

RELIGIOUS LEADER LETTER TO THE G8 ON HIV/AIDS AND DEBT

June 2007

Dear President Bush,

We, the undersigned religious leaders, ask that you address two critical issues at this year's G8 Summit in Germany that have a profound impact on the continent of Africa and implications for the rest of the world: the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the enduring international debt crisis. **We call on you to work with the rest of the G8 to create a strategy and a comprehensive long-term funding package to ensure that the goal of Universal Access to Prevention, Treatment, Care and Support for HIV/AIDS set two years ago will be fully financed and achieved by the target date of 2010. In addition to securing the necessary commitments to realize this pledge, we ask you to commit to expand the G8 2005 debt agreement to recognize the illegitimate nature of the international debt crisis and commit to 100% debt cancellation for all African countries without harmful economic conditions attached.**

Work to achieve universal access at the G8 this year would provide an opportunity to re-invigorate global efforts aimed at reversing the HIV & AIDS pandemic, which has already killed almost 30 million people. According to UNAIDS estimates, effective measures against the global pandemic require investments of US\$22 billion in 2008, and only a funding plan agreed across the G8 in 2007 can ensure these needs are met. This plan should map out how donor countries intend to increase revenue and channel much-needed additional money to fully fund all developing countries' national targets. We are just 3 years away from the target date and are facing a major funding shortfall. As a result, over 75% of people urgently needing life-saving treatment are not receiving it, and last year 3 million people died of AIDS-related illnesses. **As people of faith from a variety of religious traditions we are compelled to take action to protect these valuable lives. Please do your part to protect life by creating a comprehensive strategy and long-term funding package to ensure universal access to treatment by 2010.**

African efforts to confront HIV/AIDS are handicapped by the continent's massive debt burden, and by the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which constrain spending on health care in many African countries. The G8 took an important first step in 2005 by canceling 100% of the debts owed to the IMF and World Bank by 18 countries, 14 in Africa. Already this action has enabled countries like Zambia to increase access to treatment and abolish health clinic fees. This was only a first step, however. Many countries in Africa have been left behind, including Liberia, a newly democratic nation that desperately needs debt cancellation to rebuild after decades of conflict. Liberia needs access to its full budget to address urgent issues of unemployment and to fight HIV/AIDS and other health crises. **We ask that you lead an initiative in the G8 this year to expand this debt deal to ensure immediate 100% cancellation of the debts of the other countries in Africa that have equally illegitimate debts and urgent health priorities.** This cancellation must come free from harmful economic conditionality.

We look forward to learning that the 2007 G8 Summit takes new strides to address these urgent global priorities.

Sincerely,

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