



Background for Congressional District Visits: International Assistance

What's the issue?

Each year when Congress funds the government, it provides about \$60 billion (around 1% of the budget) for the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. About 1/3 of that funding is allocated to programs that help to alleviate poverty, provide humanitarian assistance, and mitigate violence. The US government partners with agencies like Catholic Relief Services to implement programs that include child vaccinations, education, water and sanitation, agricultural development, anti-trafficking programs, and efforts to mitigate climate shocks.

The Administration has put forth a budget proposal for the next fiscal year (FY18) which includes a drastic reduction in funding to the International Affairs Budget. The cuts proposed would reduce America's diplomatic and development activities to funding levels not seen since 9/11, unimaginable given today's global threats from ISIS to pandemics like Ebola. The Administration is proposing steep budget cuts – as much as 31 percent – in FY18. Drastic cuts in international assistance could have life and death consequences for millions of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. Ultimately, Congress makes the decisions about budget funding levels. International assistance, historically, has had bipartisan support as was recently demonstrated in the FY 2017 Omnibus Appropriations. As a church, we believe it is critical to voice our concern to Congress that the United States government continue to reflect our values of generosity to those most in need.

What is the Church doing to help?

Pope Francis explains that “the dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies.” When it comes to balancing a government's budget, it cannot be on the backs of the most vulnerable, but rather must first and foremost address the needs of the poorest among us. The Church calls us to protect our brothers and sisters living in poverty overseas. Catholic social teaching makes clear the responsibility of richer nations to poorer ones. It emphasizes our belief in solidarity, the notion that there are no borders to the global community, that we are all one human family. Balancing the budget on the backs of the poorest and most vulnerable people is antithetical to the American spirit and our Christian values.

Catholic Relief Services and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have been and will continue to aggressively fight to protect core poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance. Last year, Catholic Relief Services served more than 120 million people in 117 countries. CRS focuses on implementing life-saving and life-changing assistance in the areas of health, agricultural livelihoods, and emergency response and recover. The cuts proposed would directly impact the people whom we serve, endangering their livelihoods, their families, and their lives.

What can I do to help?

Pope Francis encourages us to “transform our institutions and economic structures so that they may be able to...be in service of the human person, especially those marginalized and discarded.” He urges us to take urgent action and stand up for those who are too often forgotten by society. You can start by scheduling a district visit with your members of Congress this summer, letting them know that caring for our brothers and sisters around the world is important to you, their constituent. Download [instructions on how to set up a visit](#) and [tips for a successful visit](#) with your members of Congress. You can also contact your [CRS regional office](#) for assistance.

For more information, visit [Catholic Relief Services](#) and the [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) websites.



Talking Points

1. **It is critical that funding for international assistance which saves lives and reduces poverty is protected in appropriations for the upcoming fiscal year (FY18).** Although only 1% of the federal budget, this assistance does a world of good, not only saving lives but also fostering good will around the world.
2. **As a Catholic, I believe there is a moral obligation to provide assistance to the poor.** As a privileged agent of the common good and the world's wealthiest nation, the US government has the responsibility and capacity to address the needs of the poor to prevent conflict, promote opportunity, and keep all people safe. Pope Francis has said, "Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members."
3. **International development saves lives and lifts people out of poverty.** Global health investments keep us safe from disease. Agricultural livelihoods investments serve some of the 800 million people who go hungry every day. CRS programming supports farmers to combat climate change and gain access to markets, families withstand drought, and war torn communities regain stability.
4. **I believe that global challenges demand United States engagement and leadership.** The proposed cuts come at a time when more people have been forced from their homes by war, poverty and climate change than ever before. CRS, with the support of the US government, currently provides shelter, water and sanitation services, food, and psychosocial support to communities around the world. Now is not the time to cut back on US leadership in humanitarian response.
5. **It is proven that longer-term investments in water and sanitation, education, agriculture, disaster-risk reduction, and adaptation to climate change are cost effective and help prevent future crises.** By helping communities with development programs today, we can avoid catastrophes.
6. **Historically a bipartisan issue, international assistance has broad support across the nation, reflecting our common value of service to others.** Catholics in the pews illustrate their support for international assistance by contributing every time we ask. By leveraging these private donations, agencies like CRS can scale up innovative, cost effective programming and respond quickly to crises. I ask you to remain committed to our values and show support for the poor in protecting funding for international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance.