

Building Bipartisan Support for International Assistance

When implemented appropriately, international assistance (i.e. foreign aid) is a tool that promotes human dignity, peace, justice, security and economic prosperity. International assistance includes programs that address immediate humanitarian needs like those caused by emergencies, natural disasters and conflicts. It also includes development programs that support sustainable solutions and community independence through local leadership, peacebuilding, health systems and livelihoods.

The international assistance efforts of the U.S. government and the U.S. Catholic Church have supported each other nearly since their inception. Modern international assistance has been a hallmark of U.S. policy since the end of World War II, when the United States provided significant aid to European countries to avoid widespread poverty and reduce the possibility of another multi-national conflict. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), originally called War Relief Services, was established by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in 1943 to assist refugees in war-torn European countries. By the mid-1950s, CRS received its first grant from the U.S. government which, along with the generous support of Catholics across the U.S., allowed CRS to expand globally.

ROOTED IN CATHOLIC TEACHING

Catholic social teaching is an articulation of the values of the Church and practical guidance for living in communion, or right relationship, with our whole human family.¹ It sets the expectation that people of faith will act to:

- Protect the life and dignity of every person,
- Support the well-being of families and communities,
- Own the individual responsibility to protect universal human rights,
- Uplift the rights of workers,
- Demonstrate care for creation,
- Prioritize the needs of people experiencing poverty and vulnerability,
- Live as one human family by loving our neighbors, whether next door or around the world.

Catholic teaching has long held that governments, alongside the Church, must play a key role in protecting lives and recognizing the dignity of all members of our global family.² This is especially true for wealthy nations, like the United States, as reflected in Pope Paul VI's remark that "economically advanced nations have a very grave obligation to help developing peoples."³ When aligned with the values of Catholic social teaching, international assistance is—in the words of Pope Benedict XVI—an "indispensable expression of [the Church's] very being."⁴

SERVING THE WORLD IN PARTNERSHIP

With its extensive reach and credibility, the Catholic Church continues to be a vital partner to the United States in humanitarian efforts and advancing peace and sustainable development globally. The Church works with the U.S. government to expand and enhance international assistance in three important ways:

- Improving the policies and legislation that *authorize* and dictate the guidelines for U.S. government funded programs.
- Ensuring robust funding is available for lifesaving and life-affirming programs through the congressional *budget and appropriations* process.
- Using U.S. government funds to *implement*, or carry-out, high-quality international assistance programs around the world in partnership with the local Church.

Authorization, appropriation and implementation are critical parts of the system that supports and delivers lifesaving and life-affirming humanitarian and development assistance to vulnerable communities globally.

THE U.S. INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROCESS

Each year, Congress uses a process called *appropriations* to assign U.S. tax-payer money to agencies within the administration for the upcoming fiscal year. Less than 1% of the money Congress appropriates goes to agencies like the *State Department* or the *U.S. Department of Agriculture* to fund accounts designated for international assistance. Only half of that 1% is directed toward poverty-reducing budget lines, such as those found on the [CRS/USCCB chart of accounts](#). Those federal agencies use

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. [Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](#). Accessed 25 July 2025.

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. [Life and Dignity of the Human Person](#). Accessed 25 July 2025.

³ Pope Paul VI. [Gaudium et Spes](#). Accessed 25 July 2025.

⁴ Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI. [On the Service of Charity](#). Accessed 25 July 2025.

funds in poverty-reducing budget lines to pay for programs Congress has *authorized* by passing legislation to ensure programs support the values, policies and priorities of the United States.

Organizations that *implement* humanitarian aid and development programs, like CRS, compete for funding *awards* associated with specific government programs, like Title II Food for Peace. Awards come with explicit guidelines for how organizations are allowed to implement the program. Moreover, implementing organizations are required to strictly monitor program activities and regularly report on their progress to the administration. CRS applies for awards that align with CRS' mission and Catholic identity. In the application process, CRS must demonstrate how it will collaborate with the U.S. government to use the funds effectively and efficiently. The attention to detail and appropriate use of funds expected by Congress and the administration is well-aligned with *CRS' guiding principle of careful stewardship of resources*. CRS is proud to continue its partnership with the U.S. government to support the implementation of lifesaving international assistance programming.

U.S. INVESTMENT IN INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE IS CRITICAL

Though Congress appropriates only a very small portion of the country's budget towards international assistance, the United States has historically been one of the most substantial contributors to global aid. U.S. investment in aid has historically received bipartisan support because it makes the world safer, stronger and more prosperous. It also carries direct benefits for the U.S., such as keeping American troops safe by stabilizing conflict zones, building good will with foreign governments and reducing migration by helping families and communities feel safe and secure. Finally, it represents American values like leadership and service and has long been a way in which the United States lives up to its ideals.

Nonetheless, recent actions within Congress and the administration have dismantled key systems and structures and threatened the long-term viability of crucial lifesaving and life-affirming international assistance programs. In January, the administration issued an executive order suspending U.S. international assistance programs and pausing payments to implementing organizations until a review ensured that active programs aligned with the administration's policy goals. The sudden stop in services caused immediate and tragic impacts on millions of people worldwide. Ultimately, the review process resulted in the termination of 83% of programs funded by the former U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and many international food security programs funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The administration also used a process called rescissions to formally request that Congress cancel roughly \$8 billion of funds for international assistance. Congress approved the administration's rescissions request in July, canceling funds meant for disaster and crisis assistance, maternal and child health and other aid that protects the life and dignity of millions of people globally. These actions demonstrate a disturbing retreat from U.S. leadership in fostering a more peaceful and prosperous world. More than that, they undermine decades of work to eradicate global poverty, hunger and disease.

A Catholic pro-life approach to U.S. international assistance goes beyond charity. It is a strategic investment that has a profound impact on human life, dignity and global stability. The dedicated efforts of constituent advocates are essential to rebuilding strong, bipartisan support for international assistance and safeguarding the leadership role of the U.S. government in promoting safety, security, and prosperity both domestically and globally.

ASK CONGRESS TO PROTECT INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

When you engage with your members of Congress, share why your faith and life experiences motivate you to care deeply about lifesaving and life-affirming international assistance programs. **Then ask your members of Congress to:**

Protect international assistance by maintaining poverty-reducing accounts in fiscal year 2026 appropriations and opposing the rescission of funds for lifesaving and life-affirming programs.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING

For more information on **appropriations** for poverty-reducing accounts, view:

- [CRS/USCCB Chart of Accounts](#)
- [CRS Urges Congress to Prioritize Critical Poverty-Reducing Humanitarian Aid in FY26 Appropriations](#)
- [Video: The Federal Budget and Appropriations Process](#)

For more information on **terminations and rescissions**, view:

- [Aid Cuts and Lack of Payment Threaten Millions of Lives](#)
- [Terminations of CRS McGovern-Dole School Feeding Programs to Leave More Than 780,000 Children Without Their Only Meal of the Day](#)
- [The Rescissions Process](#)