

DROP DEBT, SAVE LIVES

VIRTUAL LOBBY GUIDE 2020

A virtual lobby for debt cancellation
for the poorest and most vulnerable
countries in the world

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has turned our world upside down. Many of us have suffered from illness, bereavement and uncertainty.

As is so often the case people living in poverty have been the hardest hit, with the most serious health crisis in a century threatening to push hundreds of millions out of work and limiting access to food, education and healthcare.

We urgently need to make sure that governments in poor countries have the resources at hand to stop the spread of the virus, to treat those who are infected and to help communities to recover and rebuild. Yet dozens of governments are spending more on debt payments than they are on their own health care systems. This must stop.

The G20 (a group of 20 of the world's most powerful countries) has recognised this is a problem and has suspended some debt repayments due this year. But we need them to go much further.

In October, finance ministers from the world's richest countries, as well as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, will meet to decide the next steps in the global recovery from the pandemic. We need to make sure that no one is left behind and that governments in poorer countries are not faced with an impossible choice between saving lives or repaying debts.



The UK has one of the most powerful voices in these international meetings. We need to raise our own voices to urge the UK Chancellor to show leadership and work to cancel the debts of countries struggling to cope with the effects of the pandemic.

If we can build up enough pressure from MPs, the Chancellor will have to listen.

In the run-up to these crunch moments in October, please invite your MP to meet you and other voters in your constituency online to raise this vital issue. Ask your MP to write to the Chancellor urgently, calling on him to work to cancel the debts of the world's poorest countries.

The coming weeks could make the difference. Ask your MP to play their part.

What is a virtual lobby?

A virtual lobby is an online meeting with your MP, together with other people in your constituency. As constituents, you have a powerful voice and the more people in your constituency that show they care about an issue, the more MPs are pushed to act.

From the 28th September to 14th October, constituents will meet MPs to talk about why it's crucial that the Chancellor acts now to cancel debts for developing countries as part of the fight against the coronavirus.

What should we talk about?

We want MPs to hear why, as their constituents, you care about debt cancellation for those already living in poverty. Speak about your own personal feelings and why you care.

At the moment, developing countries are being forced to fight COVID at the same time as paying huge amounts in debt. Here are some facts about this that can help you in your conversations with your MPs.

- 64 countries spend more on external debt payments than on healthcare. For example, the Central African Republic has just three ventilators for almost five million people, but it's due to spend \$25 million on external debt repayments in 2020.
- Despite some debt suspension earlier this year, private lenders like banks and hedge funds and the World Bank are yet to suspend or cancel any debt.
- There is growing global support for debt relief from African finance ministers, along with countries such as Pakistan.
- \$22.5 billion is owed to private creditors and multilateral institutions in 2020 alone. That's money that could be going towards fighting COVID.
- Cancelling all debt payments could save countries \$40 billion in 2020.
- Almost 500 million more people could be pushed into poverty because of the pandemic.

The UK has a powerful voice in the global meetings, and the Chancellor has the opportunity to show leadership, working with fellow finance ministers and at the IMF and World Bank meetings to reduce the debt burden on developing countries struggling to cope with the effects of the pandemic.

The Debt Service Suspension Initiative (known as the 'DSSI') is a scheme set up earlier this year by G20 governments to assist poorer countries in the face of the pandemic. The scheme is a valuable first step in support of these countries (it's good to acknowledge this positive step in your meeting). However, suspension also means that countries could face an even bigger debt crisis in two years' time, and the best route to solving the debt crisis would be to cancel the debts of the countries most in need until at least the end of 2021, and for up to four years.

Here is what we want the UK government to push for:

- External debt payments for all countries in the DSSI and all other countries in need should be cancelled until at least the end of 2021, and for up to four years. In this time, a mechanism should be created to bring debt down to a sustainable level.
- Private creditors must immediately match the terms of the existing debt suspension (and of any future review) offered by the DSSI under a binding and compulsory scheme. The UK government can contribute to this by introducing legislation so that countries owing debt governed by English law cannot be sued for suspending debt payments to private lenders.
- Multilateral development banks must immediately match the terms of the existing debt suspension (and of any future review) offered by the DSSI under a binding and compulsory scheme.
- The DSSI should be extended for at minimum 1 year and up to 4 years, and should be extended to all countries which are in or at risk of severe sovereign debt crisis

You can find out more information in this supporter briefing: <http://bit.ly/debtlobbybrief>

We'd like you to **ask your MP to write to the Chancellor**, calling on him to support debt relief and take action at these important meetings to ensure developing countries are able to tackle the pandemic.

