

Sachs, economist and health advocate, navigates Grand Central Terminal in New York on Nov. 21, 2002



PHOTOGRAPH BY NIGEL PARRY FOR NEWSWEEK

Fighting Poverty, Fighting AIDS

JEFFREY SACHS, an economist, links global wealth to global health

BY GEOFFREY COWLEY

JEFFREY SACHS IS AN ECONOMIST, not an evangelist. But give the man 10 minutes behind a microphone, and a scholarly symposium starts to feel like a revival meeting. “Ladies and gentlemen,” he tells a hushed hall after describing how AIDS sufferers die in Malawi for want of \$1-a-day drugs, “this plague is *exploding*. Its consequences will make the world *quake*. Rich countries could *stop* the devastation. And most are still looking away.”

Sachs is not the first to sound this alarm,

but he speaks with special authority. As the newly appointed director of Columbia University’s Earth Institute, he heads a huge interdisciplinary effort to help poor countries build sustainable economies. Sachs also chairs blue-ribbon panels for the World Health Organization, advises U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan on development issues and circles the globe pleading with policymakers to support the fledgling Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. In the coming year he’ll work closely with Dr. Allan Rosenfield, the dean of Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health, to seed new treatment and prevention programs throughout Asia and Africa. He’ll also help government ministers in China, India and other high-risk countries to improve overall health services.

From Sachs’s perspective, controlling AIDS is not only a moral imperative but

also a practical necessity. Disease is as much a *cause* as a consequence of poverty and political unrest, yet the world’s richest countries now spend just \$6 billion a year in health-related development assistance. A Sachs-led WHO commission concluded last year that by raising that commitment to \$27 billion by 2007 and \$38 billion by 2015, donor nations would save 8 million lives every year—while improving a third of the world’s prospects for prosperity.

Will that dream come true? While pressing ahead with Middle East war plans that could cost \$100 billion or more, the Bush administration pledged less than \$1 billion last year to helping poor countries fight AIDS, TB and malaria. Sachs doesn’t doubt that priorities will shift as the pandemic grows. The issue that worries him—and it’s a big one—is how long the awakening will take. ■