Pedestrians walk on street in Nairobi.

Pedestrians walk along a street in downtown Nairobi, Kenya, July 15. A new pastoral letter from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops calls on the Global North to wipe out low-income countries' crippling debt and consider the ecological burden it has placed on the Global South. (OSV News/Reuters/Thomas Mukoya)

Quinton Amundson/The Catholic Register

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Faith-based organizations are commending a new pastoral letter from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops pressing the Global North to wipe out low-income countries' crippling debt and consider the ecological burden it has placed on the Global South.

"Forgive us our Debts: Pastoral Letter on Debt Forgiveness in the Jubilee Year," written by the CCCB's Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace and released July 28, continues the tradition of urging the relaxing of crippling monetary obligations during a year of special grace in the universal Catholic Church.

Dean Dettloff, the research and advocacy officer for Development and Peace - Caritas Canada, said the bishops' missive meets the moment.

"Their new letter shows that today's debt crisis requires even more ambition, providing not only urgent debt forgiveness, but also changing the financial structures that have created these problems," Dettloff said in an email to The Catholic Register, Canada's national Catholic newspaper. "The spiritual and moral clarity of the letter helps us to deepen our engagement with the Jubilee Year, reviving the pulse of the biblical jubilee and becoming pilgrims of hope."

Read full document:
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Forgive Us-Our Debts_7.28.2025.pdf

Indeed, the CCCB letter does critique creditors for certain actions they employ to exacerbate these crises.

"To receive a loan, creditors sometimes require debtor countries to enact austerity conditions and privatize key sectors, making countries more dependent on foreign exports and denying the right of countries to develop on their own terms," states the letter. "Creditors have also at times given loans to corrupt governments, where political leaders may use the money to enrich themselves or repress their citizens rather than to fund development."

In this Jubilee Year, the CCCB deems it appropriate for creditors to cancel debts "that oppress and hold back integral human development."

Beth Lorimer, the ecological justice program coordinator for the faith-based ecumenical organization KAIROS Canada, is pleased the bishops are "amplifying the call from movements in the Global South, but also from Pope Francis, to address ecological debt."

The CCCB referred to Francis' observation in his 2015 encyclical Laudato Si' that "countries in the Global South often host an abundance of land and resources but are exploited for the sake of profit and consumption in the Global North." The bishops suggest that "given the effects on the environment caused by commercial imbalances between North and South, we can speak of the existence of an 'ecological debt.' "

Aerial view of neighborhood outside Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Houses are seen in Canaan, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Jan. 10, 2020. (OSV News/Reuters/Valerie Baeriswyl)

Lorimer said Kairos Canada has long advocated for Canadians and their leaders to "be talking about ecological debt and the responsibilities that we have as that Global North country in addressing debt."

Pronouncing that Canada is "greatly blessed with abundant natural resources, a stable political system, resilient infrastructure and a strong economy," the bishops say "to whom much has been given, much will be required of us."

The pastoral letter advocates that because of Canada's "privileged situation" created in part from "access to the raw materials of the Global South," Canadians have an impetus to aid nations deprived of the same advantages.

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From June 12-15, Development and Peace - Caritas Canada, Kairos Canada and other partners hosted the G7 Jubilee People's Forum in advance of the G7 Leaders' Summit in Kananaskis, Alberta. Hundreds of activists convened at Ambrose University in Calgary, Alberta, to learn about and discuss the same issues spotlighted in the pastoral letter.

Attendees were also stirred to support the ongoing "Turn Debt into Hope" campaign. This petition drive, which has garnered over 40,000 of the desired 100,000 signature goal, calls on nations to cancel "unjust and unsustainable debts," enact global financial reform to prevent future calamities and usher in a debt resolution framework within the United Nations that is "transparent, binding and fair."

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The CCCB concluded its document with a call for Catholics in Canada to support this campaign and raise their voices.

By doing so, wrote the bishops, "we might become, in the words of Pope Leo XIV, 'a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close above all to those who are suffering.' "