

Social Justice: Why bother?

A few weeks ago many of us signed a "Stop the Traffik" postcard. Effective advocacy on behalf of the world's poor, who don't have a voice, happens when we, the rich and powerful who *do* have a voice, speak up on their behalf. Our voices need to be raised consistently and persistently over a long period of time. Only then will our politicians listen and legislate more justly for the poor of our world.

We, the Dural Baptist Social Justice Group, are part of a larger coalition of groups advocating for the desperately poor under the Catalyst banner, an initiative of Baptist World Aid. Around Australia, our politicians are hearing the same message again and again. Australians care about the poor of our world, give money themselves, and want our government to be generous too.

Social Justice: Why can't they help themselves?

We have no idea just what desperate poverty looks and feels like. Imagine selling one of your children to raise enough money so that the rest of the family can eat one meal a day for a while longer. That child will probably never be able to escape their forced labour, at least not without outside help.

Or imagine not being able to send your children to school, partly because you can't afford the school fees or the mandatory uniform, but also because the few cents they earn working each day helps to keep the family alive.

Yes, they need to help themselves. But without our help, they will never be able to do so.

Social Justice: Isn't private aid enough?

Australians are incredibly generous. We give a lot to overseas aid. But that is only part of the answer. Governments give aid too. Australia is also generous. But we are a very wealthy country, and we need to give a lot more to contribute our fair share.

In 2000, we signed the Millennium Declaration. The aim of these Millennium Development Goals is to halve world poverty by 2015. If all the rich countries give their fair share, this is an eminently achievable goal. But, at the moment, we fall far short. All rich countries are being called upon, and most have committed to, giving 0.5% of their Gross National Income (GNI) by 2010, and 0.7% by 2015. We need to encourage our politicians to do the same.

Social Justice: Can we really make a difference?

Yes! Remember the Jubilee 2000 campaign? Huge amounts of debt have been forgiven in poor countries as a result of advocacy all over the globe. There is hope for change here too, but only if we all play our part. The poor themselves, along with the leaders of poor nations, must take action that enables them to lift themselves out of poverty. Wealthier countries need to provide the resources to help make it happen.

By linking aid to the Millennium Development Goals, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals, the money can be seen to be working effectively. It is only given if governments agree to use the money to actually help their poorest citizens. The goals are measurable – more children in primary school, villages with clean water, etc. Real change from the ground up.

For more information, go to: <http://www.catalystonline.org.au>
