

Testimony of **Bill O’Keefe**
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regarding **Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations** to the House subcommittee on
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
 March 13, 2020

Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rogers: On behalf of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), I respectfully request that you increase international poverty-reducing humanitarian relief and development assistance in Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) appropriations. We urge you to prioritize the accounts below according to the levels indicated. We deeply appreciate your commitment to these accounts in Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20), and your recognition of the critical leadership role the United States plays in responding to immense needs around the world every year.

Maternal and Child Health (USAID)	851,000,000
Nutrition (USAID)	150,000,000
Vulnerable Children (USAID)	30,000,000
HIV/AIDS (USAID)	330,000,000
Malaria (USAID)	770,000,000
Tuberculosis (USAID)	310,000,000
Neglected Tropical Diseases (USAID)	102,500,000
Global Health Security (USAID)	115,000,000
PEPFAR/Global Fund (DOS)	5,930,000,000
Development Assistance (USAID)	3,500,000,000
International Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)	4,520,000,000
Migration and Refugee Assistance (DOS/PRM)	3,604,000,000
Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (DOS/PRM)	1,000,000
Complex Crises Fund (USAID)	30,000,000
Millennium Challenge Account (MCC)	905,000,000
Atrocities Prevention Board (DOS)	5,750,000
Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (DOS/IO)	1,660,653,000
Peacekeeping Operations (DOS/IO)	457,348,000
Green Climate Fund (Treasury)	500,000,000
U.S. Institute of Peace	45,000,000
Anti-Trafficking in Persons (USAID and DOS)	67,000,000

As the international relief and development agency of the Catholic community in the United States, we are committed to assisting the poor and vulnerable overseas. We partner with over 2,000 local, national, and international Catholic institutions and structures, and many other organizations, to assist people on the basis of need, not creed, race, or nationality. Motivated by the desire to preserve and uphold the sacredness and dignity of all human life, CRS serves more than 136 million people in over 100 countries.

I. Prioritize Integral Human Development

In written remarks to this year’s World Economic Forum, Pope Francis reminds us to live by the “principle of placing the human person, rather than the mere pursuit of power or profit, at the very centre of public policy.” CRS aspires to be more ambitious in advancing our vision of a world in which all people—with a preferential option for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized—have opportunities to fulfill their God-given human potential. Realizing this vision requires integral human development: saving lives and alleviating suffering, accelerating the end of poverty, hunger and preventable disease, and cultivating just and peaceful societies. **Placing the poor and vulnerable at the center of public policy requires Congress to protect the humanitarian, development, and life-saving global health accounts listed above that prioritize the poor and the vulnerable. We therefore urge Congress to increase the international affairs budget to \$60 billion to allow for the integral human development we propose.**

CRS and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops are concerned with recent realignments of foreign assistance policy that are contrary to the Holy Father’s message and will negatively impact poor and vulnerable communities around the world. The administration’s foreign assistance strategy prioritizes national security, focuses on allies, seeks to increase burden sharing, and fosters private sector engagement. We acknowledge these goals are valid but remain worried that in practice they undermine the moral imperative to serve those most in need.

U.S. foreign assistance is about people. The American taxpayer, through U.S. government entities, supports efforts largely implemented by non-governmental agencies such as CRS to help communities overseas. The strategy that drives this programming should be grounded in people too. Instrumentalizing foreign assistance exclusively for short-term economic and political gain marginalizes communities suffering from food insecurity. Abdicating our moral and financial responsibility as the global leader in humanitarian relief and development jeopardizes our ability to reach those recovering from disaster or provide opportunity to someone forcibly displaced from their home. At CRS, we believe prioritizing integral human development is in line with long-term U.S. interests of peace, prosperity, and the common good. We also have principled concerns with global health interventions inconsistent with Catholic teaching and support the Mexico City Policy, which prevents foreign non-governmental organizations from receiving U.S health assistance if they perform or promote abortion. In *Gaudete Et Exultate*, Pope Francis affirms the Church’s defense of the sacred lives of the unborn, the poor and destitute, the abandoned and underprivileged, victims of human trafficking and slavery, and all forms of rejection.

