

A Call to Solidarity with Africa

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Msgr. William P. Fay, General Secretary, USCCB

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Introduction

"We want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you, the Family of God in Africa. . . . Christ our Hope is alive; [you] shall live!" These words from the African bishops' 1994 *Message of the Synod* reveal the hope and courage of the Catholic Church and the peoples of Africa as they confront daunting challenges and persistent obstacles. This message of hope inspires the Church in Africa to persevere in its struggle to make visible the fullness of life (Jn 10:10) promised to every human person. It demands from the international community—and the Catholic Church in the United States in particular—a meaningful response.

The urgency of our attention to the Church and the peoples of Africa is prompted by two conflicting convictions: hope and concern. We write in hope, recognizing the history, strength, spirituality, courage, and capacity of the Church and peoples of Africa. We write with deep concern, witnessing the proliferation of armed conflict, a deterioration in health care and education infrastructures, the weakening of social and community structures, and an increasing spread of disease and other threats to the lives of our African brothers and sisters. Our fear is that Africa's hopes could be destroyed by indifference and inaction in Africa and around the world. For these reasons, we raise our voices and echo the plea made by the Holy See at the U.N. Millennium Summit, "that Africa be given special attention, and that efforts be made which are really capable of meeting its needs."¹

Responding to the call of the Church in Africa, as pastors in the United States we recognize the mutual bonds of

solidarity that unite us—bonds that have been forged through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We stand in solidarity with the Church and the peoples of Africa, to recognize and support their courageous commitment to peace, justice, and reconciliation. We encourage the Catholic community in the United States to contribute its diverse talents and gifts to the continent's causes of justice, peace, and integral development. We call the U.S. government to demonstrate responsible leadership and increase its engagement in working with African nations in order to address their present challenges and future possibilities. As we do this, we are reminded of the words of the Holy Father: "*Africa is not destined for death, but for life!*"²

This call to solidarity with Africa extends well beyond the witness of the Church. Most recently, it has been expressed through an increased awareness among, and involvement of, the world community in the search to promote development and foster peace with and among the peoples and nations of Africa. Recent gatherings and initiatives are signs of a growing international commitment to work with African countries to fight poverty, HIV/AIDS, and infectious diseases, and to promote peace, security, and development. These overdue efforts must be encouraged and promoted.

Our call to solidarity with the Church, nations, and peoples of Africa, particularly the nations of sub-Saharan Africa, recognizes and is based on the special responsibilities and opportunities that we have as Catholics and citizens of the United States. As Catholics, we embrace the universal character of our Christian identity, an identity that "transcends national boundaries and calls us to live in solidarity and justice with the peoples of the world."³ As Americans, we acknowledge the singular position enjoyed by the United States as one of the wealthiest nations on earth, but privilege cannot be divorced from responsibility. The cry of Lazarus, a sickly beggar to the wealthy, insensitive rich man in Luke's gospel (16:19-31) continues to challenge our sense of responsibility. We cannot satisfy our moral obligations to the world's poor by allowing only a few crumbs from the table of material abundance to fall upon the nations and peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. We are called to a much greater commitment of resources and energy.

Our faith demands it: Jesus' message of salvation is universal. Jesus reveals to every person the dignity of what it means to be truly human. This message proclaimed by the Gospel is the basis of the principles of Catholic social teaching, challenging every person to respect the life and dignity of all and to realize the connections and common destiny of the entire human family. In Christ, we discover the bonds of mutual solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Africa.

Our sisters and brothers are asking for our help: As we witness intense suffering and hear cries for help, we recognize the bonds of a shared faith and a common humanity with the peoples of Africa, especially the poor. Pope John Paul II and the Church in Africa call us to solidarity and seek our assistance. As members of the universal Church, we "'must continue to exercise [the Church's] prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless,' so that everywhere the human dignity of every individual will be acknowledged, and that people will always be at the center of all government programs."⁴ We must respond to this call.

Our world needs this effort: The immensity of poverty, violence, disease, and despair, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, threatens the stability and security of the international community. Diverse peoples must recognize shared interests, values, and obligations despite distance and differences. The promotion of this international common good will help all peoples to live in security and peace.

The United States has special responsibilities: Our nation's history, its affluence, its economic and political power, and its leadership role in the world require us to accept an inescapable responsibility to help the peoples of Africa to live in peace and with dignity. From the earliest days of our nation, people of African descent contributed so much, playing major roles in the defense of democracy, and in the social, cultural, economic, and spiritual development of the United States. We also acknowledge the sad fact that the evil institution of slavery played a significant role in the development of our country. Citizens of African descent continue to play an integral role in defining American identity and in promoting the common good. For these reasons, the United States has a clear moral duty to adopt policies and support programs that encourage integral human development and long-term economic growth for the poorest countries, with particular attention to sub-Saharan Africa. This is not just a policy option; it is a moral obligation.

We can make a difference: Today in Africa lives are being lost at an alarming rate. The continent faces serious challenges that oftentimes weaken the resolve of peoples committed to the pursuit of justice, peace, and integral development. Our voices can join with others to encourage a sustained, just, and comprehensive engagement of the world's vast resources to generate lasting solutions that respect the full, human dignity of our brothers and sisters in the poorest countries of Africa.

In our efforts to respond in concrete ways to this call to solidarity with the Church and peoples of Africa, we recognize "that Africa is a huge Continent where very diverse situations are found. . . . It is necessary to avoid generalizations both in evaluating problems and suggesting solutions."⁵ Our task is not to reduce difficult situations and the complex histories of peoples, regions, and nations in Africa in an effort to find simple solutions. Nor do we pretend to speak *for* Africa, *for* the peoples and nations of Africa, or *for* the Catholic Church in Africa. Rather, we stand *with* the Church in Africa; we seek to call attention to Africa's problems and potential; we want to amplify the voices of Africans, so that they can be heard by a sometimes distracted world.

