



**Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development  
Office of International Justice and Peace**

**Background on International Poverty-Reducing  
Humanitarian and Development Assistance - January 2023**

*“...to live better lives after the Covid-19 emergency, we cannot ignore one fundamental fact, namely that the many moral, social, political and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected... Consequently, we are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion. We must revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all. We must promote actions that enhance peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars... We urgently need to join in caring for our common home and in implementing clear and effective measures to combat climate change. We need to battle the virus of inequality and to ensure food and dignified labor for all...” - [Pope Francis, World Day of Peace, 2023](#)*

**BACKGROUND:**

U.S. sponsored international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has provided opportunities for countless millions around the world to move out of poverty. Of the more than \$4 trillion U.S. federal budget, Congress allocates half of 1% towards poverty-reducing international assistance with strong bipartisan support. This small fraction of the federal budget supports the poorest and most vulnerable communities around the world through agricultural assistance to help farmers feed their families; medicines to ensure people living with HIV remain healthy; cost-effective vaccines to prevent diseases; and mosquito nets to avert malaria. Moreover, these funds assist orphans and vulnerable children; early childhood development; people facing the risk of famine; populations devastated by conflicts; communities at risk of increasing floods, droughts, and other climate change impacts; and peacekeepers to protect innocent civilians.

While U.S. sponsored international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has saved millions, incredible challenges remain, especially related to global hunger and conflict. The United Nations World Food Program estimates that 48.9 million people are currently on the brink of starvation while the number of people living in poverty has increased for the first time in 20 years. Extreme hunger has more than doubled since 2019, with surging food, fertilizer, and energy prices further constraining household purchasing power and agricultural productivity more recently. Climate change has proven a threat multiplier--disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable--by destroying agriculture and natural resources, disrupting livelihoods, contributing to mass displacement, and increasing the risk of conflict. Conflict, as well as political and economic crises are also disrupting progress, driving more than 89 million people from their homes, more than ever before.

**USCCB and CRS POSITION:**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance. USCCB and CRS support international assistance because it is effective in upholding the sacredness and dignity of all human life and nurturing peaceful and just societies. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reminds us all that, “What we need in fact are states and civil institutions that are present and active, that look beyond the free and efficient working of certain economic, political or ideological systems, and are primarily concerned with individuals and the common good.” The Church views international assistance as an essential tool for promoting human life and dignity, reducing poverty, advancing global solidarity, and enhancing peace and security throughout the world. International assistance is a moral responsibility to

assist “the least of these” (Matthew 25). Therefore, assistance must be an expression of our solidarity with all people living in poverty, not an exercise in short-term self-interest, or self-promotion.

CRS operates in over 110 countries and is a key implementing partner of the U.S. government. Among numerous programs around the world, CRS provides food assistance to conflict affected people in South Sudan and Ethiopia; supports education in Guatemala; delivers emergency assistance to families impacted by the war in Ukraine; helps children with HIV thrive in Cameroon; and provides support to drought affected families in Afghanistan.

USCCB and CRS’ experience affirms the idea that the U.S. can play a constructive role in advancing peace, justice, and wellbeing. The numerous global challenges we face today demand a strong U.S. response. U.S. leadership will be critical to end global hunger; prepare for future health crises; care for our common home and address climate change; mitigate human suffering and address the root causes of conflict and instability; and strengthen local capacity to bring about transformational change.

We commit to working with Congress to uphold human dignity, to stand in solidarity with the poor, to be good stewards of the earth, and to prioritize the common good. We have grave concerns about providing taxpayer funding for activities inconsistent with the Catholic faith and basic human rights. Therefore, we strongly urge Congress to maintain the Helms Amendment and other long-standing policies that protect human life in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill. The USCCB will oppose any bill that expands taxpayer funding of abortion, including any appropriations bill.

#### **STATE OF PLAY:**

In December, Congress passed Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations, almost three months after the start of the fiscal year. While Congress provided small increases to many of the core accounts that USCCB and CRS support and included supplemental humanitarian assistance for people impacted by the war in Ukraine and other emergencies, delayed appropriations do impact the effective delivery of critical humanitarian and development assistance.

At the beginning of February 2023, we expect the President to submit his Fiscal Year 2024 budget request to Congress. This submission will kickstart a months long process of conversation and debate on Capitol Hill about spending for the upcoming fiscal year, which starts October 1, 2023. This means that our timing on Capitol Hill is ideal to share our perspective on the Church’s international funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2024. Moreover, given the difficulty of moving legislation through a divided Congress, it is more important than ever that we speak with a moral voice to all members of Congress about the importance of international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance and U.S. leadership.

#### **ACTION REQUESTED:**

Urge your member of Congress to support increases to international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian assistance in Fiscal Year 2024 to address global hunger and conflict (See chart of accounts supported by USCCB and CRS).

#### **RESOURCES:**

Visit: [www.usccb.org/IJP](http://www.usccb.org/IJP). Contact: *Steve Hilbert*, USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace, [shilbert@usccb.org](mailto:shilbert@usccb.org), 202-541-3149.