NELSON MANDELA’S SPEECH TO TRAFALGAR SQUARE CROWD

3rd February, 2005

Nelson Mandela pledges his support

Nelson Mandela has urged leaders to make poverty history, telling them to "recognise that the world is hungry for action, not words." The former South African president, was addressing a crowd of thousands in London’s Trafalgar Square at the campaign’s first mass rally which also featured speeches from Bob Geldof and Oxfam’s Adrian Lovett. He appealed for G7 leaders to make a concrete commitment to overcoming poverty at their meeting in London on 4th February and also emphasised the importance of 2005 as a great opportunity for change.

Mandela’s speech in full

"I am privileged to be here today at the invitation of the campaign to Make Poverty History. As you know, I recently formally announced my retirement from public life and should really not be here. However, as long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest. Moreover, the Global Campaign for Action Against Poverty represents such a noble cause that we could not decline the invitation.

Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times - times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry and wealth accumulation - that they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils. The Global Campaign for Action Against Poverty can take its place as a public movement alongside the movement to abolish slavery and the international solidarity against apartheid. And I can never thank the people of Britain enough for their support through those days of the struggle against apartheid. Many stood in solidarity with us, just a few yards from this spot. Through your will and passion, you assisted in consigning that evil system forever to history. But in this new century, millions of people in the world’s poorest countries remain imprisoned, enslaved, and in chains. They are trapped in the prison of poverty. It is time to set them free. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.

And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom. The steps that are needed from the developed nations are clear.

The first is ensuring trade justice. I have said before that trade justice is a truly meaningful way for the developed countries to show commitment to bringing about an end to global poverty. The second is an end to the debt crisis for the poorest countries. The third is to deliver much more aid and make sure it is of the highest quality.

In 2005, there is a unique opportunity for making an impact. In September, world leaders will gather in New York to measure progress since they made the Millennium Declaration in the year 2000. That declaration promised to halve extreme poverty. But at the moment, the promise is falling tragically behind. Those leaders must now honour their promises to the world’s poorest citizens.

Tomorrow, here in London, the G7 finance ministers can make a significant beginning. I am happy to have been invited to meet with them.
The G8 leaders, when they meet in Scotland in July, have already promised to focus on the issue of poverty, especially in Africa.

I say to all those leaders: do not look the other way; do not hesitate. Recognise that the world is hungry for action, not words. Act with courage and vision.

I am proud to wear the symbol of this global call to action in 2005. This white band is from my country.
In a moment, I want to give this band to you - young people of Britain - and ask you to take it forward along with millions of others to the G8 summit in July.
I entrust it to you. I will be watching with anticipation.

We thank you for coming here today. Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation. Let your greatness blossom.
Of course the task will not be easy. But not to do this would be a crime against humanity, against which I ask all humanity now to rise up.
Make Poverty History in 2005. Make History in 2005. Then we can all stand with our heads held high.”