

2005 is crucial year for cutting poverty, say religious experts: Progress toward Millennium Development Goals abysmal

News in the [May 3, 2005](#) issue

A third of the way into the 15-year United Nations program aimed at cutting global poverty by 50 percent, church leaders say progress so far has been abysmal and 2005 is a make-or-break year for the program.

The eight-pronged Millennium Development Goals will fail unless governments commit the resources to achieve them, according to the Anglican archbishop of South Africa.

“Globalization has accorded this world so much prosperity and progress, it is not only sinful but also morally wrong that there are people who go hungry every day,” Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane said in an interview.

Supporters say unless efforts are refocused at three key meetings this year, the world will fail to keep promises made in 2000 to combat poverty, hunger, lack of education, high child and maternal mortality rates and HIV/AIDS.

Sparked by the Jubilee campaign in 2000 that helped erase crushing debt loads owed by poor Third World countries, religious groups from across the spectrum have shown unprecedented unity in fighting global poverty.

The One Campaign, for example, brought together a dozen Christian and secular relief groups to keep focus on the millennium goals. Last year Ndungane helped inaugurate the Micah Challenge, a coalition of 260 nonprofit aid groups with the same goal.

Activists worry, however, that the world’s attention is fading. Ndungane, visiting Washington to lobby for the program, has emerged as a leading voice for Third

World development, much the way his predecessor, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, focused the world's attention on apartheid in South Africa. On a scale of 1 to 10, he rates progress at a 3. "Five years down the line our record has not been good," he said, blaming inaction on Western greed, selfishness and lack of political will.

Three meetings this year—the annual summit of G-8 nations in Scotland; a UN summit on the millennium goals next fall; and a December World Trade Organization meeting in Hong Kong—may determine the future of the initiative.

Last year, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said the effort needs a "quantum leap" in order to meet its goals. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, said it's now time for the U.S. and others to "get serious about getting the job done." - *Religion News Service*