



RELIGIOUS ACTION NETWORK

(for peace with justice in Africa)

a project of the American Committee on Africa

50 Broad Street, Suite 711 • New York, NY 10004-2307

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March 23, 1999

Dear Pastor/Youth Group Leader,

As part of the Religious Action Network's collaboration with the Jubilee 2000/USA campaign we urge you to participate in the **National Chain-In Event** the week of April 5-11.

Jubilee 2000 is a worldwide movement dedicated to the cancellation of Third World debt of the highly indebted poor countries (33 of which are in Africa) by the year 2000. The United Nations Development Program estimates that "relieved of their annual debt repayments, the severely indebted countries could use funds for investments that in Africa alone would save the lives of about 21 million children by 2000 and provide 90 million girls and women with access to basic education."

Because the futures of Africa and America rest with the youth of today, it is imperative that there is a sharing of information that affects the lives of young people on both sides of the Atlantic. Please help in facilitating this information sharing process by making copies of the bulletin insert entitled **The Religious Action Network & Jubilee 2000 Working to Break the Chains Around Africa**. This bulletin is helpful in that it provides background information on the Third World debt crisis, with specific reference to Africa.

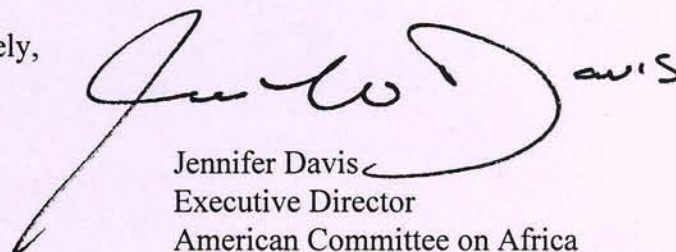
However information alone is not enough- informed, consistent, active participation is needed as well. Your youth group and congregation's active participation in this campaign will send a clear signal to Congress that there is an even younger constituency for Africa which is emerging and that it is one that is informed of the many socio-economic issues facing Africa.

Thank you for helping to make a "chain-ge" for Africa. If you have any questions or require additional materials contact Angelique Bell at the Religious Action Network at 212-785-1024.



Wyatt Tee Walker
President
American Committee on Africa

Sincerely,



Jennifer Davis
Executive Director
American Committee on Africa



RELIGIOUS ACTION NETWORK

(for peace with justice in southern Africa)

a project of the American Committee on Africa
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What is the Religious Action Network? The Religious Action Network is a national interfaith network of congregations born out of the struggle to end apartheid. Now seeking to achieve peace with justice in Africa, the network is dedicated to supporting African development, democracy and human rights.

Why a Religious Action Network? RAN responds to a call for support by members of the religious community in Africa. Summoning us to action in 1995, Archbishop Desmond Tutu warned,

"Africa is in danger of being forgotten. An entire continent, dozens of countries and millions of people. Forgotten as if they did not exist."

That message has come to RAN from another great African leader. Speaking at The Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in 1994 Nelson Mandela said:

"Those people who stood with us when we were all alone, will ever remain our friends, our allies, and the Canaan Baptist Church is one of our greatest allies....The real battle in South Africa has just begun; the fight against poverty, against disease, against joblessness...That is the battle we are now preparing to fight and we want our friends to be involved in that fight".

RAN accepts the role of the faith community in advocating for basic human rights. We speak out against military dictatorships and repressive regimes that oppress African people in countries like Nigeria. RAN believes human rights must also include the right to clean water, daily bread, adequate health care and education.

What does The Religious Action Network do?

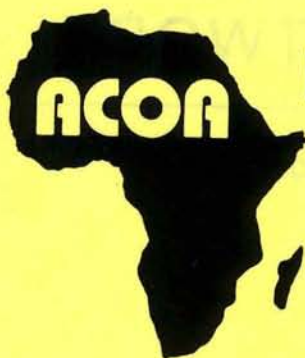
RAN INFORMS, LINKS AND EMPOWERS.

INFORMS: RAN members get information which the traditional media cannot or will not provide: RAN updates its members via mailings, speakers and conferences.

