

THE MORAL CHALLENGE TO ELIMINATE POVERTY

Gordon Brown, Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer and likely successor to Tony Blair as Prime Minister, delivered an address, "What Is Morally Unjust Cannot Be Economically Correct," to British development activists in December 2004. It was published in *envio* (March 2005), the Jesuit journal of the Universidad Centroamericana in Nicaragua. It was a clarion call to his own people and to the other rich countries to take up the moral challenge to reduce and eliminate poverty and its dire consequences through dramatically increasing debt relief and development aid. "We have the power to shape history, to turn globalization from a force that breeds insecurity to a force for justice on a global scale." (49)

Brown's proposal to the richest countries is to complete debt relief for the poorest countries, which now stands at \$70 billion, to 100%; to increase development aid to 0.7% of each country's GDP, which would double the current amount of \$50 billion; and to create an International Finance Facility with an additional \$50 billion to bridge gaps between promises and reality. With this kind of commitment the nations of the world might be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for health, education, and the halving of poverty by the year 2015 that they adopted in December 1999 but which already show a tragic shortfall.

On present progress in Sub Saharan Africa, primary education for all will, at best, be delivered not in 2015 but 2130, 115 years too late; poverty will be halved by 2150, 135 years too late; and avoidable infant deaths will be eliminated by 2165, 150 years too late. This is too long to wait for justice, too long to wait when infants are dying in Africa while the rest of the world has the medicines to heal them. (50)

Many lives are at stake. Brown notes that 30,000 African children die unnecessarily every day. 25% of those deaths could be prevented by providing a \$4 mosquito net for each child. Half of all malaria deaths could be prevented by providing diagnosis and drugs costing \$0.12 per person. In Burkino Faso 2 million people are dependent on cotton production, but they are at risk due to government subsidies to 25,000 U.S. cotton farmers. In the 1980s aid to Africa was \$33 per person; now it is \$19. "For every dollar given to poor countries in aid, two dollars are lost because of unfair trade." (53)

What began as the greatest bond between rich and poor of our time is at risk of ending as the greatest betrayal of the poor by the rich of all time. As a global community we are at risk of being remembered not for what we promised to do but for what we failed to deliver, yet another set of broken hopes that break the trust of the world's people in the world's governments. (50)

- 1. Explain why the rich countries are failing to meet the challenge described by Brown and set forth in the Millennium Development Goals.**
- 2. List the ways in which people like us can make a difference locally and globally.**