

July 11, 2005 At the G8 summit in Scotland last week, we heard once again how the wealthy nations of the world have not done enough to raise Africa out of poverty. At the Live 8 music festival that preceded it, we heard angry demands for “Justice, Not Charity” in Africa. Implicit in such demands is the collectivist fallacy that wealth is a zero sum game, and therefore western prosperity is possible only at the expense of African misery. As usual, Americans and other western nations are portrayed as villains who somehow conspire to keep Africa poor. The White House attempted to quell criticism that America is not doing enough to save Africa by announcing that the U.S. would double its economic aid to the continent, from \$4.3 billion to \$8.6 billion, over the next few years. Neither Congress nor the American people were consulted prior to this pronouncement, I might add. I think the public might not share the administration’s generous mood, especially as we spend billions in Iraq and face single year deficits of \$500 billion. Frankly, a federal government with nearly \$8 trillion in debt has no business giving money to anybody. British Prime Minister Tony Blair went a step further, promising that the G8 nations will provide \$50 billion in economic aid to Africa by 2010, along with canceling hundreds of millions in debt owed to taxpayers of several western governments. But why should foreign leaders have any say over how American tax dollars are spent? Is our annual federal budget now subject to foreign scrutiny and approval? America is an incredibly charitable nation, as evidenced by the hundreds of millions of dollars donated by private citizens for tsunami relief last year. We don’t need lectures or guidance from the world when it comes to foreign aid. African poverty is rooted in government corruption, corruption that actually is fostered by western aid. We should ask ourselves a simple question: Why is private capital so scarce in Africa? The obvious answer is that many African nations are ruled by terrible men who pursue disastrous economic policies. As a result, American aid simply enriches dictators, distorts economies, and props up bad governments. We could send Africa \$1 trillion, and the continent still would remain mired in poverty simply because so many of its nations reject property rights, free markets, and the rule of law. As commentator Joseph Potts explains, western money enables dictators like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe to gain and hold power without the support of his nation’s people. African rulers learn to manipulate foreign governments and obtain an independent source of income, which makes them far richer and more powerful than any of their political rivals. Once comfortably in power, and much to the horror of the western governments that funded them, African dictators find their subjects quite helpless and dependent. Potts describes this process as giving African politicians the “power to impoverish.” The bottom line is that despite decades of western aid, more Africans than ever are living in extreme poverty. Foreign aid simply doesn’t work. Despite this reality, western political leaders who offer to increase aid are always praised for their compassionate and progressive policies. But what about the people who are suffering here at home, whether from hunger, illness, or poverty? Are their lives and well being less important? Where is the constitutional provision allowing American tax dollars to be sent overseas? The president is promising money we don’t have to solve a problem we didn’t cause. Americans have the freedom to do everything in their power to alleviate African suffering, whether by donating money or working directly in impoverished nations. But government-to-government foreign aid doesn’t work, and it never has. We should stop kidding ourselves and ignore the emotionalist pleas of rock stars. Suffering in Africa cannot be helped by delusional, feel-good government policies.