

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by  
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## **Redirect U.S. Spending to Protect the Future**

When discussing the major environmental issues on this planet, we cannot disregard poverty. The four components that must be addressed relative to poverty are: 1) increasing the productivity of agriculture, 2) improve health services, 3) educating to participate in the global economy, and 4) improved infrastructure including power, roads, safe water, and communication services like phone and Internet connectivity. Each of these also has an impact on population growth. If you think about it, improvement in each of these components will tend to reduce population growth and consumption.

The countries that are trying to reduce their poverty level need help, primarily from the fully developed countries like the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Japan and Australia. In general, these countries tend to be more socially responsible for their own people, and consequently also have higher levels of international aid. But the level of international aid among these countries varies significantly.

You can actually group the capitalist societies into three groups: the social-welfare states consisting of the Scandinavian countries, the mixed economies (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and The Netherlands), and the free-market countries (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, U.K. and U.S.). The countries with high levels of social expenditures also have high levels of international aid. Of all of these developed countries, the U.S. has about the lowest social spending at home and provides among the lowest international aid.

In March 2002, the G8 (the eight richest large economies) signed the Monterrey Consensus pledging to spend 0.7 percent of GNP (Gross National Product) for international aid. The European Union met this obligation in 2005, but the U.S. has still not provided its share. Why? You only have to look at military spending. In 2006, the United States military spending was almost equal to the total of the rest of the world. By now, it is very likely that U.S. spending exceeds the rest of the world combined. So the U.S. does not provide its share of international aid, but then again, it doesn't provide for its own people. That is why we are considered a free-market economy and not a socialist country. Does this make it better for the Americans?

The social-welfare countries have a lower poverty rate, a more equal distribution of wealth, and the highest percentage of disposable income received by the poorest 20% of the population. These same countries spend more money on research and development and are ranked higher in terms of technology. Does this mean that these social-welfare countries are better off than the United States? Not necessarily, because it depends on what is meant by "better off". The primary point is that military spending by the U.S. is excessive and its contribution to international aid is lacking.

Now that the American electorate has selected a new president along with a Democratic congress, it is likely that there will be some changes – at least that is what has been promised. Speculation is that these changes may lead the U.S. toward socialism. I am not necessarily suggesting we move away from a free economy, but, rather, we just need to do more for the global environment. We must focus on the major environmental issues of climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy, water quality and quantity, and population growth. More important than protecting a relatively few people today, let's consider protecting a large number of future generations. The U.S. should reduce its effort in policing a few countries (Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, etc.) and devote a greater effort in providing assistance to the developing countries for the benefit of future generations worldwide.