



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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January 2, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I am writing to welcome your leadership and initiative in seeking to make U.S. foreign assistance more responsive and effective. Our Bishops' Conference has been deeply involved in these matters for many years. Our commitment stems from our faith. It is grounded on the Scriptures, our Catholic Social Teaching to care for the "least among us," and the broad and enduring experience of our Conference's relief and development agency, Catholic Relief Services.

We agree that U.S. foreign assistance programs have a unique capacity to express our nation's moral obligations toward our poor and vulnerable brothers and sisters around the world. It is important that our foreign assistance reach those who need it most.

Under the leadership of President Bush, U.S. foreign assistance has increased and adapted to new realities. The Bishops' Conference welcomed and worked to advance the President's new initiatives, including the Millennium Challenge Account and the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. We have called for and supported adequate funding levels and we have worked with the Congress to support the Administration's requests. We have worked with the Administration in this cause time and again and are encouraged by your own leadership.

In the last few weeks, you have begun to lay out a new vision for U.S. foreign assistance that involves significant operational changes for the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State Department and Foreign Service personnel. We look forward to working with Mr. Randall L. Tobias as Administrator of USAID and Director of Foreign Assistance. While at an early stage, these initiatives demonstrate both a new vision for US foreign assistance and institutional changes in its policy, planning and delivery.

We welcome efforts that make U.S. assistance more responsive to the needs of the poorest. Globalization offers new opportunities and responsibilities to bring the world together in the fight against hunger and disease. In this process of reform, it is vital that more resources reach those who have the greatest need and the least hope.

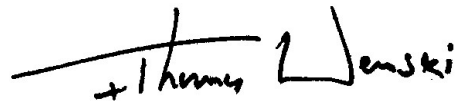
Our Bishops' Conference is concerned that that by placing so much emphasis on threats to security that "emerge more within states than between them" and "shifting existing resources to meet our new priorities," it is possible that needy people could fail to receive U.S. assistance.

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There are many states whose people experience severe hardship, but whose situation may be of little strategic interest to the security of the United States. We ask that you take steps so that their lives and dignity not be overlooked or marginalized. Not to do so would be mistaken and would not reflect the compassion and generosity of the American people.

In his first Encyclical, entitled "God Is Love," Pope Benedict XVI offers an eloquent reflection on the role of charity as the authentic expression of love of God and neighbor. Charity does not seek its own gain. Rather it requires sacrifice and self-giving in a genuine desire for solidarity with the other, especially the poor and abandoned. Our common efforts should reflect this vision as we seek to make foreign assistance more responsive and effective. In this way, the moral obligation to love one's neighbor that is embedded deeply within the faith and fabric of our nation will be honored and advanced.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left of the name.

Most Reverent Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, International Policy Committee