

Written Testimony by Bishop Oscar Cantú
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to the
House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs
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On behalf of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I thank the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs for this opportunity to submit testimony on appropriations for FY 2016. We urge you to preserve funding for the international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development accounts specified in the table below that address factors that cause or exacerbate poverty such as health, infrastructure, armed conflict, and forced migration.

Agency	Account	Amount (\$ in thousands)
USAID	Maternal Health and Child Survival	\$770,000
USAID	Nutrition	\$120,000
USAID	Vulnerable Children (orphans and displaced children)	\$30,000
USAID	HIV/AIDS (USAID Programs)	\$330,000
USAID	Malaria, TB, & other infectious diseases	\$1,078,000
DOS/PEPFAR	HIV/AIDS (State Funding/PEPFAR)	\$5,670,000
USAID	Development Assistance (including water, education)	\$2,999,694
USAID/OFDA	International Disaster Assistance	\$2,100,000
DOS/PRM	Migration and Refugee Assistance	\$3,300,000
DOS/PRM	Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance	\$100,000
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation	\$1,250,000
DOS/IO	Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities	\$2,930,223
DOS/IO	Peacekeeping Operations	\$495,200
DOS/IO	Peace Response Mechanism	\$150,000
DOS/IO	Green Climate Fund	\$350,000

Generous and effective international assistance is a moral imperative to assist “the least of these” by promoting human life and dignity, advancing solidarity with the poor, and enhancing human security in our world. Such aid gives life to our values as a nation and is a requirement of United States leadership in the world.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis argues, “The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises... Inequality is the root of social ills” (#202). He calls on all nations to express true solidarity with the poor and to address the growing inequality in the world, an inequality that “eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve” (#60). He elsewhere notes that among the poorest and most abandoned are migrants and refugees” who need more humane conditions and need the causes of their migration to be addressed. (*World Day of Migrants & Refugees (2015)*).

The American public shares a commitment to people in poor developing countries. A 2010 World Public Opinion survey found that Americans believe international assistance is about 25% of the federal budget. When asked what percentage would be more appropriate, people say about 10%. The actual amount of the federal budget allocated to international assistance is approximately 1%, while the accounts that the USCCB supports total only about 0.5%. We urge you to hear the cry of the poor and to protect international assistance that saves lives, protects those that God holds dear, and reduces desperation that can drive violence.

Reflections on Foreign Aid Reform Elements

We would like to offer some strategic recommendations on how the United States can rebalance and refocus its international assistance for better results. Our recommendations complement the testimony that Catholic Relief Services, the bishops' relief and development agency, has offered the Subcommittee. Woven throughout these recommendations is a common theme that we believe will improve the effectiveness of international assistance. **We strongly recommend that the United States design and develop a systematic and strategic partnership with American civil society, in particular faith-based organizations, and increase its support to civil society and faith-based communities in the developing world.**

1. Towards a more just balance among defense, diplomacy and development

Poverty-reducing assistance is not only a moral imperative, it is also a direct investment in peace and stability in our world, contributing to the security of all. As Pope Benedict XVI taught in his 2009 World Day of Peace Message, "to fight poverty is to build peace" (#15). Pope Francis agrees: "Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between people are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence.... When a society – whether local, national, or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programs or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance can indefinitely guarantee tranquility" (*The Joy of the Gospel*, # 59). Shortly after the 9/11 attacks our Bishops' Conference warned, "Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive." We urge our political leaders to look beyond a limited focus on counter-terrorism to address the poverty and powerlessness that make some people easier recruits for violence and terror.