LINKS: RAN congregations make direct links with southern African leaders, organizations and congregations. RAN delegations and members have made several working visits to Africa.

EMPOWERS: RAN engages member congregations in nationwide campaigns. When the Republican Congress tried to slash U.S. aid to Africa last year, wiping out the Development Fund for Africa, RAN mobilized its members; they wrote letters, visited congressional representatives, went to the White House. Working with many allies we beat back the attack. Now the fight must begin again this year.





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PARTICIPATION FORM for RAN - JUBILEE 2000/USA NATIONAL CHAIN-IN WEEK

APRIL 5-11, 1999

"We are building bridges for African development and democracy." - Wyatt Tee Walker

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YES, We are working with RAN in breaking the chains around Africa!

We are supporting the RAN-JUBILEE 2000/USA NATIONAL CHAIN-IN WEEK by one or more of the following actions:

PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- _____ We are distributing copies of the bulletin insert, **The Religious Action Network and Jubilee 2000 Working to Break the Chains Around Africa.**
- _____ We are actively participating in the campaign by creating and sending chains to our Congressional Representative/Senators.
- _____ We are writing a letter expressing our concern for Africa's debt relief to our Congressional Representative/Senators.
- _____ We dedicate a special moment of prayer for Africa during our service.

Name

Congregation/Organization

Address

City/State/Zip

Home Phone

Office Number

Fax Number

Contact Person (Missions, Social Action, etc.)

Become a RAN Member today or continue your support with a contribution of \$250 or more!
Please make your check payable to the American Committee on Africa.



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The Religious Action Network Endorses

Jubilee 2000/USA National Chain-In Week, April 5-11, 1999

Help the Religious Action Network and Jubilee 2000 make a **chain-ge** by introducing the Jubilee 2000 campaign and chain-making project to your Sunday school class or youth group! During National Chain-In Week supporters of debt relief will send hundreds of chains (paper, cloth, yarn) to members of Congress. The chains symbolize the urgent need for action to break the chains of debt around Africa.

Did you know that:

- every child in Africa is born with a financial burden which a lifetime's work cannot repay.
- many African governments spend more money on repaying their debts to rich countries than they do on schools and health clinics. Because of this many young boys and girls in African countries are unable to go to school or see a doctor when they are sick.
- 30% of children in sub-Saharan Africa do not get enough food to eat and half of all deaths among pre-school children are caused by malnutrition.

"But this is not fair, I think I would lead a protest- is there any protest?"

-A New York City Teenager and Youth Group Member

Yes! You can show that you care and let your voice be heard by following these steps:

Step 1

Have a chain making session with members of your Sunday school or youth group. Here's how:

Tubes – toilet paper rolls, etc.



You could paint the chain or cover it with papier mâché or decorate it any other way you can think of.

Paper chains



You might want to write a message or a prayer on the links
Make sure you write it before you make the link.

Step 2

- Involve the whole congregation in your protest. Ask permission to be part of the worship service on Sunday April 11. Place a short piece of string or yarn in each church bulletin or order of worship. At your time to speak have someone from your youth group explain why the pieces of string are in the bulletin and why the Jubilee 2000 campaign is using chains as a symbol.
- Ask everyone in the congregation to get together in groups of threes (representing the 3 zeros in 2000) and join their pieces of string by knotting them into three links. Have members of your youth group collect these chains from members of the congregation.
- Place these chains along with the ones made during the Sunday school/youth group meeting in a large box with a large sign on it which reads **"Break the Chains Around Africa."**

Step 3

- Put these chains with the ones that your youth group made. Call to make an appointment with your Congressional Representative or Senators or one of their aides. To find out the location of their office which is closest to you, call 202-224-3121. At the time of the meeting present your chains to him/her along with your concerns about debt relief for impoverished countries in Africa. Or, just mail your chains to your Congressional representative or Senator at their Washington, D.C. office. Be sure to include a cover letter such as the one below.

Step 4

- Call your local television station and newspapers to let them know about your chain making session and the delivery of the chains. A useful contact may be the religion editor at the newspaper or someone who covers activities of local religious organizations.

