

## Yousuf Bhailok. DFID speech

Over the centuries humankind has made giant strides in almost every field of human endeavour. From the architectural splendours that are the pyramids of Egypt, to the technological feat of the exploration of Mars, we marvel at these and other momentous achievements. They serve to remind us of the breath-taking artistic, intellectual and technological capacity we as people possess. None of this would have been achieved had it not been for the ambition and determination that drove committed men and women beyond what would have been considered possible for their times.

But our own challenge has been facing us for far too long. For little more than the cost of a bus journey in central London, over a billion of our fellow human beings try to eke out a daily existence. Small change for some. The difference between life and death for others. It is time we put right one of the greatest injustices of all time: world poverty.

The 2015 target to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty is ambitious. But for a fifth of the world's population who live on the margins of existence, our ambition is their basic human right. So this is not just an ambition, it is our collective duty. For Muslims, combating world poverty acquires an added religious and often personal dimension. Allah instructs the faithful that "...it is righteousness - to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him [Allah], for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity... Such are the people of truth, the Allah fearing" (al Baqarah: 177).

At a personal level, many Muslims have directly witnessed absolute poverty through living in or visiting Muslim countries - some of which are the poorest countries in the world. Many have relatives who struggle to make a living for themselves and their families and rely on the generosity of those of us in more fortunate positions. Giving to the needy therefore is for many Muslims a family duty, but for all Muslims a religious obligation. This is reflected in the fact that the largest Muslim charities contribute some 10 million pounds to the aid effort every year.

This is perhaps not the easiest of times to take forward the seven 2015 targets. War and conflict dominate our news headlines, and hardly a week passes by without more news of a global downturn. People start worrying more about themselves and their families, and less and less about those in far flung lands in Africa and Asia. So it is particularly encouraging to see our government taking a lead on this issue. Now, more than ever, what Britain does, counts.

We greatly welcome the leadership DFID is providing in galvanising and bringing together the work of government, charities and NGOs. This will bolster co-ordination, co-operation and increase effectiveness in achieving the seven 2015 targets. Many of our larger Muslim and non-Muslim aid agencies are already co-operating on the ground in places like Afghanistan and Kosovo. This will build on this. The MCB has been calling for partnership approaches to policy implementation at home. It makes perfect sense to extend this abroad. Only through working with one another can we hope to achieve our aims. We note that the government is keen to involve business. We would urge them to focus particularly on Muslim businesses who have links with poor countries - not necessarily all Muslim poor countries - to see what role they can play in our global vision on poverty.

Proof, if it were needed, that we can beat poverty. If the will exists. For the resources are already there. The New York Stock Exchange for example traded over 11 trillion dollars in 2000 and as this booklet points out, the 80 billion pounds required to eradicate poverty is only 0.5 per cent of the world's take-home pay.

We applaud the government - and particularly Gordon Brown and Claire Short - on the leadership they are providing on the world stage in combating world poverty through debt reduction; the commitment to meet the UN target for development assistance of 0.7 per cent of GNP; and of course, the commitment to achieve the seven 2015 targets. In addition to action and intent, we also commend the government's approach in promoting consultation; initiating partnership involving all the main faith communities, and its attempt to change our perception of world poverty from an issue that that is 'over there' to one that is 'over here'.

The MCB is very pleased to be associated with this initiative and ready to play its part. We are particularly proud of the role Muslim aid agencies are playing. The presence here today of Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief bear testament to the dedication and hard work of their staff across the country - and across the world.

We stand fully behind the seven targets: to halve the proportion of people in extreme poverty, to extend primary school education to all children, to give girls the same education opportunities as boys, to reduce child mortality,

to reduce maternal mortality at childbirth, to give people access to and the choice of appropriate reproductive health services and for all countries to develop national strategies for sustainable development.

In a few weeks' time, Muslims celebrate Eid. This is a time when we sacrifice an animal and distribute its meat in the tradition of our Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), and when children wear new clothes and exchange gifts. But many children will forego the clothes their parents cannot afford and instead draw happiness from the fact that Eid is one of those rare occasions when they have access to meat. Wouldn't it be wonderful if children could smile all year round?