

One billion people sick and underfed

by Marcia Merry

More than 1 billion people, or 20% of the world's inhabitants, are "diseased, in poor health or malnourished," according to the estimates of the United Nations World Health Organization. A Sept. 25 release summarizing WHO's findings concluded with a chart entitled "The Silent Killers," listing in millions the number affected by the seven major disease categories, ranging from tuberculosis, to malaria and river blindness, to AIDS. And if WHO's statistic of only 5 to 10 million infected with AIDS is any indication, their figures are vast underestimates of the reality.

The report provides a catalogue of the crimes of those in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other private and public agencies who, in recent decades, prevented the development of necessary social infrastructure—safe water, plentiful food, housing, power, sanitation, and health care.

In terms of the geography of debilitation, the WHO reports: "The greatest health problems are in sub-Saharan Africa where 160 million or 30% of the population are ill and undernourished. The most rampant diseases in Africa are diarrheal diseases, malaria, respiratory diseases, schistosomiasis, sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, and measles."

In South and East Asia, WHO estimates that 500 million people, or 40% of the population, are suffering from disease and malnutrition. The most prevalent diseases are diarrheal, respiratory, dengue, measles, and malaria.

In North Africa and the Middle East, 90 million people, or 25% of the population, are affected with one or more of the common diseases—diarrheal, respiratory, measles, and tuberculosis.

Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, the Director General of WHO, describes the situation as "a preventable tragedy, because the developed world has the resources and technology to end common diseases worldwide. The missing ingredient is the will to help the developing countries. Simply, the rich countries must transfer technology, health manpower and money, because the poorest countries can't help themselves."

Another WHO analysis shows that health expenditures in the poorest countries average less than \$5 per capita. On the other hand, in the United States, Canada, Japan, and

Western Europe, the expenditure averages \$400 per capita.

Dr. Nakajima estimates, "If we could increase the health spending in the developing countries by only \$2 per head, we could immunize all their children, eradicate polio, and provide the drugs to cure all their cases of diarrheal disease, acute respiratory infection, tuberculosis, malaria, schistosomiasis and sexually transmitted diseases."

Result of deliberate policies

From this simple picture, one must wonder why the good doctor is so simple-minded. Is he acting out a script, or does he not know any better? The vast incidence of most of the diseases is the direct result of conscious policies for the past 30 years on the part of leading forces controlling the governments of the so-called "developed" or "rich" nations. The needless resurgence of malaria is the most dramatic example.

Moreover, even if there were a mobilization to use the WHO-prescribed drugs and vaccinations to beat back the spread of disease, there must also be a concomitant, massive food mobilization to improve nutrition. For example, just two weeks after the release of the WHO report, U.N. officials announced that drought conditions in Ethiopia will result in a new famine and feared mass death.

In the case of malaria, there are likely not only an estimated 100 million clinical cases of the disease a year, but 264 million more may be carrying the malaria parasite. Twenty-five years ago, the prognosis was that malaria could eventually be eradicated. However, the ban on DDT—proven to be an effective killer of the mosquito vector which transmits the parasite—was imposed in the United States. This was based on a campaign by the "wilderness lobby" in Washington, D.C., including such agencies as the World Wildlife Fund/Conservation Foundation, one of whose directors was William Ruckelshaus, the government official who banned DDT. The elite families and financial groups that Ruckelshaus represented openly avow their desire to drastically depopulate the world—starting with those who they consider to be "inferior" peoples.

The case of schistosomiasis is similar. The disease, common in the tropics and caused by water-borne parasites, currently afflicts at least 200 million people. The parasite is passed from humans via human excrement to fresh water snails, and back again to humans. An estimated 600 million people are at risk from the disease because they live in areas with unsafe water.

If adequate water and sewage treatment projects had been constructed and repaired over the past 25 years, the disease would not be a problem today. As even the WHO report states, "In the 1970s, the outlook for controlling the disease had been transformed by praziquantel, a drug developed by the pharmaceutical industry in collaboration with WHO. For less than \$1, a patient can be cured of schistosomiasis. The problem lies in the high rate of reinfection because of the lack of sanitation."