



1:35 PM PDT, August 30, 2005

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# U.S. Ranks 12th Among Richest Nations for Foreign Aid

By Sonni Efron, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON -- The United States has significantly increased its foreign aid to poor countries but still ranks 12th among the 21 richest nations in its overall performance in helping the world's poor, according to a widely watched annual report.

Denmark ranks as the most generous country in the world, spending 89 cents per person per day in government aid and one cent per person per day in private giving, according to the "Ranking the Rich" survey released today by the Center for Global Development and Foreign Policy magazine.

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The United States spent 15 cents per person per day in government aid to poor nations and 6 cents per person daily in private giving, the report found.

The foreign aid statistics were based on 2003 data, and did not include the unprecedented outpouring of charity sparked by last December's tsunami. The United States pledged \$950 million for tsunami relief, out of an estimated \$12 billion promised by all Western donors.

More than 2 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. The controversial index attempts to measure how countries help these global poor, not only by their direct foreign aid contributions but also by their policies on trade, migration, the environment, technology, security and foreign investment.

For example, the index penalizes nations that sell expensive weapons systems to undemocratic, impoverished dictatorships, but gives points to countries that accept migrants from

underdeveloped countries. It subtracts from the totals interest payments made by underdevelopment countries to aid donors.

Japan ranked last among the 21 donors, mainly because of high trade barriers, low per capita foreign aid spending, and a poor environmental record in developing countries, the survey found.

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After the tsunami, conservative opinion leaders and others were outraged by suggestions that the U.S. response to the disaster had been "stingy" and lambasted the index.

Among other criticisms, they argued that such measurements do not include the amount Americans give to domestic charities. Nor do they give the United States credit for the billions it spends in military operations that it says provide the global security that allows other nations' economies to flourish.

Responding to such criticisms, the 2005 Commitment to Development Index uses a revised methodology, according to David Roodman, who heads the study at the Center for Global Development, a liberal Washington think tank. For example, this year's report gives the United States points for its military contributions to keeping the world's sea lanes open for global trade, Roodman said.

The United States, the European Union and Canada also are given points for eliminating tariffs on textile imports from developing nations under a World Trade Organization agreement. However, the United States, Britain and France all lose points as the world's largest arms merchants, though the United States was selling fewer weapons to undemocratic countries than it did in the past, Roodman said.

The United States spent \$18.7 billion in foreign aid in 2003, more than any other nation. But more than \$1 billion of that was write-offs for uncollectible loans, mostly to the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, Roodman said.

Such debt relief is "a good thing, but it's also overrated because most of that money would never have come anyway," Roodman said. "It's more about rich countries accepting reality" than truly helping the global poor, he said.

The index also subtracted from the U.S. aid total the \$1.5 billion in debt repayment that Washington received from the developing world, leaving a net total of \$15.8 billion in material foreign aid given in 2003, Roodman said.

Even measured by that stricter standard, U.S. foreign aid has increased sharply, from \$12.4 billion in 2001 and \$14.7 billion in 2002. "Our aid really has gone up a lot and the Bush administration deserves credit for that," Roodman said.

Overall, however, the U.S. rank slipped from 11th in last year's survey to 12th this year.

The United Nations has called on all nations to give 0.7% of their gross domestic product in foreign aid, but the United States rejects that standard, noting that it would require a U.S. foreign aid budget of \$91 billion per year.

If the United States were ever to spend that sum, it would so dominate the global aid effort that it would be "imperial development by the United States," Andrew Natsios, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, said at the United Nations in June.

"We couldn't spend \$91 billion if we wanted to," Natsios added, according to the Associated Press.

Nevertheless, Roodman said, "if you want a meaningful measure of how much countries are trying, you have to look at aid either per capita or as a share of GDP," which measures countries by their capacity to give.

"We preach the values of political equality and economic opportunity all over the world," he added. "What we do with this index is look at how each country is pursuing those same ideas beyond their borders."

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