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear Rep./Sen. _____:

Our friends in Africa need your help. The Bible says "Do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor (Deut. 15:7)." We at [name of church or group here] present to you the enclosed chains as a symbol of the chains of debt burdening 33 poor countries in Africa. The U.S. government must take action to help unlock the chains of debt around Africa- in order to free up resources that can be used to wipe out poverty and protect the environment.

Many nations now spend four times as much on debt repayment as on health care and because of this millions of children end up suffering. To address this problem, we are supporting the Jubilee 2000 movement, which proposes cancellation of unpayable debt of the world's poorest countries by 2000. This would help in giving Africa a fresh start and benefit millions of children there.

We urge you to help our neighbors in Africa and cancel the debt of these African countries. Give these countries a chance to invest in their future- the children of Africa. Please let us know how you plan to help our friends in Africa.

Addresses:

The Honorable _____
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable _____
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Useful web sites: www.house.gov
www.senate.gov

March 1999

THE RELIGIOUS ACTION NETWORK & JUBILEE 2000
Working to Break the Chains Around Africa



What is the Jubilee 2000 Campaign?

Jubilee 2000 is a worldwide movement of concerned individuals and groups seeking to cancel the international debts of the poorest countries by the new millennium. Thirty-three of the most heavily debt burdened countries in the world are in Africa.

Why the name Jubilee 2000?

The movement was inspired by the Old Testament book of Leviticus in which a jubilee year is described. In this year social order is restored in that slaves are set free, land is returned to original owners, and **debts are canceled**. Archbishop Desmond Tutu suggests that leaders of rich nations look to the Bible for inspiration. "Every 50 years you make a new beginning. . . . it is a chance for renewal for everybody."

"Lord forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

-The Lord's Prayer

Why is debt a problem for Africa; exactly how much do these countries owe?

In order to repay foreign debts, many African countries are forced to divert scarce government resources from development of infrastructure - schools, health clinics, and roads. Some results of this are that many children are denied access to formal education, HIV-infected persons go without counseling and treatment and small scale farmers lack credit and technical assistance.

The 33 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries located in Africa have a combined debt total of more than \$227 billion which is roughly 83 % of their total GNP (the amount of income generated by a country in one year).

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Every child in Africa is born with a financial burden which a lifetime's work cannot repay. The debt is a new form of slavery. . ."

-The All Africa Conference of Churches

How did these countries get so indebted? Isn't it their own fault?

During the Cold War, Western governments including the US often lent money to undemocratic or corrupt governments for political reasons—ignoring how the borrowers used the money. Many African leaders squandered money on badly designed projects, military spending or personal corruption. Some African states have suffered from armed conflicts and adverse weather which cut food and export crop production, virtually all have endured long-term declines in world prices for their primary exports (mostly unrefined products like coffee or cotton). As export earnings dropped, governments could no longer keep up interest payments, which were added to the unpaid principal of the debt. This compounding of interest and rescheduling of loans has led to situations in many countries where, despite years of making payments, the debt grows bigger instead of being reduced. Between 1980-1996 the fall in export prices alone cost Africa an estimated \$150 billion in lost revenue.

Who suffers from this debt problem most?

Everyone living in heavily indebted countries suffers, but the effects on women and their children are particularly devastating. Uganda, considered by international financial institutions as a "best case" country in terms of economic reform and poverty reduction programs, still falls short in terms of its impact on the lives of women and children. The Ugandan Women's Network noted in a February letter to President Clinton that "Ugandan women have suffered the brunt of debt repayment and they continue to pay with their lives."

To whom do these countries owe money?

The main creditors are the world's wealthiest nations, such as the US, Britain, Japan, France and Germany. Other important creditors include the large international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and The World Bank, which are controlled primarily by the world's wealthiest nations. Many commercial banks also have outstanding loans to poor nations. Not only must these countries pay back large sums of money, but they must do so in "hard currencies," i.e. dollars, pounds, yen. This is very difficult to do when a country's currency is continuously being devalued in relation to the hard currencies.

Why should people of faith and other activists in the US care? How does it affect us?

