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United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation to Focus on Higher Profile of Developing Countries in World Economy, Decision-Making

Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations Development Programme Administrator Expected at High-level Event in Nairobi, 1-3 December

The most important United Nations meeting on South-South cooperation in decades will highlight growing political and economic ties within the developing world, as countries of the South assume leading roles in decisions on hot global issues ranging from economic recovery to food security and climate change.

Hosted by Kenya and taking place at the Nairobi headquarters of the United Nations, the 1-3 December conference will seek to promote and sharpen the benefits of mutual support among developing and transition economies, as well as maintain support for the process from the developed world through "triangular" cooperation. Negotiations on an outcome document are continuing this week at the Organization's Headquarters in New York.

Participation in the meeting, formally known as the High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, is expected at the Head of State and ministerial levels. United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark are among the senior officials who will attend.

Shaping Global Governance and the World Economy

Correlated to the new economic heft of the developing world is the rapid pace of South-South trade and investment. Two new reports of the Secretary-General (documents A/64/321 and A/64/504) highlight the current trends: South-South merchandise trade has grown by an average 13.4 per cent per year since 1995 -- reaching .4 trillion, or 20 per cent of world trade, by 2007 -- while exports from emerging markets and developing countries have grown to about 40 per cent of overall world total; and, during the same period, the South-South share of African exports grew by an average of 7 per cent a year, and combined annual African exports to India and China rose to about billion.

In addition, the Secretary-General states, total outgoing flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) from developing nations hit a record 3 billion in 2007, constituting about one eighth of the world total, with more than 40 per cent of developing-country FDI invested in the economically vulnerable least developed countries; and, with developing countries having become increasingly important sources of development assistance, total aid flows could reach billion by 2010, if pledges are met.

However, the Secretary-General indicates that these South-South success stories are leavened by other difficult and destabilizing trends, including sharp economic reversals in many countries during 2008-2009, difficulties in attaining the Millennium Development Goals, an increase in the number of malnourished people, expected to exceed 1 billion, and the ominous impacts of climate change.

The developing world is assuming an ever-more integrated and influential role in reaching decisions in these problem areas. The 1978 United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, held in Buenos Aires, was an early milestone. Major developments in South-South cooperation date back to the preceding decade. New international agreements that have helped shape world events ever since the 1960s include the formation of the "Group of 77" developing countries, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Non-Aligned Movement, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Since 2008, the kinds of discussions on global economic policy once carried out in the relatively exclusive Group of Eight (G-8) club of countries are taking place in the more inclusive Group of 20 (G-20), and both the Secretary-General and the United Nations General Assembly are driving home the point that the consequences of the economic crisis are felt by another group -- the "G-192". They point out that all countries feel the effects of the crisis and need to be involved in setting the terms of recovery and reform.

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With world hunger growing, 26 developing and developed countries met at the G-8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy, in July, to agree on a forceful and comprehensive action plan on food, backed by commitments for increased official development assistance (ODA) for agriculture. These principles were more widely endorsed by United Nations Member States last week in Rome, at the Summit on World Food Security.

Recognizing the complexity of climate change negotiations and the limited time before talks resume this December in Copenhagen, the Secretary-General convened the largest-ever climate change summit during the General Assembly in September. Arriving at a response to perhaps the biggest global challenge of the generation will entail a North-South partnership, and both sides have been taking steps to move closer to agreement.

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