

Network of Buddhist Organisations and the British Humanist Association
G20 April 2 2009

On the occasion of the visit of G20 Leaders for their London Summit on 2 April, the Network of Buddhist Organisations and the British Humanist Association have issued the joint statement below. Largely based on a similar statement organised by Archbishop Rowan Williams, it demonstrates, in the words of Hanne Stinson, BHA's Chief Executive, 'that you do not have to believe in a god to share the same concerns'.

"We acknowledge the severity of the current economic crisis and the sheer complexity of the global and local challenge faced by political leaders. They, and we, have a crucial role to play in recovering that lost sense of balance between the requirements of market mechanisms that help deliver increased prosperity, and the moral requirement to safeguard human dignity, regardless of economic or social category.

"Many people are suffering as a result of the economic crisis. The World Bank estimates that 53 million more people could fall into absolute poverty as a result of the crisis. The likelihood is that more will face significant hardship before it comes to an end, and those who are already poor suffer the most. Along with the leaders of the G20 we all have a duty to look at the faces of the poor around the world and to act with justice, to think with compassion, and to look with hope to a sustainable vision of the future.

"We wish therefore to draw attention to some of the promises made by the international community in recent times - with our wholehearted support - that risk being postponed by the pressing concern to rectify market failures. We need to be properly conscious that all communities include, and must pay special attention to the needs of, poor, marginalised and vulnerable people. To forget their needs would be to compound regrettable past failures with needless future injustices.

"Some aspects of this crisis will require technical economic solutions. However those solutions alone will not be enough to address all the questions that we face. At the roots of this crisis lie important ethical issues.

"We are concerned for people and the work they do. We believe there is a need to consider the aspirations of both rich and poor; to examine our own expectations and how realistic they are; and to root future global patterns of work in our understanding of human dignity. We recognize that people who have lost jobs, savings, or homes, or who now live with the worry of what the future might bring are in need of immediate help. Their hope is for sustainable employment and not continuing job insecurity.

"The international community has made important commitments to the developing world. The Millennium Development Goals are of fundamental importance and cannot now be forgotten. Even in these difficult times we strongly urge the leaders of the G20 to hold fast to the commitments they have made to the world's poorest people. We still need to find ways to enable poorer countries to trade their way to prosperity. We hold that promises made to the poor are especially important.

"When we spend now, we have to pay later. This also applies when we use up the resources of the natural environment. Morally binding commitments to cut carbon emissions and so to slow the devastating effects of man-made climate change have been made in recent years. They should not be forgotten or postponed. We call on the whole of the international community to hold firm to commitments already made. Most recognise that even more radical commitments will need to be agreed in the near future.

"The leaders of the G20 countries are concerned to recover stability in the global economy. We support those efforts. And we call on them to protect the vulnerable from unintended injustice and to respect the commitments they made in easier times."