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Plan aims to end extreme poverty

If aid pledges are honored, goal is attainable, U.N. told

By Maggie Farley
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UNITED NATIONS - The world could end extreme poverty within a decade if wealthy nations fulfilled their pledges to increase development aid, Columbia University economist Jeffrey D. Sachs said yesterday as he presented a plan to the United Nations for achieving that goal.

But if those countries' governments don't come through with what they have promised, the poor will continue to get poorer and the world less secure, he said.

"We are not asking for one new promise," he said. "Only the follow-through on what has already been committed."

Sachs is leading the United Nations' Millennium Project to meet development goals adopted by world leaders at a summit in 2000, including eliminating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Almost 3 billion people live on less than \$2 a day, and the report spells out the investments needed to elevate them above the level of bare survival and provide them with the means of leading productive lives.

"Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals" is the result of a yearlong study led by 265 top development experts and is designed to show "not only that it can be done, but how it can be done," Sachs said.

As he spoke at a news conference yesterday, he stacked a dozen reports by separate task forces that flesh out the recommendations into a pile nearly a foot high.

If endorsed at a summit of the Group of 8 leading industrial nations in July and a gathering of world leaders at the United Nations in September, the plan is expected to provide a blueprint not only for governments but also for international institutions such as the World Bank that oversee major development projects.

Along with a call for a major overhaul of the international development system, it includes 18 "quick wins," simple and cost-effective ways to save and improve millions of lives that governments can immediately implement. The steps include providing school lunches for children, mosquito nets for malaria-endemic areas and generators for hospitals and schools.

But to end hunger and poverty in the next decade, the world needs to do much more. In 2000, developed nations promised to take steps toward giving 0.7 percent of their gross national product for development aid. Today, only five countries do: Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Six other countries have committed to reaching the target by 2015. The United States currently earmarks about 0.015 percent of GNP, not including private donations, though that amount may grow.

Sachs has suggested that meeting the aid target should be a requirement for all permanent Security Council members, a move that has caused consternation in Japan, Germany and India, which are seeking permanent seats.

"We're talking about rich countries committing 50 cents out of every \$100 of income to help the poorest people in the world get a foothold on the ladder of development," Sachs said. "It's utterly affordable."

The countries also committed to work toward eight Millennium Development Goals, including ending poverty and hunger, improving survival rates for mothers and children, combating HIV/AIDS and other major preventable diseases, and promoting equality for women.

Heartened by the global response to the tsunami, Sachs said it was time to reckon with the "silent tsunami" of preventable diseases that kills millions every year, but could be avoided through simple measures such as clean water, inoculations and mosquito nets.

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