I. The Church in Africa: Source of Hope for a Continent in Transition

The Church in Africa is characterized by deep historical roots, dynamic growth, vibrant spirituality, and creativity. From the middle of the first century a.d., the Church actively pursued its mission through thriving Christian communities in Egypt, Nubia (southern Egypt and northern Sudan), Ethiopia, and elsewhere in North Africa and the Horn of Africa. [\[See textbox 1: the development of the Church in Africa.\]](#) African popes, theologians, spiritual ascetics, and committed lay Christians contributed to the evolving understanding of the Church's theological and missionary nature, and to its spiritual effervescence, a presence that continues today. Later, as the Church deepened its African roots in the midst of great turmoil, Catholic missionaries, responding to Christ's mandate to preach to and teach all peoples, carried the message of Christian hope throughout the continent. These dedicated witnesses cared for people in all dimensions of their lives: spiritual, physical, and social. They introduced systems of education and health care that continue to serve the needs of millions throughout the continent. And they shared with the world the values and insights gained from deep communion with the Church and its members in Africa.

Today the Catholic Church and other Christian ecclesial communities in Africa are the fastest growing in the world. Among the more than 800 million people living in the fifty-four countries of Africa, more than 350 million are Christians and more than 116 million are Catholics.⁶ African Catholics compose nearly 15 percent of the entire African population. The Catholic Church is a vibrant, dynamic community of faith providing spiritual and social renewal throughout the continent and within our universal community of faith.

A. The Church as Servant

In Africa, the most viable non-governmental institutions providing social services—including schools, hospitals, clinics, and agricultural cooperatives—are those operated by the Catholic Church and other Christian groups. Nearly 17 percent of all health systems in sub-Saharan Africa are ministries of the Catholic Church. In areas of intense conflict, such as southern Sudan, eastern Congo, and Sierra Leone, the Church continues to serve the needs of the people with great courage when governments and other political organizations fail.

In addition to serving the social needs of many Africans, the Church in Africa is continuing to stand up for human life and human dignity and working for justice and peace in difficult situations. Consider the following examples:

- In southern *Sudan*, the Catholic and Christian churches are standing up for human rights and bringing warring factions together to reconcile longstanding differences, and to build more effective bridges for communication and mutual cooperation; meanwhile, in northern Sudan, the Church provides health and education services to some of the more than 2 million displaced persons who receive no assistance from their government.
- In *South Africa*, the Catholic community joined many others in opposing apartheid and today is helping to promote healing and reconciliation while serving the basic needs of many South Africans. With the support of Catholic Relief Services, the Church in South Africa is pursuing new strategies to confront more effectively the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which afflicts nearly 25 percent of the adult population. These strategies include community-based care, moral formation, education and public advocacy, and the promotion of greater access to essential drugs for the treatment of malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS.

- In *West and Central Africa*, the Church is a major actor, working with others to help reform political structures and rehabilitate national institutions. Two examples are found in Benin and the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) where in the early 1990s, the Church through its bishops actively facilitated and directed the national reconciliation processes, calling for greater respect for democracy, human rights, and responsible and transparent governance.
- In *Nigeria*, the voice of the Church, together with leaders of other Christian churches and the Muslim community, serves as an effective instrument in calling for substantive inter-religious, inter-ethnic, and inter-regional dialogue in the midst of tremendous political, social, and economic turmoil. The Church throughout the continent should be supported in efforts to promote ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, religious liberty, and mutual respect.
- In *Kenya*, the Church and other religious groups are spearheading efforts to reform the constitution, defend human rights, and uproot corruption.

These and other activities of the Church in Africa are signs of a community seeking, in the words of Pope John Paul II, to stand "resolutely on the side of the oppressed and of voiceless and marginalized peoples."⁷

African Catholics also contribute significantly, in turn, to the life of the Church in the United States. African priests and men and women religious who have been commissioned to work or study in the United States provide an important service to the Church. African laity join with us to celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and to make their particular contributions to parishes, dioceses, and other church entities. Their experience and wisdom can help provide direction and momentum to our efforts to preach the Gospel and to promote justice, peace, human rights, and full human development in Africa.

B. Other Signs of Hope for a Continent Facing Many Challenges

African nations themselves give witness to processes of change and revitalization. South Africa, in its stunningly non-violent struggle to move beyond apartheid, teaches other countries the power of prayer, truth, and reconciliation. Ghana's recent successful electoral process sets an example for nations more powerful or with a longer tradition of democracy. Mozambique's active pursuit of a program of reconstruction and development provides renewed hope and fresh opportunities to its people. The leaders of five African nations presented an initiative to the G-8 Summit (Genoa, July 2001) committing African governments to poverty eradication, more transparent governance, the rule of law, an end to tribalism and conflict, and the promotion of sustainable growth and development. The initiative also invites the international community to deepen its commitment to economic investment, technical assistance, and a more harmonious and just integration of Africa into the world economy to promote development in African nations. G-8 leaders welcomed the initiative and agreed to a new partnership. These examples demonstrate the strength and courage of the peoples and nations of Africa that enable them to create effective solutions for their problems. Africa is not a continent of despair. It is rather a place of people who are struggling to overcome past problems and current challenges in order to build a future of hope and opportunity.

The world community owes much to the peoples of Africa. Africa has always served other nations as a source of rich human and material resources. Nearly 15 percent of U.S. oil imports and a large percentage of diamonds, gold, precious woods, and many other materials come from the African continent. Today Africa's medical specialists, educators, and other trained professionals are contributing to the growth of human knowledge. African doctors and researchers are major partners in the search for new and more effective remedies to the deadliest and most vexing of diseases. African musicians and artists are creating new artistic expressions that deepen and broaden the aesthetic range of peoples and nations throughout the world; still others excel in many athletic competitions around the world.