II. Catalyze Local Leadership

Based on experience, CRS is committed to the principle of subsidiarity: those closest to a challenge have the best understanding of it and should play the central role in developing and implementing solutions. CRS’ commitment to subsidiarity calls us to put people and partners at the forefront of our work. Our experience with partners, as well as our mission and values, require that we support the emergence of local leadership and the growth of locally led humanitarian and development efforts. Local leadership is critical for effective, meaningful, and sustainable humanitarian response and development and should be a priority for future foreign assistance, in line with USAID’s journey to self-reliance. **Consequently, we urge Congress to support funds that allow communities to be the artisans of their own recovery and development and that provide adequate time and technical support.**

CRS has a strong history of empowering leadership by our local partners. CRS commends the administration and USAID's efforts in northern Iraq and is proud to partner with the U.S. government to support the return and resettlement of vulnerable religious minority communities. For three years, CRS has supported displaced Iraqis to return home, rebuild their homes and schools, gain access to quality education, and receive critical relief supplies. With generous funding from USAID, CRS, in collaboration with Caritas Iraq and other NGO partners, launched the Shared Future project to address two key barriers to return: broken trust among diverse ethnic and religious groups and a lack of access to income generating activities. CRS and Caritas work with over 300 youth, community, and religious leaders across the Ninewa Plains to increase their readiness to engage with other ethnic and religious groups, to leverage support to engage with others, and to collaborate on shared goals. Youth and leaders from different religious and ethnic groups now meet to build relationships and work on projects that address issues of mutual concern. A survey among participants reports a 73% increase in mutual understanding, tolerance, and trust.

In the Sahel, CRS is responding to unprecedented levels of violence, displacement, and the deterioration of community bonds. CRS has launched a Sahel Peace Initiative to respond to the crisis and prevent it from spreading further to coastal states. Local partners are an essential part of this response. With support from USAID, CRS in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso provides food assistance, cash assistance, and access to water and sanitation. The Emergency Rapid Response Mechanism is an OFDA funded project that collaborates with a network of local service providers to conduct rapid multi-sectoral needs assessments following sudden onset crises in Mali. This facilitates timely, data-driven responses. Phase three of the project has reached almost 200,000 individuals and strengthened the capacity of local responders to better prepare for the next crisis.

Since its inception, PEPFAR has allocated 10% of its funding to Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) affected by HIV. CRS' Sustainable Outcomes for Children and Youth (SOCY) project in Uganda has improved the health, economic, education, and psychosocial wellbeing of OVC/youth and their households while reducing abuse, exploitation, and neglect. The program operates in 24 districts in central, southwestern, and western Uganda. Since 2015, SOCY has served 379,525 OVC from 76,713 OVC/households. With a model of implementation that emphasizes local civil society capacity strengthening, SOCY has graduated 13,017 (17%) households out of program support and built the capacity of 13 local OVC service providers. One of those SOCY partners, TPO, already receives direct PEPFAR funding for OVC service delivery in 15 districts.

From Iraq to Mali to Uganda, challenges remain in developing local leadership and capacity. But we know what works. Local leadership begins with effective partnership and the recognition that sustainable development takes time. Local leadership flourishes when all stakeholders (local civil society, INGOs, local government), including faith-based organizations, are engaged in program strategy and implementation. Local leadership is sustainable when there is meaningful and holistic investment in capacity strengthening. We appreciate the United States' recognition of the importance of local voices and encourage Congress to ensure funding is focused on subsidiarity.

III. Care for Creation and Invest in Climate Change Adaptation

This year marks not only the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, but also the 5-year anniversary of "Laudato Si," Pope Francis's groundbreaking Encyclical on the environment and human ecology.

CRS seeks to protect our common home and acknowledges the need to address natural resource scarcity, threats to the environment and climate, and pandemics. **We are committed to ensuring all people achieve dignified and resilient livelihoods in flourishing landscapes, and as a result, urge Congress to fund climate change mitigation and adaptation.** In “Laudato Si,” Pope Francis reminds us that “[Humanity does not face] two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (Laudato Si, 139).

Unfortunately, we witness the devastating impact climate change has on the lives of the communities we serve. The poor and vulnerable disproportionately suffer from natural disasters, storms, droughts, conflict, diseases, and food scarcities that are now further exacerbated by climate change. Eighty percent of smallholder farmers rely on rain-fed agriculture and are vulnerable to environmental changes affecting water and soil, with women and girls often disproportionately affected. As climate change, poor farming practices, and other forces degrade productive land, more than a billion people cannot produce sufficient crops to meet their food, nutrition and livelihood needs. CRS has long supported food security as a pathway out of poverty. According to the United Nations, agriculture is the single largest employer in the world, providing livelihoods for 40% of the global population. It is also the largest source of income for poor, rural households. A study in the *Journal of Development Economics*, shows that income growth generated by agriculture is up to three times more effective in reducing poverty than growth in other sectors.

