

Oxfam: Bottom half of world's population received none of the wealth created in 2017

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With the world's elite and their political representatives converging on Davos, Switzerland for the World Economic Forum this week, Oxfam released its annual report on global inequality, exposing the historic growth of social inequality over the last year.

Nearly all global wealth growth in 2017, 82 percent, went to the top one percent, while the bottom half of the world's population, some 3.8 billion people, saw nothing at all. Last year saw the largest increase in the number of billionaire's worldwide in history. The number of dollar billionaires currently stands at 2,043, with a new billionaire created every two days.

Every year, the Oxfam report reveals an increasingly irrational and untenable political and economic setup, in which a handful of elites engorge themselves on the wealth created by the labor of billions.

"All over the world our economy of the 1% is built on the backs of low paid workers, often women, who are paid poverty wages and denied basic rights," the report notes. Women provided \$10 trillion in unpaid care work last year in support of the global economy, according to data cited by Oxfam.

A recent survey by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that nearly one in three workers in emerging and developing countries live in poverty, and that this figure is only increasing. Even more exploited are the 40 million who were enslaved in 2016, forced to work for nothing as modern slaves in a host of industries including harvesting shrimp, sewing garments and cleaning buildings. The ILO estimates that 25 million of the enslaved worldwide are forced labor.

Over the course of the past year, the world's billionaires saw their wealth increased by \$762 billion, enough to eliminate extreme poverty from the face of the planet seven times over. From 2006 to 2015, the

typical worker saw their average income rise by just two percent a year. This was dwarfed by a 13 percent annual increase in billionaire wealth.

Rather than being the result of hard work on the part of the world's billionaires, the report found that two-thirds of billionaire wealth is the product to inheritance, monopoly, and cronyism. The 500 richest people in the world are expected to hand down \$2.4 trillion to their heirs over the next two decades, an amount larger than the GDP of India.

Oxfam notes that the world's billionaires utilize their extreme wealth and connections to manipulate public policy, take advantage of privatization deals, procure natural resource giveaways, and benefit from tax exemptions and loopholes to further enrich themselves at the public expense.

The super-rich can dodge taxes by hiding their money in an international network of offshore tax havens. Accord to data contained in the leaked Panama and Paradise Papers, some \$7.6 trillion is being shielded from taxation. An analysis of the data by economist Gabriel Zucman found that the super-rich are avoiding \$200 billion in taxes through the use of tax havens.

Nearly every country can lay claim to a handful of rich elites who control enough wealth to eliminate hunger, poverty and all other social ills.

The report found that the richest man in Nigeria, Aliko Dangote, earns enough just in interest on his \$13 billion in wealth to pull two million out of extreme poverty. At the same time that Dangote has become one of the richest people in history, poverty has risen in Nigeria.

The four richest men in Indonesia owned more wealth in 2017 than the bottom 100 million people in the world's largest island country. Nearly half of the country's population, approximately 133 million

people, continues to languish in poverty.

Meanwhile, in Brazil a worker earning the minimum wage must work 19 years to make the same amount that someone in that country's top 0.1 percent makes in a single month.

When it comes to social inequality within so-called developed countries, the United States is in a league of its own. In little more than a day, a typical CEO in the US earns as much as the average worker will make in a year. The three richest people in the US owned as much wealth as the bottom half of the population, approximately 160 million people.

Jeff Bezos, CEO of Seattle-based Amazon, recently became the richest person in world history with a net worth of \$105.1 billion, which he acquired off the backs of a highly exploited international workforce of some 300,000 employees. Amazon workers in India make as little as \$233 per month, while workers in the US average less than \$13 an hour.

Microsoft founder Bill Gates follows closely behind Bezos with \$92.3 billion, while Warren Buffett, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, claims a net worth of \$87 billion. The implementation of tax cuts signed into law by President Donald Trump late last year will only accelerate the growth of the gap between the top and the bottom.

The ever-increasing concentration of so much wealth into so few hands to the detriment of the billions who toil every day just to meet their basic needs makes the case for the expropriation and redistribution of the global plutocracy's ill-gotten gains.

In just one instance cited by Oxfam, it would cost only \$2.2 billion to raise all 2.5 million Vietnamese garment workers to a living wage. This is just one third of the amount that was paid to the shareholders in the country's top five garment sector corporations last year.



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