

The Rt. Rev. Jean Zaché Duracin, Episcopal Bishop of Haiti

Jubilee Prayer Breakfast Speech

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=4nejdYYWdYQ&feature=related>

October 16, 2007

I would like to thank very much Jim Curry, Secretary of Bishops [of the Episcopal Church], working for a just world, and his invitation to me to take part in this meeting of Bishops working for a just world and your campaign. I also thank the staff of the Episcopal church — Episcopalians of all traditions. And I thank all of you, bishops, Congressmen and women, ecumenical partners, brothers and sisters in Christ — for this opportunity you've given me to talk to you about Haiti — especially about debt relief, debt cancellation.

Haiti has the greatest incidence of economic poverty in the Americas. With 80 percent of the population living in abject poverty, life expectancy is 53 years and 1 out of 9 children dies before reaching his fifth birthday.

Despite the urgent need for government spending to reduce poverty and a government committed to the health and well being of its people, Haiti is forced to spend \$56 million from its national budget each year to reimburse rich countries and international financial institutions like World Bank, IMF, and Inter-American Development Bank.

For debts are caused as a result of loans to past governments. More than half of Haiti's \$1.3 billion dollar debt was amassed because of irresponsible loans to Haiti's dictatorships, particularly the regimes of Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier. **Immediate and full debt cancellation is necessary for Haiti's new government to work with its citizens to combat poverty, grow jobs, and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.**

Haiti's legacy of debt began shortly after the country won independence from France and abolished slavery in 1804, becoming just the second independent non-native state in the Americas and also the first black republic in the world. Following threats by the French to invade and reestablish slavery, Haiti compensated the French for lost property, including slaves. Haiti agreed to pay France 150 million francs, which amounts to 21 billion dollars in today's money.

I have to say so many things about Haiti, but time is almost up. **This enormous debt equaled to ten times Haiti's export revenues or the price of surrendering [to the French] and it plunged the world's first black republic into a cycle of debt and underdevelopment that detracted from investment, infrastructure, education and public services.**

From 1957 to 1986, when Haiti was controlled by the father-son Duvalier dictatorship, the government wasted foreign assistance payments on fur coats and brutal death squads like the tonton macoutes. The subsequent report revealed that in his last six years of power, Jean Claude Duvalier diverted at least 500 million dollars in foreign assistance to illegitimate purposes.

So, in contrast to the approach taken by the international financial institutions, the very organizations responsible for Haiti's debt in the first place, strategy for immediate debt cancellation would free much needed Haitian resources for the fight against poverty.

As now, we have a new government in Haiti, with René Préval as the president, and Jacques-Édouard Alexis as our prime minister. They are making a fresh start and raising hopes for an end to the political unrest that has plagued Haiti since the February 2004 coup d'état.

100 percent debt cancellation and an end to economic conditionality would not only heighten spending on poverty, health and education, but would also give the new president and the people of Haiti a fair opportunity to stable and strengthen democracy.

Let me finish to say that, as I know, that Representative Maxine Waters and a bipartisan group of lawmakers has introduced this legislation in the U.S. Congress to win 100 percent debt cancellation to Haiti along with an end to the harmful economic conditionalities imposed by the international financial institutions.

This legislation would make a vital contribution to democracy in Haiti and the health and wellbeing of the Haitian people. So I would like that lawmakers who are interested in co-sponsoring the Haiti debt cancellation resolution should contact Representative Waters or her staff. Thank you very much.