II. A Continent Facing Tremendous Challenges

A. Signs of Struggle

Christian hope is not to be confused with naive optimism. While recognizing the significant contributions made by African peoples—their great human potential and rich natural resources—we also are aware of the many destructive forces that have robbed, and continue to threaten, the integral development of the peoples and nations of Africa. Slavery, a system fundamentally evil and base, stole from the African continent many of its *most* precious resources: men, women, and children. Millions of people were forcibly uprooted from their families and communities to lands and conditions so alienating and dehumanizing that words cannot convey the depth of their suffering. Our own nation, as well as the rest of the Americas, still lives with the effects of this evil. Our own people still bear slavery's scars and live its history—a history that has not yet been fully acknowledged or entirely reconciled. America's own responsibility to overcome this legacy of slavery and racism should be reflected in our domestic and international programs and policies. Moreover, great efforts must also be made by African nations and the international community to eliminate the ongoing practice of slavery in countries such as Sudan and Mauritania.

The legacy of Africa's colonial past has contributed to the conflict, disorder, and animosity among the many ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. Conflict and instability in Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and elsewhere can be traced to colonial programs of alienation, discrimination, social exclusion, and manipulation of ethnic identity intended to ensure domination and control over vast geographical areas and tremendous human and natural resources. In post-colonial Africa, politicians and military leaders have often employed these same methods to harness resources for their own narrow ends. Throughout these periods, the Church in Africa has struggled to make more evident in her witness of faith that justice she dares to speak about to others.⁸

Corruption and bad governance ravage the resources of Africa's peoples, thus diminishing their capacity to address human needs. As the bishops of Cameroon said last year, "corruption has attained a suicidal level in our society. It is accepted as a normal way of life, so much so that those who practice it no longer feel the slightest guilt."⁹ Social and cultural factors within Africa contribute to this situation. Regrettably, some of the practices of multilateral lending institutions and bilateral humanitarian assistance programs have not adequately focused on poverty eradication but have inadvertently contributed to the deepening of corruption. These same institutions and programs have at times been blind to corruption and bad governance in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Kenya, Cameroon, and elsewhere, in the name of democracy and development. Whatever the source, the fruits of corruption and poor governance are malnourished babies, illiterate children, and the unemployed masses.

In several countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the issue of land reform has invited a serious examination of colonial land agreements and post-colonial reform programs that were based on unjust expropriation, and have perpetuated and deepened poverty and underdevelopment. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference recognizes that "an overwhelming proportion of the productive land in South Africa remains in the hands of the minority which obtained it historically by unjust means."¹⁰ Zimbabwe is a most egregious example of where violence, instability, the suspension of the rule of law, and corruption have marred attempts by African governments to address land reform.¹¹ The international community should support and encourage just and equitable land reform undertaken by African governments as part of a broader strategy for poverty eradication. In this way, the "universal destination of the earth's goods" might be achieved.¹²

B. Poverty, Disease, and the Burden of Debt

The destitution and deprivation of so many Africans demand a more urgent response from the international community, including our nation. Hundreds of millions are losing their lives and are denied the most basic elements of human dignity. Nearly 300 million Africans—a number approximately equal to the population of the United States—live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than one dollar a day. Most lack access to health services or safe drinking water. Malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and other communicable diseases threaten to wipe out as much as one-quarter of the populations of some African countries over the next twenty years. [\[See textbox 2: World Health Organization statistics on communicable diseases and their impact on sub-Saharan Africa.\]](#) As a consequence of this devastation of the general population, there are fewer teachers, farmers, health professionals, and other workers.

Children are one of the groups most affected by poverty. Many die from hunger or lack of adequate health care. Millions face illiteracy, short life expectancies, and lack of family support. Others are forcibly conscripted into military service or coopted by rebel militias. The number of orphans, street children, and child-headed households is in the tens of millions, as parents fall victim to disease or conflicts. African women also bear a disproportionate burden of poverty, lack of health care, and little political empowerment. The result is a self-reinforcing circle of poverty, death, the breakdown of family and other traditional support systems, loss of social identity, and deprivation.

Many sub-Saharan African countries also struggle under a heavy burden of debt repayment obligations. Even with enhanced international debt relief, strongly urged by our bishops' conference in the 1999 statement *A Jubilee Call for Debt Forgiveness*, a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa continue to pay debt services that average close to one-quarter of government revenues, thereby shifting already limited resources away from vital health delivery services, education, and other efforts to eliminate poverty. In an age of globalization, Africa is quickly becoming the primary place of poverty in the world.¹³ Given the deepening crisis, today's global response remains inadequate and indefensible.

C. Conflict and Insecurity on the Continent

While most of Africa is at peace, some of the world's deadliest conflicts continue to rage on the continent. The near-genocidal war in Sudan, which has raged on for eighteen years and is fueled by a systematic campaign of Islamization and Arabization, has resulted in 2 million dead and twice that many displaced. The world cannot ignore this horrible abuse of power carried out by the Sudanese government. The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has resulted in 3 million deaths in the past three years alone. Widespread amputations of arms and legs in Sierra Leone, the depopulation of large areas in Angola, and fierce fighting in Burundi further illustrate a legacy of death and destruction that has set back efforts to promote poverty eradication and long-term development.

