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Bush and Blair divided on Africa plan

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US President George W Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair will pledge hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Africa.

But Bush will stop short of backing Blair's more ambitious plan to lift the continent out of poverty.

A senior White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the two leaders tomorrow will announce a joint British-US initiative to feed the hungry in Ethiopia, Eritrea and other African nations threatened by famine.

The US contribution would include \$US674 million (\$A882 million) - enough to feed 14 million people - and a significant commitment will also be made by the British, the official said.

The initiative was in response to a UN appeal for \$US4 billion (\$A5.2 billion) this year to address Africa's emergency needs. Washington has already provided nearly \$US1.4 billion (\$A1.8 billion) this fiscal year.

But no breakthrough was seen on Blair's request that Bush support Britain's International Finance Facility which would double aid for poor countries by issuing bonds against the future aid budgets of rich nations.

That plan would raise \$US25 billion (\$A32.7 billion) to \$US50 billion (\$A65.4 billion) a year by selling bonds on global capital markets.

Bush made clear his position last week, saying the proposal "doesn't fit our budgetary process".

White House officials said that position remained the same ahead of the Blair meeting.

British government sources are floating the idea of pressing ahead with the finance facility without US involvement.

Blair has staked his reputation on helping Africa during Britain's presidency of the G8 group of rich nations.

He has already had talks with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and will visit the leaders of France, Germany and Russia in the run-up to next month's G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, of which he is host.

Bush and Blair will also discuss debt relief for Africa as well as events in Iraq, Iran and the Middle East.

The two leaders were rock-solid allies on the Iraq war and both came under strong criticism at home for basing the decision to go to war on alleged weapons of mass destruction that were never found.

Blair has also pledged to address climate change at the Gleneagles summit, despite the US refusal to abide by the Kyoto treaty aimed at cutting greenhouses gases believed to contribute to global warming.

- Reuters