- Money that should be spent on developing infrastructure such as schools and clinics is used instead for debt repayment.
- The conditions resulting from unpayable debt inflame social conflicts.
- Debt harms the environment, encouraging rainforest destruction and pollution as poor countries use cheap but environmentally destructive ways to earn export revenues.

- Countries with major debt burdens generally are not good customers for US products or investment. As the Ugandan Women's Network noted, unrepayable debt "discourages foreign direct investment, affects commerce, stifles consumption and development of markets." That hurts US farmers, workers and businesses, as well as people living within indebted, poor countries.
- None of us can prosper for long unless all of us have the things we need for lives of sufficiency and dignity. The debt burden carried by people in poor countries harms us all, and its cancellation will benefit us all.

Has debt cancellation ever been tried before?

Yes. To reward Egypt for supporting the US during the Gulf War, the US government canceled \$7 billion of debt payments. In 1991 the US canceled \$2.5 billion of Poland's debt. Both of these cancellations occurred without doing damage to the US or the global economy. Some countries are taking bold steps on the issue: Norway recently announced plans to *unilaterally* cancel \$180 million in poor country debt. Recently Cuba—despite an economy severely damaged by US sanctions—was the first country to cancel the debt owed to it by Nicaragua following Hurricane Mitch.

Won't debt cancellation cost a lot; is it really practical?

Because the world financial community knows that the official "face value" amount of these debts can never be repaid, the market value of the debts is only a fraction of that amount. The contributions needed from wealthy nations to write off these debts would be based on this market value and, therefore, be relatively small. Haiti's foreign debt is a good example. Even though the official value of Haiti's debt to the US government was \$8.3 million, canceling it in 1995 cost only the debt's market value, \$377,000.

Although African governments have tried very hard to repay these debts, the reality is that the debt cannot and will not be repaid, and it is senseless for creditors to pretend otherwise. African nations cannot develop healthy economies when millions of their people are being denied basic health care and education and earn wages so low that they can barely survive. Canceling this unpayable debt is the most practical way to restart their economies, protect the global environment and reduce poverty.

Who has the power to cancel these debts?

Governments of the wealthiest nations, including the US, can forgive Africa's debt. They can provide financial resources to international agencies like the IMF and the World Bank and direct that the funds be used to write off poor countries' debts. They should require, however, that the debt be canceled in a way that benefits ordinary people and without conditions that lead to more poverty and environmental destruction.

Our government and others together have the power and the resources to do it—*the only thing missing is the political will*. That must come from people like you.

"We call for the cancellation of debt in a manner which benefits the poor and marginalized and respects their human rights."

-Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, December 1998

Won't debt cancellation just benefit corrupt leaders rather than help ordinary people?

While corruption remains a problem in many places, including here in the US, a growing number of poor countries have more democratic governments and active civic groups and non-governmental organizations working to hold these governments accountable. Inaction is no solution. That penalizes ordinary people, not the corrupt leaders. The real challenge is to ensure that the resources made available from debt relief are used for reducing poverty.

In 1997 the United Nations Development Program stated, "Relieved of their annual debt repayments, the severely indebted countries could use the funds for investments that in Africa alone would save the lives of about 21 million children by 2000 and provide 90 million girls and women with access to basic education." *Wouldn't this benefit all of humanity?*

How can we proclaim Jubilee by helping to break the chains around Africa?

- Help bring good news to the poor and liberation to the oppressed by establishing a Jubilee 2000 committee within your church or organization.
- Work with the **Religious Action Network** in our "National Chain-In" for Jubilee 2000.
- Especially encourage young people in actively participating in your church's Jubilee 2000 campaign. The future of Africa and America rests with the youth of today.
- Organize a visit to the local office of your congressional representative. Raise your concern for debt relief for impoverished countries at town meetings held by your representative or at candidate forums. If you cannot visit in person, then write a letter or call the Congressional hotline at (202) 224-3121.
- Educate yourself as much as possible on the issue; the more you know, the more you can act. For more information, contact us directly at 212-785-1024 or check out our website at: www.prairienet.org/acas/acoa.html. You can also contact the Jubilee 2000/USA office at 202-783-3566 or look on their website at www.j2000usa.org.

We gratefully acknowledge Jubilee 2000/USA for the use of their materials.

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