Conflict in Africa takes many forms. A particularly distressing form involves the manipulation of cultural and religious identity

to gain and consolidate political, economic, and social control. Situations in Southern Sudan, Burundi, and Rwanda testify to the ways that ethnic and cultural identity can be employed to cultivate a culture of deep suspicion and hatred between different ethnic groups, which can lead to genocide. In Rwanda in 1994, more than half a million people (some 8 percent of the population) were massacred in the space of only three months. For Christians, it is particularly painful that ethnic differences in Rwanda, as elsewhere, split asunder the unity and love that has been entrusted by Christ to his Church. The Church and peoples of Rwanda, and other countries torn apart by intercommunal conflicts, need our continued prayers and support as they strive to overcome a legacy of ethnic hatred and reconstruct just, stable multiethnic societies.

The use of religious identity—for example, the pitting of Muslims against Christians and Christians against Muslims—represents a particularly disturbing development. The Sudanese government's systematic denial of religious liberty, human rights abuses, bombing of civilian populations, and enslavement of women and children demonstrate how religious and cultural identity can be manipulated to serve political and economic ends. This perversion of religion for political ends poisons areas of Africa and deprives many Africans of their lives and human rights. [\[See textbox 3: story from Sudan church.\]](#)

Africa's wealth in natural resources—which should be such a rich source of blessings—has sometimes become a source of tremendous suffering. The relationship between natural resources and conflict in Africa is becoming clearer. Two natural resources, diamonds and oil, are of particular concern. In Sierra Leone, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, conflicts over diamonds have produced intense human suffering and political instability. Oil exploration and development in the Niger Delta have been associated with deeper economic impoverishment, political disenfranchisement, and ecological disasters for the people and the region. Likewise, in southern Sudan, oil exploration has led to the forcible displacement of large numbers of people and is fueling the government's cruel war against the south. Oil also has fueled Angola's decades-long civil war. In each of these countries, foreign corporations—American, European, Asian, and others—reap large profits from diamonds and oil while too often demonstrating little concern for the negative impact their activities may have on peace, stability, human rights, and the environment. As part of this exchange for natural resources, individuals, multinational corporations, and foreign governments have provided arms to African governments and non-governmental entities resulting in further instability and deeper human suffering.

It is all too easy to dismiss these wars as intractable ethnic conflicts, unsusceptible to outside influence or having little strategic interest to the United States and the international community. The principal responsibility for resolving these conflicts clearly lies with the political and military leaders in these countries. But the United States and the international community cannot ignore their own responsibility to help resolve these conflicts. Sadly, race and geographical proximity, as well as economic and political factors, it seems, can disproportionately shape our nation's foreign policy. While genocide in the Balkans attracts a serious U.S. response, Rwandan genocide did not. Conflict in Northern Ireland commands significant U.S. attention, but not war and persecution in Sudan. We hope these tragic examples are giving way to new interest and involvement.

D. Refugees and Displaced Persons

A disturbing byproduct of the ongoing civil wars and political unrest in Africa is the large number of refugees and internally displaced persons who inhabit the African landscape. Africa hosts more than 3.5 million refugees—nearly 30 percent of the world's total—and approximately 50 percent of the world's 25 million internally displaced persons. Primarily because of long-lasting conflicts in the Horn of Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea), the Great Lakes region (Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda), and West Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea), millions of refugees have fled unrest in their respective homelands, only to face an unstable and meager existence in insecure refugee camps. Many of these camps are subject to violence, shortages of food, and insufficient sanitation and potable water. Because of a lack of resources and political will from the international community, many refugees, for whom resettlement is the only durable solution, languish in camps for years.

Internally displaced persons, those who are forced to flee from their homes but do not cross an international border, often find themselves in even more desperate situations. Because internally displaced persons do not enjoy international legal protection, and no international body is charged with their care, they often lack the basic necessities to survive and are not provided opportunity for asylum or resettlement in another country. They face even graver danger because they remain in harm's way, continuing to be victims of internal wars or ongoing human rights abuses by their government or other parties to a conflict. For example, the 18-year civil war in Sudan has produced more than 4 million internally displaced persons—the largest number in any country in the world—who live in subhuman conditions and remain vulnerable to aerial bombings and forced displacement by armed militias.

The world can no longer ignore the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa. Many African countries have welcomed fleeing refugees who seek protection in their lands, offering them whatever safety and support they can afford. This is no substitute, however, for a stronger U.S. and international commitment of leadership and resources to protect African refugees and internally displaced persons.

III. The Challenge of Africa to the United States and the International Community

American foreign policy towards Africa changed as the Cold War drew to a close. Throughout much of the post-colonial era, Africa was too often an arena of conflict by proxy on the part of the United States and the former Soviet Union. Wars, dictatorial and corrupt regimes, human rights abuses, and underdevelopment are among the legacies of this period. [See [textbox 4: landmines in Africa/trade in excess Cold War weapons.](#)] Today there is less external intervention but more neglect and indifference. While the strategic rationale for intervention has diminished with the end of the Cold War, the ethical imperatives for engagement with Africa remain stronger than ever. The United States must not write off Africa as having little relevance to our strategic priorities but rather must embrace a broader vision of our nation's interest in, and obligation to, the world's poorest continent. Our nation should provide more development aid for the neediest countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including aid for Africa's debilitated health care systems. The United States should also seek and develop trade relationships that are an engine for the elimination of poverty, and should play a more central role in promoting peace throughout Africa.

