

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, 2006**  
***ENDING GLOBAL POVERTY***

*There is no lot which is harder than poverty,...*  
(Exodus R., *Mishpatim*, xxxi, 12)

**Issue**

For many nations this is a time of unparalleled wealth and prosperity, yet globally more than 800 million people go hungry every day – 300 million are children – more than one billion people lack access to clean drinking water; and 2.6 billion live without basic sanitation facilities.<sup>1</sup> Women make up the largest percentage of those in the poorest population quintile worldwide.

**Background**

At the 2000 UN Millennium Summit, international leaders, including President Clinton, met to combat global poverty, setting forth eight goals, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for which there are quantified and measurable targets to halve global poverty by 2015. Endorsed by all 191 member nations, the Millennium Development Goals provide an unambiguous plan to markedly reduce poverty, hunger, and disease. Precisely because this is a time of great prosperity, the wealthy nations of the world are enabled to work together to end global poverty. *Pathway to Gender Equality: CEDAW, Beijing and the MDGs*, a United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) publication, stresses the need to link the MDGs to the requirements of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women for successful reduction of global poverty.

The Millennium Goals include: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development. Through the years WRJ has taken strong positions on the issues addressed in the first seven goals.

The targets for the eighth and last of the Millennium Development Goals – to develop a global partnership for development – address necessary action by developed countries to help developing countries meet this goal.<sup>2</sup> The targets call for more generous aid to countries committed to poverty reduction, debt cancellation for poor countries, and more equitable trade rules. The United States and Canada have made repeated promises to increase the percentage of their Gross National Product (GNP) that they commit to development assistance. Specifically, the UN Earth Summit of 1992 and Monterrey Consensus of 2002 reaffirm this commitment to allocate 0.7% of GNP to development

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<sup>1</sup> Fast Facts: The Faces of Poverty. The Millennium Project.  
<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/facts/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> The delegates to the 2005 Union for Reform Judaism Biennial Assembly adopted the resolution “Ending Global Poverty.” WRJ concurs with that resolution and appreciates the opportunity to include portions of it here.

assistance. To meet its pledge, the United States will need to quadruple its current development assistance, while Canada will need to nearly triple its current funding.

### Global Poverty and Health

The AIDS emergency is one of the worst health catastrophes in human history and is severely exacerbating the poverty crisis in many parts of the world. By 2004, more than forty million people around the world had been infected with HIV, and nearly thirty million people had died from AIDS. Every day, 14,000 people are newly infected and 8,500 people die. Tuberculosis and malaria, two deadly diseases in their own right, are responsible for more than half of all AIDS deaths in the developing world, and together AIDS, TB, and malaria kill six million people every year.<sup>3</sup>

Local cultural values of sexual ignorance and purity, as well as power imbalances between women and men, put women at a disadvantage in seeking safe sexual practices, making women particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Compounding the urgency of the situation are the secondary aspects of the AIDS crisis. Across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Americas, by 2004 AIDS had killed or incapacitated seven million agricultural workers so that fifteen million people are at risk of starvation in 2005 even without serious drought conditions. High rates of HIV/AIDS among teachers, law enforcement personnel, health care staff, and other workers threaten the economic security and future of many countries in the developing world. Fourteen million children have lost at least one parent to the virus, dooming a second generation to poverty.

### Global Poverty and Debt Relief

While increased funding is necessary to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, it is not enough. International debt continues to hamstring poor countries' efforts to invest in their populations. Even with 100% debt cancellation for 18 poor countries in 2005, other poor countries continue to spend billions in debt service payments. This cripples their ability to provide education, health care and other essential services to their impoverished populations. Moreover, debt relief is too often conditioned on economic policies that deepen poverty or degrade the environment, such as requiring user fees for health care or education. The United Nations has declared that only full debt cancellation would free the resources needed. Many experts point out that debt cancellation needs to be done in a manner that does not undermine the World Bank and other development banks' ability to make loans to developing nations.

### Global Poverty and Fair Trade Rules

Finally, fair trade rules are necessary to meet the Development Goals. More than half the world's population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. Therefore, changes in agricultural trade policies affect billions of people. Current policies, which include billions of dollars in subsidies for farmers in developed countries, assure unequal trade. All 191 signatories of the Millennium Development Goals agree that an open, rules-based system of trade, where trade rules are applied to all countries equally, is necessary to alleviate poverty. Individuals can support fair trade goods, already available on the global

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unaids.org>

market, by buying items such as food and clothing that are labeled “Fair Trade” and ensure a fair wage and safe working environment for the producers.

### **Resolution**

In accordance with long-standing commitments to social and economic justice, Women of Reform Judaism resolves to:

1. Endorse the Millennium Development Goals to work towards ending global poverty;
2. Urge international agencies to inform implementation of the MDGs with the policies required by CEDAW and Beijing.
3. Call on the governments of the United States and Canada to increase funding for development assistance to 0.7% of GNP as previously promised;
4. Urge the United States and Canada to contribute generously to the global campaigns to combat AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria;
5. Advocate support of all scientifically proven means of disease prevention, including the use of condoms;
6. Call on multinational corporations and their affiliated companies to provide employees and their dependents with immediate affordable access to treatment for AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria;
7. Commend the United States and Canadian governments for their leadership in canceling 100% of the debts of 18 of the world’s poorest nations;
8. Call on the U.S. and Canadian governments to continue debt negotiations until agreement is reached on 100% debt cancellation without harmful economic conditions attached, for all poor countries with accountable and responsible governments that are burdened with high levels of human need and environmental distress;
9. Call for strict accountability, and rigorous oversight of debt cancellation to prevent fraudulent behavior by government officials and administrators responsible for the distribution of funds; and
10. Urge the United States and Canada to meet their commitments to create a fair system of international trade that protects labor rights, access to essential medicines, local food production, environmental integrity, and the livelihoods of farmers, and that prioritizes poverty reduction for the most vulnerable members of society.

Moreover, WRJ urges its affiliates to:

1. Develop informative programs on the Millennium Development Goals as a practical and effective means to end global poverty;
2. Help identify and utilize Fair Trade products; and
3. Support the work of international relief organizations including, but not limited to, American Jewish World Service, MAZON, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.