Poorly governed and impoverished countries, such as South Sudan and Nigeria, are often the most vulnerable to violence and civil conflict. The war in Somalia, terrorist attacks in Nigeria, and the activities of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in Mali have led observers to declare Africa a new front in the struggle against terrorism. The rise of terrorist groups in Africa and the resultant loss of lives are not solely the result of ideology: they are also the consequence of poor governance, mismanagement of latent conflict, and crushing poverty. While police and military initiatives attempt to halt terrorist attacks, the United States and its allies must not limit its response solely to military operations.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, two other fragile countries, the United States has spent significant resources on a military approach to ending conflict. The brave men and women of

the American armed forces have done everything asked of them, yet the Afghan and Iraqi people are far from living in peace. It is clear the U.S. strategy must be broadened to include much greater investment in U.S. diplomacy, such as the promotion of inclusive and responsive government, peace talks among warring parties, and dialogue and reconciliation between opposing ethnic communities. We urge you to increase diplomatic and development capacity in places where the United States is also involved militarily. We also urge USAID and other development bodies to integrate peacebuilding programming more fully into their work. It is important to increase the capacity of the State Department Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations to address conflict and injustice. Congress should also expand funding for the USAID Offices of Transitional Initiatives and Conflict Management and Mitigation, and the Complex Crisis Fund. We recommend that you call for a review and renewal of these initiatives to build greater coordination and more efficient management. These improvements will develop their ability to prevent conflict before it breaks out, mitigate it when it does occur, and eventually to foster peaceful and just relations. These offices should also place a much greater priority on partnering with, and strengthening, civil society and faith-based institutions. These vital institutions can play key roles in addressing societal and state injustices that can lead to conflict, and in transitioning from open conflict to sustainable peace through rebuilding social cohesion.

A new and revamped strategy must promote greater investment in human development at the grassroots level, and strengthen local civil society and faith-based efforts to promote peace and prosperity. This requires increases in allocations to the development accounts listed above that reduce poverty and build peace. Bill O’Keefe from Catholic Relief Services will testify before your subcommittee and will present more detailed information on these concerns.

2. Towards a more just balance in U.S. government support to local government, private enterprise and civil society

A healthy, prosperous and peaceful society has three essential social components: an inclusive, democratic and responsive government; a robust and fair private enterprise sector; and a vibrant, organized and effective range of civil society institutions that defend the common good of the people. The ability of governments to meet their responsibilities to their citizens must be developed, but it is critical that civil society be strengthened to help hold governments and business accountable to their people. Greater investments in developing civil society, human rights, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and other democracy-building activities are investments in peace and stability.

Local civil society and faith-based groups play crucial roles in promoting integral human development. In poor developing countries, Church groups are particularly close to the poor, and are trusted institutions. Faith-based development institutions offer health care, education and community development in areas where governments often have no effective presence. Strong civil society and faith-based groups act as the critical third pillar of social development in addition to government and private enterprise. Faith-based groups can help hold governments accountable to their people and act as checks on corruption and state abuse of power. The experiences of Kenya, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) show the importance of free and fair elections, but democracy is more than elections. During our past visits to the DRC, our Committee has seen how a strong faith community can

help hold its government answerable to the people. The Catholic Church along with other civil society groups forced the DRC parliament to ensure that upcoming elections are not simply an expression of ruling party power, but rather reflect the voice of the people.

In states transitioning out of, or in the midst of, conflict such as the DRC, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and South Sudan, it is incumbent on civil society and particularly faith-based groups to help ensure that governments build inclusive and effective structures. Church groups are well-placed agents of reconciliation among peoples and groups struggling to overcome past conflict and its trauma. Reconciliation rights wrongs, heals trauma, and restores social cohesion - all of which are essential elements for long-term sustainable peace. It is crucial for resolving protracted refugee and IDP situations. The U.S. Government should increase its support to faith-based groups and civil society peacebuilding efforts in places like Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan to sustain peace once the fighting has stopped.

