

What Happens to the World's Poor?

There is an unprecedented economic crisis in the world. What began as a crisis in the developed world, particularly in the United States, has now spread to the whole world, demonstrating so dramatically how interconnected the world has become and countries all over the world are coming together to address this serious issue. This editorial draws attention to one category that is likely to get neglected in the whole effort to salvage world economy: The world's poor.

The World Bank tells us that 1.4 billion people lived in extreme poverty in 2005. Each year more than eight million people around the world would die because they are too poor to survive. Twenty-seven percent of children under five in the developing world are underweight. Their mortality rate was 83 per 1000 live births, about 14 times the rate in rich nations. More than 800 million would go hungry each day and more than 100 million primary school age children will not go to school. The ILO predicts the number of unemployed to be above 200 million by 2009.

The extreme poverty of the world is a denial of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights will remain a mere promise for the world's poor until there are effective measures in place to solve the problems of poverty. It is anybody's guess that extreme poverty and injustice have an undeniable link to the growing unrest and terrorism around the world. The world cannot be peaceful with such intense poverty around. Islands of prosperity cannot survive in the middle of extreme deprivation.

The Millennium Development Goals were a major step in the world's commitment to reducing poverty. Agreed to by the international community in 2000, it promised to significantly reduce extreme poverty and its effects by 2015. The world leaders showed a rare kind of unity in promising their share of aid to reduce poverty and bring peace to the world.

What has come of the promises, especially in the context of the current financial crises? Data show that aid from the world's developed countries fell by almost 13 percent between 2005 and 2007, to under \$104 billion. This is in contrast to the promise made in 2005 to increase development assistance to \$130 billion a year

by 2010.

In 2002, the world leaders had targeted to make available 0.7 percent of their national income for development aid. But currently, the aggregate aid budget of the most developed nations amount to 0.28 per cent of their gross national income. Except for Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Denmark, no other country in the world keeps their promise.

Now here is the crunch. How are the poor of the world going to help themselves in the absence of even the aid promised from the developed world? Many argue for a re-commitment to the Millennium Development Goals particularly Goal 8: Partnerships for development. Governments must work together with civil society organisations, multilateral institutions and private sector entities to face this critical challenge to the very survival of humanity.