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Global Justice
Overcoming Poverty

Network BULLETIN

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RESISTING THE RULE OF THE RICH
DEFENDING FREEDOM AGAINST BILLIONAIRE POWER

For over 10 years, Oxfam has produced a report on the state of global inequality. As a global non-Government Organisation (NGO) it works across all the countries in which it is based, to highlight how inequality and poverty are interlinked. In January 2026, during the World Economic Forum in Davos, it released its paper focusing on how the super-rich use their extreme wealth to buy politics, media and justice, to defend their own fortunes, dismantle and destroy progressive policies and strip away basic civil and political rights.

Globally, billionaire wealth rose by more than 16% in 2025, reaching a record $18.3 trillion. This growth was three times faster than the average annual increase over the previous five years. And since 2020, billionaire wealth has grown by 81%. The United States billionaires have seen the sharpest growth in their fortunes. In the United Kingdom, the richest 56 people now hold more wealth than 27 million combined – highlighting how concentrated wealth is.

A good decade for billionaires: the facts

- Billionaires are over 4,000 times more likely to hold political office than ordinary people;
- the world's 12 richest billionaires have more wealth than the poorest half of humanity, or more than four billion people;
- the number of billionaires has surpassed 3,000 for the first time; and
- the level of billionaire wealth is now higher than at any time in history.

In October 2025, the world's richest man, Elon Musk, became the first person to have wealth over half a trillion dollars.

It highlights a deeply unequal world. And when a billionaire uses his/her wealth to buy a politician, to influence a government, to own a newspaper or a social media platform, or to 'out-lawyer' any opposition to ensure their impunity from justice, these actions are inimical to progress and fairness. Such power gives billionaires a grasp over all our futures, undermining political freedom and eroding the rights of the majority.

This phenomenon of the richest influencing and controlling politics is not new; it is familiar in countries in every part of the world. But events in the United States in 2025 perhaps made this very clear: in country after country, the super-rich have not only accumulated more wealth than could ever be spent but have also used this wealth to secure the political power to shape the rules that define our economies and govern nations. At the same time, all over the world we are seeing an erosion and rolling back of the civil and political rights of the many; the suppression of protests; and the silencing of dissent. A century ago, the US Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis, said,
'We must make our choice. Either we can have extreme wealth in the hands of the few, or we can have democracy. We cannot have both.'

Life is becoming unaffordable for everyday people everywhere
In previous decades, defenders of the global economy could evidence the real progress in reducing poverty, pointing out that this was what mattered, not the wealth of a few at the top.

Yet, since 2020, this is no longer the case. The reduction in poverty has largely ground to a halt, with poverty rising again in Africa. In 2022, nearly half of the world's population (48%), 3.83 billion people, lived in poverty. One in four people worldwide face moderate or severe food insecurity. This number increased by 42.5% between 2015 and 2024 and includes 92 million people in Europe and North America, some of the richest regions in the world.

Economic inequality becomes political inequality
Research finds that rising inequality is one of the strongest predictors of democracies beginning to fall apart.

One study analysed 23 episodes of 'democratic erosion' in 22 countries. This democratic erosion included the undermining of checks and balances such as the judiciary or legislature; the restriction of civil liberties; the manipulation of elections; and the normalisation of authoritarian practices, such as concentrating power in the hands of a political leader. The study found that the most unequal countries are as much as seven times more likely to see this democratic erosion happen than more equal countries.

This report is about that choice – how governments worldwide are making the wrong choice, choosing to defend wealth not freedom. Choosing the rule of the rich. Choosing to repress their people's anger at how life has become unaffordable and unbearable, rather than redistributing wealth from the richest to the rest. It shows how the economically rich are becoming politically rich the world over, able to shape and influence politics, societies and economies. In sharp contrast, those with the least wealth economically are becoming politically poor, their voices silenced in the face of growing authoritarianism and the suppression of hard-won rights and freedoms.

Source: Alex Maitland, Anjela Taneja, Anthony Kamande, Carlos Brown Solá, Harry Bignell, Max Lawson, Rune Møller Stahl, 'Resisting the Rule of the Rich: Defending Freedom Against Billionaire Power', 19 January 2026, Oxfam International. Edited by Rosamund Burton.

NEWS from *FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH*
Land, Debt, Trade, Sovereignty, People on the move

Welcome to FOCUS Dispatch, a publication of *Focus on the Global South*, described as an 'activist think tank in Asia'.

Land
Ten global corporate landowners now control territory equal to the size of Japan. This vast concentration of land—much of it in the Global South—is fuelling inequality, ecological destruction, and elite wealth accumulation. Since 2000, corporations and operators in finance have acquired more than 65 million hectares, making land a key site for extraction[1]. This situation calls for urgent redistribution and global tax reforms.

