

Christian aid groups disappointed with G8: Plans will not make poverty history

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Britain's two largest Christian aid organizations have expressed disappointment about the Africa package agreed to at a meeting of the Group of Eight (G8) nations last month in Scotland, but have pledged to fight on for economic and trade justice.

G8 leaders said in their July 8 communiqué: "We have agreed to double aid for Africa by 2010. Aid for all developing countries will increase, according to the OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development], by around \$50 billion per year by 2010, of which at least \$25 billion extra per year is for Africa."

At least one African church group rued that the July 7 bombings in London that killed at least 55 people and injured hundreds of others had been detrimental to the church-backed Make Poverty History campaign for the G8 meeting.

"The G8 meeting was indeed addressing the very concerns of millions in Africa and the world. We in Africa were accordingly taken aback by the crude interruption of our keen attention on the G8 deliberations by a handful of misguided individuals," said the New Sudan Council of Churches in part of its sympathy message to families of bomb victims.

Speaking for the G8—the leading industrialized nations—at Gleneagles, British Prime Minister Tony Blair confirmed that some of the debts of 18 of the poorest countries would be written off, and he promised universal access to drugs for HIV/AIDS sufferers.

But Charles Abugre, the head of policy for the British-based NGO Christian Aid, warned that the deal would not make poverty history. "Millions of campaigners all over the world have been led to the top of the mountain, shown the view and now are being frog-marched down again," he said.

There were “nuggets of good news,” particularly the statement that poor countries would no longer be forced to liberalize their markets in return for aid or debt relief, but he said overall it was a sad day for poor people in Africa and throughout the world. -*Ecumenical News International*