



# Hill Notes

## February 2009

### FOREIGN ASSISTANCE



#### ***What is the Church's vision for U.S. foreign assistance programs?***

The Church views foreign aid as an essential tool to promote human life and dignity, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance security throughout the world. Foreign aid is not simply an optional commitment; it is a moral responsibility to assist “the least of these.”

#### ***What credibility does the Church have in speaking out on foreign assistance?***

First, the Church in the United States has broad and deep **experience** reaching out to our brothers and sisters in need through Catholic lay movements and religious communities of men and women who operate numerous missions, schools, health structures and humanitarian groups across the globe. Catholic Relief Services, the official relief and development agency of our Conference, has been active for 65 years and now works in about 100 countries around the world. Second, the Catholic Church in our nation also has profound and abiding **relationships** with the Church in many developing countries and frequently is guided by the lived experience of the local Church. Third, our Church has a rich body of **teaching** that offers principles that can help guide the reform of foreign assistance, including: the defense of the life and dignity of the human person; promotion of the common good through participation and subsidiarity; the centrality of the option for the poor; and building peace through justice.

#### ***Why is foreign assistance important to the foreign policy of the United States?***

Generous and effective foreign assistance is a moral imperative. It also expresses our values as a nation by reaching out to poor and vulnerable people who live at the margins of the global community. A commitment of foreign assistance focused on human development and humanitarian needs is an indicator of United States leadership in the world. Foreign aid is also an investment in the future well being of people in developing countries and improves global security and stability, thus contributing to the security of our own nation. Pope Paul VI taught us that “the new name for peace is development.” Development funding is a vital tool in a balanced foreign policy. It is one of the three Ds (development, diplomacy and defense) that together can build a world that is more secure and prosperous for all.

#### ***What is the Church's record on foreign assistance funding and reform?***

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has a long history of addressing global poverty and supporting effective foreign assistance. In the wake of World War II the bishops called for “human solidarity” and “governmental aid” to assist other countries. In more recent years, the Bishops' Conference and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) have successfully supported focusing more foreign aid on poverty reduction and increasing foreign aid funding. This year, USCCB and CRS are working in a particular way to promote foreign aid reform and to expand poverty-focused foreign aid programs.

#### ***What is the current state of foreign assistance programs?***

U.S. foreign aid has improved the lives of many people in developing countries, but there are barriers to improving its effectiveness and focus:

1. Only 25-34% of foreign assistance goes to the poorest countries of the world.
2. Although the United States gives more than any other developed nation in foreign aid, we are second from the bottom when foreign aid is measured as a percentage of our national income.
3. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 reorganized U.S. foreign assistance programs and established the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Over the years, the Act has been amended numerous times to add programs, earmarks and initiatives with overlapping objectives and

little coordination. There are over 20 different federal agencies with 50 separate objectives involved in development projects overseas. There is a strong need for a unifying strategy that sets out a coherent goal and a clear set of coordinated objectives.

4. U.S. civilian agencies have lost the capacity and independence required to effectively implement development and humanitarian programs.

***What are current levels of funding for key foreign assistance programs?***

The Bush Administration made important strides in increasing the U.S. commitment to fighting poverty through two new initiatives: the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR); and the Millennium Challenge Corporation that provides direct support to foreign nations for long-term development with accountability mechanisms. In 2007, the U.S. spent \$21.8 billion on foreign assistance, but only about \$8 billion of those funds went to development-related activities such as child survival, water and sanitation, humanitarian assistance, health, peacekeeping and infectious diseases.

***What are the new Obama Administration and Congress doing to reform and fund foreign assistance?***

During the campaign President Obama promised to double foreign assistance funding by 2012, but later indicated the increase may need to be postponed. Although our economic situation has deteriorated since that time, it is important that the President's proposed budget make a down payment on this commitment. Prosperity and security at home are ultimately linked to the welfare of poor nations. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has made a commitment to revitalize the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and make development a more credible and forceful tool of State Department's foreign policy efforts. Congress has committed itself to rewrite the Foreign Assistance Act in order to make our foreign aid programs more effective. Even the Defense Department recognizes that the U.S. must increase the civilian capacity of our development assistance and diplomatic missions overseas.

***What recommendations do USCCB and CRS have for U.S. foreign assistance?***

USCCB and CRS urge the Congress and the Administration to:

- A. **Increase Foreign Assistance funding** for the following poverty-focused programs by \$3 billion as a down payment on the Administration's commitment to double foreign assistance by 2012:
  - a. HIV/AIDS programs, especially the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR);
  - b. Development and humanitarian assistance and emergency programs;
  - c. Title II Food Aid Program for development and emergency programs;
  - d. Millennium Challenge Account;
  - e. Debt relief for poor developing nations; and
  - f. Peacekeeping programs.
- B. **Reform Foreign Assistance** to make it more effective:
  - a. Make human development and poverty alleviation the fundamental goal of foreign assistance;
  - b. Formulate a coherent national global strategy that integrates development assistance, trade, agriculture, climate change and other policies to promote human development and reduce poverty;
  - c. Restore U.S. civilian capacity and authority to manage foreign assistance;
  - d. Ensure foreign aid is more accountable to the people it serves and to the American people through participation and transparency; and
  - e. Mandate that between one-half and two-thirds of foreign aid funding be allocated to promote the human development of the poorest countries and communities of the world.

**Where can I find more information on foreign assistance?**

Visit the web: [www.usccb.org/globalpoverty/](http://www.usccb.org/globalpoverty/) and [www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/foreignind.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/foreignind.shtml). For further information, contact: *Steve Hilbert*, Office of International Justice and Peace, USCCB, 202-541-3149 (phone), [shilbert@usccb.org](mailto:shilbert@usccb.org).