Is Environmentalism More Important Than Lives In Africa?

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The United States has just assumed the largest burden of forgiving $40 billion in debt owed by 18 mostly African countries. It's no wonder these countries can't repay their debts when they suffer the enormous human and economic costs of malaria.

According to Harvard development expert Jeffrey Sachs, malaria cuts in half the potential growth of African countries. Yet, new evidence has just surfaced that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), to which our taxpayers give $90 million a year to fight malaria, spends 95 percent of this money on consultants, advertising, and "social marketing," and less than 5 percent on fighting the disease.

Malaria has killed more people, especially children, than any other infectious disease in history. Annual deaths from malaria, mostly in Africa, Asia and Central America, have long been estimated at between a million and 2.7 million.

British scientists at Oxford University recently reported that in 2002 there were 515 million people infected with the most dangerous strain of malaria. Malaria deaths could easily exceed the 3 million people killed annually by AIDS.

In 1998, the World Bank pledged to reduce malaria disease and fatalities by 50 percent by 2010, but instead malaria rates have increased by 15 percent. This is the same World Bank now demanding that its bad loans to African countries be reimbursed by the United States.

Malaria is a disease carried by mosquitoes, and the world knows how to kill the hated mosquitoes -- it's to spray them with the insecticide called DDT. Between the end of World War II and 1970, DDT practically eliminated malaria in the United States and Europe, and successfully battled it elsewhere.

According to the National Academy of Sciences, in those years DDT saved more than 500 million lives. In India, for example, there were one million deaths from malaria in 1945, and DDT reduced that figure to only a few thousand in 1960.

DDT not only saved lives and prevented debilitating illnesses, it laid a more stable foundation for development and wealth creation in malaria areas of Africa and Asia. DDT's effectiveness against malaria was dramatically demonstrated and is really beyond dispute.

Then, in 1962, Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring" created a worldwide scare about DDT, which she claimed was a danger to wildlife. Much of her so-called scientific basis for a DDT ban was soon proven either wrong or exaggerated, and the 1972 edition of her book admitted as much.

No study has been able to link the use of DDT with any negative human health impact, even though sprayers have worked with the chemical many hours a day.

Nevertheless, contrary to expert testimony that DDT was not harmful to humans, animals or the environment, in a raw exercise of arbitrary power in 1972 the Environmental Protection Agency banned DDT, and it has continued to be banned in most of the world. Since then, more than 50 million people have died from malaria.

The death toll from mosquitoes breeding in the contaminated water left by the tsunami could be more deadly than the tsunami itself.

DDT is cheap, easy to use, long lasting, does the job, and could save literally millions of African, Asian and Central American lives every year. Wealthy countries like the United States can afford alternate anti-mosquito repellents that you and I can buy at any supermarket, but the epidemic of malaria in poor countries makes anything other than DDT impractical.

DDT alternatives are less effective and five to 10 times more expensive. Africans and Asians threatened by hundreds of thousands of cases of the killer disease are far more worried about malaria than about any tiny theoretical threat from DDT.

Despite the obvious value of DDT in saving lives, environmentalist campaigns continue to prevent its use.

Due to the large influx of illegal aliens who, of course, are not tested for disease as are legal immigrants, mosquito-caused diseases are reemerging as a U.S. health problem. Malaria has popped up in Texas, and Dengue Fever, another mosquito-borne disease, had a virulent outbreak in a Texas county on our southern border.

Another mosquito-borne disease, West Nile Virus, which was unheard of in the United States prior to 1998, has come to our country from Africa. This now infects tens of thousands of people in 21 states, and many have died.

Researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch have just discovered that mosquitoes can pass West Nile virus to each other much faster than previously thought. This is what caused the disease to spread rapidly across North America despite earlier predictions that it would spread more slowly or even die out.

The USAID and World Bank anti-DDT policy that saves mosquitoes instead of humans has stymied African countries' economic growth and is now forcing American taxpayers to bail out a mountain of bad debt. When will Americans wake up to the high costs of junk environmentalism?