A. Addressing Poverty, Debt, and Development

As part of a comprehensive approach to ensure a more just relationship with Africa, dramatically higher levels of development assistance are needed to address the many challenges facing the peoples and nations of Africa. Our nation's lack of serious attention to the needs in Africa is a scandal. Contrary to popular opinion, U.S. commitment to development assistance ranks the lowest as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) among the developed nations. The U.S. effort in sub-Saharan Africa falls well short of a responsible contribution, given the severe nature of the problems and America's leadership role in the world. Our country gives less to this region, as a percentage of its total aid budget, than nearly all other donor countries. The U.S. Catholic bishops have called for an additional \$1 billion dedicated to poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa, which would bring U.S. assistance as a percentage of its aid budget to sub-Saharan Africa to just above the bottom third of donors.¹⁴ [See [textbox 5: chart illustrating ranking of United States among the developed nations in percentage of GDP given in foreign assistance.](#)]

More money is needed, but money alone is not enough. Resources can still be diverted from the urgent task of poverty elimination through corruption, regional conflicts, oppressive or weak governments, and poor economic management. Peace, stability, and good governance are necessary for poverty eradication and require urgent attention from donor countries as well as from African countries themselves. The campaign for poverty eradication must be *by* Africans and *for* Africans, placing the people's interests first. Civil society should play an increasing role in the monitoring of good governance and in the formation of a deeper understanding of the common good.

The United States, in particular, needs to reorient its foreign aid policies to make a greater and more specific commitment to global poverty eradication, with priority attention given to sub-Saharan Africa. Further, U.S. investments in poverty eradication in the poorest regions of Africa should reflect our values and hopes as a people. Many current humanitarian programs place excessive attention on morally objectional population control. As Pope Paul VI said, "people are certainly tempted to act in an authoritarian way to reduce the number of guests at table rather than to increase the food supply on it."¹⁵ Commitment instead to human solidarity enables us to make the world a welcome place for all, especially the poorest of the poor.

The United States and the international community also should continue and intensify their commitments to debt relief for the poorest countries, most of which are in Africa. At a bare minimum, countries should act to reduce the external debt service obligation to a maximum of 10 percent of government revenues for all recipients under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' initiative (HIPC).¹⁶ This relief would be granted in addition to, not in lieu of, the substantially increased investment for development assistance and health programs discussed above. Debt relief cannot be viewed in isolation, and it will only succeed in its intended purposes if it is part of a broader approach to poverty eradication for the world's most vulnerable countries.¹⁷

B. Providing Urgent Assistance for Strengthening Health Care

Africa's catastrophic health care situation presents a special development challenge. In addition to increased funding for research and delivery of essential drugs for the prevention and treatment of malaria, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases, at least \$4 billion to \$5 billion is needed to begin to address seriously the HIV/AIDS pandemic. [See [textbox 6: quote from Pope John Paul II on the "drama of AIDS" and basic statistics for HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.](#)] The commitment of additional resources to combat HIV/AIDS by the member countries of the G-8 and the European Union at Genoa in July 2001 is welcome, but the proposed amounts are seriously deficient. The funds should be used for a well-defined strategy of appropriate prevention and treatment, addressing the deeper causes of this pandemic. Instead, some current and proposed approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention fail to respect religious and cultural sensitivities in Africa and are inconsistent with Catholic moral principles. We urge increased funding for medicines and treatment, research, basic healthcare delivery systems, and care for those living with HIV/AIDS, as well as appropriate educational programs that provide accurate information about the transmission of the disease and promote responsible sexual behavior. We also urge

the international community—and major pharmaceutical companies—to respond more effectively to the needs of AIDS patients in poor countries, "so that these men and women, tried in body and soul, may have access to the medicines they need."¹⁸

C. Promoting Educational Development

The youthfulness of Africa is demonstrated not only by statistical tables, but can be witnessed on the streets, in the markets, and in the churches of any African city or town. Youthfulness provides hope and a sense of perpetual renewal in the midst of serious challenges. It can, however, become a source of great instability and further decay of a society unless adequate resources and opportunities are provided to those destined to help in the construction of human society.

The U.S. government and the international community recognize the importance of strengthening education in Africa. Conflict, disease, and other factors are depleting the ranks of dedicated and qualified teachers. Children are forced to abandon studies and to assume adult roles, including the roles of parents and soldiers. Education plays an essential role in the formation of moral conscience, responsible participation in democratic processes, professional and technical expertise, promotion of the common good, and development of a holistic understanding of human sexuality and relationships. The Church in the United States and the U.S. government should energetically support the efforts of the Church and other groups in civil society, as well as governments in Africa, in promoting universal access to quality education so that the hopes and opportunities of Africa's youth might be realized.

D. Fostering Trade Relationships as Partnerships

A just trading system—in addition to breaking down barriers to promote growth—should enhance the life and dignity of everyone, lessen economic injustice, and help eradicate poverty. Trade relationships between the United States and developed or underdeveloped countries must take into account the promotion of human rights and sustainable development. The moral measure of the U.S. trade relationship with Africa is whether it helps reduce poverty among Africa's poorest peoples.

U.S. trade policy should focus on opening U.S. markets to African goods and helping to lower Africa's international debt. European markets need to open their agricultural trade and industries to African nations as well and amend their excessively high agricultural tariffs. Effective labor and environmental and human rights standards are needed to meet the requirements of social justice. The negotiation and implementation of trade agreements, including those involving intellectual property rights and patenting of life forms (plants, seeds), should be undertaken in consultation with African governments and civil society to protect the rights and dignity of all parties. In this way, U.S. trade relationships with African countries can help to promote more equitable terms of exchange, greater development, and broader political and economic participation within African societies, thus strengthening Africa's self-reliance.

E. Supporting Peacemaking in Africa

The United States, multinational corporations, and the international community can play a more constructive role in peacemaking in Africa in several ways.