We know many of you have already done lots of lobbying on debt before and your MP may have already written to the Chancellor on this issue. That is no problem at all! If your MP has already written to the Chancellor, here are a few other things you can ask them to do:

- **Ask your MP to table a question for the Chancellor in parliament.** MPs can table written and oral questions in parliament to find out information from the Government or get a topic on the Government's agenda. If your MP would be happy to do this, we can help with writing questions.
- **Ask your MP to meet with the Chancellor.** If your MP is very keen to do something, ask them to meet with the Chancellor to share some of your concerns with him directly.
- **Ask your MP to tweet a photo of your meeting.** If your MP is not happy to do any of the other actions, you can ask them to tweet a photo of your meeting so others know that they have met with constituents about this important issue.

What if my MP is unavailable or resistant to meet?

The most important thing is that your MP is hearing that their constituents care. Just let us know if and when your meeting is arranged and let us know how it went – if it does eventually go ahead. If not, get in touch with us and we can support you in writing a letter to your MP to try and get a meeting.

Step by step guide for setting up a virtual constituency lobby

1. How will the MP meetings be set up?

If you haven't already, sign up to join the lobby using this link: bit.ly/dropdebtsaveliveslobby

If you sign up as a Constituency Coordinator to organise a lobby:

Thank you! If you are able to take on this role, it will be a great help in securing a meeting. We will ask you to email your MP asking them to set up a Zoom meeting with you and other constituents and ask you to reply to queries from others signed up to join the lobby in your constituency via Google Groups. Don't worry if you haven't done this before, we'll support you with everything you need!

At the same time, the organisations involved in the campaign will contact all MPs to let them know that the virtual lobbies are happening between the 28th September and 14th October and to be aware of your requests coming.

There is a template email to your MP below.

MPs are very busy, so if you don't hear back from them, do follow up with their office by giving them a call. You can find their details at members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP. Alternatively, you can ring the parliamentary switchboard on 020 7219 3000 and ask for your MP's office.

If you sign up to attend a lobby:

We'll put you in touch with others in your constituency and when the lobby is arranged you will be given the time and date. We'll also support you with training and setting up a pre-meeting discussion to agree what you want to say.

You can also get in touch with your MP directly and ask them if a meeting has been arranged, or get in touch with us at the coalition, at debtcoalition2020@gmail.com.

2. Invite others to join you

By inviting others to sign up and join the debt lobby, you can show your MP that they will get more support locally if they act and write to the Chancellor.

For example, you could invite:

- Your friends and family
- Your neighbours

- Local networks - for example, Facebook Groups, Next Door pages and so on
- People in your faith organisation.

If you know others are going to join you, please check if they've contacted your MP and if not, do let your MP know.

3. Prepare for your meeting with your MP

On 22nd September we will host a session on how to lobby your MP. You can sign up here: bit.ly/dropdebtsavelivestraining

In the meantime, you can prepare for your meeting with your MP by getting a better understanding of how coronavirus is pushing countries in the global south deeper into poverty by:

- Watching this webinar: bit.ly/COVIDdebt
- Checking out this supporter briefing: bit.ly/debtlobbybrief

4. Meet your MP

Be ready to join the call at least five minutes beforehand to avoid any connection issues.

Top tips for speaking with your MP:

- Speak from the heart about why you personally care about this issue. Think about what led you to feel passionately about this and why you are lobbying your MP today.
- You don't have to be an expert to speak on these issues, but make sure you are clear, concise and ask them to act. In the meeting, if you don't know the answer to a question, that's fine, just say you will follow up with them after the meeting.
- Ensure that you give everyone else the time to have their views heard and encourage others to speak too.
- Give your MP the time to respond to your request - meetings work best when they are a conversation. At the same time, make it clear that you would like to see them commit to some sort of action and try not to leave without getting some commitments.
- Be friendly to your MP and thank them for meeting with you! They are humans with very busy workloads so do recognise that they may have been dealing with lots of different issues and may not know all the details.

5. Follow up with your MP the week after virtual lobby

MPs need to hear from their constituents consistently to ensure they are taking concerns seriously and acting on them.

