

April 16, 2008

Re: Restore America's Image in the World

Dear Members of Congress;

Public opinion research clearly demonstrates that Americans are concerned about the U.S. reputation in the world and want to improve our image by working with allies and through international organizations rather than by going it alone. We write to urge you to strengthen America's international standing by honoring our treaty commitments and paying our past debt and present obligations to the United Nations and other international organizations.

As of February 1, 2008, the United States was \$2.8 billion behind in its payments to the UN. U.S. debt to the UN includes \$1.2 billion in so-called permanent debt—unpaid bills that remain unaddressed by the Administration's FY 2008 supplemental and FY 2009 regular budget requests. This permanent debt will increase by another \$600 million unless the Congress includes UN funding beyond the amount requested in the Administration's FY 2009 budget. The rest of our debt results from the regular U.S. practice of paying virtually every international organization a year or more late, by which time new bills have already come in.

The large and growing U.S. debt to the UN hurts the advancement of U.S. interests at the UN and our reputation around the world. It hinders our ability to make a positive impact on millions of people the UN's work affects—from furthering human rights around the world to delivering much-needed assistance to populations suffering from conflict or natural disaster. The accumulation of debt is also contrary to our actions and deeds: shortchanging peacekeeping missions that the U.S. has approved and voted for in the UN Security Council. Failing to pay our fair share hampers the UN's ability to implement agreed upon reforms, and undermines the U.S. ability to play a constructive role in pushing for additional major reforms of the UN system. U.S. assessments are not voluntary commitments—they are negotiated and agreed to by the U.S. government, a treaty-bound and privileged member of the United Nations and its Security Council. As our debt grows, it becomes harder and harder for the UN to manage cash flow and pay its bills. In short, we are not honoring our commitments.

The United States cannot bear all the costs or risks of achieving international peace and security. Working through the UN means the U.S. shares the human and financial costs of maintaining international peace and security with 191 other countries. UN peacekeeping currently has over 100,000 peacekeepers deployed to 17 conflicts around the world to maintain stability without risking American lives and for a fraction of the cost of a comparable U.S. force. Failing to honor our commitments to the UN frustrates the ability of peacekeepers to carry out their mandates in often complex environments, such as the newly deployed UN-AU mission to Darfur (UNAMID). It impedes the UN's ability to prepare for potential demands for peace operations in countries like Somalia where peace remains tenuous, and inhibits countries from putting their own troops forward for peacekeeping missions. Finally, through political missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. has asked the UN to play a larger role in coordinating and distributing aid, assisting refugees, and creating political space for national reconciliation. But the UN cannot effectively play this role without sufficient resources to do the job.

We urge you to act now to address the problem and fully pay our UN dues. The nearly \$3 billion that it would take to catch up on U.S. debt to the UN is an investment in peace, security, and diplomacy that pales in comparison with annual U.S. military spending, which now stands at \$530 billion. By repaying our debt at the UN, Congress can send a simple, yet significant, signal to the international community: the U.S. wants to work with the rest of the world to realize our shared goals of peace and prosperity.

Sincerely,

20/20 Vision
 Africa Action
 African Medical & Research Foundation USA
 American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
 (ADC)
 American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
 American Humanist Association
 American Jewish World Service
 American Public Health Association
 Americans for Democratic Action, Inc. (ADA)
 Americans for UNESCO
 Americans for UNFPA
 Amnesty International
 Better World Campaign
 CARE
 Center for American Progress
 Center for Inquiry
 Center for War/Peace Studies
 Church Women United
 Church World Service
 Citizens for Global Solutions
 Coalition for American Leadership Abroad
 Concern America
 Council for a Livable World
 Democracy Coalition Project
 EarthAction
 Enough! The project to end genocide and crimes
 against humanity
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 Federation of American Women's Clubs
 Overseas
 Friends Committee on National Legislation
 Friendship Ambassadors Foundation, Inc.
 General Federation of Women's Clubs
 Genocide Intervention Network
 Global Action to Prevent War
 Global AIDS Alliance
 Global Associates for Health Development, Inc.
 Global Ministries of the Christian Church
 (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of
 Christ
 Global Witness
 Heifer International
 Horn of Africa Community Center
 International Peace Operations Association
 International Rescue Committee
 Jewish Council for Public Affairs
 Lutheran World Relief
 Maryknoll Global Concerns
 Mercy Corps
 NAACP
 National Association of Social Workers
 National Council of Churches USA
 National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the
 U.S.
 Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
 Open Society Policy Center
 Operation USA
 Oxfam America
 Oxford Council on Good Governance
 Pact
 Partnership for a Secure America
 Peace Action Education Fund
 Physicians for Human Rights
 Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington DC
 Office
 Rainbow/PUSH Coalition
 Reconciliation Ministries
 Refugees International
 RH Reality Check
 Save Darfur Coalition
 The Advocates for Human Rights
 The Fellowship of Reconciliation
 The Fund for Peace
 The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the
 Advancement of Human Rights of the American
 Jewish Committee
 United Church of Christ, Wider Church
 Ministries
 United Methodist Church, General Board of
 Church and Society
 United Nations Association of Maryland
 United Nations Association of the National
 Capital Area
 United Nations Association of the USA
 We, the World
 Women of Reform Judaism
 Women's Action for New Directions
 Women's Commission for Refugee Women &
 Children
 Women's Environment and Development
 Organization
 Women's International League for Peace and
 Freedom, U.S.
 World Learning