



Just In Time

CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee

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Give us our daily bread

Introduction

When you look back on old science fiction films it is interesting to see how previous generations imagined today's world. Filmmakers of the past would no doubt be disappointed to learn that, by the year 2009, not only are we not living in chic moonpads, but our lives on Earth leave many wanting. For all of the advances that we have seen in the 21st century, we still live in a world where **more than one billion people are desperately poor**.

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) may have put money on the minds of many ordinary Australians, but it should be especially in our consciousness as we observe **Anti-Poverty Week** from the 11th-17th of **October**. Indeed, the GFC may have overshadowed the *everyday* global crisis that is poverty. It is a crisis of truly phenomenal proportions, as **almost half of the world's population live on less than two dollars a day**. Thankfully nations do have a clear plan to address this prevailing crisis.

In the year 2000 the United Nations (UN) gathered an historic number of world leaders at the Millennium Summit. Those gathered adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which is an international agreement targeted at reducing poverty and aiding development in countries all over the globe. From this declaration came eight specific goals, known as the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, which the United Nations hope will be achieved by the year 2015.

Anti-Poverty Week gives us the opportunity to raise our awareness and understanding of a problem that affects so many people in Australia and around the world. In this issue of Just in Time we will take a look at the MDGs and what progress has been made towards achieving them.

New Millennium Resolutions...

What are the hallmarks of a developed nation? The GFC has taught us that even the most developed nations are vulnerable to economic instability. The developmental goals adopted by the UN do not focus on bottom lines or Gross Domestic Product, but rather on the following fundamental issues:

Millennium Development Goals

- 1) Eradicate extreme 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 sustainability
- 8) Develop a global partnership for development

These goals do not propose 'magic wand' solutions, but they are certainly ambitious and require large-scale action from all nations involved. So are we on track to achieving these eight goals? The 2008 Millennium Development Goals Report states that "We have made important progress towards all eight goals, but we are not on track to fulfil our commitments." With over half of the time for action gone, it is now that the world needs to intensify efforts to ensure that the MDGs can be reached by 2015.

Australia has an important role to play in providing developmental assistance to struggling nations. It also has a responsibility to address the needs of its own poor peoples.

Small change?

It may seem, of late, that the key role of our Government is to hand out incomprehensible sums of money. The \$42 billion recently granted to Australian citizens in response to the GFC is just one example. Thankfully the *poverty* crisis is also receiving some financial attention from the Australian Government. AusAID recently announced a commitment of \$250 million to the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm) and a further \$26 million to target health development in Nepal. This is an encouraging commitment from Australia, but efforts also need to be directed internally.

The 2008 Millennium Development Goals Report makes an interesting observation, "in most countries, there are usually segments of society that do not share in the benefits without targeted actions to reach them...Government and other actors should therefore pay special attention to any and all at risk of being bypassed by the progress towards the MDGs."

This statement rings particularly true for Australia. While we are a wealthy nation, on any given night over 100,000 Australians are homeless. Our Indigenous population has a shockingly low life expectancy in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians, and suffers daily from inequalities in health, education and housing.

Since being elected to Government, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has made homelessness a key issue and has successfully initiated action to improve the accessibility of homelessness and housing services. Large amounts of funding have also been allocated for the construction of community housing. The wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, however, has suffered from a less well-coordinated approach. The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER or Intervention) has met with much criticism and has been slow to bring positive changes in the targeted areas of housing, health and education. It is not simply for the good of our fellow Australians, but for the sake of achieving the MDGs, that Australia must achieve real development within Aboriginal communities and for those suffering from homelessness.

Unexpected crises like the GFC will not be the only obstacle to the MDGs being achieved. The series of

natural disasters that have swept south-east Asia recently only remind us that the climate will present us with new challenges into the future. These climate events will hit developing countries the hardest, making it all the more important for the international community to work harder, and with great generosity, to achieve the MDGs.

Anti-Poverty Week is the perfect time for us to reflect on our responsibilities as citizens of the 'lucky country'. Whether you donate to aid organisations, volunteer time with community groups, lobby the Government, or simply raise awareness amongst your friends and colleagues, there is something positive that you can do this Anti-Poverty Week.

Information and Action



We recommend that you visit the following sites for more information and links to ways that you can make a difference this Anti-Poverty Week.

Contains resources, promotional material and ideas for how you can get involved:

<http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au>

Find out more about the MDGs and read the latest reports:

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>

The 2009 Amnesty International Report contrasts the GFC with real poverty:

<http://report2009.amnesty.org/en/introduction>

Read more about AusAID's \$276bil commitment:

http://www.ausaid.gov.au/hottopics/topic.cfm?ID=16569080_4911_7568_2834

More information about homelessness in Australia:

<http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/site/index.php>

UN comments on the situation of Indigenous Australians:

<http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/313713727C084992C125761F00443D60?opendocument>

To read past issues of Just in Time visit the CLRI(NSW) website:

<http://www.clrinsw.org>

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