



Are the UN Millennial Goals Still Feasible ?---What Can Churches Do?

The eight UN Millennial Goals got unfolded with great splash and fanfare in 2000, with 189 U. N. member States formally endorsing them as a sort of solemn covenant. The eight goals encapsulated previously agreed upon targets, from a number of special UN sessions, on international development. With the strong endorsement of Bono and Bob Geffen, many celebrities boastfully proclaimed “ the end of poverty as we know it”. Dubbed the Millennium Development Goals, the eight (many of them inter-related) goals had the decided virtue, finally, of setting out concrete and even measurable development objectives. A target date of 2015 was set to achieve the goals. The point of the goals was to move from previous vague statements of desiderata to concrete targets. At the time, they were seen as achievable. Five years later, 2005, at Gleneagles in

Scotland, Tony Blair hosted the G-8 summit and, again, a firm and solemn covenant was pronounced to achieve the eight goals.

The eight Millennial goals are the following:

- To eradicate extreme poverty and halve the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day.
- To provide universal primary education for all.
- To promote gender equality and empower women, ensuring women's equal rights and opportunities, especially in primary and secondary schools.
- To reduce infant mortality by two-thirds.
- To reduce maternal mortality by three-quarters.
- To halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/Aids, malaria and tuberculosis.
- To ensure environmental sustainability and reduce by half the proportion of people (that proportion is presently 1 billion), without sustainable access to safe drinking water. 2.4 billion on earth lack adequate sanitation facilities.
- To develop a global partnership for development, including targets for developed countries, to remove barriers to the import of goods from poorer countries and for Official Development Assistance from developed countries to increase to .7 (seven tenths of one percent) of Gross National Income.

Last week I attended a two-day conference in San Francisco, sponsored as a National Inter-faith Conference on Global Poverty. The Conference tried to get inter-faith groups (Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Moslem, Hindu) to work together to jump-start, in civil society , in lobbies and joint efforts, a new phase on the UN Millennial Goals. With just five years to go on the target, the original goals have fallen woefully

short of expectations. There will be another UN Summit, this coming September, to try to re-ignite global solidarity on the goals, five years short of their target date.

There have been, to be sure, some major successes in the last decade in combating extreme poverty and hunger, improving school enrollment and child health, expanding access to clean water and to HIV treatment and controlling malaria, tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases. Yet, overall, the achievement record seems fairly dismal. In 2005, there were still 1.4 billion people living on a dollar or less a day. This was down from 1.8 billion in 1990. Yet most of this decrease took place in China and India. Without China, the number of people living in extreme poverty actually increased, between 1990 and 2005, by about 36 million. The goal of halving this number failed.

The number of hungry in the world has been actually rising since 1995. There are still over a billion hungry people and more than 2 billion people who are deficient in micronutrients. The number of hungry people world-wide rose from 842 million in 1990-1992 to 873 million in 2004-2006 and to 1.02 billion during 2009. The fuel and food crises of 2007-2008 exacerbated the level of hunger.

If there is one bright spot, it has been the remarkable progress toward achieving universal primary education for all in developing countries. Many poorer countries have passed the 90 percent enrollment threshold. Enrollment in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 58 % in 2000 to 74% in 2007. Yet girls' progress in education has been by far slower than anticipated. Women around the world continue to assume the largest share of unpaid work. Violence against women remains a major issue worldwide.

While there has been some notable progress in the reduction of deaths among children under five years of age (reduced from 12.5 million per year in 1990 to 8.8

million in 2008), the child mortality rate reductions in developing countries fell well short of the proposed target of a two thirds reduction. The reductions, overall, were from 99 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 72 in 2008 (the target reduction of two-thirds would have reduced that to 33 by 2015). Alas, the progress in reducing maternal mortality has come nowhere near the target goal. Nor have the goals for clean water or sanitation. With the conspicuous exceptions of The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, the developed countries' aid falls egregiously below the seven-tenths of one percent goal. The United States, especially, is niggardly in its aid.

A recent document from the UN spells out the statistical successes and failures at the current stage of the targeted goals (cf. Keeping the Promise: A Forward-Looking Review to Promote an Agreed Action Agenda to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015—Report of the Secretary General). That report makes clear that, if there have been huge failures in the decade of working on the targeted goals, there have also been important lessons learned, e.g., about targeting aid to civil society groups and not just governments; about finding ways to bundle aid from differing governments and foundations to tackle a common issue; about the need to pay more attention to health-care infra-structure and the training of health workers. The Secretary General's report seems to think the original Millennial goals are still feasible. I much doubt that.

The original impetus for the goals stressed their precise feasibility and the targeting of them in a quantitative and measurable way. I suspect they will have more bite if, if necessary, they are revised to more achievable goals by 2015, taking into account some of the lessons learned about obstacles to development. Otherwise they will seem once again, mere desiderata or utopian dreams. Governments can not be left off the hook.

I have been saying, recently, a prayer composed by The Center of Concern.: “ In a world where so many go hungry, let us make the fruits of creation available for all. In a world where one billion of our brothers and sisters do not have drinking water, let us help the waters run clear. In a world where so many children die so young, and so many mothers die in childbirth, and so many families are ravaged by disease , let us bring health and healing. In a world where women carry such heavy burdens, let us recognize and restore the rights of all. Let us join together with a new sense of global community, A new awareness of our need for one another and for this fragile planet , to meet the clear challenges of the Millennium Goals, to bring hope as substantial as bread, to make human dignity as viable as wheat in the fields.”