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Clark urges nations to honour aid pledges

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*NZPA*Helen Clark

Former prime minister Helen Clark has called for world leaders who promised aid to developed nations at the turn of the millennium to deliver on their promises, despite the global recession.

"Providing development assistance, especially now, is surely a moral imperative," she said in Washington.

"It should be of concern to all of us that those least responsible for the economic crisis stand to bear the brunt of its effects, and are the least able to respond. What none of us want... is the global recession precipitating more conflicts in already fragile states, and winding back the clock on development in stable but still poor countries."

Clark was one of the government heads who signed off on the Millennium Development Goals at the United Nations nine years ago, with a target date for reaching them of 2015, and told an American policy group it was in the interests of developed nations that the goals were met.

"The eight millennium development goals were not meant to be merely aspirational, they were meant to be met, and it is in all of our interests that they are met," she said in notes for her speech.

"We cannot let the millennium development goals simply become another promise the international community has made but has not kept".

Clark, now administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, told invited guests of the Women's Foreign Policy Group of the challenges her agency faces in promoting development during a global recession.

The first woman to lead the UNDP, she also chairs the United Nations Development Group, a committee consisting of the heads of all UN funds, programmes and departments working on development issues.

Clark said she was pre-occupied by what the recession might do to the less developed parts of the world with the least resources, the least means of protecting themselves, and the least options for stimulating their own economies.

"The global recession could stall or reverse many of the hard-fought gains which have been made on development," she warned.

Worldwide, the number of people who will live in extreme poverty in 2009 is estimated to be 55 to 90 million higher than was forecast before the recession.

The 850 million "chronically hungry" people in developing countries in 2007, just before the global food crisis hit, is expected to exceed 1 billion this year.

Health status in the developing world was likely to deteriorate and school enrolment and completion rates would drop, especially in the poorest countries, said Clark, who noted many of the adverse effects would hit girls and women the hardest.

Meeting the millennium goals would make a huge improvement to the lives of billions of people, boosting income, education, health and the environment, and empowering women.

One millennium goal of reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015 "seems likely to be achieved," she said. Extreme poverty is defined as living on less than \$1.93 a day.

But as many as 1 billion people are likely to remain in extreme poverty by 2015.

And the target of achieving universal primary education by 2015 was "a little off track".

The goal toward which there had been least progress so far was improving maternal health.

"This speaks volumes about the low status of women in far too many societies, and about the low priority given to meeting their needs," Clark said.

Seats at the forum, at the Ritz-Carlton in the US capital, cost about \$391 each.

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