

Open for Service

A Case for Good Governance



FOREWORD

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A solemn commitment was made by 189 world leaders in September 2000 at the historic United Nations Millennium Summit to free their citizens from the indignity of abject poverty and realise the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Ten years later, as we count down to 2015, we have to remind our leaders that breaking a promise is a sin but breaking a promise to the poorest people on the planet is nothing short of a crime. If the loss of almost half a million women's lives during childbirth every year, nearly all of which are completely avoidable, is not a crime, what is?

Nobody is better placed to speak truth to power than the millions of people and leaders who make up the Micah movement. The tens of thousands of church leaders who spend their lives in remote villages and slums with those experiencing grinding poverty, providing them with spiritual nourishment, truly understand the difference that achieving the MDGs can make to those who have close to nothing in the form of material resources.

In many places, faith groups and NGOs are making a heroic effort against all odds to directly provide education, health and livelihood support to the poor. But the collective efforts of all private entities to directly provide services through local projects can only reach a very small proportion of the people who need it. Ultimately, it is primarily governments who can and should ensure the achievement of the MDGs. It is after all

governments who are mandated to collect taxes and receive the majority of aid from the international community. Most importantly, it is governments who are elected by their citizens as custodians of public resources and have to therefore be accountable to their voters.

The people in the front-end of the evangelical churches know that if public resources are managed in a transparent and accountable manner, there is nothing stopping the world from achieving the MDGs by 2015. Some of the poorest countries in the world, like Rwanda, are well on their way to achieving specific MDGs simply because the leadership at the highest level has prioritized the fight against mismanagement of public funds and shown their zero tolerance to corruption by personal example.

The Micah Challenge has the unique legitimacy to raise its voice with those in power, not just because of its daily contact with millions of people living in poverty, not just because in many countries its leaders are voices that have earned the trust of the people and media, but equally because its conviction is built around the fundamental values of universal human rights, justice and ethics for all.

From the UN Millennium Campaign, which has partnered Micah Challenge since its inception, we wish you every success in your important contribution to achieve the MDGs through a world that is governed for the poor, if not by the poor.

I INTRODUCTION

In a small and seemingly inconsequential nation, squeezed between intimidating empires far more powerful, a lone but persistent voice spoke out. It took courage and a compelling conviction to pronounce God's condemnation of those who abused their positions of influence for personal gain: political leaders "contemptuous of justice"; leaders of the judiciary selling their verdicts to the "highest bidder"; religious leaders and opinion-shapers more interested in "mass marketing" and "high fees" than proclaiming God's truth. All were confronted and denounced by Micah for their complicity in grand-scale corruption and mis-governance.

As always it was the poor who suffered, and again Micah called it how it was. Those whose job it was to pursue justice were instead intent upon derailing it, cannibalising those too weak to resist them. Without the protection of law, the powerless could but watch the destruction of their livelihoods and even the victimisation of their children.

Micah's descriptions of oppression undiluted by conscience or accountability are as meaningful now as when first spoken. The abuse of power and privilege still denies the poor the opportunity to create a better future, denying them access to what is rightfully theirs, even basic rights such as a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. What is clear is that

it is not just a matter of policy inadequacy failing the poor. The prophetic question of the songwriter, addressed to those in government many years ago, remains tragically and urgently relevant – "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?" Moreover, the divinely inspired urgings of that same singer still need to be articulated: "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and needy. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

This is a demand for good governance, for godly governance. It is divine insistence that the affairs of nations are governed according to fundamental principles that ensure the weak and powerless are treated with the dignity that is rightfully theirs as people made in God's own image. This is why Micah Challenge¹ is placing a call for good governance at the centre of its advocacy.

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OPEN FOR SERVICE – A CASE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

A lot of effort went into seeking out a non-English name for our paper. The exercise demonstrated just how much language is filled with subtleties which are not always easily transferable. In the end we ended up reluctantly with an English title which nonetheless is aimed at demonstrating a transparency which lends itself to public service for the well-being of all citizens.

We hope this paper will fuel debate which will lead to action.

¹ Micah Challenge is a global campaign to mobilise Christians against poverty. The campaign aims to deepen Christian engagement with impoverished and marginalized communities, and to influence leaders of rich and poor nations to fulfill their promise to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

II THE BIG CHALLENGE

In the on-going shaping of God's redeemed people and world, we believe the Church plays a central role in achieving the kind of human thriving that God intends. At the same time, in fulfilling our purposes as productive stewards of the land, creative entrepreneurs, or faithful laborers, it is very clear that an empowered and empowering private sector is also essential. And we know too that without appropriate, effective, and efficient governments and international frameworks, neither the private sector nor the Church can be effective.

