



## **Sisters of Notre Dame Corporate Stance**

### **Cancel Debt of Poor Nations**

#### **Introduction**

We, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in the United States, who belong to an international religious congregation of more than 2000 Roman Catholic Sisters, join with the voices around the world who are calling for the cancellation of the crushing international debt of impoverished countries by the new millennium. We agree that the year 2000 is a very appropriate time; in our biblical tradition, there is a call for Jubilee every 50 years, in which social inequalities are rectified, slaves are freed and debts are canceled. (See Leviticus 25: 8 - 10; 23-28).

Cancelling the debt is a matter not only of compassion but also of justice. People who are already living in dire poverty should not have to become poorer in order to pay for a debt about which they were never consulted and from which they never benefitted. There is, in fact, no indebtedness on the part of these people.

#### **Rationale**

Our Notre Dame goals resonate with the world-wide movement of Jubilee 2000. From our beginning we have been called by our constitutions to reach out to "the poor in the most abandoned places." More recently, we have been called to focus on women and children. The debt itself, and especially the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), the economic conditions imposed on debtor countries by creditor nations and institutions, are particularly hard on women and children. SAPs cause governments to reduce their spending on health, education, social services, in order to pay the debt. The suffering of women and children is increased.

Reports from our Sisters living in highly indebted countries - Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nicaragua, Peru, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Brazil - have sensitized us to the effects of debt on women and children. In Kenya, for example, child mortality has increased because clinics, once subsidized by the government, are now run by the private, profit-making sector. Poor women and children can no longer afford to go to them. In Nicaragua, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Mitch was worse than it might have been because the government had reduced the budgets of the civil defense workers, police, fire brigade, clinics, to comply with SAP regulations. In South Africa the people carry the burden of odious debt. The people who suffered under apartheid need not pay the debt accrued by the apartheid government to further its cause. They need not pay for the instruments that tortured them.

The principles of the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church also resonate with Jubilee 2000. Take, for example, the principle of solidarity. Solidarity is a "firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are really responsible for all."(John Paul II) Solidarity is, in the case of debt, what motivates people around the world to work toward alleviating the debt burden in order to give new hope and new life for the poorest of the poor. We are all in this together.

The Gospel also affirms that God is calling us to a special concern for people living in poverty and oppression. According to Matthew 25, nations and people will be judged on the basis of how they treat the hungry, the homeless and most vulnerable members of society.

### **What We Are Calling For**

We as a Congregation are calling for a cancellation of the debt of impoverished countries by the year 2000, as is called for in the Jubilee 2000 Petition, which many of us have signed. Our particular concern is: impoverished people should not in any way bear the burden of the debt. They were never consulted about the debt and they never benefitted from it. The debt burden should be shared by governments, institutions and individuals who were involved in making and benefitting from the original agreements. Therefore, SAPs should not be imposed in debtor countries as a condition for debt relief.

### **Action**

We pledge ourselves, as a group and individually, to support the world-wide campaign to cancel the debt by:

- \* Praying, individually and communally, for the cancellation of the debt.
- \* Signing, if possible, the Jubilee 2000 Petition.
- \* Supporting our Justice and Peace Network and our Unit  
Justice and Peace structures in advocacy activities when appropriate.
- \* Raising awareness among our associates, students and co-workers about the importance of debt cancellation.
- \* Engaging in on-going study of the economics of international debt, how it affects our lives and those of the poor, and how we can be more effective in reducing the devastating consequences.

*Adopted July 12, 1999*