

The Millennium Development Goals

ISSUE: The Many Dimensions of Extreme Poverty

More than one billion people around the world live each day under the weight of extreme poverty. A person dies every three seconds simply because of being too poor to live. A life is claimed by AIDS, tuberculosis, or malaria every six seconds. A child is orphaned every 14 seconds because of the effects of poverty and disease. At least one billion people live without access to clean water.

The dimensions of extreme poverty are broad and include hunger, income poverty, pandemic disease, widespread conflict, environmental degradation, chronic hunger, and a lack of access to education. These phenomena are *both causes and effects of deadly poverty*, and form a cycle that makes it hard for those living in extreme poverty to escape. In order to meet the challenge of addressing global poverty in all its dimensions, world leaders, beginning in 2000, created the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, a set of eight quantifiable targets designed to cut poverty in half by the year 2015. The MDGs challenge rich and poor nations to work together in partnership to combat extreme poverty.

The world reached the halfway point of the MDGs in 2007. The first seven years brought new commitments, resources, and many successes in fighting poverty and disease. On a whole, however, progress has been slow, and most of the world's poorest regions are destined to fall far short of meeting the MDGs unless significantly increased resources from the world's rich nations are made available.

BACKGROUND

In 2000, more than 180 countries, including the United States, began the new century by signing the Millennium Declaration pledging a massive global mobilization against poverty. Out of the Declaration flow the eight goals, each of which represents a different facet of the fight against poverty. (*See box*). The goals lay out different roles for rich and poor countries in building partnerships for the eradication of poverty. Goal 8 challenges industrialized nations like the United States to provide resources – through foreign aid, debt cancellation, and fair-trade rules – that can be used in partnership by poor countries seeking to combat poverty. Poor countries, in turn, are challenged by the first seven Goals to invest in the health and well-being of their people, develop creative poverty-reduction strategies, and promote good and transparent governance.

U.S. Policy: Where are we and what needs to happen?

The past eight years have brought historic commitments from the U.S. government to fighting poverty and disease around the world. Foreign aid to Africa stands at three times the level it did at the beginning of the decade. Historic

What are the MDGs?

The eight MDGs challenge the world, by the year 2015, to:

1. Cut in half income poverty and hunger;
2. Achieve universal primary education;
3. Promote gender equality and empower women;
4. Reduce child mortality;
5. Improve maternal health;
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
7. Ensure environmental stability;
8. Develop a global partnership for development with targets for aid, trade and debt relief.

legislation in 2003, renewed in 2008 at a much greater funding level, is addressing AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria abroad, and has led to a more-than-tenfold increase in treatment rates around the world. Along with other world leaders in 2005, President Bush committed the U.S. government to significant new levels of poverty-focused foreign aid and debt cancellation for the world's poorest countries, and Congress stands on the verge of passing new debt-cancellation legislation in late 2008. Specific commitments the U.S. needs to make to lead the way in achieving the MDGs:

- **Foreign aid must be expanded and better focused on fighting poverty.** For every \$100 the U.S. government spends, less than 50 cents is spent on fighting poverty around the world. However, with just a ONE percent increase – approximately one more dollar out of every hundred – the U.S. could lead the world toward achieving the MDGs.
- **Remaining poor-country debts must be cancelled.** Past debt relief has led to tens of millions of children returning to school, clean water for several million people who didn't otherwise have it, and countless lives saved through HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. The Jubilee Act (S 2166, HR 2634) passed the U.S. House in April 2008 and currently awaits final consideration in the Senate. It would begin the process of debt cancellation for the dozens of countries that are well-governed and interested in investing in the health and well-being of their people but have not yet qualified for the world's debt-relief initiatives.
- **Trade rules must be made significantly fairer for poor countries to compete.** Fairer trade rules will allow poor countries to empower themselves, trade their way out of poverty, build their economies, and enhance national pride. U.S. backing for renewed international-trade-rule negotiations, and reform of U.S. agricultural policy that hurts poor people abroad, are immediate priorities.¹

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Join the ONE Episcopalian campaign at www.episcopalchurch.org/ONE. You will receive messages urging you to e-mail your lawmakers in support of key initiatives related to the MDGs. Your voice, along with the voices of the 2.4 million other Americans who have joined the ONE Campaign, is the way through which the United States will help the world achieve the MDGs. If you're interested in deeper engagement in the ONE Episcopalian campaign in your local community, email Alex Baumgarten at abaumgarten@episcopalchurch.org.

GENERAL CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS RELATED TO THE MDGs

The 75th General Convention in 2006, through resolution D022, adopted the MDGs as a mission priority for the Episcopal Church over the next three years, and officially endorsed the ONE Episcopalian campaign. This builds on the action of the 2003 Convention in endorsing the Goals and calling upon dioceses and parishes to designate at least 0.7% of their annual budgets to international development. The Anglican Communion also has endorsed the MDGs in a variety of settings, including resolutions of the Anglican Consultative Council and communiqués of the Primates' Meeting.

¹ ONE Episcopalian fact sheets on each of these three areas – aid, debt, and trade – are available at episcopalchurch.org/ONE. Each contains a message you can send to your lawmakers today.