

Background Information and Talking Points: Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

OVERVIEW

The background information and talking points in this document serve as a guide for how to structure your communications and meetings with your members of Congress.

Our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. Together, we are called to encounter Christ in the members of our human family most in need, and to share the Good News with others—becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good. CRS' campaigns on hunger and climate change allow you to do just that.

As an opportunity to stand with people experiencing hunger and climate change, your communications and congressional meetings will focus on advocating for international, poverty-reducing development and humanitarian assistance in the fiscal year 2024 federal budget. CRS works as a partner organization with the U.S. government to implement U.S.-funded foreign assistance programs. You can find a list of the U.S. funding accounts that CRS supports in [CRS' appropriations chart](#).

Your voice matters! Your members of Congress want to know *why* you and your community care about these issues. As you prepare to meet with your senator/representative, reflect on the stories of our sisters and brothers around the world that you can share to illustrate the importance of caring for our global family and how you and your community are taking action to support people in need.

BACKGROUND

According to the United Nations World Food Program, 349 million people are experiencing crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition—a magnitude of hunger that our world has not seen before. Families are struggling to meet their food needs due to the compound effects of conflict, climate change, COVID-19 and rising food costs. Inflation of food prices has put people under tremendous strain, while supply chain interruptions have impeded humanitarian operations and disrupted local and regional markets around the world. The rising costs of food, fertilizer and fuel make it difficult for individuals to build sustainable livelihoods, secure a steady income or feed their family with nutritious food.

In many parts of the world, people are also experiencing the compounding effects of climate change, such as in the Dry Corridor of Central America, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, where communities are facing the worst drought ever recorded after five consecutive failed rainy seasons. Farmers who depend on the ability to grow and harvest crops for their livelihood are directly impacted. In many regions, families are forced to migrate to other areas in search of food, causing conflict over land and resources, which then results in disruptions to local food, livestock and crop production.

Climate change continues to be an urgent challenge for our world today and especially affects communities experiencing poverty. Often these communities live in low-lying coastal zones, dry arid regions or flood-prone

areas, making them more susceptible to the impacts of droughts and flooding—devastating homes and communities, disrupting livelihoods and causing economic instability and inequality. The World Bank estimates that over the next 10 years, up to 130 million people will fall into extreme poverty levels from the impacts of climate change. Across the globe, people who have contributed the least to climate change are experiencing the greatest harm.

The global food crisis and the impacts of a changing climate are disrupting the efforts of communities who have been working hard to lift themselves out of poverty. Instead of being able to thrive, they are fighting merely to survive. We must act together to serve people who are most vulnerable and to find sustainable solutions that help us better care for God’s creation and each other as one planet and one family.

On this year’s World Day of Peace, Pope Francis reminded us that “we cannot ignore one fundamental fact, namely that the many moral, social, political, and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected. ... 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.”

Poverty, hunger and climate change are directly linked, which is why CRS uses a multi-sectoral approach to address the root causes in a holistic way. CRS works in more than 100 countries around the world, responding to immediate needs while also implementing long-term development programs that provide opportunities for people to build a pathway to prosperity for themselves, their families and their communities. CRS programming integrates climate adaptation and promotes resilience strengthening to provide people with training and resources to overcome the challenges of climate change. Some of these projects include restoring degraded landscapes to create new farming opportunities and support livelihoods; improving watersheds for access to reliable, clean water for human consumption and land use; improving soil health for more prosperous yields; and promoting biodiversity for optimal human health and environmental wellbeing. CRS employs nature-based solutions—working with nature rather than against it—by planting trees and diversifying crops, among other evidence-based activities to reduce the impact of climate shocks on smallholder farmers who rely on agricultural production for food and income. Additionally, CRS implements complementary support activities that train communities on optimal nutrition for young children and new mothers, that provide access to microfinancing and that establish market pathways.

