

**USCMA Resolution Supporting
DEBT CANCELLATION FOR IMPOVERISHED COUNTRIES
2007 Annual Meeting
Austin, Texas**

Let it be resolved that:

US Catholic Mission Association members, to celebrate the 2007 Sabbath Year, commit ourselves to promote debt cancellation in support of our sisters and brothers in poor, debt burdened countries.

Rationale:

In the Hebrew Scriptures, we find a vision of life in community that is liberating and just, governed by Sabbath cycles – the Sabbath Day, the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee year. Sabbath Year observance requires that every seven years debts are canceled and those enslaved because of debts are freed, *restoring equal relations among community members/nations and preventing a situation of ongoing exploitation in which the rich accumulate ever more wealth at the expense of the poor.* “...proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you.” (Lev. 25: 10) In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus follows in this tradition in declaring a “year of God’s favor” (Lk 4: 18-19). This year 2007 has been proclaimed the Sabbath Year because this is the seventh year of this effort and marks the halfway point in reaching the *Millennium Development Goals*.

Background:

The ongoing crisis and the work yet to be done: In late 1997, thousands of people came together, especially within the Catholic Church, in support of debt cancellation. Jubilee 2000 formed an organized effort in the U.S. and began to connect with Jubilee groups in other countries. In 2005, the G-8 countries forgave the debt of 18 countries, but the cancellation depended on conditions.

Strings attached: The conditions that come with new loans and debt relief hurt the poor. Debt relief under the current program takes essential services, like primary health, education, and access to safe water out of reach of the impoverished majority.

What is needed? A true Jubilee cancellation of crushing debt: Millions around the globe remain locked in poverty and suffer under a crushing and unjust burden of debt. Beyond those in the G-8 deal, there are more than 40 other impoverished nations that require total debt cancellation to reach the *2015 Millennium Development Goals*, and dozens more nations require cancellation of debts which are clearly odious and/ or illegitimate. Harmful economic conditions must be removed so that countries can see the benefits from cancellation, while assuring accountability and transparency through empowering civil society.

Debt costs lives: In the world’s impoverished nations, the majority of the populations do not have access to clean water, adequate housing or basic health care. These countries are paying debt service to wealthy nations and institutions at the expense of providing basic services to their citizens.

They already paid: These nations have already paid back their debts time and again. The debt crisis set in when interest rates skyrocketed and compound interest made repayment impossible. FACT: Nigeria borrowed \$17 billion, repaid \$18 billion but still owed \$34 billion early in 2005. Creditors in the Paris Club later cancelled the majority of Nigeria’s debt, but Nigeria had to pay \$6 billion to receive cancellation and still has significant debt to the IMF/World Bank.

Debt cancellation is adding by subtracting: Debt cancellation allows countries to access their own resources for poverty reduction. FACT: Experts estimate it would take an annual commitment of \$10-15 billion a year to turn around the AIDS crisis in Africa that claims 7,000 lives a day. Sub-Saharan Africa pays almost \$15 billion in debt service to the wealthy nations and institutions every year.

Debt cancellation gets results: The small amount of debt relief given so far has achieved startling results, including more than doubling school enrollment in Uganda, vaccinating five

hundred thousand children in Mozambique and adding three more years of schooling for Honduran children.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS:

- Call for a Congressional hearing on the **Jubilee Act**.
- Become familiar with Jubilee USA, www.jubileeusa.org, where you can find resources for education, prayer and fasting as well as monthly action alerts.
- Invite someone to serve as liaison between your faith community and Jubilee USA.
- Integrate prayer for the world's poorest countries and forgiveness of the debt into community prayer.
- Consider becoming a Jubilee community and suggest this in parishes with which you are associated.
- Encourage members to advocate for passage of the **Jubilee Act, H.R. 2634**. The bill calls for the cancellation of debt without harmful conditions for a list of 50 impoverished countries.
- Host a screening of one of the films suggested by Jubilee USA.
- Urge political candidates, especially those running for president, to articulate their position on debt cancellation.
- Consider a contribution to Jubilee USA to further this effort.

[ORIGIN OF THE PROPOSAL: LCWR Global Concerns Committee]