



Committee on International Justice and Peace
Committee on Migration
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February 14, 2017

Dear Senator:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Chair of the Committee on Migration of USCCB, and President of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), **we write to strongly urge you to protect international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance programs by maintaining a robust top line funding level for the FY 2018 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs.**

The humanitarian and poverty-alleviating accounts that the USCCB and CRS support represent the values of the people of the United States in helping those most in need around the world, **including those suffering due to the unprecedented forced migration crisis worldwide.** While we don't endorse everything in the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs appropriations, we recognize that to maintain these critical poverty-reducing accounts, the overall account cannot suffer severe cuts.

We have a moral obligation to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, and care for the sick. The Catholic Church in the United States invests hundreds of millions of dollars overseas every year to support our brothers and sisters in need. Millions of Catholics demonstrate their generosity through their support to CRS. As a result, in FY 16, CRS served more than 100 million people in over 100 countries. Our partnerships with local church agencies in those countries ensure that these investments are sustainable and culturally sensitive. Our partnership with the U.S. government helps to ensure that these investments reach appreciable scale. U.S. Catholics also support the important work of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of USCCB. MRS works through local U.S. parishes and local Catholic Charities agencies in 80 dioceses across the country to welcome the most vulnerable of refugees through the life-saving resettlement program, a long-time example of an effective public-private partnership.

Cumulative investments in humanitarian response and poverty alleviation have left a powerful legacy. The number of chronically hungry people in the world has nearly been cut in half. Although we do not support nor implement all PEPFAR activities, almost 11.5 million people living with HIV and AIDS receive lifesaving antiretroviral treatment due to PEPFAR programming, with an additional 9.2 million receiving such treatment from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Some 87 percent of the world's population has access to safe, affordable and sustainable drinking water. These investments help reduce social tension that can lead to violence and civil war. They help to build the international security that makes life more secure at home as well.

As Church leaders, we are grateful to Congressional appropriators for their willingness to respond to the increasing humanitarian needs year upon year. In recent years, humanitarian and peacekeeping accounts have increasingly been funded through the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account. In recent appropriations, for example, more than half of the funding in the International Disaster Assistance and Migration and Refugee Assistance accounts came through OCO. **We understand OCO may be eliminated in FY 2018. We urge you to continue U.S. leadership by ensuring that, should the OCO account be cut, the base funding in the state, foreign operations and related program appropriations is commensurately restored.**

Pope Francis has raised his deep concern that a “culture of indifference” towards the poor and marginalized is increasing in a world that is turning inward towards nationalistic, self-centered policies. These new social and political trends run counter to our Christian belief of helping the “least of these”. When the United States makes international assistance a priority, it signals across the world that greatness in part means living up to our moral obligations. With more than 65 million people forcibly displaced around the globe, United States leadership and funding is more critical than ever.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Oscar Cantu
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace



Most Reverend Joe Vasquez
Bishop of Austin
Chair, Committee on Migration



Sean Callahan
President
Catholic Relief Services

Cc: Senate Appropriations Committee



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