

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

August 6, 2009

The House is in recess and the Senate is on its way out too, scheduled to remain in session only until this Friday, Aug. 7. Both chambers will return to work in Washington, DC on Sept. 8, right after Labor Day. The August recess is a great time for constituents to be in contact with their elected officials. Most Members return home to their states and districts during August, and many will hold public events and town hall meetings. Visit your Members' websites to find out how where they will be and what events they will attend this month. If you don't know who your Representative and Senators are, visit <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/> to find out.

This week's messages are-

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- Moved By Faith: A Call for Peace in Sudan
- What's Happening with Health Care?
- Set Up a District Meeting Today to Protect the World's Poorest Countries
- Micah 4:3 - Swords into Ploughshares

Presbyterians Invited to Participate in Washington Office Review

Witness to Faith A Public Affair

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (July 31, 2009) - The Washington Office of the PC(USA) is "a central and important instrument through which Presbyterians make witness to their faith of matters of public affairs," says Sara Lisherness, Director for Compassion, Peace and Justice ministries of the General Assembly Mission Council.

In 2008, Rev. Eileen Lindner, A Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pastor, presbytery executive and social research specialist, was engaged to lead a study of the role and purpose of the Washington Office. Presbyterians are now invited to provide feedback and responses to the study.

The study includes a provisional mission statement, eight principles to guide the work of the office in the future, and a request for input from Presbyterians. The mission

study and feedback will be reported to the General Assembly Mission Council during the September 2009 meeting.

The effort that culminated in the initial report included analyzing previous research; assessing the work of ecumenical partners' Washington presence; scrutinizing all correspondence regarding the office received over the last several years; empanelling a distinguished group of Presbyterians for additional consultation; conferring with leading secular partners in public witness activities; and reviewing related literature.

In preparation for the presentation of the report to the General Assembly Mission Council, the guidelines and comment section are now posted on the PC(USA) Web site at <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/missionstatement.htm>.

Lindner stated, "The public voice and public witness of the PC(USA) is the business of all Presbyterians in keeping with our reformed theology. As we move closer to making decisions about the future of our public witness we will be strengthened in our discernment by the shared thoughts of a diversity of Presbyterians sharing their views."

Moved By Faith: A Call for Peace in Sudan

As the stability of the Sudan North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement is threatened due to tensions between signers of the agreement, and as the humanitarian situation in Darfur remains dire, the PC(USA) Washington Office as well as many other denominations and faith groups across the country ask people of faith like you to join other faith leaders in signing the letter below calling on President Obama to continue his work for lasting peace in Sudan.

The last day to add your signature is August 31, so please sign the letter today!

Want to learn more about how you can get your congregation involved in advocating for peace in Sudan? Follow this link to download resources.

<http://www.lwr.org/sudan/index.asp>

Mark your calendars for the Weekend of Prayer and Action for Sudan, August 28-30. Details to follow soon.

Below is the sample letter you can use in your congregation or go to <https://secure3.convio.net/lwr/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=179> to sign the petition.

Moved By Faith: A Call for Peace in Sudan

Dear Mr. President,

We, the undersigned faith leaders write to express our support for your work to achieve lasting peace in Sudan. We urge you to continue those efforts that will bring peace to millions that live in violence and fear while lacking the basic services essential for survival. Our shared humanity connects us to people in need, and our faith leads us to shed light on situations of injustice. For decades, the citizens of Sudan have been plagued by war, famine and marginalization. Our faith inspires us to work for justice throughout the world, and we know that the leadership of the United States is critical if holistic peace, development and equality are to be realized in Sudan.

Four years after the U.S. helped broker the pivotal 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), it is clear that peace between the north and south remains extremely fragile, and fears of renewed civil war are on the rise. We thank your administration for recent efforts to address the current state of the CPA along with representatives of Sudan and the international community. We ask that you continue, along with the signatories of the agreement and the international community, to ensure that all aspects of the CPA are fully implemented to help achieve a just and lasting peace for the people of Sudan, including the people of the Three Areas-South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei.

In Darfur, after more than five years of violence, displacement, and rampant insecurity, millions of people now depend on humanitarian aid and are forced to live in makeshift camps. We urge your administration to continue working with the international community and key actors, including civil society, to help bring a sustainable peace agreement that will restore security and allow the Darfuri people to return freely to their homes and rebuild their lives.

