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On the Eve of St. Patrick's Day, Leprechauns Descend on Irish Embassy Calling for Irish Debt Relief

Giant Leprechauns representing the Anglo-Irish Bank and the European Central Bank will hoard pots of gold to symbolize money taken from the Irish people in front of the Irish Embassy in Washington, DC today at 12:45 PM. A letter from US religious and policy organizations will be delivered to the Irish Embassy calling on the Irish government not to make payments for the failed Anglo-Irish Bank debt.

The Anglo-Irish Bank (Anglo) financed some of Ireland's worst property speculators for unsustainable golf courses, hotels and shopping malls and saddled the Irish people with a massive unjust debt. **"This isn't rocket science - payments for a dead reckless bank, that was part of creating this financial crisis, should be stopped immediately. On St. Patrick's Day, the Irish Government should commit to ensuring that this money should go to help the Irish people,"** said Eric LeCompte, Executive Director of Jubilee USA Network.

In 2008, the Irish Government guaranteed debts owed by Anglo to its creditors, but by 2010, it was clear that Anglo was unable to repay debts on its reckless financing. The Irish government negotiated a deal with the Central Bank of Ireland and the European Central Bank (ECB) for Anglo to receive funding to repay debts. Anglo didn't have sufficient collateral, so the Irish Government created a "promissory note," or an unconditional promise by the Government to cover the liability.

Anglo failed; it's a dead bank, and now the Irish people are being forced to pay off loans incurred by Anglo's reckless lending and the government's promissory note. If Ireland continues making repayments, the Irish will have paid \$61.7 billion to the ECB by 2031 - or 30% of Ireland's GDP. The Government is scheduled to make a promissory note payment of \$4.1 billion to the ECB on March 31, 2012. While \$4.1 billion could pay for funding the nation's entire primary school system for a full year, it will instead be paid into the Central Bank, be deducted from its liabilities and, effectively, be destroyed.

The Irish government has the option of immediately stopping payments and entering into negotiations with the ECB to ensure that the debt is written down and the money can be invested in the welfare of the Irish people. Nessa Ní Chasaide of Jubilee Ireland and The Debt and Development Coalition Ireland noted that "People in Ireland are now living through the same mistakes that were imposed on people who have been living through debt crises for generations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It's time for a line to be drawn under reckless lending and borrowing. Writing down the illegitimate Anglo debt would be a very good place to start."

Over the last 12 years - along with Jubilee partners in 50 countries - Jubilee USA Network has won over \$100 billion in debt relief and financial reforms to benefit the world's poorest. Developing nations have long struggled with large sovereign debts that divert needed funds from social services to repayment. As countries in the North now witness the global debt crisis spreading into their own economies, international financial institutions and banks have continued to respond with outdated and failed policies, and the people continue to shoulder the burden.