

Media Release



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Oxfam challenges governments – back Annan's vision, save lives

New York: International agency Oxfam today challenged world leaders to seize the chance to save millions of lives by acting on Kofi Annan's blueprint for a safer, fairer world. Governments must now make long overdue commitments to protect civilians in conflict, the agency said, as well as deliver urgently needed aid, debt relief and trade reforms.

The Secretary General's report, released today, sets out a bold agenda to be endorsed by governments at the UN Millennium Plus Five Summit in New York in September 2005. One of its key calls is for the international community to agree that it has a 'responsibility to protect' civilians caught up in warfare, and, as a last resort, to use military force to do so.

"Millions of people are dying because of conflict and poverty while rich countries are busy jostling for Security Council seats," said Nicola Reindorp, head of Oxfam's New York office. "Governments must come together at the UN this year and focus on the real task of ending poverty and protecting innocent people caught in deadly conflicts."

Oxfam believes that by agreeing governments' responsibilities to protect civilians, and clear criteria for UN-authorized military intervention as a last resort, the international community could make significant strides towards ending the obscene levels of civilian suffering in today's conflict zones.

"From Rwanda to Darfur, the United Nations system has time and again failed to mobilise the political will and funds needed to protect civilians," said Oxfam's Reindorp. "Ultimately governments have the power and the responsibility to act to save lives."

Oxfam strongly believes that ending poverty around the world is the only way to ensure collective global security and that rich and poor nations must seize the golden opportunity of this report and the Summit to change the lives of millions trapped in conflict and poverty.

"Kofi Annan's report throws down the gauntlet to the leaders of rich and poor countries. In 2005 they must commit to increased overseas aid and debt relief and tough trade reforms and tougher arms controls," said Oxfam's Reindorp.

"This represents a challenge to New Zealand," said Barry Coates, Executive Director of Oxfam New Zealand.

"While generally supportive of the United Nations, the New Zealand government has failed to meet the challenge of supporting the poverty reduction targets agreed by all the member nations."

Oxfam New Zealand calls on the government to respond quickly to support this UN report. This means setting a timetable for meeting the agreed target for aid levels, supporting the call for 100% cancellation of the debts of the poorest countries, and ensuring that developing countries are allowed to prioritise poverty reduction in world trade talks.

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Notes to editors

- Two recently released UN reports have provided the foundation for Kofi Annan's report: the report of the Secretary General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, released in December 2004, and the report of the Millennium Project by Jeffrey Sachs, released in January 2005.
- The Millennium Development Goals are eight targets agreed by over 190 governments in 2000 to help eradicate poverty through action by developed and developing countries. They focus on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other preventable diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development. But at current rates of progress, many of the goals will be missed in many parts of the world.
- Oxfam calculates that if the world fails to meet the Millennium Development Goals and current trends are allowed to continue:
 - 45 million more children will die between now and 2015
 - 247 million more people in Sub-Saharan Africa will be living on less than \$1 a day in 2015
 - 97 million more children will still be out of school in 2015
 - 53 million more people in the world will lack proper sanitation facilities
- NZ overseas aid currently amounts to 0.26% of Gross National Income. The UN report would require this to almost double to 0.5% by 2009 and increase further to 0.7% by 2015.

For interviews with Oxfam New Zealand's Executive Director, Barry Coates or further information please contact Prue Smith on 09 355 6858 or 021 1400 825.

Oxfam works with others to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice.

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