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Statement by

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We welcome the convening of this informal meeting to exchange our preliminary views on the report prepared within the framework of the United Nations Millennium Project 2005. Yet we regret that we cannot extend the welcome to the report itself.

Like many other Member-States we in Belarus waited for this report with high expectations. We hoped that the report would practically help us to identify and utilise effective mechanisms and new practical approaches to accelerate our movement to the Millennium Development Goals. Today I can say that the report significantly fails on these expectations.

The report is partial and biased. Giving the authors the credit where the credit is due, I have to say that they did not very much try to cover up this bias.

A week ago getting ready for this meeting we were hoping to consider the report in a constructive and considerate manner. Even its title evokes trust and respect.

Yet trust can be easily betrayed. By imprudence. By arrogance. By hypocrisy.

In another situation I would have simply let **offensive characterisations used in the report** with regard to sovereign members of the international community weigh on the conscience of its authors. Yet I have no choice but to voice the unacceptability of such allegations if they appear in a document commissioned by the UN Secretary-General and sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme.

This delegation will not be deluded by the disclaimers about the nature of the report. Under no circumstances can its authors be taken for inexperienced apprentices unaware of the decades long conventions of responsible behaviour and respectful discourse within the United Nations.

What we see is not an isolated and unfortunate error of judgement. We regard it as a creeping tendency based on **a premeditated use of double standards, bias and selectivity for attaining obvious political ends.**

It is an attempt to implant a new set of rules for the UN system. One with experienced and respectable judges on the one hand and disobedient pupils on the other. The system where wealth equals good and where all threats are coming from the underprivileged and poor. The system where wisdom and truth are the prerogative of the chosen few.

These rules are very much in place in bilateral relations between states these days. Yet we will not allow this tendency to take root in the United Nations. Belarus has a vested interest in this Organisation and we will not idly watch the attempts to hijack some of its basic principles under the guise of innovative approaches.

The General Assembly has clearly determined that **operational activities of the United Nations should be carried out for the benefit of recipient countries, at the request of those countries and in accordance with their own policies and priorities for development.** The General Assembly ruled that the fundamental characteristics of the operational activities of the UN system should be their universal, voluntary and grant nature, neutrality and multilateralism, as well as their ability to respond to the development needs of recipient countries in a flexible manner.

If in this hall there are people still wondering what this outburst of emotion is all about and how well it may be justified, I would like to offer a little quote. It is the World Bank's two months old assessment of the performance of one 'poorly governed poverty trap country' in Eastern Europe. The World Bank analysts state that,

“Belarus’ poverty monitoring and analysis system has potential to be a “good practice” model for the region (p.iii)... Compared to other transition economies, Belarus has one of the lowest poverty rates at the lower regional line of \$2.15 per capita per day (p. iv)... Belarus has some of the best education and health indicators in the region (p. vii)... The poverty reduction and inequality performance of Belarus is impressive... Belarus has already embarked on a number of reforms, especially in the last 2-3 years and especially in terms of institutional reforms to its education, health and social protection service delivery and financing systems... These reforms are serious and commendable (p. ix)... The policy framework in place has been successful in maintaining living standards and reducing poverty better than in several transition economies (p. xv).”

Report No. 27431-BY “*Belarus: Poverty Assessment, Can Poverty Reduction and Access to Services Be Sustained?*” Main Report, Europe and Central Asia Region, Human Development Sector Unit, World Bank, November 2004

I would like to end my intervention with a little remark on the issue of responsibility. A casual visitor to the UNDP home page could have encountered an intriguing statement dated 19 January 2005: “Governments and international development assistance organizations **have endorsed** the UN Millennium Project report”. Not more. Not less. It makes me wonder what we, representatives of sovereign states, have gathered here for, if the report has already been “endorsed” in our name?

Whether one takes these disturbing signs seriously or chooses to ignore them is entirely a matter of one's free choice. Yet, notwithstanding our sincere reverence to the subject matter of the report before us, we will not tolerate any attempts – from whomever they may come – to turn the United Nations into a cheering crowd of gratified onlookers. It is my strong belief that this sentiment will be shared by many.