

Make Poverty History:

A global campaign to eradicate poverty

Over 10 million children die every year in extreme poverty. With the Make Poverty History campaign, and its worldwide support, it feels like—for the first time in a long time—an individual can make a difference, writes **Salima Jethani**.

IT WAS A RAINY THURSDAY NIGHT in Vancouver and I was in front of the TV watching a sitcom, trying to forget how difficult my workday was. I usually run to the fridge during the commercial breaks but this time a public service advertisement caught my eye. It was a white background with Brad Pitt wearing a white wristband snapping his fingers, then Bono, then George Clooney and other celebrities I recognized. The voice in the background said, “Every 3 seconds, a child dies in extreme poverty. Snap. Somebody’s daughter, somebody’s son. Snap. There goes another one. Snap. And this is totally preventable. Snap. Make Poverty History. Join the Campaign.”

I was floored. I know that the *gap between the world’s rich and poor is getting wider everyday*. I know that it isn’t chance or bad luck that keeps people trapped in bitter, unrelenting poverty. I also know that factors like imbalanced global trade systems, debt burdens for developing

countries, and insufficient and ineffective aid continue to exacerbate poverty.

But, I always think about what I can do about this—I am only one person—what in the world could I do that would make a difference?

Well, for one, an unprecedented global movement of people committed to ending poverty is afoot. This campaign to “make poverty history” is now in full swing in more than fifty countries worldwide. And Canada is one of them.

This campaign is not only one that tugs at your sense of global responsibility but, almost more importantly, the

campaign is strategic and lays out concrete ways to actually get the job done.

Back in 2001, the governments of the eight wealthiest nations on the planet said that they were going to do something about it. In what was seen as a breakthrough, they promised to halve world poverty by 2015. This was deemed the number one Millennium Development Goal.

“The gap between the world’s rich and poor is getting wider everyday. I know that it isn’t chance or bad luck that keeps people trapped in bitter, unrelenting poverty.”

Four years later, the world is failing dismally to reach this target.

Make Poverty History believes that by ensuring trade justice, debt cancellation, and more and better aid for the world's poorest countries, and by focusing on eradicating child poverty, that poverty can indeed be a thing of the past. The Campaign will focus on three key international events: the G8 Summit on July 2nd, the UN review of the Millennium Development Goals on September 10th, and the World Trade Organization meeting on December 10th.

Inspired by the global movement, the BC Council for International Cooperation (BCCIC), the umbrella group for many of Canada's aid and development agencies, in partnership with SPARC BC, First Call, Canadian Crossroads International, Co-development Canada, and a host of anti-poverty activists and citizens committed to the issue, launched the Make Poverty History Campaign in Vancouver. Organized in two short weeks, over 100 people attended the launch at SFU's Harbour Centre and signed on to the global campaign to eradicate poverty. At the launch, Jean Swanson, a well-known anti-poverty activist delivered the keynote address followed by a passionate speech by a 19-year-old named Alex Natross.

Following this initiative, the recent U2 con-

certs in Vancouver inspired St. Andrew's Wesley Church to don a white band around its steeple and challenged other churches to follow suit.

Since the launch in April, a dozens of diverse organizations have come together to support events in B.C. and will continue to play a lead

"Imbalanced global trade systems, debt burdens for developing countries, and insufficient and ineffective aid continue to exacerbate poverty and leave millions to die needlessly every year. Make Poverty History encourages every one of us to get involved and help make poverty a thing of the past."

during the coming months. Volunteers from all walks of life have come forward at an astounding rate to lend their hands and voices to this campaign.

For the first time in a long time it feels like one person in one Canadian city can make a difference. We need to stand together in the city of Vancouver, the province of British Columbia, the country of Canada, and around the world to Make Poverty History. ■

If you are interested in joining the campaign, please visit the campaign website at www.makepovertyhistory.ca. If you are in Vancouver and would like to lend a hand or voice, please contact Salima Jethani at bccic@web.ca or call (604) 899-4475.