



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

**Background on International Assistance and Diplomacy
February 2021**

“The overriding consideration, never to be forgotten, is that we are all members of the one human family. The moral obligation to care for one another flows from this fact, as does the correlative principle of placing the human person, rather than the mere pursuit of power or profit, at the very center of public policy.”- Pope Francis, World Economic Forum, 2020

BACKGROUND:

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance. In the recently passed Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations, this aid amounts to \$25 billion, just over one-half percent of all federal spending. The programs supported by this funding serve the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the developing world to save lives, reduce violent conflict, and defend people’s dignity. The programs provide agricultural assistance to help poor farmers feed their families; medicines to extend the lives of people with HIV and AIDS; cost-effective vaccines to prevent diseases; and mosquito nets to avert malaria. Furthermore, aid assists orphans and vulnerable children; early childhood development; people facing famine in Africa; refugees and nations devastated by conflicts such as in Syria and Yemen; and peacekeepers to protect innocent civilians in places like South Sudan and Mali.

International poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has helped more than one billion people lift themselves from extreme poverty since 1990. The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has saved 20 million lives while the President’s Malaria Initiative has saved over 7.6 million lives. And on average, the U.S. government responds to 75 humanitarian crises in more than 70 countries each year, providing life-saving food, water, shelter, and other critical aid.

While we have witnessed success, incredible challenges remain. Covid-19 has begun to undermine development progress. Research by the United Nations indicates that Covid-19 has the potential to reverse 30 years of reducing global poverty; the economic fallout could push half a billion people into poverty. In addition, the number of forcibly displaced persons, 79.5 million, is at an all-time high. Increased conflict and fragility, as well as climate disruptions have also disrupted progress, altering people’s ability to grow food, pursue viable livelihoods and fundamentally survive. Moreover, inequality continues to grow, further exacerbating conflict and endangering social cohesion.

USCCB and CRS POSITION:

USCCB and CRS support international assistance because it is effective in upholding the sacredness and dignity of all human life from conception to natural death, 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 aid 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

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be an expression of our solidarity with all people living in poverty, not an exercise in short-term self-interest, or self-promotion.

USCCB and CRS will work with the new Administration and the 117th Congress to renew and increase our commitments to meet humanitarian and development needs. More broadly, we will urge the United States government to rededicate itself to eliminate poverty and alleviate human suffering. A revitalized commitment is even more crucially important at a time when the world faces Covid-19, the worst pandemic to strike in a hundred years. The United States must rise to this challenge and show the world that they will protect all of God's children from this menace.

Since 2019 the USCCB has urged Congress and the Administration to address another important challenge of our time: make conflict prevention a top priority. The United States must increase investments in building peace, human rights and accountable, transparent governance to eliminate the root causes of violent conflict. This calls for a more balanced approach to violent conflict requiring new investment in diplomacy and development rather than defense. It also calls for targeting these resources on the poorest and most fragile states and where the impacts of climate change are the greatest.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks the U.S. Bishops' Conference warned, "Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive." Our political leaders need to look beyond a limited focus on counter-terrorism to address the poverty and powerlessness that leave people vulnerable to violence and terror. The U.S. Institute of Peace issued a report called "Beyond the Homeland – Protecting America from Extremism in Fragile States". Their conclusion is *Going forward, the priority for U.S. policy should be to strengthen fragile states—to help them build resilience against the alarming growth of violent extremism within their own societies.*

Furthermore, the Brookings Institute estimates that by 2030, 31 countries will be home to 80% of people living in extreme poverty. Africa now accounts for two-thirds of the world's extreme poor and will reach nine-tenths by 2030. If Africa is the center of poverty in the world, it is also ground zero when it comes to fragility and conflict. Of the 25 most fragile countries in the 2018 Fragile State Index created by the Fund for Peace, 19 are in Africa. If the United States wants to create a more prosperous and peaceful world and one that will align with our national interests, we must prioritize those countries where poverty and fragility are the greatest threat to international stability.

In 2021, CRS and the USCCB will work to ensure that Congress and the Administration prioritize global solidarity, the common good, and efforts to promote peace and prosperity in the poorest and most fragile countries of the world.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Urge Congress **(1) to provide at least \$20 billion in emergency spending to respond to COVID-19 overseas and (2) to increase funding for international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian programs in Fiscal Year 2022 appropriations** to save lives, address the root causes of conflicts, and reduce crushing poverty. (See chart for programs supported by USCCB and CRS.)

RESOURCES: Visit: www.usccb.org/committees/international-justice-and-peace/. Contact: *Steve Hilbert*, USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace, shilbert@usccb.org, 202-541-3149.