



## Visiting Bulgaria, Ban urges youth to join UN in building a safer, equitable world



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (file photo)

5 May 2011 –

**Secretary-General** Ban Ki-moon today exhorted the planet's youth to join forces with the United Nations to build a world free of extreme poverty, safeguard the environment through the sustainable use of natural resources and help eliminate the threat of nuclear catastrophe.

"Realizing these goals will not be easy. It means investing when the dividends may not be immediate. The real pay-off may come far down the line. But it will only come if the bold steps are taken now," Mr. Ban told an audience at the University of Sofia in Bulgaria, where he was invited to speak on his vision of world in the next two decades.

He said the current generation is the first one with the means and know-how to wipe out global poverty as he highlighted the anti-poverty road map known as the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**), which was laid out by world leaders 10 years ago.

He said progress was being made in reducing extreme poverty, boosting access to primary education, empowering women, improving the health of mothers and children, fighting killer diseases such as AIDS and malaria and protecting the environment.

"Like never before, fighting poverty and promoting growth in developing countries can create jobs and promote growth back home. That's how we build a new generation of prosperity."

On the environment, Mr. Ban told the students, faculty members and dignitaries gathered at the university that the days of consumption without consequences have passed.

"Our test is to green our economies... to reduce emissions and seek clean-energy growth," he said. The path towards the green economy entails "connecting the dots among climate, water, energy, food security and other key challenges of the 21st century... by finding solutions to one problem that are solutions to all."

Turning to nuclear safety, Secretary-General said the public and an increasing number of governments are realizing that nuclear weapons bring only the illusion of security.

“As long as nuclear weapons exist, we live at risk: nuclear proliferation... nuclear terrorism... a catastrophic accident or war. The only way to eliminate those risks is to eliminate nuclear weapons.”

He recalled his visit last month to the site of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine to mark the 25th anniversary of the disaster there, telling the audience that he called for a “top-to-bottom review” of nuclear safety standards.

Mr. Ban advocated a larger role for the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (**IAEA**) on nuclear safety issues, and stressed the link between natural disasters and nuclear safety. He also called for new cost-benefit analysis of nuclear energy and emphasized the connection between nuclear safety and nuclear security.

Reminding Bulgarians of the genesis of their own transition to democracy in 1989, Mr. Ban compared the events then with current developments in North Africa and the Middle East, where people are demanding greater civil and personal freedoms.

“Visiting Tunisia and Egypt recently, I saw the euphoria, the same sense of fresh possibility that Bulgaria experienced two decades ago,” he said.

“These revolutions represent one of the greatest opportunities to advance human rights and democracy in a generation. Properly handled, they can become a model for similar transformations across North Africa and the Middle East.”

But he pointed out that the success of such social transformations cannot be assumed and require the strong backing of the entire international community to come to fruition.

“Bulgaria has much to offer these emerging democracies. You know how hard it is to build democracy... transform economies... dismantle a police State and create the rule of law.

“I hope you will join the United Nations and others in helping this new generation of revolutionaries to realize their dreams.”

Earlier today, Mr. Ban also met with Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, Sofia’s mayor Yordanka Fandakova and Tsetska Tsacheva, the Chair of the country’s National Assembly. His visit to the Eastern European nation will continue tomorrow.

He later **told reporters** that his discussions with Mr. Borisov had touched on the challenges of climate change, global governance, the fight against corruption, as well as developments in the Middle East and North Africa, and the situation in Western Balkans.

“I would like to highly commend such strong [Bulgarian] leadership and strong political commitment to work with the United Nations and the European Union to fight against organised crime and corruption,” said Mr. Ban.

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