

Bishops support extension of trade protections for Haitian garments

WASHINGTON - U.S. bishops have called on the Senate to support the extension of favorable trade status for Haitian-made garments.

In a Feb. 19 letter to senators, Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, called for passage of the Renewing Hope for Haiti Act, S. 2978, which would renew existing trade protections set to expire in September.

Passage of the bill, introduced Feb. 2 by Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., will help the Haitian economy create much needed jobs and reduce poverty, Bishop Hubbard wrote.

Jobs especially are needed in Haiti following the massive Jan. 12 earthquake, which struck a large portion of the poor Caribbean nation, killing at least 220,000 people and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless, Bishop Hubbard told the senators.

Citing the long-standing support from the U.S. bishops for protections for Haitian goods from taxes and other trade barriers, Bishop Hubbard said passage of the bill can help rebuild the country's economy and encourage exporters to reconstruct damaged or destroyed factories more quickly.

"Down the road it will be important to adopt broader preferential treatment for Haitian goods, but immediately extending the existing preferences will be important to the sustainable development of Haiti," Bishop Hubbard wrote.

On another economic front, the House Financial Services Subcommittee on International Monetary Policy and Trade March 4 approved a bill that would cancel all international debt Haiti owes.

The bill, known as the Jubilee Act, H.R. 4405, also has won the support of the U.S. bishops. It could come up for a vote in the House of Representatives next week.

Haiti owes \$1.5 billion to the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other international banking institutions.