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Posted on Tue, Jan. 18, 2005

U.N. calls rich nations key to halving poverty

By Nicolas Brulliard
COX NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - World poverty can be cut in half by 2015, but it won't happen unless rich countries nearly triple their contributions to development, a report released Monday by the United Nations says.

The report is not only a blueprint to reduce global poverty and improve the living conditions of more than 1 billion people; it also shows that most wealthy nations have not made the financial commitments needed to achieve these goals.

It comes weeks after the Indian Ocean tsunami and a remark by a U.N. official that Western nations were "stingy" in their initial relief effort.

"We have a chance now to end poverty within a generation, and it's actually unprecedented," said John McArthur, the project manager of the report. "What's been missing is the ambition and scale that these goals require."

The report urges industrialized countries to spend a combined \$135 billion in development aid in 2006, or 0.44 percent of their national income. By 2015, annual contributions should reach \$195 billion, or 0.54 percent, the report adds.

With this money, authors claim, 500 million people would be lifted out of extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$1 a day; all children would have access to primary education; and the spread of AIDS and malaria would be stopped.

In 2000, world leaders committed to these goals and others, and now a panel of 265 development experts has devised a series of practical measures to reach them.

But only a handful of smaller nations, such as Norway and Luxembourg, are fulfilling the financing requirement, and the project is sure to fail if the world's leading economies don't increase their donations significantly, the report says.

The United States, the world's largest economy and the main contributor to the United Nations' budget, sets aside 0.15 percent of its gross national income for development aid, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Japan, the second-largest economy, reserves 0.20 percent of its income for this purpose, less than half of what the report recommends.

McArthur said he has received positive feedback from a number of governments and is optimistic the world community can still meet the goals outlined in the report.

He said the devastating tsunami and the outpouring of generous public and private donations that followed increased the awareness of the need for development aid in addition to humanitarian relief.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has declared that the fight against extreme poverty should be the world community's priority in 2005.

The report lists a number of quick actions to address what McArthur calls the "silent tsunamis" of the world, such as malaria, which kills more than 150,000 African children in one month. Many of these deaths could be prevented by simple \$5 bed nets, the report says.

Other recommendations include opening rich countries' markets to exports from poor countries and improving the coordination among U.N. agencies.



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The report identifies a need to focus development assistance on well-governed countries that have demonstrated they can use aid effectively.

"Many of these countries have plans on the shelves or sitting in drawers, but they haven't had the international support yet to implement them," McArthur said.

FIGHTING POVERTY

Some of the key recommendations from a U.N.-sponsored report released Monday on how to meet U.N. goals to tackle poverty, hunger and disease by 2015:

- Poor nations should plan to meet the U.N. goals.
- Donors should target countries for a rapid development.
- Prepare for quick action in the event of disaster.
- Rich countries should increase donations to about 0.44 percent. (Assistance in 2003 was 0.25 percent of gross national income.)
- Rich countries should open their markets.
- More research is needed to address the needs of the poor.

SOURCE: United Nations, Associated Press



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