

Fifteen Years to Try Men's Souls: The Millennium Development Goals

In the year 2000, an estimated three million people died from Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)(*AIDS Update* 3). At that same time, 20% of the world's population held 86% of its wealth ("People & Poverty 2000" ¶6). The remainder lived largely in squalor. On September 8 of that same year, the United Nations Millennium Declaration was passed, its eight chapters outlining a plan to, among other things, "combat HIV/AIDS" and "eradicate extreme poverty" by the year 2015 (UN Development Programme). These goals, while noble and certainly warranted, have been implemented with mixed results. If the United Nations has any hope for the success of its Declaration, its member nations need be prepared for change, and special emphasis placed upon those goals that are most beneficial to the global population as a whole.

In sub-Saharan Africa, stories of corrupt leaders and political officials such as Sani Abacha, Jean-Bedel Bokassa, Idi Amin, Paul Biya and Charles Taylor (who had a swindled fortune greater than Liberia's entire Gross National Product) have abounded for years, and similar tales persist to this day (Roberts ¶6) . Corruption in developing nations is especially detrimental to the Millennium Declaration, whose success depends on record levels of foreign aid. This aid can not be put to good use if it is siphoned into offshore bank accounts or used to buy (in the case of Paul Biya) golf courses and European mansions (Roberts ¶6) . The only solution to this callous fraud is for developing nations to streamline their financial doctrines, allowing foreign aid to work more efficiently and placing a greater deal of accountability on the shoulders of third-world treasuries. The removal of dishonest officials should also occur at all levels of government. Any country

that fails to adequately combat corruption within its borders needs to be refused aid. If the Declaration is to succeed, that money should be put to its intended use instead of padding the pocketbooks of crooked officials. Further change will have to occur on the part of developed nations if progress is to be seen. As stated above, record levels of monetary assistance, sometimes estimated as twice that received currently, will be required to fund the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (“Cost of MDGs” ¶1). Indeed, the World Bank estimates that \$40-60 billion will be required to reach all MDGs (“Cost of MDGs” ¶1). With the global economy limping further into recession by the day, this goal may seem unrealistic. Realistically, one can only assume that news of bloodletting on Wall Street will not inspire record levels of charity. However, impending depression or not, the goal is by no means an impossibility. This liquidity can be achieved through a variety of means, not confined to UN membership dues and individual governments’ voluntary contributions. One of these techniques is debt relief, which cancels “unsustainable” levels of debt in Heavily Indebted Developing Countries (HIDCs)(Carrasco, McClellan and Ro ¶4). In 2007 the amount of debt owed by HIDCs was \$523 billion, much of that amount due to the accruing of interest (Carrasco, McClellan and Ro ¶28) . By canceling interest, which benefits only the already-wealthy lender, developed countries suffering from the recent global downturn lose no principle, whereas HIDCs can begin the payment of their original debts, while diverting revenue originally set aside as interest to fund projects that will directly benefit their nations.

Should the proper infrastructure and funding be provided, the United Nations will be able to focus more of its efforts on achieving the goals set out by the Declaration. Perhaps the most important MDG is the first, which charges UN member nations with

halving the number of people globally who suffer from extreme poverty or hunger. This objective gains greater significance when considering the effect that its success could have on the other chapters of the Declaration, particularly those concerning disease and preventable death. Should hunger and poverty be drastically reduced within the prescribed time table, disease would almost invariably follow. Because, disallowing viral diseases such as AIDS, a disproportionate number of deaths annually are linked either directly or indirectly to malnutrition and poor living conditions (“Child Mortality” ¶7). These two factors, when combined, would cause under-five and maternal mortality rates (the focal points of objectives four and five in the Declaration, respectively) to drop as well, as cleaner living conditions and access to even the most rudimentary foodstuffs and medical equipment could prevent thousands of deaths by hemorrhage and hypertensive disorders (in mothers) and malnutrition, pneumonia, and diarrhea (in children)(Khan ¶1) . Clearly, this one sweeping goal could positively influence at least three others, making its accomplishment of vital importance to developing countries. Development goal eight should also be emphasized by the United Nations. Goal eight, titled “developing a global partnership for development,” will not result in the same trickle-down effect as goal one, but will instead mold to individual countries’ needs, whether they be landlocked states in Eastern Europe or island nations of the Pacific (UN Development Programme). And, unlike goal one, eight focuses more on fostering growth at the national level rather than on the individual level by providing struggling countries with unrestricted trade, debt relief, new technologies, and advanced medicine not available to them previously. That is not to say that these things will not affect the people of developing nations: indeed, several of the objective’s goals were written with the immediate and express benefit of

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the world's citizenry in mind, and some of the more desirable political benefits are footed with qualifiers necessitating a "commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction" by any nation's government before said benefits would be granted (UN Development Programme). Whether helpful to the individual or not, though, goal eight remains crucial, especially when viewed in the long term. Lower national debt and flourishing trade generally correspond with a thriving, politically-stable regime, a vision that many governments have aspired to but never realized.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration may be the most ambitious and far-reaching project ever undertaken by man. For a nation that boasts a Gross National Income of roughly 13.9 trillion dollars, yet spends only .16 percent on foreign aid, the United States can— and should— contribute significantly to the cause ("GNI 2007")("Net ODA as % GNI" Chart).

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