

UN teams up with fashion industry to fight poverty



Ray Chambers, MDG Advocate and Special Envoy for Malaria (left) and Evie Evangelou, co-founder and Global Chair of Fashion 4 Development. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

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The United Nations today announced its partnership with the fashion industry to fight poverty and provide assistance to millions of women and children worldwide through the Fashion for Development (F4D) initiative.

“The fashion industry in the past several years has redefined how to market, how to brand, how to raise awareness and how to inspire others,” said Ray Chambers, a Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) Advocate, at a news conference at UN Headquarters in New York.

F4D is a global platform to advance the MDGs, which are a set of targets on poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, child and maternal health, environmental stability, and HIV/AIDS reduction with a 2015 deadline.

The initiative was founded in 1996 by former supermodel Bibi Russell with the support of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), and seeks to assist women in the developing world with creating new businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities in the fashion industry.

Mr. Chambers noted that F4D is also working to reduce tariffs on threads and fabric, and to raise capital for new factories, train local people and enlist established designers to get involved in these initiatives, many of whom are based in Africa.

“I think the fashion industry will lead the emergence of so many of the developing economies,” Mr. Chambers said. “So the leadership of the fashion industry could not have come along at a better time.”

Among the supporters of the partnership are Franca Sozzani, Editor-In-Chief of Vogue Italia and F4D Goodwill Ambassador, and Evie Evangelou, co-founder and Global Chair of F4D.

Mr. Chambers, who is also the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Malaria, said the UN is exploring other opportunities to build close partnerships with the fashion industry.

“In September the UN General Assembly week generally follows Fashion Week in New York so we are hoping to bring them together to do a lot of cross-promoting and media coverage. We are also looking to people in social media to take up the support of what the fashion industry can do to help.”

Ms. Sozzani spoke of the F4D projects with women in Africa and the challenges that they face when working in the fashion industry, from production and fabric prices to their working conditions.

“Africa can really produce great things,” she said. “They have the best raw materials and the talent to succeed, but the raw materials are not treated there so we have to find and fund the textile industry in the continent.”

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