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International

Millennium goals

UN report asks rich nations to hike aid

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UNITED NATIONS, JANUARY 18 An international team of experts sponsored by the United Nations on Monday proposed a detailed, ambitious plan it says could halve extreme poverty and save the lives of millions of children and hundreds of thousands of mothers each year by 2015.

The report says drastically reducing poverty in its many guises — hunger, illiteracy, disease — is “utterly affordable”. To fulfill this goal, industrialised nations would need to roughly double aid to poor countries from a quarter to a half of one per cent of their national incomes.

“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,” said Jeffrey D. Sachs, a professor at Columbia University, who was appointed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to lead the project in 2002.

The report of the UN Millennium Project advocates reforms to ease trade barriers, as well as a sweeping array of investments in health, education, rural development, road building, slum upgrading and scientific research, among others.

The report is a synthesis of 3,000 pages of findings by 265 experts. The project’s blueprint is likely to shape the agenda for agencies of the UN over the coming decade and to influence other key players. It won quick praise from the heads of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, whose chief economists were consulted. But its approach was viewed by some critics as utopian over-reaching. And at least one of the economists involved in the project, Nancy Birdsall, who heads the Center for Global Development in Washington, said she worried it put too little emphasis on the need for poor countries to make deep political and social changes to reduce poverty.

The project’s recommendations arrive at a time when momentum is building among rich nations to improve the lot of the world’s poor, a trend influenced by post-September 11 concerns that impoverished nations like Afghanistan and Sudan can be incubators of terrorism and conflict.

Several nations have recently pledged to significantly increase aid in coming years. And a spate of reports and high-level meetings this year will draw further attention to the topic. The worldwide outpouring of grief and aid since the tsunami in Asia has stirred hope here that the same wellspring of empathy can be tapped for what Sachs called “the silent tsunami” of poverty that kills more than 1,50,000 children every month from malaria alone.

The Millennium Project’s agenda is the first in a series of initiatives this year intended to re-focus attention on fulfilling promises to fight poverty that were made at the UN in 2000. They agreed to institute universal primary education, promote sex equality and achieve sharp reductions in hunger, child and maternal mortality and the proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day by 2015. —*NYT*

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