At a side event on land and economic justice during the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Focus Co-Director Joseph Purugganan spoke on the issue of transnational

[1] *Extraction activitie*s involve finding, extracting, and processing non-renewable natural resources such as oil, gas, metals, and minerals from the earth through methods like mining, quarrying and dredging.

landownership in the Philippines. He highlighted the country's stalled agrarian reform, corporate policy capture, and criminalization of farmers and Indigenous Peoples. He emphasises the need for stronger corporate accountability through a UN binding treaty.

Debt

Sri Lanka is devastated by debt and structural adjustment[2] and stands as a symbol of broader global patterns—where governments spend more on debt than on public services. The world must insist that food sovereignty is impossible without financial sovereignty.

Trade

Momentum around trade justice continues. Civil society groups across the RCEP[3] bloc reaffirmed their call to exclude permanently Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) from the agreement. In the Philippines, the Trade Justice released two powerful statements: one calling for regional solidarity and a shift toward a development model grounded in resilience and sovereignty; the other denouncing the newly announced US-Philippines trade deal as lopsided and dangerous. The statement warns of risks to local industries and democratic oversight, and calls for full transparency, public consultations, and a clear accounting of what was conceded in exchange for minimal gains. These concerns were underscored by the announcement of the new US-Philippines trade deal following a meeting between Presidents Marcos Jr. and Trump.

The Forum for Trade Justice have published their concerns about the proposed United Kingdom (UK)-India Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). The statement critiques the deal's disproportionate benefits for the UK, warning that India stands to lose critical policy space in areas such as health and medicines, digital governance, agriculture and the transfer of climate-linked technology. Civil society voices stress that the agreement, which weakens India's progressive stance in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), undermines public interest protections and democratic regulation, all for illusory export gains.

Advocacy and Solidarity

As global power shifts and as land is seized, debt deepens, and civic space contracts, the struggles for justice persist. Across the Global South, movements continue to rise with clarity and determination, building pathways toward sovereignty, solidarity, and a more just and democratic world.

From expanding wars and occupations to worsening climate collapse and shrinking democratic space, 2025 was shaped by the convergence of extractivism, militarism, and corporate power. Yet it was a year highlighted by the resistance of communities, movements, allies working to confront these systems. and contribute to pathways for justice and transformation.

A civil society initiative has been A Global Call to Action: For Democracy that Delivers Peace and Prosperity for All urging governments and institutions to act for peace and justice, not profit and war. The statement calls for a global shift away from militarism and corporate power toward policies that uphold human rights, redistribute wealth, and build a just, equitable, feminist and sustainable world. It demands the redirection of public resources from arms and conflict toward systems of care, social protection, and climate justice.

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[2] *Structural adjustment* refers to policy reforms, primarily mandated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank since the 1980s, designed to restructure developing privatisation of state-owned assets, free markets and deregulation.

[3] *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership*, the world's largest free trade agreement, involving 15 Asia-Pacific nations.

In the face of injustice and repression, people continue to resist. They organise, mobilise, reclaim land and rights, tell stories, and imagine better futures. *Focus* remains firmly rooted in this collective struggle.

Source: Focus on the Global South, Focus Dispatch 2025. Edited by Alison Healey.

POPE FRANCIS ON HOPE AND PEACE

Listening to the plea of an endangered humanity

At the start of this year of grace, we wish to hear the desperate plea for help that rises up from so many parts of our world – a plea that God never fails to hear. We for our part feel bound to cry out and denounce the many situations in which the earth is exploited and our neighbours oppressed. These injustices can appear at times in the form of 'structures of sin', that arise not only from injustice on the part of some but are also consolidated and maintained by a network of complicity.

The Goal of Peace

The future is a gift meant to enable us to go beyond past failures and to pave new paths of peace. When I divest myself of the weapon of credit[i] and restore the path of hope to one of my brothers or sisters, I contribute to the restoration of God's justice on this earth and, with that person, I advance towards the goal of peace. As John XXIII observed, true peace can be born only from a heart *'disarmed'* of anxiety and the fear of war.

May we seek the true peace that is granted by God to *hearts disarmed*: hearts not set on calculating what is mine and what is yours; hearts that turn selfishness into readiness to reach out to others; hearts that see themselves as indebted to God and thus prepared to forgive the debts that oppress others; hearts that replace anxiety about the future with the hope that every individual can be a resource for the building of a better world.

Disarming hearts is a job for everyone, great and small, rich and poor alike. At times, something quite simple will do, such as "a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed." With such gestures, we progress towards the goal of peace. Peace does not come only with the end of wars but with the dawn of a new world, a world in which we realise that we are closer and more fraternal than we ever thought possible.

Lord, grant us your peace!

Source: From the Vatican, 8 December 2024. foreseeing the Jubilee Year of Hope, 2025. Edited excerpts by Alison Healey.

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[i] Pope Francis is referring to the use of financial loans, high-interest debt, and international financial systems to dominate, control, and exploit poorer nations and individuals.