

OPINION PIECE

By Kumi Naidoo, representing the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)

When I Berlin last week something was playing on my mind. Wasn't it here in 1884 that my continent Africa was carved up so randomly by European powers? At the Berlin Conference borders were drawn and communities split leaving irreversible fault lines throughout Africa. Was it to redress the errors of the past that I had been invited to join thirteen other civil society campaigners for a meeting with Chancellor Angela Merkel?

The German leader's invitation expressed a wish to hear our concerns on poverty relief and climate change in advance of next month's G8 summit on the Baltic coast. As a representative of the world's biggest anti-poverty campaign, The Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), I was there to put to her our demands for concrete outcomes and past promises to be honoured.

Alongside two colleagues from the South, we put to the Chancellor that history is the common denominator among the world's poorest countries. Africa, like most parts of the Southern hemisphere, is rich below the ground and impoverished above. This is principally because of colonial actions and the subsequent failure to redress the injustices that were done.

What we in GCAP, a coalition spanning over 100 countries and representing millions of people from all walks of life, are calling for now is that justice is done and a future planned that favours everyone, not just the richest. To this end, we need more and better aid, fairer trade conditions and renewed efforts to lift the debt burden. We also need to hold our governments to account, in the north and in the south, so that the promises they make effect change in the lives of the poorest. Central to our demands are the calls for effective, democratic governance, human rights and the realisation of gender equality.

Two years ago, the G8 leaders met in Gleneagles in Scotland and renewed an old promise. They dusted down a commitment made back in the 70's, to provide 0.7% of their GDP in development aid. The circle of eight made a commitment that, if met, would lead to millions of lives saved but to our disbelief they pushed the delivery date back. With a few exceptions, there has actually been a net decrease in aid from

these countries since 2005. Citizens have shown time and time again through petitions, rallies, symbolic actions of solidarity, that they want this money given to the poor, yet their leaders respond tardily.

I put to the Chancellor that aid is not a panacea. Since the Marshall Plan to reconstruct war-torn Europe sixty years ago, we know that it works when properly managed and directed to the provision of essential services. It is their duty to ensure this. When we see how rapidly money is mobilised by these same governments when called up on to go to war then we, the people living in the poorest places on earth, cannot understand why a fraction of that money cannot be found now? The Chancellor appeared to nod her head in agreement.

My colleagues and I, called too for a better future for the poorest countries, a future in which neither aid nor debt relief would be necessary. I explained to Ms. Merkel that every day more and more African citizens are becoming aware of the unbalanced and unjust way world trade rules are set. They cannot believe European cows are subsidised to the tune of 2 Euros a day when half the people on the planet survive on less. They ask if this is some sort of global economic apartheid? If 6,000 white people were dying every day of HIV Aids as is happening to the people of Africa, would they stand idly by? Given that what we are seeing in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world is a passive genocide or, if you like, a silent tsunami, I really do not know what to tell them.

Agri-businesses in the US and Europe consistently flood the markets of the poor nations with produce so local farmers cannot even compete domestically, let alone think of exporting on a level playing field. How can an economy grow when these barriers exist? It is our belief that the urgency is needed to bring the current round of trade negotiations to a just conclusion, the G8 must not push for a rushed deal in the World Trade Organisation, which then fails to live up to the promise of the Doha Development Round on fairer trade rules. EU-ACP negotiations also must also be turned around to deliver pro-development outcomes. We believe that in all regional and bilateral negotiations, development issues must not be used as concessions, but rather as critical components of a development friendly agreement. Poor countries need to be free to use trade and investment policies to promote food security, rural livelihoods, and future industrial development.

Germany has an opportunity to change the course of history. It could be remembered not as the place where Africa's woes began but where impoverished nations got the chance they needed to recover, once and for all. Just as Germany benefited from the Marshall plan, surely a global

Marshall plan now makes sense. It would ensure future generations live in a world characterised by political, social, economic, gender and environmental justice. I left Ms. Merkel, I hope, still nodding her head in agreement.

ENDS/

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The **Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP)** is an alliance of trade unions, community groups, faith groups and campaigners working together across more than 100 national platforms. GCAP calls for action from the world's leaders to meet their promises to end poverty and inequality enable concerned citizens to join with GCAP, to put pressure on their country's leaders and decision makers. www.whiteband.org