



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

**Background on International Assistance and Diplomacy  
January 2020**

*One thing is certain: good politics is at the service of peace. It respects and promotes fundamental human rights, ... In these days, we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in the wake of the Second World War... Peace, in effect, is the fruit of a great political project grounded in the mutual responsibility and interdependence of human beings. But it is also a challenge that demands to be taken up ever anew. It entails a conversion of heart and soul; it is both interior and communal.*

- Pope Francis, 2019 World Day of Peace Message: *Good Politics is at the Service of Peace*

**BACKGROUND:**

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support international assistance for poverty-reducing programs. This aid amounted to \$24.8 billion in the Fiscal Year 2020, just over one-half percent of federal spending. These programs serve the poorest communities in the developing world. U.S. assistance saves lives, reduces violent conflict, and defends people's dignity. These programs provide agricultural assistance that help poor farmers feed their families; medicines to extend the lives of people with HIV/AIDS; cost-effective vaccines to prevent diseases; and mosquito nets to avert malaria. This aid assists orphans and vulnerable children, early childhood development, people facing famine in Africa, and refugees and nations devastated by conflicts such as in Syria and Yemen. International assistance provides support for peacekeepers to protect innocent civilians in places like South Sudan and Mali.

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. More than one billion people have lifted themselves from extreme poverty since 1990. As of 2018, the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has saved 17 million lives, and nearly 2.4 million babies at risk of AIDS were born HIV-free. The President's Malaria Initiative has saved over 7 million lives and in 2015 USAID provided life-saving support to 109 million people trying to survive humanitarian emergencies. Over the past ten years, U.S. aid saved 4.6 million children from death due to preventable disease. Less desperation equals more prosperity and security for our nation and world.

But in the last two years, the Administration has drafted and developed new policies that would realign international assistance and threaten to jeopardize ongoing efforts to serve poor and vulnerable communities. The realigned policies: 1) focus assistance on friends and allies, 2) require foreign assistance to advance national security, 3) promote burden sharing, and 4) catalyze private sector investment. Moreover, for each of the last three years, the Administration has requested to cut foreign assistance by roughly 30%.

Although the Administration has not officially announced the policy realignment, statements such as the Africa Strategy launched in December 2018 and the President's speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2018 indicate the change in priorities.

**USCCB and CRS POSITION:**

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). Assistance must be an expression of our solidarity with all people living in poverty, not an exercise in self-interest, or self-

promotion. Pope Francis asks us to dedicate ourselves to “the integral development of all peoples within a human family committed to dwelling in justice, solidarity and fraternal harmony.”

USCCB and CRS are concerned that the ongoing realignment and implementation of foreign assistance policy in addition to repeated proposals to eliminate humanitarian and development aid will negatively impact poor and vulnerable communities around the world. Partnering with allies is critical to meeting humanitarian and development needs, while fostering global stability and advancing security for all people is a common goal. However, if the United States solely focuses assistance on friends and allies and only seeks to advance national security, we undermine U.S. moral leadership and the collective goal to eliminate poverty and alleviate human suffering. In addition, we encourage all people, communities, and countries of goodwill to welcome those in need, contribute resources within their means, and stand in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable. We cannot abdicate our moral or financial position as the global leader in life-saving humanitarian and poverty-reducing development assistance. We can all do more. Lastly, we encourage all actors in society, including the private sector, to be positive agents of change. Foreign assistance should not be instrumentalized solely for economic gain. Rather, we must focus on integral human development and promote Pope Francis’ vision of “placing the economy at the service of people.”

In 2019, Archbishop Timothy Broglio, the former Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, wrote to the Administration and/or Congress urging them to protect funding for development, humanitarian aid, diplomacy; to increase investments in building peace; and to promote human rights and accountable, transparent governance to reduce root causes of violent conflict. In his written testimony to the House of Representatives, Archbishop Broglio lifted up the need for more balance among defense, diplomacy, and development; highlighted the importance of investing resources to prevent fragility and violent conflict; and encouraged Congress not to forget the dire need in the poorest and most fragile states or the impacts of climate change.

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 2020, CRS and the USCCB will 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 to preserve funding for Fiscal Year 2021 to at least Fiscal Year 2020 levels for **poverty-reducing development and humanitarian programs** that save lives, address the root causes of conflicts, reduce crushing poverty, and support the record number of 71 million forcibly displaced persons around the world, including 26 million refugees. (See chart for programs supported by USCCB and CRS.)

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