
Feature Article

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World: UN Unveils Plan To Lift Millions Out Of Poverty

A United Nations panel has unveiled an action plan to lift millions of people out of abject poverty. In its report, the panel urges rich countries to double development aid to the world's poorest countries over the next 10 years. It says that would help more than 500 million people escape poverty and save the lives of 30 million children.

Prague, 18 January 2005 (RFE/RL) -- The survey is labeled the most comprehensive ever on global poverty.

It's by a panel of experts set up to help achieve the so-called Millennium Development goals -- the global targets on reducing hunger, poverty, and disease that all countries agreed on five years ago.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan received the report in New York.

"The goals are not utopian, they are eminently achievable," Annan said. "Many countries, including some of the poorest and least developed, are making real progress in achieving them."

The report calls for a vast increase in development aid.

Rich countries have long promised to give 0.7 percent of their gross national income in aid to the poorest countries.

But only a few have met that target. And some of the richest countries -- including the United States, Japan, and Germany -- give far less.

If all 22 rich countries come up with the money, the report says, more than 500 million people could escape poverty and tens of millions could avoid certain death over the next decade.

Columbia University professor Jeffrey Sachs is the survey's lead author.

"Our generation, for the first time in human history, really could see to it that extreme poverty on the planet is ended -- not just [reduced] by half, but ended -- by the year 2025," Sachs said. "The millennium development goals can take us halfway there, and by doing so save millions of lives per year, take hundreds of millions of people out of chronic hunger and disease and other extreme impoverishment, and make possible the dream of a planet that is safe and prosperous for all."

The report says rich countries should also help by opening their markets to exports from developing countries.

It also recommends "quick-fixes" for fast results -- supplying mosquito bed nets to prevent malaria deaths; eliminating school fees and providing free school lunches; giving poor farmers soil nutrients, or providing life-saving drugs to 3 million AIDS victims.

"What we're proposing is a strategy of investment to help empower the lives of very poor people that lack the tools and sometimes even the basic means to stay alive, much less be productive members of a fast-paced world economy," Sachs said.

More than 500 million people could escape poverty if the richest countries met their aid pledges.

Some 1,000 million people live on \$1 a day or less, many going to bed hungry every night.

Life expectancy in the poorest countries is half that in high-income countries, around 40 instead of 80, the report says.

And there's the tragedy Sachs called the "silent tsunami."

"There's also the silent tsunami of Africa and other parts of the world where, unbeknownst to most people, as many children die every month of malaria in Africa as died in [last month's] Indian Ocean tsunami, about 150,000 per month or more," Sachs said. "And yet malaria is an largely preventable and wholly treatable disease."

Annan said the report would help him prepare his own recommendations for world leaders set to attend a follow-up summit in September that will also tackle UN reform.

(news agencies)

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