

## EU backs global battle against poverty

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EU development chief Louis Michel has "backed to the hilt" a radical new UN report on alleviating world poverty.

But the Belgian European Commissioner also warned that carrying out the proposals, which could save tens of millions of lives, lay in the hands of the developed world's politicians.

Speaking on Tuesday, Michel said he hoped the report's findings would prick politicians' consciences.

"I'm optimistic about this report, it shows we have the ways and the means [to combat world poverty]", he said.

"But it's all a question of political will...it's important to get politicians up and running... if the Millennium goals are to be achieved. We need to act now."

### Millennium Development Goals

The report highlights the investment needed and provides practical proposals to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals to reduce poverty, hunger and disease, agreed by world leaders in 2000.

Currently one billion people survive on less than a \$1 a day, with 2.7 billion living on \$2 a day.

Three years in the making, and utilising 265 of the world's leading development experts, the report proposes a package of measures that together could cut extreme poverty in half, and radically improve the lives of at least one billion people in the world's poorest nations by 2015.

Director of the UN millennium project and lead author of the report, Professor Jeffrey Sachs explained that until now, there had been no concrete plan for achieving the millennium development goals.

"The experts who contributed to this huge undertaking have shown without a doubt that we can still meet the goals – if we start putting this plan into action right now", said Sachs.

Sachs emphasised that the report's recommendations were not just "wishful thinking", but achievable practical strategies that would save lives and help millions of people to escape the extreme poverty trap.

### Massive Scale

Illustrating the massive scale of the problems affecting the world's poor, Sachs told reporters that largely treatable and preventative diseases were killing hundreds of thousands each month.

"There is a silent tsunami underway in Africa", said Sachs, 150,000 children die of malaria each month."

A \$5 impregnated bed net would effectively prevent the deaths by malaria of more than 1 million children a year across Africa and Asia explained Sachs, but extreme poverty meant that the world's poorest people could not even afford this cost.

The world's richest nations agreed in 1969 to reach a target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for development aid, but few countries have met this target.

The report urges donor nations to make, maintain or accelerate their commitments to reach this long standing target, which was reaffirmed by world leaders at the Monterrey conference on financing development on 2002.

### Global Initiatives

The report kicks off a year of global initiatives, aimed at making the millennium goals a reality.

World leaders will meet in the UK in July at the G8 summit and again at the UN in September to discuss progress towards achieving the millennium targets.

"We hope that the project's report will help catalyse world support for a 'grand bargain' between global poverty reduction and security at the millennium plus five summit in New York in September", said Mark Malloch Brown, chairman of the United Nations Development Group.

### **Broad Consensus**

Development experts have become too cautious in their thinking because of so many failed development programmes and strategies suggested Malloch Brown.

"This report reflects the broad consensus of the development community, and allows us to think big".

And the report suggests that breaking the cycle of poverty would also contribute to global security.

"When people lack access to food, medical care, safe drinking water, and a chance at a better future, their societies are more likely to experience instability and unrest that spills over to the rest of the world", said Sachs.

And Michel emphasised the practical nature of the report.

"It's more a project than a report...it doesn't have the usual verbiage or platitudes. I have the feeling that I am optimistic about it...and fully commit to this battle [on global poverty]".

### **Finance Mechanisms**

The Belgian development chief also called on world leader's to consider a range of financial mechanisms to increase levels of aid.

Michel highlighted the UK's proposed international finance facility, which hopes to free up aid from the world's richest nations, and to examine lightening the debt burden of the world's poorest countries

Aid agencies welcomed the report.

"The report lays down the gauntlet to the leaders of EU countries. 2005 must see substantial new investment to fund a war on poverty. The tiny amounts currently given by rich countries are inexcusable and the poorest are paying with their lives", said Jo Leadbeater head of Oxfam's EU office.