

Ending extreme poverty: A moral and spiritual imperative

Over 30 leaders from major world religions and heads of global faith-based organizations today launched a clarion call to action to end extreme poverty by 2030, a goal shared by the World Bank Group.

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Our common understanding

As leaders from diverse religious traditions, we share a compelling vision to end extreme poverty by the year 2030. For the first time in human history, we can do more than simply envision a world free of extreme poverty; we can make it a reality. Accomplishing this goal will take two commitments: to act guided by the best evidence of what works and what doesn't; and to use our voices to compel and challenge others to join us in this urgent cause inspired by our deepest spiritual values.

The world has achieved remarkable progress in the past two decades in cutting in half the number of people living in extreme poverty. We have ample evidence from the World Bank Group and others showing that we can now end extreme poverty within fifteen years. In 2015, our governments will be deciding upon a new global sustainable development agenda that has the potential to build on our shared values to finish the urgent task of ending extreme poverty.

We in the faith community embrace this moral imperative because we share the belief that the moral test of our society is how the weakest and most vulnerable are faring. Our sacred texts also call us to combat injustice and uplift the poorest in our midst. No one, regardless of sex, age, race, or belief, should be denied experiencing the fullness of life.

Our shared moral consensus

This is why the continued existence of extreme poverty in a plentiful world offends us so deeply. Our faith is tested and our hearts are broken when, in an age of unprecedented wealth and scientific advancement, so many still live in degrading conditions. We know too well that extreme poverty thwarts human purpose, chokes human potential, and affronts human dignity. In our increasingly interconnected world, there is enough to ensure that no one has to fight for their daily survival.

Ending extreme poverty will require a comprehensive approach that tackles its underlying causes—including preventable illness, a lack of access to quality education, joblessness, corruption, violent conflicts, and discrimination against women, ethnic minorities and other groups. It will also necessitate a change in the habits that cause poverty—greed and waste, numbness to the pain of others, and exploitation of people and the natural world. It calls for a holistic and sustainable approach that transforms cultures and institutions, and hearts as well as minds.

In too many parts of the world, women and girls are consigned to second class status, denied access to education and employment, and victimized by violence, trafficking, and rape. Until each and every person is afforded the same basic rights, none of us can truly flourish.

We must also state unequivocally that ending extreme poverty without mitigating climate change and combating inequality will be impossible. Climate change is already disproportionately hurting people living in poverty. Extreme inequality, within and between countries, contradicts our shared religious values, exacerbates social and political divisions, and will impede progress. What is needed is a new paradigm of socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

Our call to action

We believe that now is the time to end the scourge of extreme poverty—by restoring right relationships among people, affirming human dignity, and opening the door to the holistic development of all people. If we were more committed to living these common values there would be less poverty in the world.

Our shared convictions call us to empower and uplift— not denigrate—those living in poverty, so that they can become agents of their own transformation. We must abandon a politics that too often marginalizes their voices, blames them for their condition, and exacerbates extremes of inequality. Now is the time to turn fatigue into renewed commitment, indifference into compassion, cynicism into hope, and impotence into a greater sense of agency that we can and will end extreme poverty by 2030.

We commit to working together to end the scandal of extreme poverty. We will act, advocate, educate, and collaborate, both among ourselves and with broader initiatives. And we commit to holding all levels of leadership accountable—public and private, domestic and international.

Our approach to this staggering need must be holistic, rooted in the spiritual visions of our respective faiths, and built on a shared recognition of the intrinsic dignity and value of every life on Earth.

Realizing this shared goal will require a revolution in social and political will, as well as new innovations and greater collaboration across sectors. We call on international organizations, governments, corporations, civil society, and religious communities, to play their essential parts and join with us in this critical cause.

Poverty's imprisonment of more than a billion men, women and children must end. Now is the time to boldly act to free the next generation from extreme poverty's grip.