

Sharp Rebuke for Author of Guardian Editorial by NE-CAP's Coordinator

Published in The Guardian ('Letters and emails'), 22nd July 2011,
in response to a leader entitled, "David Cameron in Africa, Resolute on Aid", 20th July 2011

You didn't quite join the ranks of the bar room bigots with your leader on international aid (20th July), but will certainly have helped confirm their prejudices. You say that we have "*little to show for [our] efforts*" – that's rich, given that developed countries, have repeatedly and brazenly broken their promises in this regard. Anyway, it's a travesty of the truth – nearly 7 million people are now receiving treatment for AIDS, sixteen times as many as in 2003; an extra 40 million children are in school; maternal mortality has been reduced by 30%, etc. "*Little to show*" indeed!

But that isn't even half of it! We shouldn't delude ourselves that we are really giving them anything. Unfair trade rules, tax fiddles by big corporations, and debt repayments, each cost poor countries far more than they get in aid. And those things don't take into account our habit of 'poaching' many of their brightest and best trained people, nor the impacts of climate change, for which we are entirely responsible. What is a constant source of amazement to me is that poor countries have made any progress at all! But they have: as Salil Shetty, Director of the United Nations Millennium Campaign, put it last year, "*Instead of just lamenting that Africa might miss the MDG targets, we should be celebrating the real changes that have happened in the lives of millions of poor people*".

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David comments further:

Re. their 'efforts': During the year 2000, the world's leaders pledged to halve severe poverty by 2015, stating that "*We will spare no effort* [note, "spare no effort"] *to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty*" (Millennium Declaration, September 2000). They made similar commitments in 2005 at the Gleneagles summit of G8 leaders, and promised, amongst other things, to reform international trade rules, boost aid by explicit amounts, and to tackle climate change.

Although *some*, such as Britain, have made real efforts to fulfil *some* of these pledges, their record overall can only be summed up by the words of Bono: "*Telling lies to Bob [Geldof] and me is one thing. Putting their signature on a G8 communique and lying to their citizenry is another matter. Breaking promises to the most vulnerable people on earth is real infamy.*"

I conclude that rich country leaders have shown more 'effort' to confirm their already well-deserved reputation for perfidy than to honour their solemn promises to the poor and vulnerable.

Re. poverty reduction and good governance: The assertion in the article, that "*Above all, the cart of poverty reduction [has been put] before the horse of good governance*" is almost unbelievable in its naivety. If we wait till impoverished societies sort out their problems with corruption before tackling poverty, we'll wait for ever, because extreme poverty is one of the main engines of corruption.

As Professor Jeffrey Sachs, formerly Economics Advisor to the UN Secretary General, explains, "*Good governance raises incomes, but also, and perhaps even more important... higher income leads to improved governance.*" [My emphasis] Sachs gives two major reasons for this latter point: first, "*a more literate and affluent society is better able to keep the government honest... second, a more affluent society can afford to invest in high quality governance*" – for example, pay civil servants, teachers, police, etc, a living wage.

If The Guardian is looking for an analogy based on travel, it should forget about horse and cart and consider pedal power – in particular, the tandem!

In conclusion, with friends like these, who needs enemies? ☹️ But it was generous of them to publish my critique! 😊

A brief substantiation for the assertions made re. trade, tax and debt injustices is provided in the document entitled, "*Britain should keep its promises on international aid!*"