Blog
Social Justice



U.S. President Joe Biden delivers remarks on the economy at the Brookings Institution Dec. 10 in Washington. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)



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More than 60 Catholic groups and individuals — including sister-supported organizations and congregations — have signed a letter urging President Joseph Biden to support an initiative promoting debt relief for low- and middle-income countries. Biden leaves office Jan. 20.

The letter — whose signatories include the Sisters of Mercy; the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns; Pax Christi USA; and Network — asks Biden to support a new issuance of Special Drawing Rights, or SDRs, which are a reserve asset created by the International Monetary Fund.

The assets can be exchanged for hard currency, or be used to pay off debts, or can keep on countries' balance sheets, helping them avoid problems related to balance of payments problems, said Dan Beeton, international communications director for the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Economic and Policy Research. The group is not a faith-based organization, but assisted in drafting and circulating the letter.

In the letter, the Catholic leaders and organizations said issuing the SDRs through executive authority would "provide people around the world with direly needed relief from their suffering in the face of poverty, hunger, and natural disaster" and doing so would "cap your legacy of global leadership."

The letter framed the idea as being connected to Pope Francis' calls for the 2025 Jubilee year, saying that Catholic faith "calls us to strive toward a more just global economic order, and to support people who are left behind by the inequities of the present order. There is much work to be done to fulfill this calling."

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The letter commends Biden for supporting a new issuance of $650 billion in SDRs in 2021, when countries were struggling with the effects of the global pandemic. That move, the Catholic leaders said, "in one fell swoop provided the developing world with more resources than an entire year of foreign aid from all countries."

The letter added: "These resources were used to purchase and distribute vaccines, to care for the vulnerable, and to invest in health care for the poor. Hundreds of thousands of lives were likely saved."

The letter addressed to Biden said that the "conditions facing the world today demand your support once more. Amidst an accelerating debt crisis, increasingly catastrophic climate change-driven natural disasters, and economic shocks exacerbated by international conflict, humanity is facing a perilous path ahead."

"As fellow Catholics," the letter concludes, "we are called by our faith to do all that we can to alleviate the suffering of others. You have an opportunity to do so on a nearly unprecedented scale, impacting the lives of millions at no cost, with little more than the stroke of a pen."



Sr. Judith Clemens of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and a personal friend of Dorothy Stang, holds the container of blood-soaked soil from the site of Stang's martyrdom. (Courtesy of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Ohio Province)

Sant'Egidio Community to honor Dorothy Stang

The Community of Sant'Egidio in Rome, Italy, will honor the late Sr. Dorothy Stang, a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, at Jan. 10 service at the Basilica di

San Bartolomeo all'Isola, or Basilica of St. Bartholomew, a month before the 20th anniversary of her martyrdom. Stang will become the first American woman honored by the community.

Stang was assassinated in Anapu, Brazil, on Feb. 12, 2005, for her ministry and outspoken advocacy to enact land reform policies in the Amazon region protecting those living in poverty.

In an invitation for the ceremony the Community of Sant'Egidio said it would help preserve Stang's memory by including her story in an exhibit at the basilica and by safeguarding a relic preserved by the congregation's Ohio province — described as "a small container of blood-soaked dirt from the site of Sr. Dorothy's murder."



Srs. of Notre Dame de Namur Judith Clemens, left, Teresa Phillips, center, and Kathleen Harmon, right, prepare the reliquary with the soil soaked with Stang's blood. Phillips and Harmon will transport it to Rome in January for the ceremony at the Basilica di San Bartolomeo all'Isola. (Courtesy of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Ohio Province)

The Basilica di San Bartolomeo all'Isola is the site of a relic of St. Bartholomew the Apostle. Pope John Paul II entrusted the basilica to the Community of Sant'Egidio in 1999 for use as a sanctuary for commemorating the lives and witness of modern-day martyrs.

The reliquary of soil for permanent installation and display in the basilica's Sanctuary of the New Martyrs will be the centerpiece of the Jan. 10 commemoration.

Related events include a Jan. 5 prayer service at the chapel of Mount Notre Dame Province House in Ohio that will honor the soil, and a Jan. 10 public symposium at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. That event, in Stang's honor, will focus on the role of women's leadership in the global climate movement.

The Jan. 5 event will be held at 3 p.m. EST and will be livestreamed here.

"Dorothy gave her one and only life to lift up those made poor and to protect the Amazon from destruction," Sr. Kathleen Harmon, provincial leader of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Ohio province, said in a statement.

"She stands as a model of compassion, conviction and courage for all Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and all persons who care about God's people and God's earth," Harmon said.

Stang, who held both American and Brazilian citizenship, has been posthumously honored by the United States Congress and other bodies. In 2008, she was awarded the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights.