



## TALKING POINTS - February 2014

### PROMOTING PEACE THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE



***What does the Church and Pope Francis teach about the value of dialogue and negotiations?*** In speaking about conflicts in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Israel-Palestine, Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of dialogue, “In the world, in society, there is little peace also because dialogue is missing... Peace requires persistent, patient, strong, intelligent dialogue by which nothing is lost. Dialogue can overcome war. Dialogue can ... make citizens of different ethnic backgrounds and of different beliefs coexist.”

***What is the Church’s position on negotiations with Iran?*** As you would expect, the Church calls for “dialogue” and “joint solutions” regarding Iran, and opposes military action. Pope Francis expressed satisfaction at the “significant progress made in the dialogue between Iran and the Group of 5+1 on the nuclear issue.” Bishop Richard E. Pates, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace, commended the P5 + 1 interim agreement “that allows continued dialogue with Iran on this crucial issue.” He went on to say, “a diplomatic solution with Iran is greatly preferable to military action, which could have unpredictable and negative repercussions for the region.” In a January 2014 letter to Congressional leaders, Bishop Pates urged “Congress not to take any actions that could undermine the negotiation process.” (P5 + 1 = U.S., U.K., France, Russia, China, plus Germany)

***But won’t negotiations with Iran undermine Israeli security?*** The Church and many experts think that successful negotiations with Iran to curb their nuclear program will enhance Israeli security and regional stability. The alternative, an attack on Iranian nuclear facilities would unleash “unpredictable” regional consequences, at best delay the Iranian program, and encourage Iranian hardliners to secure a weapon.

***Shouldn’t Congress pass additional sanctions now to go into effect if the talks fail?*** No. After decades of mistrust and little communication, Congress should not send signals that would undermine the climate needed for dialogue and negotiation. Congress could easily pass additional sanctions immediately after a complete breakdown in the talks. At this time, Congress should encourage the success of negotiations.

***What is the Church’s position on U.S. sponsored peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians?*** USCCB supports the resumption of talks between Israelis and Palestinians and joins with Pope Francis in hoping that “both parties will resolve, with the support of the international community, to take courageous decisions aimed at finding a just and lasting solution to a conflict which urgently needs to end.”

***After more than six decades of conflict, isn’t it hopeless?*** The Church does not underestimate the difficult of reaching an agreement, but we are people of hope. Few thought the Berlin Wall or the Marcos dictatorship would fall to people power. Secretary Kerry seems to be a realist. Peace is possible.

***Why does the Church support a 2-state solution to the conflict?*** USCCB supports a 2-state solution to the conflict, a secure and recognized Israel living alongside a viable and independent Palestinian state, because it has the potential to meet the legitimate aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians. Majorities support it. In the Arab Peace Initiative, Arab nations have committed to recognizing Israel and normalizing relations. A 2-state solution will enhance Israeli security, preserve Israel as a Jewish majority democratic state, and give Palestinians the dignity of a state of their own. It will allow access to the Holy Sites of all three faiths, promote economic development in the region, and undermine extremists who exploit the conflict.

***What actions undermine achieving a 2-state solution?*** Periodic rocket attacks from Gaza, excessive Israeli military responses, settler attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank, construction of a wall deep in Palestinian areas, and expansion of Israeli settlements all undermine confidence in achieving an agreement. The dire humanitarian situation in the Palestinian Territories is not in the interests of either Israelis or Palestinians. In addition the split between Hamas and Fatah and deep political divisions among Israelis pose challenges.

***Why is making peace between Israelis and Palestinians central to U.S. policy?*** Peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel would contribute to stability in the region. It would also deny terrorists a highly symbolic issue which they now exploit. The bi-partisan Iraq Study Group asserted: “The United States will not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East unless the United States deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict.” USCCB has worked with Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders in the U.S. to make a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians a top priority of U.S. foreign policy.

***In addition to negotiations, what other tool of “soft power” is critical for world peace?*** U.S. development and humanitarian assistance are essential tools for reducing human misery and promoting peace. As Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, “a peace which is not the result of integral development will be doomed; it will always spawn new conflicts and various forms of violence.”

***What is the Church’s position on U.S. international assistance programs?*** The Church views international assistance as an essential tool to promote human life and dignity, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance human security in our world. International assistance is not an optional commitment; it is a moral responsibility to assist “the least of these.” Our nation should give priority to programs for the poorest people in the poorest places on earth. USCCB supports specific programs, especially: development, humanitarian, and emergency assistance; child survival and maternal health; HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment; infectious disease control; agriculture and food security; water and sanitation; and migration and refugee assistance. Our nation must never balance its budget on the backs of the poor. Careless cuts cost lives. As Pope Francis taught in his World Food Day Message, “It is a scandal that there is still hunger and malnutrition in the world. It is not just a question of responding to immediate emergencies, but ... [achieving] a just and lasting solution.”

***What are current levels of funding for poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance?***

Congress restored funding to poverty-focused accounts in FY2012 and increased funding for Emergency Disaster Assistance, Migration and Refugee accounts, and health programs in FY2013. The FY2014 budget, which was passed in January, allocates just over \$20 billion for poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance programs that USCCB and CRS have prioritized. Poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance represents just over one-half percent (0.6%) of the federal budget, not the 20-25% many Americans believe it constitutes.

***How does poverty-focused assistance relate to conflict?*** Poverty focused assistance can reduce inequalities that lead to tensions and too often violence. The civil conflict in Syria demonstrates how inequalities can increase the chance for violence. Economic, political, and social inequalities contribute to violence. In Syria about 130,000 people have died and more than 6 million are displaced. The U.S. is providing assistance and needs to do more to promote successful negotiations. Addressing inequalities before they escalate into violence can save lives and promote development. South Sudan and the Central African Republic point to the long-term need to build inclusive economies, democratic institutions, and good governance.

***What is our message to Congress?***

- (1) Give peace a chance. Dialogue is the way to achieve long-term comprehensive solutions to complex issues such as nuclear negotiations with Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** USCCB urges that Congress not take any actions, such as passing legislation to impose new or contingent sanctions on Iran or restricting humanitarian funding for Palestinians, that could undermine the negotiation processes.
- (2) Thank you for maintaining funding for poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance in the FY 2014 budget.** [See accompanying chart.] Continue to support and expand funding for these priority poverty-focused accounts in the FY 2015 budget process. The plight of refugees fleeing Syria and Filipinos struggling to rebuild their communities are grim reminders of the lives at stake.

***Where can I find more information?*** Visit [www.usccb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/](http://www.usccb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/) or contact the USCCB Office on International Justice & Peace: *Stephen Colecchi*, [scolecchi@usccb.org](mailto:scolecchi@usccb.org), on Iran/Holy Land, or *Steve Hilbert*, [shilbert@usccb.org](mailto:shilbert@usccb.org), on international assistance.