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November 6, 2014

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives

Dear Senator Reid, Speaker Boehner, Senator McConnell, Representative Pelosi,

Addressing the Ebola crisis on October 29, Pope Francis said, “I am close with love and prayer to those stricken, as well as to the doctors, nurses, volunteers, religious institutes and associations, who are working heroically to help our sick brothers and sisters.” Indeed the many Americans and people of all nations who are rushing to West Africa to care for the sick, prevent the disease’s spread, and limit its impact, are all heroes. As Congress reconvenes in Washington, we urge you to refrain from actions on travel and visas that impede the ability of people serving communities stricken by the virus to do their vital life-saving work.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been rapidly expanding our pre-existing programs in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea to respond to Ebola. We have 170 staff on the ground, including 4 Americans (and 11 more cycling in and out). In addition to committing over \$1.5 million of our private resources, we have benefited from the support of the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and other U.S. agencies. All this support is enabling us through our local partners to:

- train health workers and health facility management in infection control procedures;
- ensure safe and dignified burials for victims of the Ebola virus;
- develop and implement prevention awareness programs and education campaigns for health workers and community members;
- maintain, and in some cases reopen, Catholic health institutions providing critical routine health care (including ensuring these institutions are prepared to handle Ebola cases); and
- provide food to people who have lost their source of income or can no longer meet their food needs due to escalating food prices.

Like all organizations involved in the response to Ebola, CRS faces serious challenges deploying enough staff to meet the enormity of the crisis. The scarcity of flights to affected countries is already a constraint to ramping up the response. Ensuring that people can return home to their families is a necessary precursor for even the most committed staff to take on a difficult assignment in West Africa. Uncertainty about potential travel policies and conflicting quarantine rules has already caused staff we need on the ground to wonder if they can accept these

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assignments. Of course, fewer flights and travel restrictions also limit further trade and normal commerce, weakening already struggling economies.

Along with the Pope Francis, the Catholic Bishops of the United States stand in solidarity with the sick, and all those impacted in West Africa. As pastors, we are also gravely concerned for the health and well-being of Americans. We understand that there is great fear among our people of such a dread disease, but we also understand that this fear may be founded in some aspects but not in others. Therefore, those fears should not be accepted hastily or uncritically by policy makers, but instead evaluated carefully using the best available medical science and sound prudential judgment.

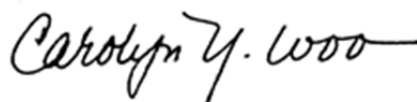
We also recognize that we have a moral responsibility to care for the sick in West Africa and to respond to the wide panoply of needs those societies now face. We must support those courageous Americans and others who have made the difficult decision to go and help. We must make it possible for them, their families, and the organizations—such as our own Catholic Relief Services—that employ them, to serve. Morally and practically, we cannot completely wall ourselves off from this disease. Only by caring for and treating those infected by the disease where it is now running rampant, can we be safer here at home. With prudent measures to protect U.S. public health, it is important to make it possible for badly needed health and other workers to go to West Africa in order stop the crisis at its source and ultimately to protect our own people.

We deeply appreciate U.S. leadership in West Africa, without which this crisis on top of so many other crises might spin totally out of control. Our nation's Ebola response will require additional emergency funding and continued sacrifice from brave men and women willing to act out of love and concern for those less fortunate. We urge you as Congressional leaders to speak out in support of the response on the ground, to dampen down reactions based on unfounded fears, and to support the proven responses and programs in the region which are saving lives and protecting U.S. citizens as well.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates  
Bishop of Des Moines  
Chairman, Committee on International  
Justice and Peace



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo  
President and CEO  
Catholic Relief Services