

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Spencer Bachus, Full Committee Markup of H.R. 2634, Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation of 2007

April 3, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for scheduling a markup on the Jubilee Act. Let me also thank Chairman Waters for her tireless efforts on this issue. We have worked together on debt-reduction and poverty-alleviation legislation for nearly a decade, and I am happy to say these efforts have been remarkably successful. I would also like to recognize the valuable contributions of Congresswoman Biggert, our Ranking Member on the Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit subcommittee.

Additionally, let me acknowledge your willingness to negotiate a compromise with Republicans. The manager's amendment removes some non-essential but contentious elements of the legislation. For example, it clarifies that we need to ensure that countries receiving debt relief have economies that are capable of redirecting their debt-service payments. Additionally, it underscores an important point: As we embark on new debt-reduction efforts, they should pay the amounts it already owes - nearly \$600 million - towards previous debt reduction efforts.

Mr. Chairman, Congress can be a tough environment, and we all say, on occasion, that we've had a really bad day. But we ought to be reminded that for billions of people throughout the world that even on our worst days, we have more food, more shelter, more clothes, more security, more health care, more of everything than the less fortunate among us have on their best days.

Nothing illustrates this point better than the words of Sister Rebecca Trujillo, a nun in who was once asked how the poor of her nation manage to survive despite crippling poverty. Her answer: "Since being in , I have taken to answer in a matter-of-fact way, 'Often they do not.'"

Mr. Chairman, we started something big with the Jubilee movement that led Congress to make a historic commitment to debt relief in the year 2000. Since then, there has been even further debt forgiveness on the part of the G-8 nations. In countries where debt relief has been implemented, debt is down by two-thirds and spending on reducing hunger and improving health, education, and social services is now four times the size of previous debt payments.

That additional investment has yielded impressive results. For example, since the start of this new millennium, the poverty rate in sub-Saharan Africa is down 6%. More than a million children in that region are receiving health care and medical treatment. Vaccinations are up, and throughout Africa the percentage of students enrolled in primary school has gone up significantly.

The Jubilee Act will build on these successes by making it possible to cancel the debts of up to 25 countries not now eligible for debt forgiveness.

Debt relief has improved the lives of millions of people at almost no monetary cost to the If the Jubilee Act is successful, the share of debt reduction for the nine or so countries that would be eligible immediately would be a hundred million dollars - less than 50 cents apiece for every man woman and child in this country. Surely the most generous country in the world can afford a commitment of that size.

Doing the right thing is not only morally imperative, it serves our national interests. The cost of not acting is not only hopelessness and unrest throughout the world, but also an increased threat of terrorist attack. Poverty breeds unrest and instability, creating the conditions that allow dictators and terrorists to thrive.

Mr. Chairman, debt relief is not the total solution to poverty, hunger, and disease, but it is a necessary first step. It is where the journey should begin to free these countries of the burden of debt, the chains of poverty, and the shackles of despair to enable them to minister to the economic and social needs of their citizens.

As a result of this bipartisan spirit of cooperation evident here today, we have reached a point where we can speedily move this bill to the House floor, and possibly enact it by the time the Pope visits Washington later this month.

Chairman Frank, thanks again for your work on this issue. Moving forward, I will continue to work with you and the other members of this Committee as we shepherd this important bill towards enactment.