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## Landmark Deal to Increase Aid to Poor Countries; U.S. Urged to Join In

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Thu., May. 26, 2005

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 26 (OneWorld) - Activists are seeking to use a European breakthrough this week to turn up the heat on some of the world's richest countries to come up with money they promised decades ago in the global fight against poverty.

The moves follow a European Union (EU) announcement Tuesday that members would boost aid to poor countries and are aimed at intensifying pressure in the run up to two sets of talks next month: the summit in Scotland of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized powers plus Russia, and a meeting of EU finance ministers in Luxembourg.

The EU's 15 oldest members agreed Tuesday to increase official aid for immunization, sanitation, schools, and other programs in poor countries to the equivalent of 0.7 percent of their economic output by 2015. The bloc's 10 newer members pledged to "strive for" 0.33 percent.


Aid charity Oxfam International welcomed the announcement and sought to parlay it into increased pressure on Washington and other wealthy capitals to follow suit.

The "landmark agreement could inject up to \$40 billion extra in the fight against poverty and save millions of lives," said Jo Leadbeater, the organization's head of advocacy.

The EU move "throws down the gauntlet to the U.S., Japan, and Canada just weeks before crucial G-8 meetings," Leadbeater said, adding that it "leaves the U.S. with nowhere to hide. If they fail to step up to the mark and pay their share they will be responsible for derailing an historic deal on aid that would help lift millions out of poverty."

On average, EU members spent 0.38 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on foreign aid last year, compared to 0.16 percent of GDP earmarked for aid by the United States, according to figures cited by European officials.

Global Call to Action against Poverty, an anti-poverty coalition, welcomed the European commitments but urged that they be bolstered with hard-and-fast deadlines.

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"The EU can still go further and all eyes are now on the EU finance ministers' meeting in Luxembourg on June 7," said coalition spokesperson Kumi Naidoo. "We want them to strengthen (Tuesday's) deal and show even more ambition to make poverty history."

Germany, which activists and even U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan--seizing an opportunity presented by Bonn's pursuit of a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council--had pressed on its spending record, also said this week that it would raise aid levels to 0.7 percent by 2015.

"Whilst we welcome Germany's announcement," said Naidoo, "we are now looking forward to hearing from Finance Minister Hans Eichel and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on how Germany is planning to move forward on this. Firm action must follow public commitments."

The 0.7-percent commitment represents a funding promise first made in 1970 with a 1980 deadline. The target was revived with a new deadline under the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals, a statement of ambitions launched in 2000. The goals, to be fulfilled by 2015, include halving global poverty and hunger, reducing death rates for babies and mothers, and improving access to health care and schooling.

Four European countries already have exceeded the target, according to EU statistics: Luxembourg (0.85 percent), Denmark (0.84 percent), Sweden (0.77 percent) and the Netherlands (0.74 percent).

Aid alone does not determine a wealthy country's impact on poorer ones, according to the Center for Global Development, a Washington, D.C. research and advocacy group, and Foreign Policy magazine.

The center and the magazine have, for the past two years, ranked 21 rich nations on how their aid, trade, investment, migration, environment, security, and technology policies help poor countries.

Denmark and the Netherlands shared the top spot for 2004 and Japan took last place. The United States shared seventh place with Germany, Norway, and France.

"The world's poor countries are ultimately responsible for their own development--and for years, rich countries have measured, categorized, scored, advised, and admonished them to cut their budget deficits, invest more in education, or liberalize their financial markets," the authors of the "Commitment to Development Index" said.

So they decided to turn the tables, ranking the rich according to how their policies help or hinder poor countries' pursuit of social and economic progress.

"Why should rich countries care about development in poor ones?" the center and the magazine asked in their joint study.

"For reasons both pragmatic and principled," they answered. "In a globalizing world, rich countries cannot insulate themselves from insecurity. Poverty and weak institutions are breeding grounds for public-health crises, violence, and economic volatility. Fairness is another reason to care. No human being should be denied the chance to live free of

poverty and oppression, or to enjoy a basic standard of education and health."

Finally, the countries ranked all are democracies that "preach concern for human dignity and economic opportunity within their own borders," the study added. "The index measures whether their policies promote these same values in the rest of the world."

## Related links

- > [Commitment to Development Index](#)
- > [Oxfam's Response to EU Agreement](#)
- > ['Voices Against Poverty' - The Millennium Campaign](#)
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