After the lobby you could:

- Arrange a follow up online meeting
- Send them a follow up email or letter
- Call their office for an update
- Contact them on social media (you could tweet a photo or screenshot of the meeting!)

It would be useful for you to share your feedback on how your MP responded and to ensure that someone in the meeting is taking notes. We'll email you the survey link after the meeting with your MP.

Template invitation letter for MP if you have signed up to a lobby

Below is a template email to MPs which you are free to edit as you wish.

Subject line: Invite from constituent to virtual meeting on debt in developing countries

Dear *[Jo Bloggs MP]*,

My name is *[your name]* and I am a constituent. Thank you for your continued hard work representing *[Your constituency]*, especially during a time such as this.

I know your current focus will be supporting those most affected in our area and continuing your parliamentary work. **I would like to invite you to meet me and other constituents in an online meeting to talk about the importance of debt relief for the poorest countries** in helping us to recover globally from coronavirus, an issue that is very important to me. Right now, 64 of the world's poorest countries are spending more on debt relief than healthcare, a situation which I'm sure you will agree is putting lives and the global response to the pandemic at risk.

The UK has one of the most powerful voices internationally and the upcoming meetings for finance ministers from the world's richest countries will help decide the next steps and whether to extend the current deal that has been agreed for international debt suspension. We need to make sure that no one is left behind in that recovery and the UK can be a global leader in making that a reality.

Due to the pandemic, we can't meet in person, so I would appreciate it if you could please send me an online conferencing link (e.g. Zoom) and a meeting time from 28th September to 14th October that is convenient to you.

You may receive similar requests from other constituents and I would be happy to join those people in the same virtual meeting. I know you are busy, so even 30 minutes of your time would be appreciated. Please confirm the time of our call as soon as is convenient.

Thank you,

[Your name, Address including postcode, Phone number]

How can I promote the virtual lobby?

There are a number of things you can do to promote your virtual lobby before and after it takes place.

Promote the lobby on social media:

Use the hashtag #DropDebtSaveLives across your social media channels like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to promote your taking part in the lobbies. You could even take a picture during the lobby and tweet your MP at the end thanking them for taking part. Here's some suggested copy:

- I'm looking forward to meeting my MP [insert MP's Twitter handle] about why it's important @RishiSunak shows leadership by supporting debt relief for developing countries. #DropDebtSaveLives
- It was great to meet [insert MP name] at the virtual lobby on debt relief today. I look forward to hearing how you will take forward our concerns to @RishiSunak ahead of the important #G20 finance ministers meeting in October. #DropDebtSaveLives

Write to your local media about the lobby

MPs really appreciate positive media coverage - especially when it shows them listening to the concerns of their constituents.

Write to your local media outlets to let them know that the lobbies took place. If you've taken one, add a picture of the lobby too!

Here's some suggested text that you can use:

[Date]

[XX Local residents] urge [Joe Bloggs MP] to back debt cancellation to help world's poorest countries fight coronavirus

Local residents have held a 'virtual lobby' to ask [Joe Bloggs MP] to help the world's poorest countries fight the coronavirus pandemic.

The constituents organised an online meeting with [constituency name] MP on [date] to urge [her/him] to persuade Chancellor Rishi Sunak to back global efforts aimed at ensuring developing countries have the resources at hand to help people who face being pushed into poverty by the coronavirus crisis.

The meeting came ahead of key discussions between finance ministers from rich governments aimed at helping the world to recover and rebuild from the pandemic.

[Add a quote in your own words, explaining why you lobbied your MP and what you hope will be the outcome of your meeting.]

As the coronavirus has spread around the world, concern has grown that poor countries do not have the resources to provide vulnerable people with health care and to support their poorest citizens as the economic effects of the crisis threaten to push millions into extreme poverty.

More than 64 countries spend more on paying external debts than on health care, with campaigners pointing to the example of the Central African Republic which has just three ventilators for almost five million people yet it's due to spend \$25 million on external debt repayments in 2020.

The virtual lobby between the campaigners and [Joe Bloggs MP] was part of a series of online meetings coordinated by some of the UK's leading development organisations, including Jubilee Debt Campaign, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Global Justice Now and Oxfam.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For further information, contact [add your contact details].
- [Add information about the local groups involved in your event.]

Contact

If you'd like more information about the campaign, please contact the debt coalition at:

debtcoalition2020@gmail.com



