

+ Debt crisis Q+A

May 2026

- **We ran a petition about the debt crisis in churches last summer. Is this the same petition? Did we achieve anything?**

Yes, we achieved a lot! And we need to carry on. The global debt campaign in 2025, the Jubilee Year, was about building a case for urgent action. 35,000 CAFOD supporters signed our petition and over a thousand of you emailed your MP. We worked with others around the world, especially in the Caritas network, to push this issue into the spotlight. This global campaigning added a real sense of public mandate to the discussions on debt at global summits last year, including the G7, G20 and UN General Assembly, and increased pressure on politicians to act on this key issue.

We've seen a shift in how the debt crisis is viewed by the UK Government. Ministers and officials now speak openly about the need to tackle unsustainable debt. The Foreign Secretary, Yvette Cooper, in response to a question in the House of Commons that referenced CAFOD's work on the debt crisis, said: "Countries should not be held back economically by unacceptable debt repayments that make them more fragile and end up in a vicious cycle."

Similarly, we've seen a change in the openness of the government to explore solutions. Baroness Chapman, Minister for International Development and Africa, has said, "Some countries spend far more on debt repayment than they do on health and education and public services. That is not sustainable and we need a solution. Various options are available..."

This is all encouraging – but the government are yet to translate these words into action, so we are calling on them to do two key things this year. It's not the same petition – it is updated with our asks in 2026. There are more details overleaf. We are very well placed to follow up on the progress we've made so far and push for more ambitious action, but we need to show public support. **Every signature you collect will help us do this.**

- **Is this petition just about South Sudan?**

No, the petition is about the debt crisis affecting 54 countries, and Cardinal Stephen's letter is an illustration of how these countries are being affected. In May 2025, the UK High Court ordered South Sudan to pay *almost half of government revenue* to a private lender called Afreximbank following defaults on loans for infrastructure and COVID-19 support, so South Sudan is a clear example of this crisis.

- **When will we hand in the petition to the government?**

Towards the end of the year, as the UK takes over the presidency of the G20. Last year we shared the petition with government in various ways, including when a group of students from Ursuline College in Kent took it into a meeting with officials at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office!



A message for you from Christine Allen, CAFOD's director: "Thank you so much for everything that you do for us as a volunteer. There's a huge team of you who help bring these issues to government's attention, and it has made a difference. I've seen it myself in the contact that I've had with the Development Minister. We want to continue to push, so please join in this new petition in your parish this summer. Let's keep fighting against the causes of poverty for a better world."
Christine, left in the photo, met Cardinal Stephen, right, in South Sudan last year.

Suggested announcement for your parish bulletin

At the end of Mass today we are collecting signatures for a CAFOD petition about the global debt crisis, which is causing terrible suffering for our brothers and sisters around the world. Cardinal Stephen Ameyu Martin Mulla from South Sudan has written to parishes in England and Wales to explain. Please stop for a minute as you leave and lend your support. Thank you for helping to build a better world.

Common questions about the debt crisis and our campaign

You can find more detailed answers at cafod.org.uk/debtfaq

What is the global debt crisis?

Low-income countries are being pushed into a deepening debt crisis, forced to pay ever higher interest rates to wealthy lenders. Money that should be spent on healthcare and education is flowing out of countries that can least afford it. Governments have an impossible choice between serving their people or paying their creditors. Millions of people are suffering the effects.

How has this crisis come about?

Low-income countries have been facing increasingly unsustainable debt since the 2008 financial crisis, when banks, hedge funds and traders ('private lenders') saw an opportunity to make vast sums of money by lending to them at high interest rates. Crises in the 2020s, including the pandemic, exposed the fragility of these debts, forcing countries to borrow further at extortionate rates.

How does this impact ordinary people in these countries?

Wesley Chibamba from Caritas Africa explains: "At the moment people are dying because they can't access healthcare. Children cannot go to school. People are going hungry and children are sleeping on empty stomachs because the governments have debt obligations. Governments don't have the capacity to respond to humanitarian crises, like floods or droughts – they don't have the funds."

What is CAFOD calling for?

Primarily we need more ambitious action. We are calling for two specific things this year from the UK Government, and we need your support to make sure they hear this:

1. Pass a Debt Justice Law

Incredibly, almost 90% of debt contracts of the poorest countries are governed by English law due to the pivotal role of the City of London in the global financial sector. This makes the UK a 'debt superpower'! And we are the citizens who can influence them. The UK oversees how these debts are enforced, and we want our government to pass legislation to require wealthy banks to participate in debt relief fairly so they can't profit from countries in crisis, as they are currently doing.

2. Lead reform of the global debt system

In 2027 the UK will host the G20, a crucial gathering of the world's most powerful economies. We want the UK to bring governments together to fix the global debt system, as they have the power to do.

But shouldn't debts just be paid?

Often, countries have paid their original debts but they're paying them several times over because of sky-high interest. And we believe that paying debts should not be put ahead of funding vital public services like healthcare and education. Debt payments to rich lenders are being prioritised over life itself.

Didn't the Jubilee 2000 campaign solve the debt problem?

Between 2000-2015 the global Jubilee campaign won \$130 billion of debt cancellation for 36 low-income countries. Children completing primary school increased from 45% to 66% in the years that followed as the money saved on debt payments went into public services. However, the same structural causes that led to that crisis remain in place. That's why we need to make changes now for the future.

How can we ensure that debt relief doesn't enable corruption?

Existing structures are not providing solutions to corruption. Only under a fairer and more transparent global debt system can corruption be tackled.

Won't countries just get into debt crisis again if it's cancelled?

Not if we reform the system to stop the cycle of debt crises from happening. We need a better way of supporting countries in debt crisis and establish sustainable ways of borrowing for the future.

What does the Church say about debt?

The Bible says money lending is about accompanying the vulnerable in order to help them, rather than to make profits: "If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them." (Exodus 22:25).

What could global debt reform achieve?

Low-income countries currently spend an average of 18% of government revenue servicing foreign debts each year, compared with just 5% in 2014. Research shows that if debt-servicing was capped at 10%, the funds provided could give clean water to 11 million people, basic sanitation to 23 million and funding for school enrolment to 3 million additional children. The potential is enormous.