A Good Governance is Essential to Achieving the Millennium Development Goals

Good governance has long been recognized as an essential ingredient in sustainable development, and in poverty eradication. But constructive discussions in the international arena, among and between high- and low-income actors on issues of good governance, are often difficult and unproductive. Progress in achieving good governance is even more difficult.

Yet the quality and accountability of governance – both in high- and low-income states – is absolutely pivotal for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals – and the broader goal of sustainable development. In fact, some countries have even gone as far as adopting a ninth MDG specifically on human rights, democratic governance, and the prevention of corruption, along with a set of indicators to measure progress.²

Micah Challenge International believes that the Church, faith-based institutions and Christians in business – in fact individual Christians wherever they find themselves – have a central role to play as advocates of good governance.

This paper lays out our thinking of why and how Micah Challenge, as a growing international Christian movement, intends to help the Church to mobilize Christians in all walks of life to effectively play that central role during the last five years of the MDGs.

B What Makes Governance “Good”?

Governance is commonly thought to refer to the processes or means by which decision-making takes place and is then implemented. “Good governance”, in our view however, refers to both “just means” and “just ends”:

- “Just means” are satisfied when the *rules* that structure decision-making in government are fair, transparent, and accountable, and when those entrusted to *implement* rules do so transparently and with integrity and efficiency,
- “Just ends” are satisfied when the end result of policy formation is fair and promotes the well-being of all; in particular, when policy decisions and implementation result in *decreasing* levels of poverty and human suffering and *increasing* levels of human thriving.

² Campaigning for the MDGs: Making Votes and Voices Count in Elections. The UN Millennium Campaign, 2010, p. 76. <http://endpoverty2015.org/files/Election-final.pdf>

The following are eight commonly identified characteristics of good governance that fall under the category of “just means”:

1. **accountability** – this is the central component of good governance. Stakeholders have sufficient opportunities to ensure that power is used according to their interests.
2. **participation** – direct or indirect participation in decision-making by all members of society including the most vulnerable.
3. **rule of law** – fair legal framework that is impartially enforced with reliability and predictability. This includes the necessary legal conditions for vibrant economic activity that is open to participation by all sectors and classes of society.
4. **transparency** – decision-making and implementation is done according to set rules and regulations, and information about these processes is easily accessible to civil society, particularly those affected, and to the media.
5. **responsiveness** – all needs of stakeholders are addressed within a specified time frame.
6. **consensus oriented** – mediation to achieve a broad consensus on the long-term interests of the whole community and how to best achieve these interests.
7. **equity and inclusiveness** – all members of society are truly stakeholders in governance processes, and the most vulnerable in particular have fair and sufficient opportunities to improve their well-being.
8. **effectiveness and efficiency** – sufficient organizational capacity and technical and managerial competence to meet the needs of society through the wise use of scarce resources, including the sustainable use of the environment and natural resources.³

These eight characteristics of good governance only define “just means”; however, it is commonly assumed that “just means” generally result in “just ends”.

This assumption is also made in the Millennium Declaration and is here summarized by the UN Millennium Challenge: “Men and women have the right to live their lives and raise their children in dignity, free from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. Democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people best assures these rights.”⁴

It is the view of Micah Challenge International that these eight commonly identified characteristics of good governance are useful principles. However, there is more to be said about right and just conduct in the international arena – particularly in the case of wealthy and powerful nations whose smallest actions can dramatically affect the well-being of millions who are not citizens and cannot easily hold such governments to account for their actions or inactions.

This is why Millennium Development Goal 8 – Develop a Global Partnership for Development – is a goal with significant implications for additional good governance principles that apply particularly to high-income nations. In fact, being committed to a serious global partnership for human development requires a commitment to a robust method of global accountability – accountability to a broader group of stakeholders than just one’s own citizens.

As we will see later in this document, Micah Challenge International is in a unique position to effectively address this lack of inclusion of international stakeholders in holding wealthy and powerful governments accountable for progress on MDG 8.

³ UNESCAP (2009). What is Good Governance? Retrieved Oct 2009. From <<http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp>>.

⁴ Campaigning for the MDGs: Making Votes and Voices Count in Elections. The UN Millennium Campaign, 2010, p. 97. <http://endpoverty2015.org/files/Election-final.pdf>.

