

"PREPARING TO FUND THE WORLD"

THE CHURCH TIMES Leader 19th May 2000 - in response to
Christian Aid "UNNATURAL DISASTERS" - A briefing paper 15 05 2000
<http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/f_unnatural_disasters.htm>

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THE CAUSES of global warming are still uncertain. It is likely, though, that both camps in the debate are right; we are currently near the peak of one of the earth's natural cycles in temperature; and human activity is contributing to climate change. Governments in the West have used the uncertainty to justify, inactivity, but, as Christian Aid points out, too many people are at risk. Whether the causes of disasters are natural or unnatural, their effects are observable and, in some measure, preventable.

It is possible to be optimistic. Seen over the past few decades, the public in the developed countries has taken steps towards a position of global responsibility. Post Imperialist attitudes towards the Third World nations have improved markedly. The international media broadcast news of disasters everywhere in the world they occur, and the public response is compassionate and generous. The failure of UN peacekeepers in places like Sierra Leone suggests a reappraisal is needed of their mandate, but the commitment behind their deployment remains.

These responses are pitifully small when measured against the scale of the disasters that threaten large numbers of the world's population 100 million currently at risk from drought in northern India; a further 16 million in the Horn of Africa. One projection suggests that three billion people will be at risk if changes to the climate cannot be halted. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the West has laid down the roots of a global ethic, of the kind advocated by Professor Hans Kung. Let us hope that the roots are deep enough, for the task ahead is nothing less than a dismantling of the materialist vision that the West has held for so long and still wishes to export to the developing world.

For we are at a halfway house. The Western public is not heedless of the suffering in the most vulnerable parts of the world; but it has yet to stand the test of sacrifice: to see its standard of living dropping in order to release the sums needed to sustain distant sections of the world's population. For the immediate future this is the only way to fund feeding and resettlement programmes for the large numbers hit by drought or flooding. Restrictions on energy use by the West are only one part of the answer. The Western public must be prepared to be, taxed heavily in order to fund resettlement programmes, as parts of the world become uninhabitable. Satisfying Western consumer desire must give way to meeting Third World want

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