

SOCIAL WATCH: G8 COUNTRIES HAVE NOT MET THEIR PROMISES

ROSTOCK, Germany (June 6) The world's most powerful countries have failed to live up to their promises, distancing the poorest countries even further from satisfying the basic minimum needs of their citizens.

According to the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) published today by Social Watch (www.socialwatch.org), at the current rate of progress universal access to a minimum set of social services will only be achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2108.

This means a delay of almost a century with regards to the target date of 2015 set by the so-called Millennium Development Goals in 2000, when rich countries committed themselves to do their part in creating an enabling global economy and assisting poor countries for it to happen.

Unless the pace of progress is substantially speeded up, by 2015 the average level of social development in most of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa will only have advanced to a very low level. All other regions of the world, except for Europe and North America, will still be far from achieving an acceptable level of social development.

Social Watch, an international network of more than 400 civil society organizations, launched this index on poverty and deprivation in coincidence with the G8 Summit, which will bring together the leaders of the world's most powerful countries in Heiligendamm from 6 to 8 June.

"The world's wealthiest countries have made very little progress in fulfilling their side of the agreement and allowing a majority of the world population to work their way out of poverty," stressed Social Watch coordinator Roberto Bissio.

Most developing countries, including the poorest among them, continue to receive minimal foreign aid while struggling under the burden of foreign debt and confronting unfair trade conditions that keep them from rising out of poverty.

In 2002, the developed nations reaffirmed the pledge they had made in 1970 to allocate 0.7% of their income to official development aid (ODA). Nevertheless, current ODA spending falls far below this level. None of the G8 countries has fulfilled this commitment to date.

The United States devotes 0.17% of its income to aiding developing countries, while Italy allocates 0.2%, Japan 0.25%, Canada 0.3%, Germany 0.36%, France 0.47% and the United Kingdom 0.52%.

The development of the world's poor countries is also being held back by unfavourable trade conditions. While the World Trade Organization pressures the poor countries to reduce their import tariffs, the wealthy countries continue to grant sizable subsidies for their agricultural and textile products. With such unequal rules of the game, the poor countries cannot compete commercially.

Meanwhile, many poor countries continue to lose billions of dollars to servicing their external debts, which means that many of the funds sent as aid end up going back to the donor countries as debt payments.

The Social Watch figures show that half of the world's countries score within the low, very low or critical categories of the basic capabilities index, and are unable to ensure coverage of minimum essential needs (health, education and others) for most of their population.

The BCI is used to evaluate and compare situations of poverty at a national, provincial and local level, based on three basic indicators: the percentage of children who successfully complete the fifth grade, survival until the 5th year of age (based on child mortality among children under 5), and the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel.

The 2007 BCI was calculated for a total of 161 countries. Since 2000 almost half the countries have made at least some progress. However, a third of them (54 countries) have regressed. There is a great gap between the region with the highest BCI average (North America, with a score of 99) and the region with the worst average value (South Asia, with a BCI of 66,3).

Sub-Saharan Africa is in a critical situation, with a BCI of 70,6, while its average evolution (1.6%) does not promise fast improvements.

For information, please see:

<http://www.socialwatch.org/en/avancesyRetrocesos/ICB/index.htm>