

Patrons:

Helen Goodman
Labour MP for Bishop Auckland

Guy Opperman
Cons MP for Hexham

Lord Rupert Redesdale
Liberal Democrat Peer

NorthEast

CALL TO ACTION

on global poverty & climate change

Rt Revd Paul Butler
Bishop of Durham

Jonathan Edwards CBE

Beth Farhat
Regional Secretary, TUC

John Grundy
Writer & Broadcaster

‘Protect the Aid Budget!’
- a Reasoned Request to North East MPs

The Request:

North East CALL TO ACTION asks all NE MPs to take part in the debate on Monday 13th June and to make clear their repudiation, in the strongest possible terms, of the move to cut the international aid budget.

The Reasons:

Our reputation: It took 41 years for our country finally to keep its oft-repeated solemn pledge to the world’s poor to allocate 0.7% of our national income to aid. The idea that we could renege on that promise after only four years is insupportable!

Our complicity in economic injustice: Unfair trade rules, tax dodges by big corporations and debt repayments cost poor countries far more than they get in aid. But above all else, there’s the damage caused by climate change, potentially an injustice surpassing all others. *So just who’s aiding whom?!*

Our leadership: *The worst lies on aid told by the tabloids are the truths they don’t tell!* Our aid has played a leading role in ensuring that global child mortality is *down more than half*, from 12.7 million each year in 1990, to about 6 million in 2014 (data by WHO, UNICEF, etc). *Such progress is without precedent in human history!* But this means that 17,000 children are still dying needlessly every day, bringing heartbreak to those who love them. This is just one of many examples of great progress - and of the great needs and challenges which remain.

UK Aid specifically is reckoned to save someone’s life every two minutes. For example, it paid for emergency shelter for 280,000 families after the Nepal earthquake last year, and pays for 10 million poor children to go to school.

Our aspiration: In Sept 2000, Britain endorsed the UN’s Millennium Declaration:

“We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty.”

Let’s not allow these to be mere words, but press on to achieve this great goal!

Cont’d over...

NorthEast
CALL TO ACTION

Chair, Judith Sadler; Vice-Chair, Rosemary Theobalds; Secretary, Lynn Fletcher; Treasurer, Mike Waller; Development Coordinator, David Golding; Mailing List Manager, Veronica Golding.

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Millennium Development Goal 6 on HIV/AIDS reached!

- humanity's greatest achievement of the new millennium?

"There is a continent - Africa - being consumed by flames. I truly believe that when the history books are written, our age will be remembered for... what we did - or did not do – to put the fire out in Africa." (Bono, addressing the National Prayer Breakfast, Washington, attended by President Bush and members of Congress, February 2006)

"We believe AIDS is the worst catastrophe ever to hit the world."
(Carol Bellamy, UNICEF's Executive Director)

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, economics advisor to the United Nations, was visiting the main hospital in Malawi in the early 2000s, and the doctor suggested he stepped into the medical ward. This is the scene which greeted him, in his own words:

"There was no medicine in the medical ward. The ward had 150 beds - there were 450 people in the ward. These 450 people were crammed into a room with 150 beds by putting three people in or around each bed. Two people were lying head to toe, toe to head, in each bed – strangers sharing a death bed. Alongside or underneath the bed there was somebody on the ground, sometimes literally on the ground or sometimes on a piece of cardboard, dying beneath the bed. The room was filled with moans. Family members were sitting by the beds, swabbing dried lips and watching their loved ones die." Die of AIDS, of course.

The government of Malawi could not afford to buy drugs for the million people dying of AIDS and turned to the rich countries for help. They drew up what Sachs described as *"one of the best conceived strategies"* he had seen, *"an enormously thoughtful response to the challenges"* involved in responding to this nightmare. They then asked for support that would enable them to treat 300,000 people - about one third of those with AIDS. The US and Europe said the proposal was *"too ambitious and too costly"* and after repeated haggling cut the number down to just 25,000 – that's treatment for one person in every 36 suffering from AIDS. The rest, the West decided, would be left to rot.

The fact is that we have not, thank God, been complacent in the face of the outrage described above, and we have made extraordinary progress. The callous and disgraceful response to the plea for help from Malawi was *then*, not *now*. In 2005 in particular, British political leaders, urged on by the Make Poverty History campaign, secured a clear commitment from G8 to tackle this scourge, and large amounts of money have been provided for health education, anti-AIDS drugs, testing kits and health facilities. Money secured by the campaign for debt relief has also been put to this use.

As a result, Michel Sidibe, Executive Director of the UN's AIDS body, was able to announce last year that, *"We have halted and begun to reverse the epidemic. Fewer people are becoming infected with HIV and fewer people are dying from AIDS... the goal of 15 million people on life-saving HIV treatment by the end of 2015 has been met nine months ahead of schedule... [15 million people! As compared with about 250,000 in 2001 – 60 times as many!]*

"The world has exceeded the AIDS targets of MDG 6 and is on track to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030." (Michel Sidibe, Executive Director of UNAIDS)

The idea that this could have been achieved without large amounts of international aid is laughable, and it is hugely gratifying the UK has been one of the biggest donors to the 'Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, etc.'

But note that we're only *"on track"* to end the AIDS epidemic – there's still a long way to go, and financial support is still desperately needed to *keep* us *"on track"*, given the obscenity of about 200,000 babies still being infected with HIV at birth (something easily prevented), each year, for example, and other daunting challenges.