...the poor often directly receive only a tiny percentage of the aid

C Good governance is NOT the present reality

As representatives of the global church, the principles of good governance listed in section B humble us – as we are only too aware that many of our own church institutions fall far short of these ideals. Since we cannot hold governments to a higher standard than those to which we hold ourselves, we pledge to be partners with government rather than accusers; to work on our own governance issues even as we strive to improve our country's quality of governance.

Good governance as defined according to the eight principles above presents an ideal that few countries have come close to achieving. The failure to make progress on these principles represents a most critical barrier to making progress against endemic poverty, i.e. achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Every one of us – whether from high-income or lower-income countries – has been affected by this reality. However, in the pursuit of sustainable human development and achieving the MDGs, we *believe improvements towards making this ideal a reality are crucial*.

We must acknowledge that there are significant differences in the quality of governance from country to country. We must also acknowledge that this is not always a function of high versus low incomes, North versus South, or East compared to West.

In many higher-income countries, political arenas are awash with large quantities of campaign cash which tend to drive political outcomes to suit the wishes of wealthy, narrow self-interests. Such processes are clearly contrary to governance that strives for equality of participation and inclusion of the most vulnerable. This makes it exceedingly difficult to effectively address domestic poverty as well as to follow through on international commitments on aid, fair trade, and debt cancellation – which are critical to the achievement of the MDGs. Such violations of the ideals of good governance occur in many unexpected places, yet many of us imagine our own societies free from this scourge.⁵

Lower-income countries also commonly fall far short of the ideals of good governance, although specific problems vary among the countries within this group. One of the most cited barriers to the achievement to all of effective governance is endemic corruption. In the lower-income countries of the South, careers in government often offer the fastest route to personal wealth. In cooperation with other international elites, leaders have sold cheaply the birthrights of whole countries, shipping billions of dollars of wealth into foreign banks. In addition to this high-level graft, petty corruption makes everyday life miserable – especially for poor people. This corruption is a result of a widespread breakdown of integrity due to unpaid wages, political patronage, a lack of monitoring, few penalties for poor performance, and few incentives for good performance.

⁵ See Michael Johnston's idea that corruption takes on different forms in different societies. Michael Johnston, *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Through reciprocal social relationships or direct bribes, the rich end up capturing far more in government spending on social services such as health, education and welfare than do the poor.⁶ Even when programs are specifically designed and funded to serve the poor, public funds often do not reach the front-line service providers; they are “lost” in the public bureaucracies.

Likewise, the poor often directly receive only a tiny percentage of the aid from high-income to low-income countries – since most donors encourage or even require the purchase of goods and services in the donor countries. This is good for corporations and individuals in the donor country but not so good for the intended recipients.

Finally, as we have seen earlier, a serious commitment to MDG 8 – developing a global partnership for development – requires governments to be transparent and accountable not only to their own citizens but to each other – and to those around the world who struggle to survive.

As Micah Challenge, a network of religious leaders and front-line development workers in more than 40 countries working in sustainable development and committed to achieving the MDGs, we have concluded that the MDGs cannot be achieved in the present context of continuing governance failure (in both high- and low-income countries) and we cannot effectively meet the needs of, and create opportunities for, those who are hungry and poor.

Yet governance issues are often left off the table when progress on the MDGs is discussed. We can be uncomfortable discussing these issues, sometimes out of concern for “political correctness”, but often out of a deep awareness that not many of us nor our churches and church-related institutions measure up to the standards we would set.

Still, with the full knowledge of the work we must do in our own “houses”, Micah Challenge International believes that as a part of the increasingly networked community of Christians around the world, we have a special and critical role to play in proposing and implementing a campaign for governmental accountability to achieve the MDGs. This could be a first step towards sustained dramatic improvements in governance.

*...we pledge to be partners with
government rather than accusers*

⁶ The World Bank Group (2004), Overview, *World Development Report 2004*, pp.4-6 <http://go.worldbank.org/3K0IRMPSPO>.



MOBILIZING THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. WHY?

In the global struggle against endemic poverty, it has become more and more evident that communities of faith, both at the local and global level, have significant influence on those who hold political and financial power – if those communities of faith choose to use it with integrity. Within these communities of faith the Christian church – particularly the large and rapidly growing segment of the Church that identifies itself as “evangelical” – is a “sleeping giant”.⁷

In October 2007 the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon – speaking for the first time to a gathering of Micah Challenge and America’s National Association of Evangelicals in Washington DC – told his audience: “Your engagement can push governments to push through on their commitments. Do not underestimate your power.”

