



Questions on Church Teaching and International Assistance

March 13, 2009

Why does the Church support international assistance programs?

The Holy See and the Church in the United States and throughout the world view 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 protect human lives threatened by hunger, disease, crushing poverty and conflict, and to assist “the least of these.”

Pope Benedict XVI has frequently affirmed the critical importance of international assistance from richer countries to poorer ones. In 2007 the Holy Father expressed support for the commitment of the leaders of the G8 nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and made an appeal for them “not to retreat from their promises to make a substantial increase in development aid in favor of the most needy populations, especially those of the African Continent.” (June 6, 2007)

What credibility does the Church in the U.S. have regarding international 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 facilities and humanitarian groups across the globe. Catholic Relief Services, the official relief and development agency of USCCB, has been active for 65 years and now works in 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** whose principles guide its advocacy on international 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.

How does the Church work to ensure that its support of U.S. international assistance is fully consistent with the moral teaching of the Church?

The Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities and the Office of International Justice and Peace work together closely to promote morally appropriate approaches to international assistance in several ways.

First, USCCB clearly delineates those international assistance programs that it supports. These programs save lives, reduce poverty and promote human development. For

example USCCB supports: development and humanitarian assistance and emergency programs; Title II Food Aid Program for development and emergency programs; the Millennium Challenge Account; debt relief for poor countries; and peacekeeping programs. USCCB does not support all programs of U.S. international assistance and specifically does not support U.S. funding for family planning or population control programs.

Second, USCCB works to preserve conscience clauses and programmatic approaches that are consistent with the moral teaching of the Church. For example, the Pro-Life Secretariat and the International Justice and Peace Office worked to ensure that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) included meaningful funding for abstinence and behavior change programs that promote faithfulness, as well as a strong conscience clause so Catholic and other faith-based providers can provide HIV-AIDS treatment and prevention services without violating their moral convictions.

Third, USCCB works vigorously to preserve barriers to U.S. funds being used to promote or perform abortions. Unfortunately, the Mexico City Policy has been repealed; but even with this repeal no U.S. funds can directly be used to promote or perform abortions. The Mexico City Policy had required that programs and organizations receiving federal funding refrain from performing or promoting abortion services as a method of family planning in other countries, even with funds from other sources. Repeal of this policy is a serious setback; however, under the Helms Amendment, which is still in force, no U.S. funds can be used *to pay for the performance of abortion as a method of family planning or to motivate or coerce any person to practice abortion.... This and all other statutory and policy requirements relating to family planning remain in effect.* (USAID Press Release 1/26/09) In any case, USCCB only supports international assistance programs that reduce hunger and disease, promote human development and build peace. The Church does not support funding for family planning or population control programs.

What has international assistance helped accomplish?

In 1990 more than 1.8 billion people lived in extreme poverty. By 2005 that number had fallen to 1.4 billion. The proportion of undernourished children declined from 33% in 1990 to 26% in 2006. Over 1.6 billion people have gained access to safe drinking water since 1990. And the number of children out of school fell from 103 million in 1999 to 75 million in 2006. Between 2003 and 2008, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) supported life-saving treatment for more than 2.1 million men, women and children. Tragically, there is a danger that the worldwide economic crisis will deepen global poverty and reverse some of these achievements.

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