- The United States can and should play a more central role in the search for a just and lasting peace in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere in Africa. Helping to resolve these conflicts on just terms should be a major priority for U.S. foreign policy. Stronger financial and other support is needed to strengthen efforts towards reconciliation between and among peoples in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The United States should give much more robust financial, logistical, and political support for U.N. and regional African peacekeeping efforts. We must learn from the tragedy in Rwanda—where our government and others refused to support the relatively small international force that many experts believe might have prevented genocide.
- The United States should support international controls on arms transfers, particularly with regard to small arms that continue to fuel, expand, and prolong conflict in Africa. Greater leadership by the United States on the issue of the sales of small arms and light weaponry could help curb this dangerous commerce.
- The United States should sign the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. U.S. leadership in halting the export of landmines and its contribution to de-mining programs is seriously compromised by its failure to endorse this global effort to ban landmines.
- Governments, international financial institutions, and private corporations involved in the exploration, development, production, and sales of natural resources (e.g., oil, diamonds, timber, minerals, and precious gems) all have a moral responsibility to ensure that the otherwise legitimate development of these resources does not contribute directly or indirectly to corruption, conflict, and repression. Transnational corporations ought to adopt codes of conduct that reinforce their social responsibilities, direct their activities toward the common good, and adopt transparency in operations and financial accountability.¹⁹ In certain cases, it might be necessary for international authorities to penalize abusive companies. These are concrete ways to protect and promote the rights, dignity, and

social development of the peoples and nations of Africa.

F. Assisting Refugees and Displaced Persons

Although the number of African refugees admitted into the United States has increased substantially in the past several years, African refugees continue to represent a small percentage of total U.S. refugee admissions.

- African refugee admissions should increase to levels proportional to the gravity and magnitude of the African refugee crisis. The United States also should significantly increase international assistance to refugees in Africa.
- The United States should take a leadership role to ensure that internally displaced persons receive adequate international aid and that governments involved in armed conflict do not target internally displaced populations.

IV. The Catholic Church in the United States in Solidarity with the Church in Africa

In recent years, our conference has increasingly engaged in issues vital to the Church and the peoples in Africa. We stood in solidarity with the Church in South Africa in its witness against apartheid and in its courageous struggle to overcome evil through non-violent means. We stand with the bishops and the Church in Sudan in their search for peace, religious freedom, and an end to abduction and enslavement, as well as their call to oil companies and governments involved in oil development to help promote peace, transparency, and an equitable sharing of the proceeds from their activities. The recent trips to the region by our conference further strengthen our bonds of mutual solidarity. In these and in other ways, the Catholic Church in the United States is attempting to respond to the needs of the Church and the peoples in Africa.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) continues its work in Africa, a work begun half a century ago. CRS now supports programs in thirty-six sub-Saharan nations, with a total annual commitment of \$140 million. CRS works with local church partners and others in such areas as health, agriculture, education, micro-finance, the HIV/AIDS crisis, reconciliation, and peace-building. CRS also is deeply involved in our Catholic Campaign for Debt Relief, poverty elimination, the promotion of increased access to essential medicines and drugs vital for the fight against HIV/AIDS, and the promotion of responsible investment. U.S. Catholics, by contributing to CRS, will help strengthen its capacity to respond to the many and changing needs of the Church and the peoples in Africa. They can also contribute to the work of CRS through effective and coordinated public advocacy on behalf of the peoples and nations of Africa.

From among the many U.S. Catholic agencies working in Africa, special mention must be made of the contributions of the Holy Childhood Association, Propagation of the Faith, and the U.S. Catholic Mission Association. In addition, the Catholic Near East Welfare Association continues to provide assistance to Egypt, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Catholic religious orders, congregations, and institutes, as well as diocesan programs for the sending of priests from the United States and the increasing service provided by American Catholic lay missionaries, all contribute to the witness of solidarity with the Church in Africa. The U.S. Catholic bishops' Migration and Refugee Services provides assistance to African refugees who are resettled in the United States. Catholic parishes open their doors to provide spiritual, moral, and financial support to our African brothers and sisters. Thus, the bonds of mutual solidarity are strengthened and the U.S. Catholic Church is enriched.

In several other ways U.S. Catholics can help promote a just and equitable development in Africa:

- *Prayer.* Prayer must always be the starting point and foundation for our work of solidarity. Too often we fail to recognize the power of prayer and how important it is for our brothers and sisters in situations of great difficulty to know that we truly are one with them in the Spirit.
- *Responsible investment.* Retirement or other investment funds can either be used to strengthen Africa's capacity to address its problems or, wrongly invested, can serve in the escalation of conflicts and human suffering. [[See textbox 7: USCCB statement on responsible investments.](#)]
- *Corporate responsibility.* Catholics managing U.S. and multinational corporations bear a special responsibility in the exercise of their professional obligations, particularly where the activities of their corporations might exacerbate conflict, corruption, human rights abuses, and environmental degradation in Africa. They could play a central role in helping to promote prosperous and just economies in Africa.
- *Self-education and involvement in public advocacy.* Individuals and groups within the Catholic Church in the United States are actively engaged with the Church in Africa in the promotion of human rights, debt relief, increased development assistance, demobilization of child soldiers, promotion of peace in troubled regions, and protection of the environment. We encourage dioceses to help Catholics to educate themselves about Africa and commit themselves to the promotion of justice, peace, and development through public advocacy.

- *Diocesan and parish twinning.* Dioceses and parishes have found twinning with dioceses and parishes in Africa and other parts of the world to be enriching experiences of communion with other members of the Body of Christ and a means of deepening bonds of solidarity with a Church in need. Such twinning projects include programs exchanging church members between Africa and the United States, reciprocal spiritual formation programs, development assistance grants, public advocacy, and other exchanges. Also included are educational programs offered through diocesan offices or local parishes to increase awareness about, and involvement with, the Church and the peoples of Africa. May these initiatives continue to flourish, thus expanding the Church's universal solidarity.