The only power the Church – and thus the Micah Challenge – has is the power that comes from following the will of God. But if the MDGs do “echo the voice of the biblical prophets...” as the Micah Call⁸ states, perhaps the time is right to engage in new thinking about ancient connections between communities of faith, governments, civil society, and the urgent moral imperative to improve the welfare of the majority of human beings in our world.

For the global Christian community, there are other important reasons to mobilize now:

A It is an important part of our shared, biblically rooted faith

Micah Challenge International’s concern with good governance flows from our conviction that Christ is Lord of all – including governments⁹ – and that He is deeply concerned with the condition of human beings and His creation. So, therefore, must we.

Further, we believe that God clearly has given governments an important role in protecting the oppressed, defending the weak, and ensuring that the poor have access to the means to survive and thrive. The Bible is full of passages urging rulers to act justly and warning them of the consequences of not doing so.¹⁰

The parent bodies of Micah Challenge International (MCI), the World Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network, as well as the individuals, churches and groups associated with Micah Challenge, believe that in living out our shared identity in Christ, it is imperative for Christian citizens to actively call their governments to govern justly. To seek to do justice in relation to all God’s creatures through, among other things, making the achievement of the MDGs a major priority.

B The Church can speak ethically and prophetically to those with power

Because we are deeply rooted in our respective communities, yet aspire to transform and improve ourselves and our communities, churches and other faith groups are well equipped to embody and promote the highest and best values of their societies. If done with humility and care, churches can be uniquely effective in holding those with political and financial power accountable to the principles and values of that society – and of good governance. There are countless recent examples – from South Africa to Poland to East Timor – where communities of faith embedded in communities have insisted that governments “do the right thing” and submit to the will of the people governed.

⁷ We must note that this is not necessarily true in all countries and locations – particularly where the Christian church constitutes a threatened minority.

⁸ The Micah Call is a statement agreed in 2001 by over 250 different Christian organisations, outlining how faith and action for and with the poor aligns with the MDGs and calling for governments to meet their promises. Over 200,000 people have signed the Call.

⁹ Colossians 1:16-20 For by Him all things were created: Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. NIV

¹⁰ Psalm 82: Defend the cause of the weak and the fatherless; Maintain the rights of the poor and the oppressed; Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. NIV.

According to Religions for Peace and the UN Millennium Challenge, “Religious leaders are uniquely equipped to help get world leaders back on track to achieve the MDGs by 2015. Religious communities all over the world have a longstanding tradition of addressing issues of extreme poverty and social injustice in creative and effective ways.”¹¹

Holding governments accountable to become better – in the service of achieving significant progress on the MDGs – is one of the things we mean to do when we speak of building the capacity of Christians to become advocates for good governance. Holding our political leaders accountable to follow-through on commitments they have made in relation to the MDGs is another important piece of this.

C It is Critical to the Church’s Ministry and Integrity

In one of the precursors to Micah Challenge, the Micah Declaration states: “Integral Mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done

alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission *our proclamation has social consequences* as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life, and *our social involvement has evangelistic consequences* as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.”

We are convinced that by empowering the church to engage with the Gospel in all its fullness, Christians and churches will promote government policies that empower the poor, encourage a productive private sector, and nurture the environment.

However, for some time, the Christian community has somewhat abandoned its role of using the voices of its members to hold our leaders accountable to their promises and actions. The work that the Church has traditionally and historically been associated with – discipleship of members and in social and moral service to the people – is no less important, but we, as Christians, have another critical responsibility. This is our clarion call to the body of Christ, to mobilize, to take on the mantle of being the conscience of our community, our governments, and our world.

CONCLUSION

Open for Service – A Case for Good Governance seeks to raise an open discussion about Christian involvement in prophetic advocacy which promotes good governance. We open this particular dialogue with a clear recognition that to whom much is given much is also required, and that such a discussion will also fully implicate the Christian church in reviewing its own processes and accountability.

But our intention is that through our service and identification with the poor, we will also rise up to become credible citizens and witnesses who provoke good governance in our local and national governments.

¹¹ *Faith in Action: Working Toward the Millennium Development Goals*. Religions for Peace/The UN Millennium Campaign, 2007, p. 11. <http://religionsforpeace.org/resources/toolkits/faith-in-action.html>



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