

THE MICAH CHALLENGE

MAKING POVERTY REDUCTION A PRIORITY

The Problem—Global Poverty

Today, in the midst of unprecedented global wealth, over 1 billion people live in abject poverty on less than \$1 a day. 50,000 people die each day from preventable, poverty-related diseases. 800 million people are going hungry in a bountiful creation. Poverty is a major threat to life, security, and sustainable development, and it is unnecessary. Solutions are known and global resources are more than adequate to end extreme poverty.

The Promise—Millennium Development Goals

In December 2000, as part of the Millennium Declaration, countries around the world agreed to a set of targets to reduce global poverty. Collectively they are called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These measurable, time-bound targets address poverty and hunger, education, maternal and child health, the prevalence of diseases including HIV/AIDS, gender equality, the environment, debt, trade and aid.¹

In 2000, Canada agreed to do its part to achieve the MDGs by 2015. The goals are achievable, but the current pace of action is much too slow. If we hold the present course, we will fail to meet these important targets. And the poor will pay the price, again.

The Micah Challenge

The Micah Challenge is a global campaign by Christians to reduce poverty substantially and influence national leaders to fulfill their public pledges to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Micah Challenge was launched globally on October 15, 2004 in conjunction with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and was launched in Canada on October 18, 2004.

Internationally, the Micah Challenge is a joint project of the Micah Network and the World Evangelical Alliance. The Micah Network brings together more than 270 Christian organisations providing relief, development and justice ministries throughout the world. The World Evangelical Alliance is a global network of about 3

million local churches in 111 countries, as well as 104 organisational ministries and six specialized ministries serving churches worldwide.

Within Canada, the Micah Challenge is led and supported by a broad network of cooperating denominations and agencies. These agencies include the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, World Vision Canada, the Canadian Christian Relief and Development Association and the Canadian Youth Network.

The Micah Challenge is a call for justice and mercy for all. The campaign is named for Micah, an Old Testament prophet of justice, and our aim is to respond to the call found in Micah 6:8: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The Micah Call: Making Poverty Reduction a Priority

We live in difficult times. In the past year alone, we have seen human populations devastated by disease, hunger, man-made terror, and natural disaster. We respond because we care about the members of our global human family. Poverty reduction is at the heart of compassionate development.

Poverty reduction is also key to global security. As a global population we are irreversibly interconnected; development and prosperity in each community benefits us all. Societies in which the poor are neither exploited nor denied justice are more stable societies. Countries that are economically stable and growing make better trading partners than countries that are impoverished and wrought with conflict. Global poverty reduction is an investment in global security, and a vital part of building a more just and peaceful world. Reducing global poverty must become a high priority in Canada's international policy.

Canada made a commitment in 2000 to do its part to achieve the MDGs by 2015. The eighth millennium development goal requires countries like Canada to provide more and better aid to developing countries, along with trade justice and debt relief. We are not looking for new promises. To reach the MDGs, Canada must focus on poverty reduction, and keep its past commitments.

In Summary, we call on the Government of Canada to:

Make global poverty reduction a high priority in Canada's International Policy

The Micah Challenge calls for poverty reduction to become a clearly articulated priority in Canada's international policy and, specifically, for urgent and meaningful policy change in three areas: more and better aid, trade justice and debt relief.

Deliver More and More Effective Aid

The Micah Challenge calls for Canada to set 2015 as the year it will meet the long-established aid target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) and put in place a timetable of gradual increases to this goal, starting with a 12% increase in the next budget. We also call on Canada to make poverty reduction the single focus for Canada's aid program through a legislated mandate and accountability to the mandate.

Agricultural Trade that Works for the Poor

The Micah Challenge calls for Canada to take a more positive stance towards development requirements in international agricultural trade negotiations, both regionally (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) and globally (World Trade Organization). We also call for Canada to push for international agricultural trade rules that encourage improving the livelihoods of small farmers in developing countries, a vital element in tackling poverty and hunger (the first millennium development goal).

Debt Relief – Finish the Job in 2005

The Micah Challenge calls for Canada to work with G-8 leaders on a financing plan for debt cancellation that does not include cuts to foreign aid, push for cancellation of debts owed to multilateral financial institutions for all poor countries. We also call for Canada to work toward replacing World Bank control of debt management with increased accountability of governments to their own citizens for the use of money saved.

Resources freed up by debt cancellation are needed to achieve the MDGs. It is time to act.

¹ For more information about the MDG's, visit our website:
www.micahchallenge.org/millennium_development_goals/