sure, the forum and its side meetings will be filled with much debate, as expert after expert tries to assess why exactly the process of meeting the MDGs, for all their urgency, have not proceeded as quickly as hoped for. There will be excuses raised, particularly for the failure of some to meet segments of the Millennium Declaration—but also valid reasons for the poorest ones, i.e., the sheer impossibility of channeling resources for creating jobs, health, education and the environment without genuine substantial debt relief.

The Philippines, which takes pride in being one of the UN’s most faithful members, has been busy with its own stock-taking since two years ago. The government has so far released two reports tracking its progress in meeting the MDG commitments, mostly with a positive tone. Yet some other concerned citizens and experts are doing their independent validation, and Social Watch Philippines is one of them. This report summarizes the latest attempt of Social Watch to track the Philippine progress. It has harnessed independent experts, people’s organizations and nongovernment organizations, and sectoral representatives to make an honest assessment not only of the commitments under the MDG, but also those made in two key forums convened by the UN 10 years ago—the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, and the Beijing Women’s Conference; as well as the Geneva 2000 World Summit on Social Development or Copenhagen+5.

More than anything else, preparing this report is at the heart of our mandate: Social Watch Philippines is part of the Social Watch network, which was formed in 1995 precisely to monitor state compliance with obligations promised by governments in UN summits and declarations. Primarily, its strongest advocacies are in ending poverty the soonest, giving flesh to social justice, and conserving the environment through sustainable development. In a word, as someone once observed, Social Watch tries to keep governments honest, in the course of making its own independent monitoring and validation. It is a complicated task, as the reader will quickly understand in the overview of this report. There are endless debates, even among the most well-meaning experts, about data gathering and interpretation, as seen in the past year’s furious questions on the government’s reformulation of poverty incidence and definitions on joblessness. That even multilateral institutions at one point joined the debate reflects the seriousness of the matter.

Beyond the issue of honesty and data integrity, the real implication of having expertly-handled, comprehensive and timely data, is the final goal: getting millions out of poverty when it still counts. And that can only happen, as in a race, when the rules are clear and unchanging, the laps clearly marked, and the finish line is not movable. Meeting the MDGs on paper, by a trick or two in formulations, may seem a work of genius, but in the end, it is a most self-defeating exercise. A state of hunger, disease, or wretchedness, cannot be disguised in any way to look better: it can and must only be redressed, and the first step for doing so is an honest admission of the problem and an understanding of what it takes to solve it.

We in Social Watch, in solidarity with social activists and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) doing similar work elsewhere, hope that this humble product of our work will help shine a light on the Philippine situation, if only because the race is quick and ruthless, and one cannot be led astray from the urgent goal by any self-deluding cheering squad waving a flag by the wayside. Indeed, as the findings of this assessment bear out, never before has the truism been more compelling, that to a child, there is no tomorrow. And if a child cannot wait, we cannot lose time tripping over wrong guideposts. We hope this report quickens the pace of the runner, yet keeps it focused on real victory all the time.

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