One example of a U.S.-funded international development program is the SPICES program—Securing and Protecting Investments and Capacities for Environmental Sustainability—in eastern Madagascar, where CRS is scaling a wide-reaching land restoration effort that engages local communities, governments and businesses to improve environmental stewardship; increase youth livelihood opportunities; and improve the education and health of local farmers. SPICES supports biodiversity by implementing climate-smart practices for better, more sustainable agricultural yields. The project focuses specifically on vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, pepper, turmeric, ginger and cocoa to protect these crops and generate increased revenue for farmers. Households use the additional income to invest in education, nutrition and health care. CRS is working with seven dioceses in five regions of the country to reach over 20,000 households.

Visit crs.org/act for stories about people who are overcoming the challenges of hunger and climate change around the world.

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY OF THE BUDGET

During the appropriations process each year, Congress negotiates how to spend U.S. taxpayer dollars. Less than 1% of the \$6.2 trillion in annual federal spending went to foreign assistance last year. Just *half* of that 1% is directed toward poverty-reducing humanitarian and development aid. Through the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, organizations such as CRS partner with the U.S. government to implement programming funded by the U.S. Congress. While foreign assistance has

traditionally received strong bipartisan support—as seen in fiscal year 2023 funding levels—protecting and increasing funding for these lifesaving accounts is not possible without the diligent work of constituents who call on Congress to prioritize this funding.

Fiscal Year 2024 International Poverty-Reducing Humanitarian and Development Funding

The administration released their fiscal year 2024 budget proposal in March 2023. Throughout the spring and summer, the House and Senate will draft and negotiate appropriations bills. Congress will have until the end of September to introduce and pass fiscal year 2024 appropriations measures. Given ongoing debates in Washington over the debt and deficit, we expect Congress will have to pass a Continuing Resolution in September, which will fund the government temporarily at current levels into the next fiscal year. Until Congress finalizes fiscal year 2024 appropriations, CRS will continue to advocate on our priority accounts to ensure the U.S. government provides robust assistance to alleviate suffering and eliminate poverty.

TALKING POINTS

Framing

Begin with gratitude

Thank you for your time to allow us to get to know each other and discuss international development and humanitarian assistance.

Express gratitude for their service in Congress or check their website to thank them for something they have done in the recent past.

Introduction: Who you are and why you're there

As people of faith seeking justice and care for all in our world, we believe there is a moral obligation to provide assistance and address the root causes of poverty. Global food insecurity and the impacts of climate change are two of the most pressing issues of our time, and they disproportionately affect people experiencing poverty and vulnerability.

Share about yourself/the group, your work in the state/district and your connection to CRS. Share your personal story of why you support CRS' international humanitarian and development work, including your concern about our human family and why global issues like hunger and climate change matter to you.

Moving to the issues: Set the stage for the conversation

The United States government has the responsibility and capacity to address the needs of people around the world experiencing poverty and vulnerability—to prevent hunger and to provide necessary assistance in adapting to the world's changing climate. U.S. leadership is critical in our collective effort to address the root causes of poverty.

Pope Francis 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."

We are pleased that Congress protected international assistance in fiscal year 2023. We urge Congress to increase funding for poverty-reducing international development and humanitarian assistance in fiscal year 2024 (Share CRS' appropriations chart). CRS is proud to partner with the U.S. government to provide assistance globally. U.S. leadership is critical in our collective effort to address the effects of climate change and to end poverty and hunger.

Share a story about the importance and impact of CRS' programs. Consider including details from this background document or using stories found at crs.org/act.

Tell your community's story. How do they feel called to support our human family in need and what activities are they doing to support CRS' work around the world? This could include advocacy actions, CRS Rice Bowl participation or some other type of activity.

The Ask

At a time of unprecedented humanitarian need, we urge Congress to increase funding for poverty-reducing international development and humanitarian assistance in fiscal year 2024. [The accounts which do this are detailed in CRS' appropriations chart.]

Discussion

Questions/Comments to Raise

1. If the senator/representative travels abroad, ask if he/she would like to visit CRS programming in the future. CRS works in more than 100 countries around the world and would welcome an opportunity to show the senator/representative the impact United States investments in food security and climate change adaptation have on the ground.
2. Let your senator/representative know that you—along with CRS—can serve as a resource both in Washington, D.C. and back home in their state/district. Express an interest in continuing to dialogue with them—or their staff—on these and other issues of mutual interest.



A partnership between the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services

