

Testimony of Sean Callahan
President and CEO, Catholic Relief Services
 regarding **Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations** to the House subcommittee on
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
 April 14, 2023

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee: On behalf of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the international relief and development agency of the Catholic community in the United States, I respectfully request that you increase international poverty-reducing humanitarian aid and development assistance in the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) appropriations. We urge Congress to increase the international affairs budget to \$72.9 billion to allow for more poverty-reducing international assistance. We urge you to prioritize the accounts below to at least the levels indicated.

Accounts	Administration's FY24 Request	CRS FY24 Request
Maternal and Child Health (USAID)	910,000,000	1,012,000,000
Nutrition (USAID)	160,000,000	230,000,000
Vulnerable Children (USAID)	30,000,000	35,000,000
Malaria (USAID)	780,000,000	900,000,000
Tuberculosis (USAID)	358,500,000	469,000,000
Neglected Tropical Diseases (USAID)	114,500,000	114,500,000
Global Health Security (USAID)	1,245,000,000	1,245,000,000
HIV/AIDS (State PEPFAR and USAID)	4,700,000,000	4,725,000,000
Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis	2,000,000,000	2,000,000,000
Development Assistance (USAID)	5,425,697,000	5,425,697,000
International Disaster Assistance (USAID/BHA)	4,699,362,000	4,899,362,000
Migration and Refugee Assistance (DOS/PRM)	3,912,000,000	4,112,000,000
Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (DOS/PRM)	100,000,000	100,000,000
Complex Crises Fund (USAID)	60,000,000	60,000,000
Millennium Challenge Account (MCC)	1,073,000,000	1,073,000,000
Atrocities Prevention Fund (DOS)	----	25,000,000
Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (DOS/IO)	1,940,702,000	1,940,702,000
Peacekeeping Operations (DOS/IO)	420,458,000	420,458,000
Green Climate Fund (Treasury)	1,600,000,000	1,600,000,000
Anti-Trafficking in Persons (USAID and DOS)	----	126,000,000

I. We are called to confront the challenges of our world.

In Pope Francis' remarks on the World Day of Peace this January, he said "...to live better lives after the COVID-19 emergency, we cannot ignore one fundamental fact, namely that the many moral, social, political, and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected.... Consequently, we are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion.... We urgently need to join in caring for our common home and in implementing clear and effective measures to combat climate change. We need to battle the virus of inequality and to ensure food and dignified labor for all...."

CRS serves over 250 million people in more than 100 countries. We witness the devastation of drought and desertification, flooding and cyclones, and food insecurity and famine. We urgently take up the Pope's call to combat climate change and ensure food security for all. For example, in Honduras: Partnering with the U.S Agency for International Development (USAID), CRS works with a sense of urgency to support Hondurans such as Rony Figueroa, a 35-year-old father of two and community leader in Aguanqueterique, La Paz, Honduras. For years, Rony struggled to grow enough food to survive the dry season. He frequently contemplated migrating to seek opportunity elsewhere. Rony, and farmers like him across the Dry Corridor of Central America, and around the globe, are seeing their livelihoods depleted by record temperatures, high variability of rainfall, and more frequent and intense weather events. Overwhelmingly, those most impacted are the world's poorest and already most vulnerable communities, who have contributed the least to climate change. In 2018, severe drought caused more than 65,000 farm families in Honduras to lose 80% of their crops. The next year, 170,000 farmers saw their crop yields fall by more than half.

To confront these challenges of land degradation, drought and erratic rainfall, low agricultural productivity, and poverty in Honduras, CRS and local partners, with funding from USAID, taught Rony a set of simple, effective farming practices that have helped him restore his land and protect water, all the while boosting yields and incomes, even during dry spells. Utilizing water smart agriculture (WSA), Rony built several greenhouses and a drip irrigation system. Now, he collects rainwater during the wet, winter months and delivers that water directly to the roots of his plants during the hot, dry summer months. Rony now provides food for his family, employs people in his community, and is resilient in the face of climate change.

These innovative agricultural practices have a great impact at scale. During the extreme drought of 2018, which left 1.4 million people in need of food assistance in Central America, farmers using these practices grew 41% more corn than those using traditional methods. For every \$1 invested in WSA, farm income increased by \$2.46 -- a 246% return on investment. Data from this year suggests that at least 25% more farmers in the Dry Corridor will meet their basic maize production needs in a drought year if they implement WSA management practices. With our local partners we are scaling up WSA, and other practices such as multi-story agroforestry, drylands greening, and watershed restoration. CRS and our partners aim to transform Mesoamerican agriculture -- reaching 500,000 farm families and putting 500,000 hectares under restoration practices by 2030. For families like Rony's, and countless others, this is the difference between resilience or crisis, putting food on the table or going hungry, and staying in their communities or selling assets to migrate. Rony's story highlights what can be accomplished when local leaders and entities,

research institutes, ministries of agriculture, public and private agricultural service providers and farmers work together to confront the effects of climate change. But to continue to do so, the subcommittee and Congress must increase funding for the above international poverty-reducing accounts.

