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**GORDON BROWN WARNS COST OF LIVING CRISIS OF 2023 IS  
BECOMING PUBLIC HEALTH AND HYGIENE EMERGENCY IN 2024.**

Former PM Gordon Brown warns today 8th February 2024, that the cost of living crisis of 2023 is developing into a public health crisis in 2024.

The former Prime Minister is so concerned by the scale of what he has called the "UK poverty epidemic" he has today released his own assessment of the landscape of poverty in which a staggering near 4 million Brits are now living below the safety net.

And with GPs across the UK reporting that patients are now asking for a prescription for basic childcare items such as nappies, he is asking businesses to come together to donate 20 million basic household hygiene goods – such as toilet rolls, toothpaste and soap – to charities by the end of this year to help the worst off families keep their dignity together.

He hopes his poverty audit will yet persuade Chancellor Jeremy Hunt to carry out an immediate review of Universal Credit, and offer a basic rate of benefits that can cover minimum costs when the budget is delivered next month.

He urges Mr Hunt to take heed of recent, independent research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which reports that one million British children along with three million adults were classified as "destitute" at some point last year – lacking the ability to keep clean, dry, warm or fed. The number has doubled in five years.

Mr Brown says:

"The welfare state has been systematically shredded over the last decade. Instead of being supported in hard times, the consequence is that as many as 4 million of our fellow British citizens, many actually in work, are now trapped in life below the safety net."

"This life means being unable to afford basics such as clothing, toiletries, laundry and bedding. It means having to cut back on essentials such as food and heating because of cuts to benefits. For 700,000 children, it means having to share a bed. For nearly half a million, it means sleeping on the floor.

"Far from getting better, the poverty crisis we've seen over the winter is now turning into a public health and hygiene emergency with families unable even to keep their children clean. This is now about basic decency and I urge all parties ahead of the Budget to repair Britain's safety net and so alleviate levels of penury I haven't witnessed in my lifetime."

Mr Brown proposes immediate solutions available to the Chancellor to make a difference to families in need now and to avoid escalating the crisis ahead of next winter: to order a root and branch review of the Universal Credit system, and to provide 'an essentials guarantee' that requires the basic rate of benefit to cover life's basic minimum costs.

Mr Brown's report also sets out plans to deliver an emergency service of household goods to the families across Britain most in need of help via the Multibank model which he has helped found where surplus and donated household goods of all kinds can be collected and distributed by collaborating businesses with local charities in their communities.

Six Multibanks are expected to be operational in England, Wales and Scotland to meet demands of "the poverty emergency" by the end of this year and the network is now seeking to source 10 million toilet rolls, 1 million tubes of toothpaste, 1 million bottles of shampoo, 2 million nappies, 2 million bars of soap and 1 million boxes of washing powder by the end of the year.

The Multibank project has been co-founded by Amazon and has recently received a £1m grant funded jointly by the company and Comic Relief.

Despite the overall easing of inflation, Mr Brown warns that with food prices showing no signs of falling back and with family savings now depleted, 2024 will be harder than last year for Britain's low income families.

Manufacturers are being urged either to donate more surplus goods or to sell household items to the Multibank network at cost price.

Mr Brown has hailed the example of manufacturer Accrol which has offered the UK Multibank network 1 million toilet rolls, half as a donation and half at production cost only.

In addition to repairs to the welfare state, Mr Brown is also urging Mr Hunt to exempt charities and companies from VAT when goods are distributed free of charge. The current law encourages products to be disposed of rather than donated. The Multibank campaign is hoping the Government will zero rate goods whether they are disposed or donated to charities.

Mr Brown is also supporting the campaign by food charity Fareshare for the UK Government to spend £25m a year buying millions of tonnes of surplus food currently produced by British farmers for distribution for poor families. The programme would offer extra income for farmers as well as providing an estimated 100 million meals for poorer homes.

"In the wake of the ITV drama 'Mr Bates vs the Post Office', people across Britain have been asking why it took so long for the Government to exonerate innocent sub-postmasters who faced such appalling treatment. In years to come, I believe people will be asking how it was that the Government walked by on the other side when thousands of children were suffering abject deprivation, and failed to support them in their hours of need."