



Tuesday, January 18, 2005, 12:00 A.M. Pacific

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#### Close-up

## U.N. offers plan to end world's severe poverty in 20 years

By Seattle Times news services

UNITED NATIONS — Global poverty can be cut in half by 2015 and eliminated by 2025 if the world's richest countries, including the United States, Japan and Germany, more than double aid to the poorest countries, hundreds of development experts concluded in a report released by the U.N. yesterday.

The 3,000-word plan says the money should be spent on both long-term projects and quick fixes, such as supplying mosquito bed nets and creating free school-lunch programs.

The goals of eliminating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 would be met if wealthy nations fulfilled existing pledges to increase development aid, Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs said yesterday as he presented a plan to the United Nations for implementing the United Nations' Millennium Project goals, adopted by world leaders at a summit in 2000.

But if those countries' governments don't come through with what they have already promised, the poor will continue to get poorer and the world less secure, he said.

#### Malaria a "silent tsunami"

"We are not asking for one new promise," Sachs said. "Only the follow-through on what has already been committed."

"We have the world's eyes focused on the tsunami of the Indian Ocean," he said. "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.

"Our generation for the first time in human history really could see to it that extreme poverty on the planet is ended," Sachs said.

Almost 3 billion people live on less than \$2 a day, and the report spells out the investments needed to elevate them above the level of bare survival and provide them with the means of leading productive lives.

"Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals" is the result of a yearlong study led by 265 top development experts and is designed to show "not only that it can be done, but how it can be done," Sachs said.

If endorsed at a summit of the Group of 8 leading industrial nations in July and a gathering of world leaders at the United Nations in September, the plan is expected to provide a blueprint not only for governments but also for international institutions such as the World Bank that oversee major development projects.

Along with a call for a major overhaul of the international development system, it includes 18 "quick wins," simple and cost-effective ways to save and improve millions of lives that governments can immediately implement. The steps include providing school lunches for children, mosquito nets for malaria-endemic areas and generators for hospitals and schools. They include providing fertilizer for farmers, fixing roads or eliminating school fees as well as opening markets to goods from poor countries.

"The goals are not utopian. They are eminently achievable," said U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in accepting the report from Sachs.

#### Fast, cheap solutions

Mosquito bed nets, for example, are cheap and could be distributed easily to save children from dying of malaria.

In 2000, developed nations promised to take steps toward giving 0.7 percent of their gross national product for development aid. Today, only five countries do: Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Six other countries have committed to reaching the target by 2015. The United States currently earmarks only about 0.015 percent of GNP, not including private donations, though that amount may grow. Japan, the world's second-largest economy, is also low at 0.20 percent as is Italy at 0.17 percent and Germany at 0.27.

President Bush's administration has pledged \$22.3 billion in aid for 2006, or 0.18 percent of gross national income. If it were to meet the report's target for 2006, the U.S. would have to contribute more than double — \$54.5 billion.

"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," Sachs said. "It's utterly affordable."

Former Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, who led the project's task force on trade, said "it is in the self-interest of rich countries to support poor countries' development" for their own security and for economic growth because new markets will open up.

In 2000, countries also committed to work toward eight Millennium Development Goals, including ending poverty and hunger, improving survival rates for mothers and children, combating HIV/AIDS and other major preventable diseases, and promoting equality for women.

Those goals may seem unreachable, especially as the first target — to give girls an equal chance for basic education by 2005 — has already been missed. The United Nations' latest assessment showed that sub-Saharan nations would not reach any of the targets by 2015 at the current pace.

But Sachs noted: "We enter 2005 both with some reasons for optimism both about the human spirit and the readiness of some governments to lead on some of these goals."

In the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami, British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown called for massive debt relief for stricken nations, and a "Marshall Plan" for Africa to lift the continent with aid and soft loans the way the United States helped rebuild Europe after World War II.

Britain has committed to doubling aid by 2013 to reach the U.N. target.

Some of the plan's recommendations, such as expanding trade and private capital investment, require massive restructuring of governments and transformations of culture. Such change can't be bought, critics say, but must be developed over time.

### **Concerns about corruption**

There is also healthy skepticism about the way governments use aid.

"There is no black market for mosquito nets," Sachs said, acknowledging that many nations feared corruption in aid programs.

The Millennium Project's research shows that only 30 cents of each aid dollar reaches relief programs on the ground in poor countries.

It also urges donors to pick at least a dozen countries with track records of good governance and low corruption, and "fast track" aid to them. At the top of the list are Tanzania, Mali, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritania and Yemen, according to the report.

Nations such as Belarus, Myanmar, North Korea and Zimbabwe should not get large-scale aid because they are accused of wide-ranging human-rights abuses, the report said.

*Compiled from the Los Angeles Times, Reuters and The Associated Press*

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