The rarely discussed conflict and lack of development among the Beja in Eastern Sudan must also be resolved to ensure sustainable peace in Sudan. We urge your administration to play a role in ensuring the 2006 agreement is upheld.

While we represent diverse faith traditions, we are united in our work for peace, justice and the well-being of all God's people. As we lead our communities in action and prayer, please know that we support you in your work and believe that your strong leadership is critical in realizing peace and justice in Sudan.

With thanks and prayers for your continued service,
[Your Name]
[Your Address]
[City, State ZIP]

General Assembly Guidance:

The 217th General Assembly (2006) approved the following:

The Presbyteries of Trinity and Shenango overture[d] the 217th General Assembly (2006) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to reaffirm our denomination's close connections to Sudan for more than 100 years; to raise awareness of the need to continue advocating for peace in Sudan and for pressure on the government of Sudan; National Congress Party, to assure its compliance with the terms of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA); and to explore the appropriateness of taking measures against any companies selling war materials to the governments of Sudan by recommending to the General Assembly that it add their names to the divestment list of the General Assembly, stating as follow:

1. Direct the Stated Clerk to send greetings to our ecumenical partners, the New Sudan Council of Churches and the Sudan Council of Churches, and to our church partners, the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church and the Presbyterian Church of Sudan , thanking God for their courageous and faithful witness to Our Lord Jesus Christ; commending them for their work toward reconciliation that provides an environment for good governance; and affirming our solidarity with them as they increase their capacity for evangelism and the establishment of schools and other community projects necessary to civil society.
2. Encourage all Presbyterians to pray for a just peace for all the people of Sudan ; to raise awareness of genocide in Sudan , planned and paid for by the government of Sudan, which continues to the present against the southern and marginalized people of Sudan , including Darfur and eastern Sudan ; and to make their voices heard by the leaders of our government, including the president of the United States, secretary of state, members of Congress, and the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, on behalf of continued sanctions against the government of Sudan until a just and lasting peace exists for all people of Sudan .

What's Happening with Health Care?

Congress has made significant progress on health reform in the last two weeks. On the House side, all three committees have approved a bill (which vary slightly from each other) and the compromise awaits consideration by the full House when they return after the August recess. On the Senate side, one of two committees has approved a bill, and the other is expected to release their version of the health insurance overhaul in early September. Though neither chamber has taken a full vote yet, the process is underway.

The proposals look somewhat promising -- both the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) proposal (the one that has been approved by its committee) and the joint (tri-committee) House proposal would make the health insurance market more accountable to patients by significantly reforming the private insurance market and including a public health insurance option. Though none of the

proposals on the table include a single-payer system like the one for which the 218th General Assembly (2008) expressed support, the expansion in coverage that these bills would bring would reach tens of millions of people who do not currently have access to health coverage, and therefore, care. Congress is not taking the approach the PC(USA) has called for, but is moving in the right direction.

Health care reform is very close to becoming a reality, but the remaining hurdle is the question of money. Congress needs to agree on how to finance this reform effort. Your members of Congress need to hear your voice this August recess. As you can imagine, opponents of change are well organized and financed. We have heard that calls to members' offices run 3 to 1 against health care reform. If people want improvements in the health care system, controls over private insurance, and a major step toward a single payer plan, members need to hear about it - now.

Your Senators will be in your state August 8-31, while and your Representative is probably already home, the House having adjourned last week. Call your Members' district offices right away to schedule a meeting. Your members of Congress may also be holding local town hall meetings on health care (information should be posted on their websites). Let your members of Congress know that you want everyone in the United States to have access to equal, accessible, affordable, high-quality health care.

* Throughout August, the WWW will provide updates on the content of the various health proposals in light of General Assembly policy on access to health care.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 2002, the General Assembly approved "Advocacy on Behalf of the Uninsured," in which it:

- Reaffirm[ed] the church's commitment to advocacy for a national medical plan.
- Encourage[d] presbyteries, sessions, and the members of congregations to be advocates for universal health care and to support advocacy efforts in their local communities to bring public and private entities together in this effort.
- Encourage[d] members of Congress to recognize the importance of universal health care - that is, equal, accessible, affordable, and high-quality health care for all persons residing in our nation.

