



## Church of the Brethren General Board

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# Jubilee 2000 Campaign

March 1999

As many poorer nations struggle to repay enormous international debts, it is the poor citizens of those nations who pay much of the price for these repayments. Already inadequate social services are further reduced. Industries and agricultural land that might have provided commodities for domestic consumption are redirected to produce export crops and products. Environmental quality is degraded, as regulations are relaxed as an incentive to economic growth, and as marginal and untouched lands are forced into production to earn export revenues.

Ironically, poor people have seen little of the benefit of the loans that have brought them great hardship. While some funds financed the construction of large infrastructure projects that may have marginally helped the poor, other monies went to military procurement or were siphoned off by corrupt politicians and businesses.

We look with compassion on our brothers and sisters in these so-called Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC's). We are particularly concerned about countries in Africa and Central America in their struggle to repay debts, as these nations face on-going social conditions and more recently natural disasters that have made debt repayment even more burdensome. In some cases, such as that of Nicaragua, debt repayment exceeds a nation's total spending on social programs. The Honduran government pays more than \$1 million per day in debt repayments. In Ethiopia, debt payments are four times public spending on health, while more than 100,000 children die annually from easily preventable diseases. The Jubilee 2000 Campaign estimates that in Africa alone, debt repayments redirected toward human need would save the lives of 21 million children in the next two years and provide 90 million girls and women with access to education.

As we enter the new millennium and prepare to celebrate the 2000th birthday of Christ, it is appropriate that this be a time for a fresh start for those nations—and the millions of poor people therein—who suffer under crushing international debts. In the spirit of the jubilee proclaimed in Leviticus 25, when land sold or appropriated by others was returned to its original owners, we are led to add our voice to those calling for the forgiveness of these debts with the following understandings:

- that lenders and borrowers acknowledge responsibility for amassing the debt and that mechanisms be created to prevent recurrence of massive debts;
- that ordinary people participate in making decisions about debt relief, future loans and priorities for their national economies;
- that debt relief be offered those governments committed to democratic principles and not be conditioned on reforms that perpetuate or deepen poverty or environmental degradation.

Therefore the Church of the Brethren General Board joins with the National Council of Churches of Christ/USA, the All Africa Conference of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and sister denominations at home and abroad as we:

- reaffirm our commitment to fulfilling the justice of God and redressing the great inequities between the rich and the poor at home and around the globe;
- endorse the Jubilee 2000 Campaign to cancel the crushing international debt of impoverished countries;
- call on our own members and congregations to join in the Jubilee 2000 campaign by advocating debt cancellation for impoverished countries and by working for global justice through personal choices, denominational programs and through other international institutions;
- urge the United States government to cancel debts owed it by HIPC's, particularly that owed by Honduras and Nicaragua, and to use its leadership in the international community to support debt cancellation for heavily indebted poor countries, and to encourage the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to implement similar debt cancellation;
- commit ourselves to assist congregations and members in their faithful response to the Jubilee 2000 Campaign.