Each year, the dioceses of the United States are invited to devote special attention to the Church and the people of Africa. Prayers, Mass intentions, educational programs, and a variety of other means might be employed to express such solidarity.

Conclusion

The Synod for Africa reminded us of the astonishing richness of the cultures of Africa and the profound contributions that the Church in Africa has made to the universal Church from its earliest history. We indeed mutually enrich each other in mission when we engage one another as sisters and brothers in Christ, in whom we find our true riches and our lasting hope. The critical challenges and enormous potential facing Africa today serve as the opportunity for—and test of—our mutual solidarity. Our response to this vocation of solidarity with the Church and peoples of Africa enables us to express love "*in deed and in truth*" (1 Jn 3:18, italics added), a love that creates no borders and sets no limits to what might be accomplished *together in Christ*.

Textbox 1

Christianity and the Catholic Church in Africa

- Africa is the fastest growing region in the world, with more than 350 million Christians.
- The Catholic Church in Africa has more than 116 million members.
- More than 10,000 parishes and 75,000 mission stations are located in Africa.
- Christian missionaries carried the message of the Gospel to Egypt, Nubia (southern Egypt and northern Sudan), and Ethiopia in the middle of the first century a.d.
- Christian mission expanded to the regions of present-day Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, areas of Portuguese influence in West Africa, and Kenya from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries a.d.
- The third phase of Christian mission, from the mid-eighteenth century to World War II, saw the establishment of the Church in West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, and southern Africa. Among the countries evangelized were Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana, Dahomy (Benin), South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Uganda, Sudan, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi.
- Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church in Africa has become indigenized and Africanized, and is bringing the Gospel to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

(Sources: *Statistical Yearbook of the Church, 2000*; David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, Todd M. Johnson, eds. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001]; John Baur, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa: An African History, 62-1992* [Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1994]; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*)

Textbox 2

World Health Organization: Report on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria

- Infectious diseases—including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria—are responsible for almost half of all deaths in developing countries. These three diseases cause more than 300 million illnesses and 5 million deaths each year.
- Those most affected by illness are the poorest people who do not have access to health care, drugs, clean water, or daily minimum nutritional requirements.

- The social and economic impact of these diseases is reflected in the perpetuation and deepening of poverty through work loss, school dropouts, decreased financial investment, and increased social instability.
- Where the adult population HIV infection rate is greater than 20 percent, African economies are shrinking at an average rate of 1 percent of GDP per year. This is the case in Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, and elsewhere.
- It would cost an estimated \$1 billion per year to reverse many of the negative effects of malaria. Eliminating malaria would increase the GDP in sub-Saharan countries by as much as \$3-12 billion a year.
- If \$1 billion were spent each year on treatment of tuberculosis, 70 percent of all cases could be treated, resulting in a 50 percent reduction in mortality over the next five years.

(Source: World Health Organization, *HIV, TB and Malaria—Three Major Infectious Diseases Threats*, backgrounder for the G-8 discussion [July 2000], no. 1)

Textbox 3 **The Crucifixion of a Nuba [Sudanese] Christian**

"On a Thursday in Toroji market [government security forces] accused me of co-operating with the [Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army] rebels, but they had no evidence even after investigation. During the arrest they tortured me in all ways. They put me between death and life. After torturing, the security [forces] decided I was innocent and they released me whilst they made further investigations. They called me a rebel. I rejected this word and said that I did not know the word 'liberation' since I was born. I said to them that I was a Christian, I serve in the Church. If you are torturing me because I am a Christian, for sure I am a Christian, and I accept what you are doing. They said that this will not prevent you being treated like a criminal and they started to practice many ways of torturing me. They beat me for three hours continuously, they burned my hand with an iron, they cut my fingers with pliers, they tried to cut my throat.

"The senior security officer was present and he ordered them to crucify me in the sun on the army tank. They beat me and tied my legs and hands like on a cross. That was between 1 P.M. and 2 P.M. and the sun was very hot. . . . The power of evil and God's Spirit began to struggle within me. The evil spirit said, 'You can confess with a lie and then you will be free.' But at last I encouraged myself and remembered the scripture, 'If you deny me in front of people, I will deny you in front of my Father and his angels,' and also, 'Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.' I became even more courageous when I remembered the incident which happened to Shadrack, Mishack and Abednego when they were thrown into the fire in the Old Testament. I have managed to be faithful and I defeated Satan by the power of Jesus Christ."

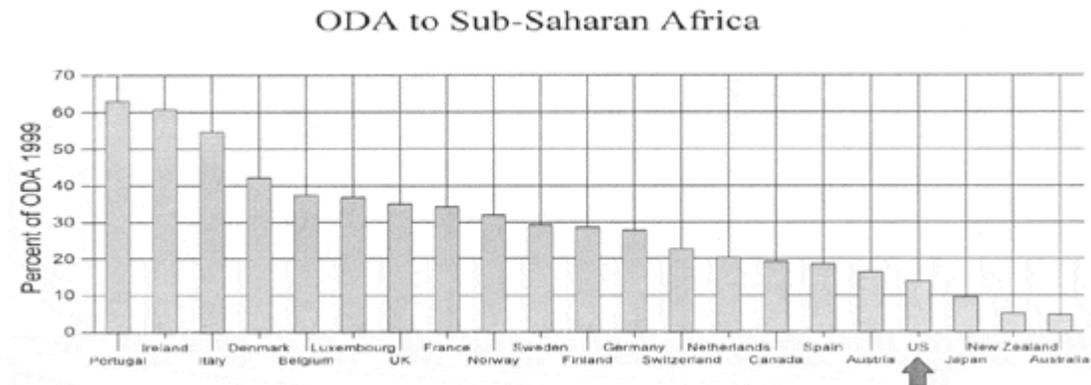
(Source: *Testimony of Gabriel Tutu, Christian Evangelist*, in R. Werner, W. Anderson, and Andrew Wheeler, *Day of Devastation, Day of Contentment: The History of the Sudanese Church Across 2000 Years* [Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2000], 611-12)

