The US millennium challenge account

THE United Nations General Assembly in its Millennium Declaration of September 2000 had adopted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to invigorate global effort to promote human development and improve the well being of people throughout the world. All 191 member states of the UN agreed to work together in a comprehensive campaign to reduce the number of people in the world living under the debilitating conditions of poverty by 2015.

The first seven MDGs are concrete objectives by which the international community can focus its efforts and measure the results. For example, to meet the first goal, member states pledged to reduce by half the number of people living on less than a dollar a day and the number of people suffering from hunger. Each of these is accompanied by similarly measurable goals to be attained by the year 2015: 1. Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty, 2. Achieve universal primary education, 3. Promote gender equality and empower women, 4. Reduce child mortality 5. Improve maternal health, 6. Combat HIV/Aids, malaria, and other diseases, 7. Ensure environmental sustainability.

The eighth MDG is the mechanism by which the international community would attain the first seven: Develop a global partnership for development, involving official development assistance from developed states to developing ones, freer access to markets and debt sustainability.

A crucial component of the eighth MDG is the financial support known as "official development assistance" (ODA) that is provided by the wealthier countries to help out the developing countries of their choice. Indeed, this assistance comprises more than 80 per cent of all the influx of capital available to the world's 50 poorest countries and constitutes the bulk of the financing foreseen to implement the MDGs.

For decades, the UN has encouraged the more developed states to provide at least 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) towards foreign assistance. But only six countries — Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and Luxembourg — have continually met this challenge. All together, the industrialized states have contributed some $50 billion in ODA in recent years, but this still comprises just half of what is estimated to be necessary to meet the MDGs by the targeted date of 2015.

The United States has consistently neglected to meet the ODA funding standards. In 1990, the US disbursed 0.21 per cent of its GDP as aid to developing countries. By 2000, the US contribution of $9.9 billion represented just 0.10 per cent of its GDP.

In 2003, after pledging to increase ODA spending at a major UN conference in Monterery, Mexico on "Financing for Development," the Bush administration increased the US contribution to more than $15 billion — but this sum was still just 0.25 per cent of the GDP. As a percentage of total GDP, this contribution relegated the United States to last among the world's 22 most industrialized countries in development assistance overseas and well below their average contribution of 0.41 per cent of GDP.

At the same UN conference in Monterey, President Bush called for a "new compact in global development" that would link any further increases in ODA to greater responsibilities for recipient countries — primarily political reforms. In 2003, the Bush administration created the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), allocating $1 billion of increased ODA funding towards this fund with a commitment of $5 billion by 2006. In order to be eligible for these new funds, recipient countries must meet the United States' criteria addressing intellectual property rights, corruption controls and "economic freedoms" such as privatization and partic-
ination in the global marketplace.

countries. Several US administrations have taken the view that economic, social and cultural rights are merely desirable goals, not guarantees of the government. During its creation, the covenant lacked support from not only Washington but many other western countries as well. Although these countries later ratified it, the United States is the only country left which has yet to ratify it.

9. The Minimum Age Work convention came into force in 1973 and has been ratified by 135 countries. The US fed-eral law sets minimum age for work at 16, but there are several exceptions that allow youth under 16 to work espe-cially in agriculture and food industries. The convention allows under-16s to work only in developing countries and the US, of course, does not qualify for that.

10. The US has signed the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families which came into force on July 1, 2003, but has yet to ratify it. If the US were to ratify it, it would have to undertake major structural and legisla-tive reforms for compliance with the convention. Several provisions in US laws under-mine many of the rights granted to migrants under the convention. The US car-ries out immigration raids in violation of the due process rights and several official practices create conditions for hate violence and crimes.

11. After decades of negoti-ations, the US now supports ratification of the Law of the Sea Convention with an understanding that parties to this treaty have the exclusive right to define which of their own activities at sea qualifies as "military activities," there-by evading the convention's goal of limiting militaristic control of the open oceans.

These and other facts high-lighted in the IATP study are a testimony to the harsh real-ity that the White House, be it under the control of the Republicans or the Democrats, is inclined to join only those multilateral agreements that expand America's global access to resources and markets, and blatantly neglects or, worse yet, undermines those that support social development around the world. ∎