

Statement to the G7 Hiroshima Summit

May 19-21, 2023

Esteemed Group of Seven Leaders,

We, Catholic Bishops from Africa responsible for Caritas and the Pastoral Mission for the Poor, write to you the Group of 7 leaders to request action in support of Africa, which has been hit hard by multiple crises in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, energy, health, economic, and war crises have disproportionately affected Africa, where the largest share of the world's poor live.

We are deeply concerned that the reversal in poverty reduction since 2020 has pushed the goal of eradicating poverty further out of reach. Shockingly, an additional 149 million people are at high risk of falling into poverty. Last year, over 300 million people experienced food insecurity, exacerbating drivers of conflict and social tension in many African countries and making governance more fragile.

As Pope Francis has emphasized in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, it is important to note that the notion of world citizenship has much in its favour because it corresponds to two levels of reality: national and worldwide unity and cooperation. Today's world, especially the world of the poorest of the poor, needs a global ethic, an ethic of solidarity and cooperation, and a politics of more brotherhood and social friendship. Therefore, we urge the Group of Seven to take bold action to support Africa in this time of need, including debt cancellation, increased aid, and fairer trade policies.

The Pope has emphasized the need for effective and reliable processes to alleviate unpayable debts. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic,¹ Pope Francis pointed out that:

"In this context, I repeat my call for the cancellation of the debt of the most vulnerable countries, in recognition of the severe impacts of the medical, social and economic crises they face as a result of Covid-19. We also need to ensure that the recovery packages being developed and deployed at global, regional and national levels must be regeneration packages. Policy, legislation and investment must be focused on the common good and guarantee that global social and environmental goals are met."

Effective and reliable processes to alleviate unpayable debts require 1) Reconnecting debt relief and human development needs, 2) Covering all creditors, 3) Securing an automatic debt standstill, and 4) Making debt relief accessible to all developing countries in need.

Given the more than 60% of debt owed to private creditors, debts cannot be reduced without their participation. The G7 includes the major debt issuance jurisdictions that need to coordinate domestic legal reforms to deter creditor litigation against countries renegotiating debts. Prompt passage of the New York Taxpayer and International Debt Crises Protection Act will do that for the large share of debt issued in that jurisdiction, and offers a simple and effective model other G7 countries can follow.

Going forward, to prevent the emergence of new cycles of high indebtedness, we need an international financial architecture with two important pillars. First, creditors and borrowers share responsibility for responsible lending and borrowing policies, including disclosure and authorization

¹ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. September 1, 2020.

frameworks, and we advocate with the G7, just as we advocate with our own countries, their implementation. Second, adopting debt contracts that increase risk-sharing between borrower and creditor both in the context of official and private sector lending.

At the same time, without new sources of affordable finance for development, and given the immense social and environmental challenges African countries face, they are likely to fall back into debt traps.

It is, therefore, essential to rethink Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) as an instrument of finance, and rechannel a significant portion of those held by wealthy countries to Africa. The recent allocation of \$650 billion in SDRs with support by the G7 countries was a significant move to provide pandemic crisis relief without adding to the debt burden of countries. However, Pope Francis emphasized the need to prioritize the common good and the integral development of all peoples, irrespective of their income levels. He states that "the dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies" (Evangeli Gaudium, 2013). He also notes that "there is a need for financial reform along ethical lines that would produce in its turn an economic reform to benefit everyone."

Likewise, multilateral development banks are extraordinary tools to finance human development and climate, especially in times of crises when other lenders shut their access. But, to operate at the scale needed to effectively meet the present challenges, they will have to receive higher resource contributions from members, and change the policies and rules that govern capital use.

In particular, the ongoing World Bank evolution process offers an opportunity to expand lending and change policies and practices. However, we approach with caution the intention to add new missions when the old ones – primarily poverty reduction and human development – remain so far from being fulfilled. Without an extremely bold injection of resources, such additions can only come at the expense of existing poverty reduction and development priorities in the places where they are most pressing.

African leaders and their full societies should be part of deciding the future of the World Bank, and make the case for highest-ambition scenarios in funding and how they can translate into vibrant, inclusive economies that meet everybody's needs. As put by Pope Francis in 2015: "reform and adaptation to the times is always necessary in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of granting all countries, without exception, a share in, and a genuine and equitable influence on, decision-making processes."²

We reiterate Pope Francis' call for a new kind of politics and a different global economic narrative that promotes the human person's dignity and the common good, calling on world leaders to engage in dialogue and collaboration to address the issue of debt crises faced by developing countries.

Rekindling hope and promise for Africa and its future generations requires action from the international community. We believe that by working together, we can ensure that Africa receives the assistance it requires to overcome these crises and build a brighter future for all.

As Pastors of the Church, it is our mission and more urgently now, to listen to the reality of the signs of the times, to the word of God, to our communities and to accompany our people the way we do. It is the latent voices of the poor that we bring to your table as you make decisions that impact lives of ordinary people.

² Address to the UN General Assembly, September 15, 2015.

Sincerely,

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2. Rt. Rev. ABELI MUHOYA MUTCHAPA François, Bishop of Kindu, Member of the Board of Caritas Congo Asbl
3. Rt. Rev. MWUMVANEZA Anaclet, Bishop of Nyundo, President of CARITAS RWANDA
4. Rt. Rev. NDABNYEMB Marcelin Marie, Bishop of Baturi, Bishop of Cameroun
5. Rt. Rev. NGOMA FOUMANET Toussaint, Bishop of Dolisie, Caritas Congo
6. Rt. Rev. ONDO Jean Vincent, Bishop of Oyem and President of Caritas Gabon
7. His Eminence Dieudonné Cardinal NZAPALAINGA, Archbishop of Bangui, President of Caritas Centrafrique
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11. Right Rev. Serverus Jjumba , Bishop of Masaka, President of Caritas Uganda
12. Rt. Rev. ANTHONY PASCAL REBELLO, Bishop of Francistown, BISHOP President of Caritas Botswana
13. Rt. Rev. Jose Ponce de Leon, Bishop of Manzini and Bishop President of Caritas Eswatini
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15. Rt. Rev. DZIUBA Stanislaw Jan, Bishop of Umzimkulu and Bishop President of Caritas South Africa
16. Most Revd. THOMAS Alexander, Archbishop of Bulawayo, President of Caritas Zimbabwe
17. Rt. Rev. GONSALLO Aristide, Bishop of Porto Novo and President of Caritas Benin
18. Rt Rev. KIENTEGA Justin, Bishop of Ouahigouya, President of OCADES-Caritas Burkina
19. Rt. Rev. Fortes Ildo, Bishop of Mindolo, President de Caritas Cap Vert
20. Rt. Rev. YEDOH Essoh Bruno, Bishop of Bondoukou et President de CARITAS COTE D'IVOIRE
21. Most Rev. OUNTEINI LOMPO DJALWANA LAURENT, Archbishop of Niamey and President of Caritas Développement Niger
22. Most Revd. Alfred Adewale MARTINS, Archbishop of Lagos and President of Caritas NIGERIA
23. SE Mgr Jean Pierre BASSENE, Bishop of Kolda and President of Caritas Sénégal