Textbox 4 **Landmines in Africa**

- Twenty-seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa are state parties to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, and fourteen others are signatories.
 - Since March 1999, antipersonnel mines have been used in more conflicts in Africa (eight) than any other region in the world.
 - In sub-Saharan Africa, twenty-six countries, plus Somaliland, are mine-affected: Angola, Burundi, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
 - In 1999, nearly \$40 million was provided by U.S. and European funding agencies to twelve countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and to Somaliland, for de-mining and educational activities.
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Textbox 5

U.S. Development Assistance Ranked Among the Lowest as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) among the Developed Nations



(Source: *Testimony on 2002 Foreign Assistance on behalf of the United States Catholic Conference and Catholic Relief Services* [March 2001]. ODA refers to Official Development Assistance.)

Textbox 6 HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa

"The drama of AIDS threatens not just some nations or societies, but the whole of humanity. It knows no frontiers of geography, race, age, or social condition . . . [calling] for a supreme effort of international cooperation on the part of government, the world medical and scientific community, and all those who exercise influence in developing a sense of moral responsibility in society" (Pope John Paul II, *Visit to Tanzania*, 1990).

- HIV/AIDS is the number one killer in Africa.
- More than 25 million adults and children are infected with the HIV virus in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for more than 70 percent of the worldwide total of infected people.
- The infection rate among adults in sub-Saharan Africa is approximately 8.8 percent. Sixteen countries, mostly in eastern and southern Africa, have HIV infection rates of more than 10 percent, with the rate in Botswana more than 35 percent. An estimated 17 million Africans have died as a result of AIDS, including 2.4 million deaths in 2000.
- It is estimated that nearly 13 million "AIDS orphans" face the risk of malnutrition, social displacement, reduced prospects for education, and forced conscription into military service or into armed militias. By 2010, it is projected that 18 million African children will be AIDS orphans.
- UNAIDS projects that half or more of all fifteen-year-olds will eventually die of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.
- An estimated 600,000 African infants become infected with HIV each year through mother-to-child transmission, either at birth or through breast-feeding.
- Infection rates in many African armies are extremely high. More than 40 percent of South Africa's military is infected with the HIV virus. Infection rates among the seven armies currently embroiled in conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been estimated at 50 to 80 percent.

(Sources: UNAIDS, *Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic* [June 2000]; R. Copson, *Congressional Research Service Issue Brief for Congress, "AIDS in Africa"* [December 12, 2000])

Textbox 7 Summary of U.S. Catholic Bishops' Statement on Responsible Investments

"United States business and financial enterprises can also help determine the justice or injustice of the world economy. They are not all-powerful, but their real power is unquestionable. Transnational corporations and financial institutions can make

positive contributions to development and global solidarity. Pope John Paul II has pointed out, however, that the desire to maximize profits and reduce the cost of natural resources and labor has often tempted these transnational enterprises to behavior that increases inequality and decreases the stability of the international order. By collaborating with those national governments that serve their citizens justly and with intergovernmental agencies, these corporations can contribute to overcoming the desperate plight of many persons throughout the world." (Excerpted from *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, no. 116)

Principles of Responsible Investing:

- **Do no harm:** (a) *refuse to invest* in companies whose products and/or policies are counter to the values of Catholic moral teaching; (b) *divest from* such companies that do not espouse these values.
- **Do good:** (a) *seek out and choose to invest* in companies that promote the values of Catholic moral and social teaching; (b) look for *alternative investments*, namely, investments that may result in lower rates of return, but that give expression to the Church's commitment to the poor of this world.
- **Active corporate participation:** *exercise normal shareholder responsibilities*, especially casting informed votes on proxies and shareholder's resolutions so as to influence the corporate's culture and to shape corporate policies and decisions. This is a particularly helpful strategy where mixed investments are involved.

(Sources: "Socially Responsible Investment Guidelines," *Origins* 21:25 [November 28, 1991]; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*)

Endnotes

1. Cardinal Angelo Sodano, speech at the U.N. Millennium Summit (September 8, 2000).
2. John Paul II, *The Church in Africa (Ecclesia in Africa)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), no. 57 (italics added).
3. United States Catholic Conference, *Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), 1.
4. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 70.
5. *Ibid.*, no. 40.
6. See *Statistical Yearbook of the Church, 2000* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 35.
7. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 44.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 106.
9. Bishops of Cameroon, *Of Goodwill on Corruption* (September 3, 2000), 3.
10. Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Economic Justice in South Africa* (Pretoria: Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1999), 25.
11. Cf. Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, *Tolerance and Hope* (2001).
12. Cf. John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum (Centesimus Annus)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1991), no. 31.
13. Cf. Cardinal Jozef Tomko, *Address to the Plenary Assembly of SECAM* [Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar] (Rome, October 3, 2000).
14. *Testimony on 2002 Foreign Assistance on behalf of the United States Catholic Conference and Catholic Relief Services* (March 2001).
15. Paul VI, *Address to UN Food and Agriculture Organization* (November 16, 1970).
16. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative was begun in September 1996 by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to assist poor countries burdened by an unmanageable debt service. The initiative provides funds for debt reduction and also calls for structural and social policy reforms. The savings from debt reduction are to be used to finance poverty reduction programs, particularly health and education.
17. Administrative Board, United States Catholic Conference, *A Jubilee Call for Debt Forgiveness* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1999).
18. John Paul II, *Letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, at the Occasion of the U.N. General Assembly Special Assembly* (June 26, 2001).
19. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1986).

