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# Canada dropping ball, not aid



JESSICA WARDEN

On 7 July, 2005, the leaders of the world's eight richest nations gathered in Gleneagles, Scotland and reached an historic agreement to significantly reduce world poverty by the year 2015.

These Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were brought about in part due to the promise of each nation to dedicate 0.7 per cent of their respective Gross National Incomes (GNIs) to poverty alleviation in the form of aid. In 2005-2006, Canada dedicated a mere 0.33 per cent of its GNI to foreign aid—short of the 0.51 per cent that would put us on track to realizing our commitments.

Canada has one of the most robust economies in the G8; however, we still aren't on track to fulfilling our promises to the rest of the world.

While all of Canada's major political parties have pledged to reach the 0.7 per cent target in aid by 2015, the Canadian government has still refused to create a valid timeline for reaching its stated goals.

Thus far, individual Canadians have sent emails numbering in the tens of thousands to the Prime Minister's office demanding that the government increase its contributions to poor

countries—yet even the demands of Canadian citizens are going unheeded by our political leaders.

It's becoming redundant to hear government officials deriding monetary aid to developing countries as useless because of the "corruption" of the receiving governments.

Developing countries are receiving around \$50 billion per year in aid from the West, but are simultaneously losing \$100 billion dollars a year due to unfair trade laws. But the fact that for every dollar in Canadian aid given, Canada itself receives two dollars back indicates that there is as much government corruption at home as there is abroad.

This supports the idea that whatever corruption exists in the Southern hemisphere, it's being supported by the North's unwillingness to work with developing countries by forgiving their debts and establishing more balanced international trade laws.

Since the modification of trade rules is a slow process, the best short-term solution would be the forgiving of debts and the realization of the 0.7 per cent promise in aid.

The MDGs aren't simply best-case-scenario results, they're the proven result of more aid given to developing countries. Zambia, for instance, has been able to begin providing free health care to people in rural areas as a result of the cancellation of its debt and aid increases.

Real money means real solutions to developing countries, yet the Canadian government continues to lag behind other G8 nations in its commitment to

improving the quality of life of people living in the nations that supply us with our cheap coffee, bananas, clothing, and other products essential to the North American way of life.

Canada's continuing refusal to live up to its aid promises proves three things. First, it shows that the Canadian government doesn't consider its obligations to developing countries to be worthy of respect.

Second, it demonstrates that Canada is willing to use developing countries to its own advantage by both using their plight as a way of gaining temporary international credibility at meetings like the G8 summit, and by profiting from willfully unfair trade laws.

Third, it proves that the Canadian government, simply put, thinks less of the lives of people living in the developing world than it does the lives of those living in the West—a curious conclusion given Canada's love of painting itself as the world's peace-keeper and harbinger of human rights to all.

The realization of these MDGs would see a world where antiretrovirals are provided to all AIDS sufferers, primary education is a right rather than a privilege, and adequate housing and food are available for all.

The Canadian government and people owe developing countries a lot more than debt cancellation and aid money. Trade laws are the root of the problem, but for now, money is the best short-term answer to the great injustices occurring daily in the name of Western development and the continuance of our way of life.

## Time to cut out the constitutional malarkey



JACALYN AMBLER

In this way, we've opted for a "sort-of, but not really" independence—much like the child who moves away to the big city but keeps a room in her parents basement just in case.

Despite contrary sentiments, Canada no longer really has a significant cultural or political exchange with Britain—at least not compared to the relationship that we have with the US. The real consequence of our constitutional limbo is therefore not interference from the Crown, but merely the creation of several symbolic offices—those of the Governor General, and the provincial Lieutenant Governors—each of whom acts as a representative of the monarchy in Canada.

Since the Queen is apparently unconcerned with our own affairs—she's not even publicly vociferous when it comes to those of her own country—her representatives busy themselves with many lovely yet purely symbolic tasks such as the giving of royal assent and the reading of the Throne Speech.

This absence of any real contribution to the Canadian political process has long raised the eyebrows of those who see the Governor General as a bearer of an expired stamp of approval, and this criticism would be valid even if these offices were volunteer positions, good for the resumé and perhaps the self-esteem, but of small financial stature. They're, however, salaried roles that include the freedom to dispense with millions of taxpayer dollars, seldom for any foreseeable reason.

In 2003, the budget of the Governor General actually increased to \$41 million—and yet, Michaëlle Jean's official website is unable to provide any example of worthwhile programs that have been supported with this money.

The usual justification for this governmental indulgence is typically the same one used for the title: the

number-one reason that Canadians are in favour of keeping the monarchy behind the constitution is that it supports and preserves "tradition."

Others argue that it gives us a sense of cultural recognition—the official website even states one of the office's main functions as "Representing Canadians and promoting our sovereignty."

These are all important goals. So important, in fact, that one might wonder why we're not actually investing this money in programs that might achieve them. It's important to keep sight of our past, but in keeping our gaze so firmly fixed on what represents the gilded hallways and shiny crowns of the old world in hopes that it will give us some sort of vicarious cultural glow, we're shooting our cultural future in the foot.

As we creep up on the second decade of a new century, we find ourselves faced with real problems—those relating to the environment, global and national health concerns, energy, and infrastructure development. Spending our tax money in pursuit of solutions for them holds the potential to foster a true sense of our national pride.

Advocates of the monarchy may argue that cultural development and unification in the coming decades will be a concern just as great as any of these, and I agree. However, I fail to see how they expect an association with Britain to assist in solving this problem, especially when they're clearly showing the marks of their own struggle with it.

As we leave Victoria Day and move towards our own celebration of sovereignty on the first of July, let's develop a cultural foundation for the 21st-century Canadian, but let's do it ourselves. Our estranged mother-country has enough to deal with without her 130-something children hanging onto her skirt.