In 2008, the 218th General Assembly:

- Endorse[d] in principle the provision of single-payer universal health care reform in which health care services are privately provided and publicly financed.
- Direct[ed] the General Assembly Council, through appropriate offices including the National Health Ministries, the Washington Office, and the Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association (PHEWA), to advocate for, educate

about, and otherwise pursue the goal of obtaining legislation that enacts single-payer, universal national health insurance as the program that best responds to the moral imperative of the gospel; monitoring progress toward this goal and reporting back to the next two General Assemblies (2010 and 2012).

Set Up a District Meeting Today to Protect the World's Poorest Countries

Last month, the British government announced its intention to pass legislation that would stop Vulture Fund profiteering from poor country debt in UK courts. And, we also have indication from US congressional committee leaders that they are interested in moving forward with the Stop VULTURE Funds Act as early as September if we can increase support for the bill. These are important steps forward in our struggle to ensure that the positive gains of debt cancellation do not get siphoned off by Vulture Funds.

Now is the time to build on this positive momentum to increase support for the Stop VULTURE Funds Act (HR 2932) in the House of Representatives. Since Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Spencer Bachus (R-AL) re-introduced the bill in June, fifteen representatives have signed on as cosponsors. We need many more cosponsors to demonstrate the political will to move forward with this important piece of legislation!

Take Action! Meet with your representative during the August recess to urge him/her to cosponsor the Stop VULTURE Funds act! During the month of August, Congress is on recess and your representative will be in his/her home district, so this is a great time to set up a meeting to ask him/her to cosponsor the bill.

Setting up a district meeting is fun and easy:

- Go to <http://pcusa.capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/> to find your representative and his/her district office phone number.
- Call the office and ask to speak to the congressperson's scheduler to set up the meeting.
- Download the legislative leave behind packet that we have prepared for you to take to the meeting.
<http://www.jubileeusa.org/vulturefunds/leavebehindpacket.html>
- Click here for more tips on preparing for a district meeting-
<http://www.jubileeusa.org/get-active/grassroots-resources/how-to-contact-congress/tips-on-visiting-congress.html>

If you are unable to set up a district meeting at this time, please call your representative and ask him/her to cosponsor the bill. You can reach your representative via the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. Click here for a call script. <http://www.jubileeusa.org/get-active/take-action.html>

What are Vulture Funds?

Vulture Funds buy the defaulted debt of poor countries from the original lender, often for pennies on the dollar. After buying a poor country's debt, vulture funds take their time, waiting for the right opportunity to strike.

When a country receives debt cancellation from governments or international financial institutions, vulture funds rarely participate in the deal. Instead they take the opportunity to sue in U.S. or European courts to seize the newly available resources - usually many times what they originally paid to purchase the debt. After Zambia received debt cancellation for example, Vulture Fund Donegal International seized \$15 million that was budgeted to be used for AIDS treatment and rural healthcare. Click here for more background resources on Vulture Funds.

<http://www.jubileeusa.org/vulturefunds.html>

What does the Stop VULTURE Funds Act do?

The Stop VULTURE Funds Act would prevent Vulture Funds from using U.S. courts to collect more than 6% interest above the amount they paid to purchase the debt. It also would require Vulture Funds to operate in a more transparent and fair manner.

Please set up a meeting or call your U.S. Representative today and ask her/him to co-sponsor the bill! You can reach your representative via the Capitol switchboard - 202-224-3121.

General Assembly Guidance:

The repayment of debts and interest at the expense of the basics of life raises serious questions of justice. The burden of debts must be shared equitably in ways that reduce poverty, protect the environment, and avoid perverse incentives in the future.

The 208th General Assembly (1996) calls on all ... engaged in international lending to strive to insulate the poor of indebted countries from the costs of debt repayment and to consider seriously debt forgiveness or debt relief for the most heavily indebted poor countries.

The 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

1. Reaffirm[s] the action of the 210th General Assembly (1998) calling for debt -relief as found in Hope for a Global Future (report and study guide from 1996), and direct their legislative agenda accordingly.

2. Recommend[s] that study materials for congregational use include the Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, "Let the Trumpet Sound a Jubilee Call to End the Stranglehold of Debt on Impoverished Peoples," and the reports of the Jubilee 2000/USA organization.

Micah 4:3 - Swords into Ploughshares

God shall judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore;

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To support the work of the Washington Office, send a contribution to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Individual Remittance Processing
P.O. Box 643700
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700.

Designate the Washington Office, ECO # 865714.

Or click here to give online: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/support.htm>

Thank You.

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