CRS has set a strategic goal to promote land restoration through nature-based solutions such as drylands greening, watershed restoration, and water-smart agriculture. CRS has seen success using these approaches with private and U.S. funding. In Oromia, Ethiopia, CRS led a Feed the Future project that ended in 2016. The project helped farmers learn climate smart agriculture practices, improve natural resource management techniques, and work on reforestation to cope with the prolonged drought, erratic rainfall, and land degradation. CRS currently implements a program called the Future Livelihoods for Resilience in Oromia, which promotes climate smart agriculture and livestock practices while also helping families build productive assets and establish multiple income streams that allow them to be more resilient to recurrent extreme weather.

With this experience at hand, we urge the committee to fulfill the funding commitment made in the Global Food Security Act by allocating \$1 billion of Development Assistance for the agriculture, resilience, and nutrition programs that support projects like Oromia. We also request that at least \$80 million is made available for the Community Development Fund, which supports Title II Food for Peace non-emergency programs that connect with GFSA programming. When CDF was first introduced in FY10, the funds reduced the reliance on monetization in FFP non-emergency programs. Now, CDF is used by FFP (and authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill) to cover partial costs of the full range of non-emergency activities. CRS also asks Congress to take urgent action regarding the climate crisis. The United States should reject efforts to back away from the commitments made under the Paris Climate Agreement. Similarly, the United States must continue to invest in community resilience by providing integrated foreign assistance funding that helps families build stable, secure communities. Communities will benefit from the Green Climate Fund and other multilateral and bilateral development accounts that include adaptation, clean energy, and sustainable landscapes as part of their focus alongside other sectors such as agriculture.

IV. Advance Programming for Vulnerable Children

Each year, 5.3 million children under five globally die from preventable disease and malnutrition. 250 million children under age five who do survive past their 5th birthday are at risk of growing up with stunted brains and bodies due to extreme poverty. CRS commends USAID for releasing the United States Government Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity (APCCA) strategy last summer which seeks to mitigate the impact of extreme poverty on the most vulnerable children. The strategy sets out the goals of building strong beginnings, putting family care first, and protecting children from violence, abuse, and neglect.

In order to support USAID in implementing this critical work, CRS requests a modest increase to the Vulnerable Children account. Ensuring that every child can survive, thrive, and reach their God-given potential is central to USAID's journey to self-reliance and one of the best investments the United States can make to eliminate extreme poverty, expand economic growth and promote peace. CRS requests this funding increase as historical investments in Vulnerable Children have been minimal. So far, the funding has only covered small projects working with the most vulnerable children out of family care—such as children living on the street or children in institutions. It is important to expand the office so they can scale up their critical work.

V. Improve Funding Processes

In 2019, CRS issued a report entitled Roadblock on the Journey to Self-Reliance: Budget Cuts, Budget Uncertainty, and Bureaucratic Delays. The report finds that budget cuts, budget uncertainties, and bureaucratic delays have direct negative impacts on the most poor and vulnerable, who foreign assistance projects often aim to reach. **We urge Congress to provide proper oversight to ensure funding is spent as intended and to conduct a review to determine where other processes within the administration can be responsibly expedited.**

Due to budget uncertainty and cuts, CRS has experienced early program closures in Sierra Leone, Guatemala, and the West Bank and Gaza. Moreover, we have witnessed the administration's budget request, the government shutdown, and the threat of rescissions negatively impact program implementation. These issues not only impact beneficiaries, partner agencies, and USAID, but also hinder the journey to self-reliance. In addition, ongoing holds on funding intended for Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and the West Bank and Gaza cause serious alarm. These process issues threaten our ability to advance integral human development, promote local leadership, care for all creation, and support vulnerable children.

We recognize Congress' steadfast, bipartisan support to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of U.S. foreign assistance. As Pope Francis wrote in his address to the World Economic Forum, there is a "need for a greater engagement at all levels in order to address more effectively the diverse issues facing humanity." Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rogers, please allow me to thank you again for your leadership in advancing international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance. We look forward to that 'greater engagement' this year to maintain U.S. leadership and uphold the moral imperative to stand with our brothers and sisters around the world.