

DROP THE DEBT

Fall 2007

NEWS and ACTION from Jubilee USA Network, Washington, DC

Hungry For Justice? Then Register for the Cancel Debt Fast!

By Brian Swarts, National Grassroots Organizer

AS YOU READ THIS NEWSLETTER, we're probably a week or two into the Cancel Debt Fast and I'm sure you've heard the buzz about the campaign! *Sojourners* and *Tikkun* magazines have run articles about the Jubilee movement. And Jim Wallis' *Sojourners* blog, *God's Politics*, featured Rev. David Duncombe, who will lead the Cancel Debt Fast with his own open-ended fast. Rev. Duncombe writes:

If my upcoming fast goes like my previous two extended fasts for debt cancellation in Washington, its effectiveness will depend not so much on what I say on my office visits, but on what is said by the fast itself — the day-to-day silent witness of a body growing visibly weaker. In a sense, a fast like this takes on a life of its own apart from me. There is something of a sacramental quality to the fast, something that carries its own grace and power. I am simply a vehicle for a fasting body, the sight of which seems to touch the souls of others.

To frame the message of the Cancel Debt Fast, we are encouraging Jubilee supporters to adopt the phrase, "I'm hungry for justice!" This is the message that we hope will become undeniably clear to your members of Congress when thousands of you join us by registering for the Cancel Debt Fast and committing to contact your member of Congress to urge their support for the Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation of 2007 (H.R. 2634).

REGISTER NOW FOR THE

CANCEL DEBT FAST

SEPTEMBER 6 TO OCTOBER 15

"MUST WE STARVE OUR CHILDREN TO PAY OUR DEBTS?" JULIUS NYERERE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF TANZANIA

As David points out, fasting is about something bigger than what we do or do not eat. It is about experiencing the hunger that millions of our sisters and brothers around the world face daily. And it's about a deeper kind of hunger — a hunger for change and for a world without poverty. This is a hunger we can experience ourselves as we fast, and it is also the kind of hunger we hope to evoke in our leaders and our communities, as they witness our fast.

If you have not already committed to do so, please join us in fasting for an end to debt. Register online today at www.jubileeusa.org/canceldebtfast.html, then send us your empty plates. After you have taken action, invite others to join you.

SEND US YOUR PLATES!



"MUST WE STARVE OUR CHILDREN TO PAY OUR DEBTS?" JULIUS NYERERE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF TANZANIA

TODAY, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ARE LITERALLY STARVING FOR DEBT CANCELLATION.

- Grab a paper plate and write to your Representative "I'm hungry for debt justice! Support the Jubilee Act, HR 2634."
- Put your name & complete address on the plate.
- Send the plates to Jubilee USA and they'll be delivered along with thousands from across the nation to your Member of Congress!

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Speak Out!

Jubilee USA's blog, **Drop the Debt** is looking for guest bloggers. If you have something to say, the world should read it. If you're interested in writing a few words or sending in photos of what you're doing during the fast and beyond, please contact monét cooper at monet@jubileeusa.org or 202.783.0214.



“...proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you...”
– Leviticus 25:10

Jubilee USA Network began as Jubilee 2000/USA in 1997 when a diverse gathering of people and organizations came together in response to the international call for Jubilee debt cancellation. Now, more than 80 organizations including labor groups, churches, religious communities and institutions, AIDS activists, trade campaigners and over 9,000 individuals are active members of the Jubilee USA Network. Together we are a strong, diverse and growing network dedicated to working for a world free of debt for billions of people.

In the Jubilee Year as quoted above in Leviticus, those enslaved because of debts are freed, lands lost because of debt are returned, and community torn by inequality is restored. Today international debt has become a new form of slavery. Debt slavery means poor people working harder and harder in a vain effort to keep up with the interest payments on debts owed to rich countries including the US and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Jubilee USA Network brings together people to turn this reality around by active solidarity with partners worldwide, targeted and timely advocacy strategies and educational outreach. Please join us in working for Jubilee justice.

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JUBILEE ACT UPDATE

Contacting Your Member of Congress Tops the Agenda

By Kristin Sundell, Advocacy & Organizing Director

THANKS TO YOUR HARD WORK, the new Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation (HR 2634) had 47 cosponsors by the time Congress left town for its August recess. Thank you to everyone who contacted their Representative and urged her or him to sign-on!

If your representative has not yet co-sponsored the Jubilee Act, please continue to call and write your representative and urge others to do the same. One great way keep the pressure on is by organizing a group in your community or church to participate in this fall's Cancel Debt Fast!

The next challenge we face is getting the Jubilee Act introduced into the Senate. Several senators will be key to accomplishing this.