II. Join in caring for our common home.

Five tropical storms and cyclones hit Madagascar in three months in 2022. Cyclone Batsirai brought winds of over 150km per hour, destroying homes, schools, farms, roads, and bridges. During the recovery from Batsirai, a second cyclone, Emnati, hit the same area two weeks later. According to Madagascar's National Office for Risk and Disaster Management, 521,000 people were affected by these cyclones.

Climate change is a threat multiplier, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable -- by disrupting livelihoods, destroying homes, agriculture, and natural resources. To ensure vulnerable populations such as those in Madagascar can adapt to climate change, we recommend the subcommittee appropriate funds to the **Green Climate Fund** and increase appropriations to **Development Assistance** bilateral funds that support adaptation, clean energy, nature-based solutions, and sustainable landscapes alongside climate-smart agriculture and water, sanitation, and hygiene. The Green Climate Fund supports farmers to deploy agroforestry practices such as hedgerows, cover crops, and terracing to minimize the crop damage that cyclones and other extreme weather events can cause. Our experience informs our support for these programs. CRS is part of a Green Climate Fund award in Madagascar that is led by Conservation International. This award for our SPICES (Securing and Protecting Investments and Capacities for Environmental Sustainability) program supports farmers to conserve the forests and biodiversity in Madagascar while also making a viable living growing spices like vanilla and cinnamon.

We also urge the subcommittee to allow funding to be allocated to the multilateral Adaptation Fund and Least Developed Countries Fund, which help communities become more resilient.

III. Battle the scourge of inequality and eliminate hunger.

Rony said that “With the support that we are having from the [United States], I have been able to solve my children’s need for food.” While we can take pride in those we have helped, as Pope Francis has said, “The scandal of entire peoples starving remains an open wound.”

The United Nations World Food Program (WFP) estimates 48.9 million people are on the brink of starvation. Extreme hunger has more than doubled since 2019, with surging food, fertilizer, and energy prices further constraining household purchasing power and agricultural productivity. Coping with climate related disasters can further erode a family’s capacity to purchase essential items and grow food to sustain themselves. To address pressing humanitarian needs and long-term development goals, we recommend the subcommittee increase funding for **International Disaster Assistance**, which supports emergency food security programming, as well as for **Development Assistance**, which provides resources to Feed the Future, a whole-of-government initiative that aims to address the root causes of global hunger, poverty and malnutrition. Hunger does not exist in isolation. Poor health, conflict, and forced displacement all drive hunger and scarcity.

Consequently, we urge the subcommittee to increase funding to life saving **Global Health Programs, Migration and Refugee Assistance**, and the **Complex Crisis Fund**.

IV. Oversee progress toward results on localization.

To care for our common home and battle inequality and food insecurity, not only what we do, but also how we do it is critical. International assistance must shift more funding directly to local entities and must empower local organizations to implement, evaluate, and own their own development. A robust, resourced, and representative civil society helps create more resilient systems and societies that can better withstand shocks: local institutions and local leaders are critical for building, supporting, and sustaining local ecosystems. We have learned that when communities and local organizations are at the center of solutions and are viewed as agents of change rather than as victims of climate impacts, they can better adapt.

Over multiple Administrations, USAID has endeavored to strengthen local organization capacity and increase resource allocation to local entities. USAID Administrator Samantha Power set goals to direct 25% of funding to local entities within five years and to have local entities lead 50% of all programming by 2030. These objectives are significant. To reach them will require great change within USAID and the entire humanitarian and development ecosystem. CRS wholeheartedly supports the objectives of locally led development and humanitarian response. They are central to our values, essential to our vision, and will be critical to how we evolve.

Local actors are ready to lead, international nongovernmental organizations like CRS are ready to help, donors like USAID are prepared to drive change, and evidence shows that localization works. To ensure USAID’s efforts succeed, Congress must oversee progress and ensure accurate data collection and transparency. Reports to Congress as required in FY22 SFOPS appropriations revealed very little funding is currently reaching local actors. Similar report language was included in the FY23 SFOPS appropriations report. We urge Congress to continue to include this reporting requirement so that USAID progress toward results can be properly assessed and data on funding to local entities, disaggregated by country and sector, can be available.

V. Work in a spirit of responsibility and compassion.

In closing his World Day of Peace remarks, Pope Francis said, “Only by responding generously to these [global challenges], with an altruism inspired by God’s infinite and merciful love, will we be able to build a new world and contribute to the extension of his kingdom, which is a kingdom of love, justice and peace.” While we are committed to working with Congress to foster love, justice, and peace, we have grave concerns about providing taxpayer funding for activities inconsistent with the Catholic faith and basic human rights. We strongly urge Congress to maintain the Helms Amendment in FY24. Integrating programming elements that many consider morally unacceptable is not in the best interest of the U.S. and would exclude providers that have strong legitimacy and credibility with local partners. Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Lee, thank you again for your generous leadership. We look forward to working with you to tackle our many global challenges in a spirit of responsibility and compassion.