

# Faith leaders' letter to Chancellor Rishi Sunak

Dear Chancellor,

We are leaders from different faith communities around the United Kingdom. We are writing to urge you to support our most vulnerable sisters and brothers worldwide as they seek to survive and rebuild from the coronavirus pandemic.

We welcome the efforts you made at the G20 finance ministers' meeting in April to reach an agreement for the temporary suspension of debts owed to other governments by those of the world's poorest 77 countries.

We now ask you to work with your fellow finance ministers at this month's G20 meeting to cancel, rather than merely suspend bilateral debt payments, as well as to urge the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and private creditors to cancel debt payments owed in 2020 and 2021 by these countries.

This is a critical and rapid means of ensuring that health workers in developing countries have the best chance of helping to defeat the coronavirus and that countries have the resources at hand to build back from the economic devastation the pandemic has wreaked – including by assisting communities already being hit by the effects of the climate crisis.

The immediate risks the coronavirus poses to poverty reduction efforts are both clear and shocking. In total, the World Bank estimates that between 71-100 million people risk falling into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic. The World Food Programme forecasts that around 270 million people around the world will face acute food insecurity by the end of this year, a doubling of the approximately 130 million who suffered severe food shortages last year. The International Labour Organization predicts that up to 340 million jobs could be lost.

To insist on debt repayment in the face of the suffering caused by this pandemic would be an affront to the faith traditions that we represent.

Indeed, there is an overarching moral case for debt relief in many faiths.

Texts in both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament call for debt cancellation and for making good debt relationships every seven years, with a jubilee every fiftieth year. The Qur'an challenges debt by strongly criticising charging interest and speaks against prosecuting those who cannot repay debts back.

In his Easter Urbi et Orbi message of hope, Pope Francis called for the reduction of the debt that is "burdening the balance sheet of the poorest nations" and said earlier this year that it is not right "to demand or expect payment when the effect would be the imposition of political choices leading to hunger and despair for entire peoples."

These are not normal times and we must respond accordingly. This crisis has emphasised the need to stand together and debt cancellation represents an urgent and essential means of assisting the most vulnerable communities to withstand the suffering the pandemic will otherwise unnecessarily cause.

We urge you to show the ambition and leadership needed to meet this challenge.

Signed by

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**Rt Rev and Rt Hon Dr Rowan Williams** - Former Archbishop of Canterbury

**Most Rev John D E Davies** - Archbishop of Wales; Bishop of Swansea and Brecon

**Most Rev Mark Strange** - Primus, on behalf of the College of Bishops, Scottish Episcopal Church

**Rt Rev John Arnold** - Bishop of Salford; lead bishop on environmental affairs for the Catholic Church in England and Wales

**Rt Rev Declan Lang** - Bishop of Clifton; Chair of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Department for International Affairs

