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UN Poverty Report Urges Massive Aid Boost

More than 500 million people can escape from poverty and tens of millions can avoid certain death in the coming decade, if the world's richest countries keep their promises to vastly increase development aid to the poorest, a United Nations-sponsored re

port will say today.

The report, to be received by UN secretary general Kofi Annan, spells out the investments needed to meet UN goals adopted by world leaders at the Millennium Summit in 2000 to tackle poverty, hunger and disease mainly in African and Asian countries where a billion people live on 55p a day or less and 1.8 billion more live on just £1.10 a day.

“The system is not working right now – let’s be clear,” said Professor Jeffrey Sachs, head of the UN anti-poverty effort 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,” said Sachs, who heads the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

As an example, he said, providing nets to cover beds and keep out mosquitos in impoverished African and Asian countries could save the lives of a million children this year who otherwise will die from malaria.

“We have the world’s eyes focused on the tsunami of the Indian Ocean, but the world continues to overlook the silent tsunamis of deaths from malaria which take every month the number of people that died in the Asian tragedy,” Sachs said.

“Every month, 150,000 children in Africa, if not more, are dying from the silent tsunami of malaria, a largely preventable and utterly treatable disease.”

Sachs was appointed by Annan in 2002 to head the Millennium Project and develop a plan to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Annan is expected to use the report to help prepare his own recommendations to world leaders who will be attending a follow-up summit in September that will also tackle UN reform.

The 3,000-page report, *Investing In Development*, says the poorest countries do not have the resources to meet the goals. They include halving the number of people living on a dollar a day, achieving universal primary education, reducing child and maternal mortality, halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria, and halving the number of people without access to clean water and basic sanitation.

But the resources needed to meet the goals are definitely within the means of the world’s richest nations and their £16.5 trillion economy – £6.5 trillion of that in the United States alone, Sachs says.

In 1970, the world’s nations agreed to provide 0.7% of their gross national income for development assistance. So far, only five countries have met or surpassed the target – Denmark, Luxembourg, the 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 only spends about 0.15% of its GDP on development aid, although President George Bush has increased the amount.

“The required doubling of annual official development assistance to 135 billion dollars in 2006, rising to 195 billion dollars by 2015, pales beside the wealth of high income countries – and the world’s military budget of 900 billion dollars a year,” the report said.

It 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 to implement a national poverty-reduction plan.

Poorly governed poverty-stricken countries such as Belarus, Burma, North Korea and Zimbabwe, which are accused of wide-scale human rights abuses, should not get large-scale aid, the report said. But Sachs said several dozen well-governed poor countries could be fast-tracked and the report names Mali, Burkino Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania and Yemen.

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