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Doha Round and Global Poverty: Ten Reasons Why the US Should Care

Allan S. Layug*

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THE United States can make a dent on global poverty – if it wants to. For one, it can help to bring to a successful conclusion the current Doha Round of trade liberalization talks in 2006 under the World Trade Organisation. This is a sure way to show seriousness in bridging the gap between its foreign policy rhetoric and foreign policy follow-through. Indeed, this gap has characterized US commitments in global poverty reduction. In the upcoming WTO Ministerial Meeting on the Doha Round in Hong Kong on December 13-18, 2005, the US can lead the rich countries, particularly the European Union, to liberalize their trade and agricultural policy regimes. This can help poor countries take advantage of the substantial cuts in tariffs and export subsidies in agriculture and help make progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Why should the world's lone superpower and the American people care about the global poor? Ten reasons explain why America should get more serious about helping the poor end their unwanted poverty.

- (1) *Global Security Strategy* – Eradicating the scourge of poverty by attending to hunger, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS and illiteracy is a significant way of tackling one of the root causes of transnational terrorism or extreme violence. As Kofi Annan put it: “While poverty and denial of human rights may not be said to ‘cause’ a civil war, terrorism, or organized crime, they all greatly increased the risk of instability and violence.” President Bush also acknowledged in the 2002 US National Security Strategy document: “Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.”
- (2) *Stronger Alliances* – To secure an American-led world order, US-allied countries should also be economically self-sufficient. Economic self-sufficiency means being able to provide for the needs of one's people, being able to meet the MDGs, thus enlarging human freedom. Investing in one's people and enhancing economic freedom will help raise standards of living and spur economic growth. The Philippines is a case in point. US aid should go for economic development mainly in the Southern region - Mindanao - where terrorism thrives. In other words, there is great potential for the US to ‘buy’ allies’ support through aid, with their consent.
- (3) *Soft Power*– One key reflection of the benignity of American power may be how it feeds

the poorest of the poor. A caring Uncle Sam with a pure heart for the impoverished will be more embraced (and probably even loved) than an imperial America that is pure muscles. Over the longer term, this will be beneficial for the US as it will not only disprove al Qaeda's embittered allegations of American insensitivity, indifference, arrogance, and immorality. Moreover, using might for the right is one important measure of legitimacy. American power used for the best interests of the poor legitimizes the rightful place of America as the global leader worthy to be followed every step of the way because it translates into actions its global commitments.

- (4) *American Wealth based on Global Poverty* – It is just ironic that five billion people live in developing countries and only one billion in high-income world. America has been reaping the benefits from the world economic order it has laboriously created through liberalism and capitalism. However, neither American leadership nor the American public would want to be accused of amassing the wealth of the world at the expense of impoverishing other countries and their peoples. The flipside of the American-orchestrated free trade that has enriched America is global inequality that has killed people, mostly women and children. That poverty also has an American face (depicted by the black Americans devastated by hurricane Katrina) is no excuse for the malign neglect on Africa and elsewhere where the weak and vulnerable abound, where human security seems not to matter at all, and where failed states become seedbeds of conflicts, violence, and terrorism.
- (5) *America's New Century* – The last century was viewed as “The American Century”. America can make a big difference in the new century by creating a world order founded on justice and freedom. One key way to do that is to eradicate extreme poverty using America's unprecedented preponderant power. Otherwise it becomes an affront to the ideals espoused by its founding fathers. Put differently, the new world cannot be created out of the deprivation of the multitude. To create an unjust and fragile world will be an insult to America's power and self-imposed mission. As Bush observed: “A world where some live in comfort and plenty, while half of the human race lives on less than \$2 a day, is neither just nor stable.”
- (6) *Vanity of American Power* – Morality aside, the US can, of course, exercise its power for whatever reasons it may deem important, even without justifying itself to the world. However, perhaps, just to prove to itself that it can do anything with its hegemonic power, it should wield its power to fight extreme poverty. Though the end-goal may not be about liberating the global poor from their deprivation, at least something is done to uplift them from their undeserved plight.
- (7) *Taxes for Real Aid* – An executive has to justify to his/her stakeholders that their taxes are put into good use. Channelling American hard-earned taxes to an effective Official Development Assistance for a great mass of poor people is more than a laudable justification; it is a noble necessity. Doubling the “size of the world's poorest economies within a decade” is a step in the right direction.
- (8) *A Good Republican Legacy* – As for any president, it is a natural imperative to leave behind a good legacy worthy of one's party's name. An actionable global commitment to eradicate (not just halve) extreme poverty is an historic legacy in the making. It will also be a good electoral investment for Bush's Republican successor.

- (9) *Personal mission* –Ending extreme poverty is an appeal to common humanity and justice. Bush has the wherewithal both as US president and a humane person to seize the great opportunity to end extreme poverty in our lifetime by really sharing the “benefits of freedom”. This will not only make America a truly “City upon a hill”, it will also make Bush a good “citizen of the world” as well as those who will follow suit.
- (10) *America’s soul* – For this president and some of his constituents, one key reason to save the poor may be not so much about pleasing the world as about manifesting a spiritual calling. This is the opportunity to show that however corrupting power is, America has still its “soul” intact – that it retains a moral goodness that no material interest can corrupt.

* Allan Layug is an ASEAN Graduate Scholar at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University. He was an assistant professor of philosophy in the University of Philippines (Diliman) .