

ICFTU OnLine...

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Campaigners march on G7 embassies to demand debt cancellation

Brussels, 1st April 2005 (ICFTU Online): In a worldwide initiative today (1 April 2005), people are mobilising at French, German, Japanese and other G7 country embassies to demand debt cancellation for the world's poorest countries as part of the Global Call to Action against Poverty, a worldwide alliance of hundreds of organisations, including trade union organisations, which is calling on world leaders to fulfill their commitments on trade justice, more and better aid, debt cancellation and accountable anti-poverty policies.

Campaigners are urging G7 finance ministers (representing Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and US) to use the upcoming World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) spring meetings (on 16-17 April) as a moment for historic change. Anti-poverty campaigners are calling for the G7 to cancel poor countries' debts so that these countries can invest in improving their health and education systems, for example. The Global Call to Action against Poverty is also urging for IMF gold reserves to be used to fund debt cancellation.

"Without urgent action from on debt cancellation, the obscene poverty that kills 50,000 people every day will continue," said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, spokesperson for the Global Call to Action against Poverty. "We strongly believe that now is the time for G7 governments to truly act against poverty before it scars several future generations and condemns millions more to a hopeless and miserable form of poverty".

"Leaders around the world have made countless promises to end poverty and time and again they have failed to deliver. People are dying while leaders debate debt relief before the cameras and ignore the issue when the media has gone."

A child dies every three seconds from a preventable disease, and yet the world's poorest countries spend more on debt repayments - USD\$100 million a day - than they do on health.

Extreme poverty is linked to a shortage of jobs and low wages - for example, of a total of 550 million working poor in the world, 60% are women, a situation exacerbated by the poor working conditions and the severe exploitation that the majority of they endure. Therefore, the anti-poverty alliance will also be calling on G7 governments - who together hold more than half of the voting power in the IMF and World Bank - to properly integrate the issue of decent work into the international financial institutions' agenda, as this is the only sustainable avenue out of poverty for millions of people across the world.

Today's embassy action follows the successful launch of a television campaign advert bringing together a number of instantly recognized celebrities, from Brad Pitt to Salma Hayek, Hugh Grant, Bono and Kylie, who, whilst wearing the campaign's symbol - a white band - click their fingers one after another. Each click symbolizes the death of a child. The production of further 'click-ads' is already underway in several other countries with celebrities in India, Germany, France, and in Africa and Latin America publicly pledging support to the Global Call to Action against Poverty calling for action on debt, trade, aid and accountable anti-poverty strategies.

The embassy action day comes ahead of the Global Call to Action against Poverty's white band days, when hundreds of thousands of people across the world will join massive demonstrations in July, September and December 2005 to voice their demands on governments to honour promises

on poverty. The white band days will coincide with the G8 meeting in July, the Millennium Development Goals +5 summit in September and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial in December.

Cancelling 100% of the multilateral debt of 32 of the world's poorest countries would annually cost just over USD\$3 per person in the UK, USD\$2.20 per person in Japan and Germany, USD\$2.10 per Canadian citizen and USD\$1.80 per person in France.

Get involved in the campaign. Visit the campaign website:
www.whiteband.org Trade unions can make all the difference.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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