



Called to Live Mercy in Our Common Home A Catholic Message to Congress



Hundreds of Catholic leaders from throughout our country are in our nation's capital for the 2016 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering. We come in response to the call of Pope Francis to "live mercy in our common home."

In his September 2015 Address to Congress, Pope Francis acknowledged that "much has been done in these first years of the third millennium to raise people out of extreme poverty," but reminded our nation that even "in times of crisis and economic hardship a spirit of global solidarity must not be lost." He called for "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."

Pope Francis cited the "refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War" and called for us to respond to refugees and immigrants in ways that are "humane, just and fraternal." Regarding those who have committed crimes, he said "a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation." In a phrase, he reminded us to follow the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Mt 7:12).

Strengthen Poverty-Reducing International Assistance and the Green Climate Fund

For the Catholic Church, the Federal Budget is a moral document; it defines our moral priorities. As Congress considers federal spending, we urge lawmakers to protect and strengthen funding for the humanitarian and development programs that serve vulnerable people such as victims of natural disasters and conflicts, refugees, and those living in crushing poverty in the developing world.

(1) Strengthen funding in the FY 2017 budget for **poverty-reducing international development and humanitarian assistance** that saves lives and reduces crushing poverty. In addition to the humanitarian needs of refugees mentioned below, these accounts also fund basic development programs that help people to climb out of poverty. Development Assistance provides access to water and education, and helps farmers to improve their yields. Health assistance funds vaccinations, responds to outbreaks such as Ebola, and strengthens health systems. Humanitarian funding literally saves lives. Reducing global poverty is an investment in people and in peace. It is among the most cost-effective \$23 billion the U.S. government spends every year. (Please see the enclosed chart for a comprehensive list.)

(2) Provide line-item funding for the **Green Climate Fund**. The Fund is the main international mechanism to assist developing countries to protect their people from the consequences of climate change (adaptation) and to adopt alternative sources of energy while continuing to grow their economies and reduce poverty. The negative effects of climate change represent an existential threat to our world, especially to its poorest countries. If climate change forces millions of people to abandon their drought-stricken fields or their flooded cities, such large-scale social disruption will create greater poverty and insecurity in the world. It has already prompted mass migration. The United States has a moral responsibility, and it is in our national interest, to lead the world's efforts to ensure that people in developing countries can protect themselves from climate change and build greater prosperity on the foundation of sustainable development. The Green Climate Fund should be a regular commitment in the Federal Budget.

Criminal Justice Reform

The United States leads the world in incarceration with over 2 million people currently in our nation's prisons and jails. The cost to imprison people, especially for non-violent offenses, has resulted in broken lives, broken communities and is financially unsustainable. We call on Congress to support legislation that will reform our nation's broken criminal justice system and promote healing and restoration.

(1) We urge Senators to co-sponsor and support **The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 (S. 2123)** which includes many worthwhile provisions:

- Reforms enhanced mandatory minimum sentences for prior drug felons;
- Expands "safety valves" to give judges more flexibility in sentencing;
- Counters recidivism by expanding prison-based reentry programs; and
- Limits the use of solitary confinement for juveniles.

(2) We call on Congress to support the **Second Chance Reauthorization Act (S. 1513, H.R. 3406)** to help people leaving prison reenter the community in healthy and productive ways through important reentry programs such as: education, literacy, job training, substance abuse treatment and mental health counseling. These programs, often administered by faith-based groups, are essential for healing and restoration.

(3) The House should support the **Sentencing Reform Act of 2015 (H.R. 3713)**. This legislation would reduce several federal mandatory minimum drug and firearms sentences and make those reductions retroactive for some prisoners. It makes the *Fair Sentencing Act of 2010* retroactive, which established parity in sentencing between crack and powder cocaine offenses. It also would expand the federal “safety valve” exception for 5- and 10-year drug mandatory minimum sentences (not retroactive), giving judges more flexibility in sentencing.

Refugees and Immigrants

Last fall, the lifeless body of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi washed on shore and reminded the world of our humanity. Aylan was one of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Africa in rudimentary sea-vessels. All seek asylum in Europe. And while Syrians make global headlines, more people are fleeing violence around the world than at any time since World War II. U.S. assistance helps refugees overseas to meet their basic needs, such as food, water, shelter, and education. Most of these refugees find refuge in other nearby countries. Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, for example, have been remarkably generous to the call to welcome the stranger, and at great cost to their social systems. U.S. assistance also helps these host populations, which can be especially critical in protracted refugee situations. Four humanitarian assistance accounts fund these humanitarian programs: International Disaster Assistance, Migration and Refugee Assistance, Emergency Migration and Refugee Assistance, and Food for Peace Title II.

(1) We recommend robust humanitarian funding through these accounts for refugees and for countries that are hosting them as they seek durable solutions to their refugee plight. We also urge that additional funding be available in the near future to enable the United States to do our fair share of hosting through resettlement of deserving, carefully vetted Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

(2) We call on Congress to avoid anti-resettlement, anti-asylum legislation and maintain U.S. leadership in **refugee and asylum protection, especially regarding the crises in Syria and Central America**. We urge the United States to maintain its strong commitment to resettlement of refugees based on their vulnerability, regardless of nationality or religion. We urge Congress not to pass legislation that would cripple the resettlement program and provide funding that will ensure its continued viability. There are strong, multi-layered procedures in place for screening refugees for security concerns. In this hemisphere, we urge the Administration and Congress to take the same approach to the Central American refugee crisis as it always advocates in refugee situations around the world—recognize it as a refugee crisis, provide humanitarian and protection assistance to those fleeing and to the countries hosting them, assure that migration enforcement in the region is consistent with international obligations, and support durable solutions, including resettlement. We should stop detaining Central American families, strengthen due process protections for them in the United States, and support refugee and child protection throughout the region. As we move toward political transitions, we also urge the Administration and Congress to continue to be open to compassionate and fair immigration reform.

Additional Resources from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Global Poverty:

Catholics Confront Global Poverty: ConfrontGlobalPoverty.org

International Aid and the Global Climate Fund:

Office of International Justice and Peace: uscbb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/

Sentencing Reform:

Office of Domestic Social Development: uscbb.org/about/domestic-social-development

Immigrants and Refugees:

Department of Migration and Refugee Services: uscbb.org/mrs

Justice for Immigrants Campaign: justiceforimmigrants.org