3. Towards a Strategic Partnership with American Civil Society and Faith-based Groups

The most effective way to build faith-based communities and a strong civil society in the developing world is for **U.S. Government agencies (Department of State, USAID, MCC, Department of Agriculture, and others) to craft a strategic partnership with American civil society and faith-based organizations.** Government to government assistance and appropriate partnerships between American business and business firms in the developing world are important, but alone they are not sufficient to ensure poverty reduction and integral human development. For developing societies to promote the common good of all, with a special priority for poor and vulnerable people, civil society and faith communities, the third pillar of a healthy society, must be empowered and strengthened. The United States should call on the best of American civil society and faith-based groups, such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS), to help accomplish this goal. To this end, strong conscience clause protection that allows religious institutions to participate to the fullest extent possible, while maintaining their religious freedom, is essential. Faith-based organizations, which have significant local infrastructures, local trust, experience, and presence in remote areas, can use these strengths to promote development.

While appreciating the Administration's collaboration to date, more and deeper partnerships among the U.S. Government, American NGOs and local civil society would strengthen the work of Feed the Future and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Strong country ownership and in-country planning are elements of these two programs. To be authentic, **ownership must come from all parts of society, not just government.** Planning and implementation of these programs must include organizations that represent people living in poverty if these initiatives are to meet the goal of reducing poverty. Poverty reduction should be the ultimate goal of all U.S. assistance, including the MCC and Feed the Future. Rising GDPs are encouraging, but they must be accompanied by just income distribution that reduces poverty and marginalization.

One way to strengthen and promote American NGOs and faith-based groups is **to make USAID development programs more flexible and less onerous.** USAID should ensure that it funds community-based development programming through grants and cooperative agreements rather than contracts, as established by law. Successful and sustainable development programs

depend on long-term local partnerships that are deeply rooted and promote local ownership and knowledge. This is facilitated by U.S. partners who have spent years developing collaborations of mutuality with their in-country counterparts. Projects built on the bedrock of these partnerships guarantee local ownership and community buy-in and stand a much better chance of success. The best mechanism to support these community-based projects is through grants and cooperative agreements that respect the goals and the hopes of the local communities that design them. Grants and cooperative agreements also allow greater flexibility to respond to changing environments and complex working conditions.

4. Towards Greater Assistance to Fragile States

The MCC, Feed the Future, and the Global Development Alliance have targeted “well-performing” countries where designers believed impact would be significant. This strategy is based on valid assumptions. We urge the United States to prioritize poverty reduction in these country programs. **In addition, we urge the U.S. government to reconsider aid to other poorly governed countries.** The effort to reduce the number of countries where the United States is active means that there are a number of poor performing countries, particularly in Africa, that are marginalized, further deepening poverty. In these fragile states poverty is high, local governance is flawed, and people are struggling to support their families in dignity. In states like Togo, The Gambia, Chad, the CAR and others, large, long-term development programs through local governments may not be the best strategy. However, the United States can support American faith-based organizations, like CRS, other NGOs and their partners in these nations to defend the human dignity of people living in poverty. They can provide programs that care for refugees and the internally displaced and aid their return home. Together they can provide community-based health, education and agricultural services, and promote peace and justice to reduce poverty and defend human rights. In this way, the United States would demonstrate true solidarity with the poorest people in the poorest places at the same time that it strengthens civil society so that these nations can move toward better performance. The people of these nations should not be locked out of major U.S. development assistance and thus locked into perpetual poverty and desperation.

5. Towards Greater Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in Fragile States

The United States, in collaboration with other nations, supports UN peacekeeping missions in countries like Sudan, South Sudan, the CAR and the DRC. These missions work in intractable conflicts under extremely difficult conditions, attempting to keep a peace that has not been fully consolidated. Despite the challenges, peacekeeping has made progress in CAR and the DRC. Sadly, the same is not true in South Sudan. Persistence, resources, international pressure and creativity are required if the fighting and the suffering are to end. **The United States must maintain its support to peacekeeping missions that protect human lives and ensure that conflict does not spread to other countries. The United States should also ensure robust funding of a comprehensive strategy to build resiliency and facilitate durable solutions for the tens of millions of internally displaced people and refugees that have resulted from conflict in places like South Sudan, Syria and Iraq. The United States should also ensure that the fragile states and host communities impacted by migration are likewise supported and strengthened.**