

CAPITAL COMMENTARY

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Africa and the G-8 Summit

Just before leaving for the G-8 summit in Scotland, President Bush announced a new aid package of \$1.7 billion primarily to fight malaria in Africa. In his speech announcing the aid he said of his administration's wider efforts, "We've tripled our aid to Africa; we plan to double it again [by 2010]. But more than this, we're standing for good government, and energy development, and debt relief, and expanded trade, all of which will help African peoples live better lives and eventually overcome the need for aid."

Indeed President Bush has done more than any other U.S. president to address debt, disease, and bad governance in Africa. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, applauded Bush's latest effort as "a powerful boost to a summit that could bring historic change to Africa" (*Washington Post*, 7/1/05). This comes against the backdrop of American leadership among wealthy countries to cancel \$40 billion of debt owed by 18 of the world's poorest countries, 14 of which are in Africa.

There remain legitimate questions about why Congress and the Bush administration are not doing even more to aid Africa because the United States is capable of doing much more. But none of this gainsays the significant achievements and promises by the Bush administration.

The fact that the summit of the eight major industrial nations last week gave so much attention to the plight of Africa is itself remarkable and encouraging. It reflects the growing awareness and moral concern of people throughout the world who realize that something is terribly wrong when economic development and the fight against preventable diseases in Africa lags so far behind that in the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, despite all the attention given to increasing aid, there are concerns among Africans themselves about deeper, underlying problems that debt forgiveness and more aid will not overcome. A report in *The Washington Post* (7/3/05) based on interviews with African farmers, business people, and intellectu-

als said this: "Instead of debt relief and more aid, many Africans said they wanted the G-8 to focus on ending corruption and on improving roads, courts, banking and secondary education."

"Another useful step, many Africans said, would be to end Western countries' trade subsidies for their own farmers, which make it impossible for African industries to do much more than survive." The cotton, for example, that some African countries grow is not bought by any of the G-8 countries. "Instead [Western countries] subsidize their own cotton farmers and then dump used clothing on the African markets, crippling Africa's domestic clothing industries."

An article in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, titled "How to Help Poor Countries," argues that development "is something largely determined by poor countries themselves." Aid and debt relief are not what those countries need most. Wealthy nations can take "positive steps to directly benefit developing countries—specifically, by taking action against corrupt leaders, assisting research and development, and enhancing global labor mobility."

The biggest challenge "for countries in the poorest parts of the world, especially Africa," say the authors, "is governance. The African continent has been ravaged both by civil war and conflict and by rapacious leaders who have plundered the natural wealth of their nations." The Bush administration has worked to tie debt relief to evidence of change from bad governance to good governance. But much more needs to be done along this line.

Let's call on the G-8, by 2010, to bring together their aid and debt relief measures with increased efforts to promote good governance in the poor countries and to open Western markets to the products of poor-country farmers and entrepreneurs.

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