



International Justice and Peace
3211 4th Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017
Tel. (202) 541-3160
Fax (202) 541-3339



228 West Lexington Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
Tel. (410) 625-2220
Fax (410) 685-1635

May 28, 2014

Senator John D. Rockefeller
Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science,
and Transportation
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator John Thune
Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Thune,

As you work on drafting a Coast Guard authorization bill, we urge you not to raise agricultural cargo preference requirements for commodities used in U.S. international food aid programs.

Under current law, a minimum of 50 percent of the agricultural commodities used in international food aid programs must be shipped on U.S. flagged cargo vessels. Section 318 of H.R. 4005, the House passed Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2014, would increase this minimum requirement to 75 percent. We know that using U.S. flagged vessels to transport international food aid is much more expensive than using vessels flagged by other nations. According to the Administration this proposed change would increase the costs of shipping international food aid commodities by at least \$75 million annually and result in at least two million people worldwide losing access to life sustaining U.S. food.

Catholic Relief Services, established by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has been heavily involved in implementing international food aid programs. We know first-hand that food aid programs have taught subsistence farmers how to improve yields, connect to markets and overall earn a better livelihood for their families. These programs have motivated parents to send their children to school, often for the first time; and have helped entire communities become more resilient to the forces of nature. Food aid is a visible symbol of the generosity of the United States to poor and vulnerable people in many of the world's most fragile states. For these reasons, we believe Congress should take steps to increase the reach of food aid programs, not cut them back, as proposed by H.R. 4005.

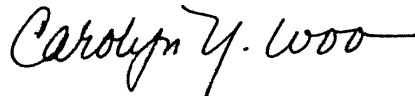
We understand that some in Congress are motivated to increase cargo preference requirements to help support the livelihoods of U.S. mariners. We do not object to this goal and note that the Church is also concerned with the well-being of mariners, and through our Apostleship of the Sea, is devoted to their pastoral care. However, increasing assistance to U.S. mariners should not come at the expense of two million hungry people. If Congress seeks to support U.S. mariners, we ask that it be done in a way that does not negatively impact the people who depend on international food aid programs.

In his address that began the Catholic Church's Food for All Campaign in December, Pope Francis decried the scandal of hunger and the irresponsible use of the world's resources. International food aid programs are a key component to answering the Pope's call to help the hungry and we implore you to make the best use of these resources by not increasing cargo preference requirements on them.

Sincerely yours,

+ 

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



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo
President
Catholic Relief Services