



## Hill Notes

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### INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE: THE BIG PICTURE AND AFGHANISTAN

#### ***What is the Church's vision for U.S. foreign assistance programs?***

The Church views foreign aid as an essential tool to promote human life and dignity, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance security throughout the world. Foreign aid is not simply an optional commitment; it is a moral responsibility to assist “the least of these.”

#### ***What credibility does the Church have in speaking out on foreign assistance?***

First, the Church in the United States has broad and deep **experience** reaching out to our brothers and sisters in need through Catholic lay movements and religious communities of men and women who operate numerous missions, schools, health structures and humanitarian groups across the globe. Catholic Relief Services, the official relief and development agency of our Conference, has been active for 67 years and now works in about 100 countries around the world. Second, the Catholic Church in our nation also has profound and abiding **relationships** with the Church in many developing countries and frequently is guided by the lived experience of the local Church. Third, our Church has a rich body of **teaching** that offers principles that can help guide the reform of foreign assistance, including: the defense of the life and dignity of the human person; promotion of the common good through participation and subsidiarity; the centrality of the option for the poor; and building peace through justice.

#### ***Why is foreign assistance important to the foreign policy of the United States?***

Generous and effective foreign assistance is a moral imperative. It also expresses our values as a nation by reaching out to poor and vulnerable people who live at the margins of the global community. Commitment of foreign assistance focused on human development and humanitarian needs is an indicator of United States leadership in the world. Foreign aid is also an investment in the future well being of people in developing countries and improves global security and stability, thus contributing to the security of our own nation. As Pope Benedict XVI taught in his 2009 World Day of Peace Message, “to fight poverty is to build peace.” Development funding is vital to a balanced foreign policy; it is one of the three Ds (development, diplomacy and defense) that together can build a more secure and prosperous world for all.

#### ***What are current levels of funding for poverty-focused foreign assistance programs?***

In 2009, the U.S. spent \$17.48 billion on poverty-focused assistance programs that USCCB and CRS support. The FY2010 approved budget for these same priority accounts increased slightly to \$17.59 billion. These funds went to aid and development-related activities: development, humanitarian and emergency assistance; child survival and maternal health, HIV/AIDS; water and sanitation; health; peacekeeping; migration and refugee services; and infectious disease control.

#### ***What else is needed to promote human development beyond generous international assistance?***

The U.S. should formulate a coherent global strategy that integrates development assistance, debt relief, trade, agriculture, climate change and other policies to promote human development and reduce poverty.

#### ***How can we improve international assistance and development to Afghanistan?***

Most of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan is coming through military as opposed to civilian channels. Since 2001, almost \$38 billion has been given to Afghanistan, but more than half went to security programs aimed at training and equipping Afghan forces and only 32% went to development and humanitarian assistance. The U.S. military administers 57 percent of development assistance provided to Afghanistan but they do so with the goal of “winning hearts and minds.” They often focus on short-term strategic and security goals, which can heighten suspicions among an Afghan population wary of “foreign occupation.”

To improve international assistance and development in Afghanistan, the U.S. should channel most of its assistance through civilian channels and clearly separate it from assistance delivered through military channels.

***Why are civilian organizations better able to deal with development than the military?***

Civilian organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services, are poverty-focused and seek to serve those in need, regardless of their affiliation. They have the experience and proven track record of promoting long-term sustainable development by cultivating responsible local partners to assess needs and ensure community support for planned programs. This takes time. In Afghanistan, CRS has been on the ground since 1998 and has strong ties to local NGOs. CRS operates in some of the most impoverished areas offering emergency relief; agriculture and agro-enterprise, water security, community based education and women's livelihood programs. By contrast, U.S. military rotate in and out every year or less and cannot provide the continuity needed to ensure that development assistance they provide is effective.

***What should be the roles for the military and civilian development organizations in conflict areas?***

The military play an important role in providing security in war-torn areas. The use of force should be proportionate to the threat and should be discriminate in targeting extremists, so as to avoid civilian casualties, both as a moral imperative and to garner civilian support. The military's proper role should be phased out as the situation stabilizes, and civilian agencies should take the lead in providing humanitarian relief and development assistance. CRS staff have shown their ability to work well in areas not controlled by U.S. military, due to close ties with Afghan communities that trust their work and shelter them if needed.

***What recommendations do USCCB and CRS have for U.S. international assistance, especially in Afghanistan?***

U.S. international assistance has promoted the human life and dignity of many; but it needs to be integrated into a comprehensive strategy with trade, agriculture, climate change and other policies to advance human development, reduce poverty, and improve national and global security. The USCCB and CRS urge the Congress and the Administration to:

- A. **Improve these poverty-focused programs and increase** their funding toward the Administration's goal of doubling international assistance by 2015:
  - a. HIV/AIDS programs, especially the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR);
  - b. Development and humanitarian assistance and emergency programs, including Title II Food Aid;
  - c. Millennium Challenge Account;
  - d. Debt relief for poor developing nations;
  - e. Peacekeeping programs; and
  - f. Migration and Refugee Services and Emergency Migration and Refugee Assistance.
- B. Urge Congress to support a **"responsible transition" in Afghanistan** and the withdrawal of U.S. forces consistent with that goal. The U.S. should strive to reduce further loss of life; address humanitarian needs and the refugee crisis; help rebuild the war-torn country; improve human rights; support good governance; and promote sustainable development. The U.S. should restrain the use of military force and ensure that civilians are not targeted, and address the root causes of terrorism rather than relying solely on military force. Whenever possible, the U.S. should deliver **development assistance through civilian channels** to promote sustainability. Given the decentralized nature of Afghan society, significant aid should go to local community projects.

**Where can I find more information on foreign assistance?**

Visit the web: [www.usccb.org/globalpoverty/](http://www.usccb.org/globalpoverty/) and [www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/). For more information on foreign assistance, contact: *Steve Hilbert*, Office of International Justice and Peace, USCCB, 202-541-3149, [shilbert@usccb.org](mailto:shilbert@usccb.org). For more information on Afghanistan, contact: *Virginia Farris*, Office of International Justice and Peace, USCCB, 202-541-3182, [vfarris@usccb.org](mailto:vfarris@usccb.org).