

**Written Testimony by Bishop Richard E. Pates
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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

before the
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 20, 2013**

On behalf of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, I thank the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs for this opportunity to testify on appropriations under your jurisdiction for FY 2014. At a minimum, please preserve funding at the higher of the FY 2012 or FY 2013 levels for the following poverty-focused humanitarian and development accounts: PEPFAR (DOS/OGAC); Development Assistance; Maternal Health and Child Survival; Nutrition; Vulnerable Children; HIV/AIDS; Malaria and other infectious diseases (USAID); Migration and Refugee Assistance and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (DOS/PRM); International Disaster Assistance (AID/OFDA); Millennium Challenge Account (MCC); Contributions to International Peacekeeping and Peacekeeping Operations (DOS/IO); and International Development Association (Treasury).

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

USCCB supports efforts to reduce future unsustainable deficits, but there has always been a bipartisan consensus to exempt programs helping the most vulnerable. Debt reduction can be reached through shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly.

The American public supports robust international assistance. 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 0.6%.

Poverty-focused assistance is an investment in peace and stability, contributing to the security of our own nation. As Pope Benedict XVI taught in his 2009 World Day of Peace Message, “to fight poverty is to build peace.” Poor countries, such as Mali, are often the most vulnerable to violence and civil war. The successful transition to independence for South Sudan, in which the United States played a key role, demonstrates the importance of proactive conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives.

Reflections on Foreign Aid Reform Elements

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 a critical third pillar of social development, in addition to government and the private sector. Faith-based groups can help hold governments accountable to their people and act as checks on corruption and state abuse of power. The experience of Kenya, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) shows that free and fair elections are important, but democracy is more than elections. During my visit to the DRC last year, I saw how a strong faith community can hold its government accountable and work to ensure that elections are not the expression of ruling the party’s power,

but rather the true 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 in particular 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. The U.S. Government supports peacebuilding efforts by faith-based groups and civil society in places like Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Liberia, and South Sudan to sustain peace once the fighting has stopped.

The most effective way to build faith-based communities and a strong civil society is for **U.S. Government agencies (USAID, MCC and OGAC) to craft a strategic partnership with American civil society and faith-based organizations.** Government-to-government assistance and appropriate partnerships between American business and firms in the developing world are important, but more is needed to ensure poverty reduction. For developing societies to promote the common good, with a special priority for poor and vulnerable people, civil society and faith communities must be empowered and strengthened. The United States would be remiss not to call on the best of American civil society and faith-based groups, such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS), to accomplish this goal. To this end, strong conscience protection that allows religious institutions to participate to the fullest extent, while maintaining their religious freedom, is essential. In this way, faith-based organizations, which have local infrastructures, trust, and experience in remote communities, can most effectively promote development.

A threefold partnership among the U.S. Government and American and local civil society would strengthen the work of the 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 be people-based**. Planning and implementation of these programs needs to include organizations that represent the poor 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.

The MCC and Feed the Future have targeted “good performing” countries where designers believed impact would be significant. This strategy is based on valid assumptions. Results in terms of poverty reduction remain to be evaluated. This strategy and the effort to reduce the number of countries where the United States is active means that there are a number of other countries, particularly in Africa, where poverty is high, local governance is flawed, and people struggle to support their families in dignity. In countries like Togo, The Gambia, Chad, the Central African Republic and others, large, long-term government-led development programs 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 countries to defend the human dignity of the poor. Together they can provide community-based health, education and agricultural services, and reduce poverty, defend human rights and promote peace and justice. 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 these nations can move toward better economic performance. The people of these nations could be unlocked from perpetual poverty and desperation.

The United States, in collaboration with other nations, supports UN peacekeeping missions in countries like Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and the DRC. These missions work in long standing conflicts under extremely difficult conditions, attempting to keep a peace that has

not been fully consolidated. Despite the challenges, peacekeeping has succeeded to a significant degree in South Sudan and Somalia. Sadly, the same is not true in the DRC. Persistence, resources, international pressure and creativity are the ingredients necessary if the fighting and the suffering are to end. It is imperative for **the United States to defend and maintain its support for peacekeeping missions that protect human life and ensure that conflict does not infect other countries.**

The war in Somalia, terrorist attacks in Nigeria, and 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 bad governance, mismanagement of latent conflict, and excessive inequality seeding chaos. Over time, these conditions can lead to a state of lawlessness that offers terrorist groups space to operate freely. While police and military initiatives attempt to halt terrorist attacks, the United States and its allies cannot treat these terrorist outbreaks solely through military operations. As our Bishops' Conference warned in the wake of 9/11, "Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive." **An effective U.S. priority should be to promote good governance, support efforts to end internal violent conflict peacefully, and foster long-term reconciliation and integral human development.** The United States will experience the best results by working strategically with American faith-based groups and local civil society to reach the people who suffer the most from terrorism and those who might be tempted to join terrorist groups. As Pope Paul VI taught: "Development is the new name for peace."