



International Justice and Peace
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June 3, 2021

Vice President Kamala Harris
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Madam Vice President:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), we write to share our priorities and offer our expertise and assistance in leveraging the Church's regional influence as you lead the U.S. Government's effort to support the people of Central America and address the root causes of migration. With decades of experience partnering with the U.S. Government to respond to humanitarian needs and address development challenges in the region, we would welcome the possibility of engaging with your Administration in conversations regarding policy priorities and the allocation of resources towards the region.

Our brothers and sisters in Central America, and specifically in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, face numerous challenges to survive and thrive in their home communities. Poverty, gang and other forms of violence, corruption, lack of economic opportunity, climate change, drought, hurricanes, and COVID-19 have forced families and individuals into attempting the perilous journey north. While strongly affirming individuals' and families' right to migrate when conditions in their home countries become inconducive to life and dignity, the Catholic Church affirms the need to foster development and mitigate the need to migrate.

We commend your Administration for increasing the allocation of humanitarian assistance resources to the region. We encourage you to urge the United Nations to develop a regional Humanitarian Response Plan and other donors to support a coordinated humanitarian response.

We agree with the Administration's intention to develop a long-term strategy to address the root causes of migration. Given the Catholic Church's institutional and humanitarian presence in the region, your efforts will be maximized through robust engagement and consultation with Catholic civil society and assistance actors, as well as other local and international stakeholders. Any comprehensive strategy designed to address poverty, violence, instability, and other migration push-factors will necessitate local civil society buy-in and leadership. Poverty-reducing development assistance that promotes rootedness will have a greater long-term impact on communities than short-term investments to securitize or restrict migration. A successful strategy will address the short-term needs, as well as focusing on the fortification of civil society through medium and long-term human development strategies.

We appreciate the Administration's \$861 million FY 2022 Central America proposal to Congress as part of a \$4 billion planned investment over the next four years. Evidence generated from CRS programs and a recent CRS migration study demonstrate that poverty-reducing development assistance addresses the push factors of migration and promotes rootedness in communities. As the Administration develops a more detailed budget request, we urge it to prioritize programs that (1) grow formal job opportunities and support job-relevant education and training; (2) create more equitable decision-making spaces between women and men; (3) improve climate adapted agricultural practices; and (4) target vulnerable families and marginalized populations, including women, indigenous communities, and youth. By focusing on improving conditions for women and youth, supporting institutional partnerships that increase employment opportunities, and promoting community engagement and leadership, the U.S. can provide opportunities for people to thrive rather than feeling forced to migrate.

As you know, security and effective governance are foundational for well-functioning and prosperous societies. Corruption in Central America erodes protections for the most vulnerable and limits societal progress. Corruption is also bad for business. By prioritizing robust civil society development through trusted regional and local actors like the Catholic Church, local populations and stakeholders can increasingly hold their governments accountable, thus laying the foundations for long-term progress and stability.

Given your leadership on Central America, as well as the extensive collaboration we already enjoy implementing humanitarian and development assistance projects in the region, we would like to meet with you and explore how we can together maximize the impacts of American leadership to address the root causes of migration and assistance in Central America. We look forward to hearing from your office.

Sincerely,



Most Reverend David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace



Mr. Sean Callahan
President and CEO, Catholic Relief Services