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Group uses hip-hop in anti-poverty campaign

MERLE ENGLISH

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Stand up, speak out. End poverty.

That's the message the Jamaica-based Hip Hop Summit Youth Council will bring to the United Nations' second annual campaign aimed at eradicating global poverty by 2015.

"They want hip-hop to get more people, especially our youth, to stand up against poverty," said Charles Fisher, 52, a music industry veteran, author and community activist who is the youth council's founder. "Hip-hop is global. What better way to get the word out than to use hip-hop?" he said.

Fisher and his son, Randy, 28, the youth council's executive director, co-hosted the fourth annual Youth Assembly at the UN earlier this year. Now, they will launch an awareness campaign "to educate young people in America about the UN Millennium initiative" and set up programs to address its goals globally.

They will be among millions standing up around the world this week in hopes of spurring governments internationally to honor the promise they made seven years ago to do just that. Last year 23.5 million people in 100 countries stood in the global

call to action against poverty launched by the United Nations.

Coordinators hope to break the record of participation at the second "Stand Up Speak Out" this year, taking place from 5 p.m. Oct. 16 to 5 p.m. Oct. 17, at events throughout the world.

More than 1 billion worldwide exist on less than a dollar a day, according to the Millennium Campaign, which wants UN member states to make good on the agreement they signed seven years ago to provide universal primary education, reduce child and maternal mortality rates, combat HIV/AIDS, provide water and sanitation, empower women, cancel debts, sustain the environment, and give more or better aid, "promises some of them have not kept," according to the Stand Up Speak Out Web site.

To press governments to meet the goals to end hunger, organizations and groups worldwide will arrange Stand Up Against Poverty events at which people will rise to their feet from kneeling or sitting positions and recite a pledge against poverty.

"We're going to bring artists to the UN to address these issues," Fisher, a Jamaica, Queens resident, said. Rapper and businessman Percy Robert Miller - better known as Master P - is among those involved.

"Growing up in New Orleans and experiencing the wrath of Katrina has given me a firsthand look at real poverty," Miller said. "That's why I'm committed to help spread the word to citizens all over the world about what they can do to help ... end poverty by 2015."

Amil Husain, 26, a global youth coordinator for the Millennium Campaign, said the UN is developing a partnership with the youth council "to help young people learn how to help achieve the goals."

Fisher's nonprofit Hip-Hop Summit Youth Council was founded in July 2001 to help implement commitments made a month earlier to youth and young adults by artists, record companies, elected officials, and community and business leaders at a hip-hop summit in Manhattan.

The summit addressed accountability for hip-hop's largely negative image and the need for the multibillion-dollar industry to police itself.

Hip-hop's participation in Stand Up Speak Out indicates a new direction for the movement, which has been criticized for lyrics said to degrade women and glorify money and violence.

"The new direction for hip-hop is social and spiritual empowerment," Fisher said. "This is what the world needs."