If you live in Delaware, Connecticut, Kansas, Wisconsin, New Hampshire or Minnesota, please contact your senator (listed below), and urge him to introduce a Senate companion to the Jubilee Act. Your calls, emails, and letters make an enormous difference!

Connecticut: Senator Dodd

Delaware: Senator Biden

Kansas: Senator Brownback

Minnesota: Senator Coleman

New Hampshire: Senator Sununu

Wisconsin: Senator Feingold

The Jubilee Act would expand access to debt cancellation to 67 of the world's most impoverished countries. Most of these countries have substantial debts and the average person earns \$1,025 or less per year. Current debt cancellation programs have provided 100 percent debt cancellation for only 21 of these countries.

The Jubilee Act requires the immediate cancellation of the debts of impoverished countries without harmful economic policy conditions attached. Current debt cancellation programs require countries to implement the IMF's economic policy model of privatization, liberalization, and cuts in social spending.

For example, Nicaragua was required to sell its electric systems to a Spanish company, resulting in skyrocketing prices and reduced access to electricity in poor communities. Zambia was forced to freeze wages and hiring of doctors, nurses, and teachers, resulting in drastically understaffed schools and clinics. The Jubilee Act would make impoverished countries eligible for debt cancellation through meeting basic standards of transparency and accountability, but without forcing countries to implement economic policies that harm the poorest.

For more information about the Jubilee Act and resources to help you contact your member of Congress go to www.jubileeusa.org or contact Kristin Sundell at kristin@jubileeusa.org or 202.783.0215.

A Country's Inheritance

Activist Muyatwa Sitali highlights Zambia's efforts to challenge vulture funds, cancel debt and push for transparency

What is the origin of Zambia's debt and what are the links between Zambia's debt and apartheid?

At independence in 1964, Zambia inherited both assets and liabilities from the colonial regime: a vibrant mining sector [and] the largest industrial base in Sub-Saharan Africa. But with only a handful (about 100) of university graduates, very limited infrastructure and a £97 million* external debt, Zambia began borrowing to cover its social and economic requirements as well as to protect itself from the brutal apartheid regime of South Africa. By 1999, over 90 percent of Zambia's \$6.5 billion debt was apartheid-related.

The causes of Zambia's crippling debt included:

1. Balance of payment problems during the 1970s due to falling copper prices and rising oil prices. From 1970 to 1980, over \$840 million in debt was amassed to offset the gap between Zambia's energy needs and its export income.
2. Zambia's solidarity with liberation struggles in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola, Namibia and Mozambique. By 1999, Zambia's involvement in the struggle against colonialism accounted for over 90 percent of Zambia's debt, which is why it is referred to as apartheid debt.
3. The necessity of alternative and costly trade routes as a landlocked country surrounded by countries embroiled in liberation struggles.
4. The repudiation of Zambia's unjust debt and refusal to comply with the austere conditionalities and policies of the IMF from 1987 to 1989. During this time Zambia accumulated \$3 billion in additional debt due to arrears and penalties, while the debt service to export ratio rose to over 50 percent.

After the debt cancellation of 2005, what are the challenges the country currently faces?

First, there is a new generation of debt crisis which directly threatens the benefits of debt cancellation and stands in the way of attainment of the MDGs: Vulture Funds! Commercial debt creditors like Mr. Michael Sheehan and Donegal International are preying off the benefits of debt relief from poor countries like Zambia that are forced to repay large amounts of money on old debts, using the money freed by multilateral and bilateral debt cancellation. Efforts to shame Sheehan into stopping his vulture activity probably won't bring about much change. But campaigns to get the G8, World Bank, the IMF and other major actors to prevent such harmful

tactics must be stepped up. Otherwise the relief experienced by poor debtor countries will be short lived!

Second, Zambia is falling back into debt, and at a very disturbing rate! Headlines in the local newspapers regularly tell us that "Zambia Lands Big Money," or "China Gives Zambia Many Millions." This "big money" or these "gifts" frequently come by way of loans, not grants. Campaign efforts in Zambia are needed for two things: 1) to demand more grants and fewer loans, and 2) more openness about the quality and conditions of any new loans.

Third, there is a clear need for greater transparency in the use of resources freed up by debt cancellation.

Fourth, there is still no mechanism through which we can broaden citizens' involvement in the borrowing process. For several years, Jubilee-Zambia has campaigned for a constitutional measure requiring parliamentary oversight and approval of new loans. Today, the Minister of Finance and National Planning can sign for millions of dollars of debt without informing the rest of the country, including Parliament. But the Mung'omba Draft Constitution contains explicit language requiring parliamentary consultation and approval of new loans. Parliamentary involvement in future borrowing is an important guarantee of fiscal responsibility that must be campaigned for. When people ask whether a new Constitution will provide more food for people, we can point to clauses like this that will guarantee better allocation of resources to address the real needs of the people!



