

GLOBAL Network for Justice

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT: 2003

Each year the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) issues a report by an independent team of experts that reflects global change in human development. This year's report concerned the progress made toward achieving the Millennium goals. There was good news and bad news. The good news was that absolute poverty (people who live on less than one dollar a day) has declined greatly overall, because the economic success of China and India has lifted vast numbers of people out of ranks of abject hunger. The bad news was that 54 developing countries, most of them in sub-Saharan Africa, has slid back in the

last decade, actually suffering income declines. More than a billion people still live in absolute poverty. Much of the negative growth is attributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 2001, over 14 million children lost one or both parents to AIDS, and the number of AIDS orphans is expected to double by 2010. War and burgeoning foreign debt also contribute to the problems of the poorest countries.

The last several Reports have included human development indices that go beyond a country's income levels and include quality of life factors like literacy, freedom, women's rights, and longevity. The Human Development Index ranks countries according to a comprehensive yardstick. This year, the highest ranking countries were Norway, Iceland, and Sweden. The lowest in rank were Burkina Faso, Niger, and Sierra Leone. 21 countries have seen their ratings decline in the 1990s. The Report notes that people in the cities fare better than those in the countryside. Services are scanty away from urban centers. In Cambodia, for example, where 85 percent of the population is rural,

only 13 percent of government health workers work in rural areas. Governments in developing countries should focus on primary schools rather than universities; rural clinics, not technologically advanced hospitals in the big cities.

In this year's Report, two other indices rank rich countries in a separate category. The Human Poverty Index (HPI) takes into account illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, and life - expectancy. Sweden, which has a lower per-capita income than the United States, ranks first, while US ranks last because of persistent inequities in literacy and economic status. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) reflects women's participation economically and politically. Some poor countries are more equitable than their rich counterparts. In terms of participation and inclusion, women fare better in Botswana, Costa Rica, and Namibia than they do in Greece, Italy, and Japan. But as the report notes elsewhere, there is great disparity. A woman in sub-Saharan Africa is 100 times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth

than her counterpart in Western Europe. Although many of the solutions are known, disease and preventable disaster are rife. Every minute of the day, a woman die in pregnancy or childbirth. Over 13 million children have died of diarrheal disease in the past decade. 800 million suffer from malnutrition. Current research and development devotes only 10 percent of its effort to the health problems of 90 percent of the world's people. Unless the well-off nations pitch in to help, nothing will change. The very nations who should be saviors become part of the problem because of their trade policies, tariffs, and subsidies to US cotton growers equal more than triple the amount of US government aid to sub-Saharan Africa. Investment in poor counties must be directed to businesses that create jobs, like textiles and manufacturing, rather than those that require a huge amount of capital, like oil production. Without aid, an already dire situation could become even worse.
(Article is taken from UN-NGO/DPI Reporter October 2003;
www.un.org/dpi/ngosection)

Excerpts from Pope John Paul II 2004 World Day of Peace Message: An Ever Timely Commitment

New International Order

#7. It must be acknowledged, however, that the United Nations, even with limitations and delays due in great part to the failures of its members, has made a notable contribution to the promotion of respect for human dignity, the freedom of peoples and the requirements of development, thus preparing the cultural and institutional soil for the building of peace. The activity of national governments will be greatly encouraged by the realization that the ideals of the United Nations have become widely diffused, particularly through the practical gestures of solidarity and peace made by the many individuals involved in nongovernmental organizations and in movements for human rights. This represents a significant incentive for a reform that would enable the United Nations to

function effectively for the pursuit of its own stated ends, which remains valid: "Humanity today is in a new and more difficult phase of its genuine development. It needs a greater degree of international ordering." States must consider this objective as a clear moral and political obligation which calls for prudence and determination. Here I would repeat the words of encouragement which I spoke in 1995: "The United Nations needs to rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral center where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a family of nations."

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