In September, heads of state who are in New York for the UN General Assembly will visit Columbia to participate in the World Leaders Forum (WLF), a unique opportunity to join in an open exchange of ideas with students and faculty as well as leading members of the greater New York City community.

Said President Bollinger, “The World Leaders Forum events help realize the purpose of having Columbia University in the City of New York serve as a center for the discussion of important economic, political, and social issues facing the world.”

This year, the Forum has been extended to a yearlong series of lectures, panels, and conversations with world-renowned leaders, and the definition of “world leader” has been expanded. Speakers now include figures in the economic, cultural, and religious arenas. There will be an address by the Dalai Lama, several concerts featuring major performers from around the world, and a film series exploring the influence of American films abroad.

The particular focus of this year’s Forum is global development. Beginning with a series of campus addresses by heads of state attending the UN General Assembly, the exploration of this theme continues with discussions of topics ranging from exporting an American-style free press to meeting rising global health challenges.

A number of symposia will discuss key priorities of the United Nations, especially the goal of grappling with the issues of poverty and hunger throughout the developing world. “Columbia faculty have played central roles in creating the

Lisa Anderson, James T. Shotwell Professor of International Relations, and dean of the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), one of the main sponsors of the 2005-2006 World Leaders Forum

In Conversation with Lisa Anderson and Jeffrey Sachs

The Record asked the dean of SIPA about the thinking behind this year’s World Leaders Forum, and her plans for next year’s event.

The Record: This year’s World Leaders Forum is focused on global development. Why did you and President Bollinger choose that theme?

Lisa Anderson: Global development is an issue in which Columbia has invested substantial resources, and it seemed appropriate to recognize that. There is hardly a school at Columbia—from SIPA to Public Health and Nursing, from Business to Law—that does not have significant programs in developing countries. And, of course, the Earth Institute’s involvement with the UN’s Millennium Development Goals is enormously important.

What kinds of development issues will leaders be asked to address?

Each country has its own agenda when it comes to development. For some, the highest priority is post-conflict reconciliation; for others, it is democratization and the extension of conflict reconciliation; for others, it is the major challenges of global sustainability. Our activities put special focus on the needs of the planet’s poorest inhabitants, but more generally aim to help the entire planet work toward sustainable development. Earth Institute scientists are working in all parts of the world, from the Arctic to Antarctica, and all major regions in between. They are also heavily engaged in studying the ecology and economics of our own region.

In addition to leading the Earth Institute, you direct the UN Millennium Project, a multinational task force of economists, scientists, and development experts. What is the advantage of having such close ties between the UN and an institute at a major university?

The United Nations and the Earth Institute benefit tremendously from their interaction. The Earth Institute has provided the UN Millennium Project with a group of dedicated world-class scientists whose research is geared toward helping the poor. At the same time, the UN Millennium Project has allowed Earth Institute scientists, faculty and students to interact with global policy experts, diplomats, and politicians throughout the world, who are working to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A strong scientific understanding of issues such as nutrition, food production, population growth, and disease is vital to achieving the MDGs. The Earth Institute’s cross-disciplinary approach enables its researchers to propose practical solutions to some of the major challenges of global sustainable development. The hope is that the

The Record spoke with the Earth Institute director about his prescriptions for ending world poverty.

The Record: The Earth Institute is closely associated with poverty relief in Africa. But then why is it called the “Earth Institute”?

Jeffrey Sachs: When we consider extreme poverty, we tend to think first of sub-Saharan Africa, which is the epicenter of the world’s interlocking crises of poverty, disease and environment degradation. Yet the Earth Institute aims to fight poverty and promote sustainable development around the world, in both the short and long term. Earth Institute scientists and researchers work in five core areas: earth sciences (including climate change), ecology and agronomy, engineering, health sciences and social sciences. Our activities put special focus on the needs of the planet’s poorest inhabitants, but more generally aim to help the entire planet work toward sustainable development. Earth Institute scientists are working in all parts of the world, from the Arctic to Antarctica, and all major regions in between. They are also heavily engaged in studying the ecology and economics of our own region.

In 2005-2006 World Leaders Forum Explores Global Development in Yearlong Event Series