Muyatwa Sitali

Muyatwa Sitali is the acting coordinator at Debt and Trade Project (Jubilee-Zambia) in Lusaka, Zambia. He can be reached at muyatwa@jesuits.org.zm. Be sure to visit www.jubileeusa.org for Jubilee USA's full un-edited interview with Muyatwa and more on vulture funds, the links between Zambia's debt and apartheid, and Muyatwa's work for economic justice in Zambia.

*\$193.5 million U.S. dollars. (2007 currency conversion figure)

Join Jubilee in Washington, DC for the Global Week of Action on Debt and IFIs

October 16 – 21, 2007

Scholarships are available to help with the cost of travel and housing. To apply for a scholarship, contact Kristin Sundell at 202-783-0215 or Kristin@jubileeusa.org. Scholarship funds are limited, so apply today!

Tuesday, October 16

8am-10am Prayer Breakfast

(Rayburn House Office Building, B-339 and B-340)

We will break the 40-day Rolling Fast to end global poverty with a prayer breakfast on Capitol Hill, led by religious and political leaders including Archbishop Ndugane of Cape Town South Africa, German Theologian Ulrich Duchrow, a Zambian Member of Parliament, civil society leaders from Kenya and Haiti, and US religious and political leaders

Noon-1pm Lunch

1pm-5pm Issue & Lobby Training

(Lutheran Church of the Reformation)

The prayer breakfast will be followed by lobby training for grassroots debt cancellation advocates from across the United States, in preparation for Jubilee USA's National Lobby Day. The afternoon will feature trainings and presentations by faith leaders and policy experts from the global South and Washington, DC.

Wednesday, October 17

Global White Band Day: An International Day of Action to Eradicate Global Poverty Stand Up and Speak Out for Economic Justice!

9am-5pm Jubilee USA National Lobby Day for debt cancellation in Washington, D.C.

Thursday, October 18

9am-5pm Jubilee Annual Network Council Meeting

(Methodist Building, 100 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002)

6pm-9pm Jubilee USA 10th Anniversary

Celebration (Stewart Mott House, 122 Maryland Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002)

Friday, October 19 – Sunday, October 21

Annual Meeting of the IMF/World Bank and civil society events and mobilizations

Visit www.jubileeusa.org for more information as it becomes available.

Revolving Doors

WE SAY GOODBYE TO OUR SUMMER INTERNS. On the Outreach team: Patricia Abbey-Mensah of Waldorf, Md.; Noel Estes of San Francisco, Calif.; Nicole Kahn of Seattle, Wa.; Sheena Shukla of Chicago, Ill. On the policy team: William Owusu of Waldorf, Md.

And we welcome two new staff members: **Brian Swarts**, National Field Organizer, and **Mercedes Mack**, Operations Coordinator!

Brian comes to us from Oregon where he served as the founding director of the Oregon Center for Christian Values, a grassroots network that trains Christians in faith-based advocacy for the impoverished, the sick and creation. Brian also worked as the faith community organizer for the Economic Fairness Coalition, managing a successful campaign to pass legislation against predatory lending by the payday loan industry. Brian's previous professional experiences include community development work in Honduras and a teaching position in rural Mississippi with Teach for America. He has degrees in theology and international development policy. Brian is thrilled to be able to integrate his diverse interests and experiences into his work at Jubilee and to continue working with issues of predatory lending and economic justice.

Mercedes arrives at Jubilee from Burlington, Vermont, where she matriculated through Quaker and Catholic schools and has been a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church since she was 11. In May, Mercedes graduated from Saint Michael's College in Vermont where she combined her passion for learning with a dedication to advocacy. "I know that it is my calling to work for and with people who, by no fault of their own, can not fight for themselves because their voices are not heard due to poverty, geography, race, gender, ethnicity, and the numerous injustices that occur in our world," Mercedes says. "Another way is possible. I am happy to be working with Jubilee because it is clear that the hard work of the people at Jubilee ensure that one day the other way I and so many others envision will be the way."



Mercedes Mack

Grassroots Conference Update!

Didn't make it to Jubilee USA's 2nd Annual Grassroots Training & Organizing Conference in Chicago? Well, you can still listen to audio from the plenary sessions and the Friday Night event featuring Tanzanian political cartoonist Godfrey "Gado" Mwampembwa and Amy Goodman, host of Pacifica Radio's *Democracy Now!*. Take the conference on the road with you and download the mp3s to your portable device at www.jubileeusa.org. See you next year!