

Building support for development in the United Kingdom

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2005 was an extraordinary year for development, and so I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss development awareness.

In March 2005, the Commission for Africa published its report, a set of practical proposals to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in Africa. This government will do all it can, and has done much already, to make the recommendations of this report a reality.

In May, the European Union (EU) agreed to double its aid to \$80 billion by 2010, and fifteen member states committed to achieving the long-held UN target of 0.7% of national income by 2015. Europe is the world's largest donor, and while it has the same size economy as the United States, the EU and its member states give more than twice as much in aid, and in 2010, it will be three times.

In July, at Gleneagles, G8 leaders added their pledges to those of the EU, and agreed that global aid will rise by \$50 billion a year by 2010. Half of this aid will go to Africa, as called for by the Commission for Africa.

Also in July, Live 8, the Make Poverty History campaign - which is just one part of the Global Campaign Against Poverty - made a huge impact on G8 and other leaders, and in raising public awareness throughout the globe. I was proud too, to march in Edinburgh as part of a white band encircling the castle, calling for poverty to be made history. I think what we achieved at Gleneagles was a significant step forward.

At their meeting, the G8 also agreed the aim of an AIDS-free generation in Africa. This spelled out commitment to ending the 6,000 new infections every day and treating the six million individuals with the virus so that they can continue to live normal lives. The agreement was as close as possible to universal access to HIV and AIDS treatment by 2010.

The G8 also agreed to support free and good quality primary education, funding for treatment and bed nets to fight malaria and free access to basic health care where countries want it.

September 2005 saw a group of countries launching a \$4 billion International Finance Facility for Immunisation which will help save five million children's lives over the next ten years. Later on in the month the committees of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank

agreed the G8 proposal to cancel 100% of the debts owed by the world's poorest countries to the IMF, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. It comprises eighteen countries to start with and another twenty to follow. The total could amount to \$55 billion cancelled once and for all, providing poor countries with reliable resources to invest in free education and health.

The United Nations (UN) Millennium Review Summit in September - which was the largest ever gathering of world leaders - for the first time resolved that the world has a responsibility to protect citizens from genocide or crimes against humanity when their own states cannot or will not protect them, or indeed are committing these crimes themselves.

World leaders also agreed a new Peacebuilding Commission to help countries recover from conflict, a new UN fund for humanitarian crises like Darfur and Niger, and a new council for human rights.

Some express cynicism about the progress we have made, but we should remember that such cynicism does not get a single child into school, or prevent a woman dying in childbirth. If we celebrate our progress, we encourage hope. And then, encouraged by what we have achieved, we can look forward to what else needs to be done, and resolve to do it.

A hundred years ago, did we think we could eradicate smallpox? No, but we have – a fantastic achievement. I am proud too of what we have done on Polio, helping to fill the immunisation gap over the next few years. Imagine if we could eradicate Polio as well as smallpox.

These agreements have not made poverty history, but we have taken steps towards making it a real possibility. None of this could have been achieved without public support and without informed citizens holding their governments to account and demanding action. This is where development awareness comes in, and the importance of development education policy.

Among my earliest political memories are of being taken by my father on marches to Trafalgar Square in London in support of the Movement for Colonial Freedom. When you are eight years old you do not always understand what is being said, but I understood enough on those marches to realise that something important was going on, and so it was. It was Africa seeking to shake off the chains of colonial rule and to find its freedom.

It is the same in school. A good education is a foundation for life and a school curriculum that increases the awareness of young people to the 'global dimension', has the potential to create global citizens that can help change this world for the better.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has worked since 1997 to develop further its strategy 'Putting the Global Dimension into the Curriculum' across schools in the United Kingdom (UK) through a

number of different initiatives including its work with the Development Education Association and regional Development Education Centres, with local education authorities, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and with schools more directly. More recently it has developed a regional strategy called the 'Enabling Effective Support' initiative which focuses on joining up activities on a more regional level. The relationship with the Department for Education and Skills (DFES) has also gone from strength to strength and DFES has itself recently published its own international strategy to 'Put the World into World Class Education' which will prove to be a very important document for the future.

DFID's budget for development awareness in the UK has increased from £1.5 million in 1997 to about £9 million in 2005, which reflects its increasing importance.

The results of efforts here, and elsewhere, mean that awareness of global issues amongst school children has climbed from 69% in 2000 to 88% in 2003. And our surveys of the public show that the number of people who think that global poverty is likely to impact on the interests of the UK has steadily increased from 61% to 66% in 2003.

Recently we worked in partnership with Rough Guides to publish the *Rough Guide to a Better World* to encourage the UK public to become more actively involved in fighting poverty. The *Rough Guide* explains the challenges for development, the Millennium Development Goals highlight progress that has already been made and explain basic actions that individuals can do that will make a difference.

"Everyone remembers a good teacher" means something to us here in UK, but there are still 100 million children in poor countries - that's equivalent to twice the population of England - who have never had the opportunity to remember any teacher. Some two out of three children in Africa start primary school but never finish it; and what about the children sitting in the back of a primary school class in Malawi, where teacher to pupil ratios are over 1 to 60. Here in the UK they are 1 to 17.

We need to be sure that awareness and understanding of development is high and continues to grow in the UK; awareness that over 1 in 5 people live on less than a dollar a day, that is less than 60p a day; awareness that in a single day, 30,000 children die of easily preventable diseases. That is equivalent to sixty Jumbo-jets crashing each day. These facts do not mean we should give up hope. Just the opposite, they should spur everyone on.

A greater understanding of the issues - through development awareness in education - gives young people the ability to contribute to the fight against poverty; to connect complicated global issues with their own responsibilities and actions as global citizens through advocacy,

volunteering, ethical consumer choice and as adults in how they vote.

This world is richer than ever before – in wealth of course, but also in technology, and ideas. So we know what we must do, and we have the means to change things. Ours is the generation upon whom this responsibility has fallen.

None of what we have achieved so far would have been possible without all those who have led, marched and campaigned, demanding not charity, but justice. None of the progress we have yet to make will happen unless we show the same determination to match passion with practical commitment.

We owe it to all the people who have died, to every child not yet in school, to each human being who goes hungry every night, to accept that responsibility and to do what must be done to change our world for the better.

Hilary Benn MP is the Secretary of State for International Development in the United Kingdom. As Secretary of State, which includes being the Prime Minister’s Africa Personal Representative, he is accountable to Parliament for the work of the Department for International Development (DFID).

For more information, and to sign up to the free e-bulletin to find out what DFID are doing to tackle global poverty, or to subscribe to the free ‘Developments’ magazine, visit the DFID website: www.dfid.gov.uk.