

Rich countries could save lives, UN reports

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UNITED NATIONS -- In the coming decade, more than 500 million people can escape from poverty and tens of millions can avoid certain death if the United States, Japan and other rich countries keep their promises to vastly increase development aid, a UN-sponsored report said Monday.

The report spells out the investment needed to meet the UN goals adopted by world leaders at the Millennium Summit in 2000 to reduce poverty, hunger and disease, mainly in African and Asian countries where 1 billion people live on \$1 a day or less.

Another 1.8 billion people live on just \$2 a day.

"The system is not working right now -- let's be clear," said Jeffrey Sachs, head of the UN effort against poverty and lead author of the report. "There's a tremendous imbalance of focus on the issues of war and peace, and less on the dying and suffering of the poor who have no voice.

"The overwhelming reality on our planet is that impoverished people get sick and die for lack of access to basic practical means that could help keep them alive and do more than that -- help them achieve livelihoods and escape from poverty,"

As an example, he said, providing nets to cover beds and keep out mosquitoes in African and Asian countries could save the lives of more than 1 million children this year who will die of malaria.

An estimated 150,000 children in Africa die of malaria each month, he said.

The report, "Investing in Development," said the poorest countries do not have the resources to meet goals that include:

- Halving the number of people living on \$1 a day.
- Achieving universal primary education.
- Reducing child and maternal mortality.
- Halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria.
- Halving the number of people without access to clean water and basic sanitation.

The resources needed to meet the goals are within the means of the world's richest nations and their combined \$30-trillion economy, with \$12 trillion in the United States alone, Sachs said.

Meanwhile, in Cape Town, South Africa, British Treasury chief Gordon Brown called on wealthy nations and international institutions to write off Africa's debt, saying debts incurred by past generations are keeping the continent poor.

Brown wants rich nations to set a timetable for increasing African development aid and is urging more countries to sign on to the International Finance Facility -- an initiative intended to double rich countries' help for Africa from the current level of \$50 billion a year.

Brown said the extra money would go to helping poor nations meet some of the UN Millennium Development Goals of halving poverty by 2015 and educating 100 million children not now in school. Brown made his remarks at the opening of a meeting Monday between 19 African finance ministers and their British and Canadian counterparts.

Those goals are far from being met. At current rates, enrolling 100 million more children in Africa's schools would not happen until 2130 and halving poverty not until 2150, he said.

In 1970, the world's nations agreed to provide 0.7 percent of their gross national income for development aid. So far, five countries have met or surpassed the target -- Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Six others have made commitments to reach the target by 2015 -- Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Spain and Britain -- and the report urged all developed countries to set similar timetables.

The United States spends about 0.15 percent of gross domestic product on development aid.

"The required doubling of annual official development assistance to \$135 billion in 2006, rising to \$195 billion by 2015, pales beside the wealth of high-income countries -- and the world's military budget of \$900 billion a year," the report said.

Sachs presented the report Monday to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who appointed him in 2002 to head the Millennium Project and develop a plan to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Annan intends to use the report to help prepare his own recommendations for world leaders attending a follow-up conference in September. Annan expressed hope the meeting will produce "bold and far-reaching decisions."

The report recommended that the international community designate a significant number of well-governed, low-income countries for "fast-track status" to receive the massive increase in development aid this year. The report suggests Mali, Burkino Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania and Yemen.

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