**Rt Rev Joseph Toal** - Bishop of Motherwell; President of SCIAF

**Rt Rev William Nolan** - Bishop of Galloway

**Rt Rev Christopher Chessun** - Bishop of Southwark

**Rt Rev Tim Dakin** - Bishop of Winchester

**Rt Rev John Inge** - Bishop of Worcester

**Rt Rev Nick Baines** - Bishop of Leeds

**Rt Rev Christopher Cocksworth** - Bishop of Coventry

**Rt Rev Ric Thorpe** - Bishop of Islington

**Rt Rev Joanna Penberthy** - Bishop of St David's

**Rt Rev James Langstaff** - Lord Bishop of Rochester and Bishop to HM Prisons

**Rt Rev Graham Usher** - Bishop of Norwich

**Rev Hugh Nelson** - Bishop-designate of St Germans

**Very Rev Susan Brown** - Convenor, Faith Impact Forum, Church of Scotland

**Rev Richard Teal** - President, Methodist Conference

**Carolyn Lawrence** - Vice-President, Methodist Conference

**Rev Mark Slaney** - District Chair, Methodist Church (Scotland)

**Rev John Fulton** - Moderator, United Reformed Church (Scotland)

**Rev Dr David Pickering** - Moderator, United Reformed Church (Scotland)

**Rev Clare Downing** - Moderator, General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

**Mr Peter Pay** - Moderator, General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

**Rev Simon Walkling** - Moderator, United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales

**Lynn Green** - General Secretary, Baptist Union

**Rev Martin Hodson** - General Director, Baptist Union of Scotland

**Frances J. Bloomfield** - Convenor, Scottish Baptists

**Dr Marcus Chilaka** - Assistant Provincial Pastor and National Ecumenical Lead, The Redeemed Christian Church of God

**Damian Howard, SJ** - Provincial, Jesuits in Britain

**Elizabeth Allen** - Clerk, General Meeting for Scotland

**Rev Gavin Calver** - CEO, Evangelical Alliance

**Rev Canon Yemi Adedeji** - Director, 'One People Commission' at Evangelical Alliance

**Rev Dr Stephen Wigley** - Chair, Wales Synod of the Methodist Church in Wales

**Rev Dr Jennifer A Hurd** - District Chair, Cymru Synod of the Methodist Church

**Rev Celia Apegyei-Collins** - President, Rehoboth Foundation International

**Rev Christopher Gillham** - Secretary, Congregation Federation in Wales

**Rev May-Kane Logan** - Congregational Federation in Scotland

**Lt Col Carol Bailey** - Secretary for Scotland, Salvation Army

**Pastor Chris Gbenle** - Provincial Pastor, Province of Scotland, Redeemed Christian Church of God

**Dyfrig Rees** - General Secretary, Union of Welsh Independents

**Rev Nicky Gumbel** - Vicar, Holy Trinity Brompton

**Professor Robert Beckford** - Professor of Theology, The Queen's Ecumenical Foundation

**Rev Dr Sam Wells** - Vicar, St Martin-in-the-Fields

**Rev Paul Harcourt** - National Leader, New Wine

**Rev Kate Wharton** - Assistant National Leader, New Wine

**Rev Prebendary Mark Melliush** - Assistant National Leader, New Wine

**Dr Julie Morgan** - Executive Director, New Wine

**Dr Krish Kandiah** - Social Entrepreneur, Theologian and Founder of Home for Good

**Chris Gillham** - Secretary, Congregational Federation in Wales

**Rabbi Aaron Goldstein** – Chair, Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors; Senior Rabbi, Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue

**Rabbi Dr Deborah Kahn-Harris** - Principal, Leo Baeck College

**Rabbi Dr Charles Middleburgh** - Dean, Leo Baeck College

**Rabbi Naomi Goldman** - Kol Chai Synagogue, Hatch End Reform Jewish Community

**Rabbi Dr Barbara Borts** - Honorary Research Associate, Department of Anthropology, Durham University; Honorary Research Fellow, Leo Baeck College

**Rabbi Dr Jackie Tabick** - Convenor, Reform Beit Din; Rabbi, West Central Liberal Synagogue

**Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra** - Imam; Chair, Virtue Ethics Foundation

**Imam Sayed Razawi FRSA** - Chief Imam, Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society

**Sheikh Suliman** - Trustee, Edmonton Islamic Centre

**Molana Mujahid Ali** - Imam, Hafs Academy, London

**Sheikh Abdulqadir** - Imam Al-Muntada, West London Islamic Cultural Centre

**Sheikh Kazi Luthfur Rahma** - Imam & Khateeb, London Central Mosque, Regent's Park

**Mohammed Saeed** - Trustee, Green Lane Mosque, Birmingham

**Imam Abid Salik** - Imam of York Mosque & Islamic Centre

**Dr Ravi** - Trustee of Liverpool Mosque & Institute

**Abdul Kareem Gheewala** - Chair, Federation of Muslim Organisations, Leicester

**Imam Emran Ahmed** - Al Hikmah (Aberdeen)

**Imam Ibrahim** - Aberdeen Muslim and Islamic Centre

**Moulana Sohail Ashfaque** - Blackhall Mosque, Edinburgh

**Moulana Abu Bakr** - Cumbernauld Mosque

**Amanda Khozi Mukwashi** - CEO, Christian Aid

**Nigel Harris** - CEO, Tearfund

**Christine Allen** - Director, CAFOD

**Alistair Dutton** - Director, SCIAF

**Tufail Hussain** - Director, Islamic Relief

**Shanon Shah** - Interim Coordinator, Faith for the Climate Network