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September 26, 2005

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
SR-361A
Washington, D.C. 20510

BY FAX: 202-224-2499

Dear Senator McConnell:

On behalf of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), we write to ask for your leadership in ensuring that the conference report of H.R. 3057, the FY 2006 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, reflects a strong U.S. commitment to addressing the critical needs of the world's poor and most vulnerable. Our concern is rooted in the principles of Catholic social teaching and the practical experience of our relief and development work in over 90 countries throughout the world.

We would like to draw your attention to the following priorities of the Bishops' Conference for major foreign aid programs:

- **Global Health:** We support at a minimum the Senate-approved appropriation of \$2.96 billion for morally appropriate, comprehensive programs to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Such funding is urgently needed as infectious diseases continue to ravage the population of the world's poorest countries and pose additional threats to economic stability and global security.
- **Development and Humanitarian Assistance:** We urge you to support the Senate-approved funding levels for core development and humanitarian assistance accounts. It is our experience that these programs help enhance skills and provide opportunities and basic services in the areas of education, health care, agriculture, rural development and microenterprise/microfinance, as well as urgent assistance to victims of natural disasters and other emergencies. The many poor countries that fail to qualify for the Millennium Challenge Account depend upon the core development programs for human development and poverty reduction.
- **International Debt Relief:** We strongly support the Senate-approved appropriation of \$99.75 million for international debt relief. The Catholic community has been deeply involved in the question of debt relief since the calls of Pope John Paul II to reduce substantially, if not cancel outright, the debt that threatens the future of many struggling nations.
- **International Financial Institutions:** We urge adoption of the House-approved appropriation of \$950 million for the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA). Full funding of the U.S. contribution to IDA is crucial to avoid

undercutting the recent G-8 agreement on new IDA debt cancellation for poor countries which we worked for and welcome. We further support the policy goal of transparent accounting for revenues generated by natural resource extraction projects financed by Multilateral Development Banks that is contained in SEC. 1505 (14) of Title VII of the Senate bill.

- **Millennium Challenge Account (MCA):** We support at a minimum the Senate-approved appropriation of \$1.8 billion. Without significant funding for the MCA, any hope for the success of this innovative approach to foreign assistance will remain far off. We also encourage conferees to focus FY 2006 MCA funding on the world's poorest countries, which have the greatest needs. We urge this limitation because MCA implementation has progressed more slowly than anticipated at the time that Congress authorized MCA funding for lower middle income countries to begin in FY 2006.
- **Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA):** We support the Senate-approved appropriation of \$900 million for the State Department's MRA account, which funds the U.S. refugee admissions and overseas refugee assistance programs. This appropriation would help resettle up to 90,000 refugees and meet immediate overseas humanitarian assistance needs.
- **Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA):** We urge conferees to adopt the Senate-approved appropriation of \$40 million for the ERMA account, which funds efforts to address emerging refugee crises throughout the world. Most recently, the U.S. has used the account to help repatriate refugees in Angola and southern Sudan. It has also been used to address crises in Côte d' Ivoire, Liberia and in the Darfur region of Sudan.

In addition to the above priorities, the Bishops' Conference urges action to help a number of countries and regions with the following urgent needs:

- **Peace in the Holy Land:** We urge you to support the House-approved appropriation of \$150 million to help the Palestinians build capacity for the peace process and eventual statehood. We also urge conferees to reject onerous conditions attached to the funding that will limit its effectiveness and delay its delivery. Now is the time to invest in a just peace in the Holy Land and to help bring about a peaceful Palestinian state.
- **Sudan:** We urge you to support the House-approved appropriation of \$367 million for Sudan in order to support critical peace and humanitarian efforts in the Darfur region and the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Southern Sudan. The continuing violence in Sudan requires sustained attention and action.

- **Colombia:** We urge you to support the Senate's certification provisions (SEC. 6110) on "Demobilization of Foreign Terrorist Organizations" related to funding for Colombia. The Colombian and U.S. Catholic Bishops have long promoted the necessity of a negotiated, just and sustainable resolution to the ongoing internal conflict in Colombia. Given considerable concerns about human rights violations by armed actors in Colombia and the evidence that they are being treated with impunity upon demobilization, any provision of U.S. funds for the current demobilization must be conditioned upon strict human rights criteria and monitoring.
- **Haiti:** We urge you to support the Senate-approved appropriation of \$116 million for Haiti. As the poorest country in the hemisphere, Haiti deserves our special consideration at this time to help them deal with ongoing political and social unrest and to enable the upcoming elections to take place without disruption.
- **Indonesia:** We urge the House to adopt the Senate language conditioning military assistance to Indonesia upon certification by the Secretary of State that certain well-defined human rights improvements have been made by the Indonesian Armed Forces. We are pleased that the Conference Report of last year did contain such language and urge that it be restated this year.

We ask that you support funding for and the inclusion of each of the above initiatives in addition to the funding levels for other health, development and humanitarian assistance programs.

Finally, we wish to underscore our support for continuing the U.S. policies on UNFPA and the Mexico City Policy:

- **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):** We strongly oppose language included in Title III of the Senate-passed bill that would weaken the Kemp-Kasten amendment by narrowing the terms under which UNFPA can be declared ineligible for U.S. funding. We urge conferees to fully reinstate the Kemp-Kasten policy against funding organizations involved in coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization. Congress should not earmark funds for UNFPA, whose support for the coercive population program in the People's Republic of China has rendered it ineligible for U.S. funds in recent years.
- **Mexico City Policy:** We strongly oppose SEC. 6111 in the Senate-passed bill, which states that foreign nongovernmental organizations shall not be ineligible for U.S. funds solely on the basis of the health or medical services they provide with non-U.S. government funds. This provision would effectively overturn the Mexico City policy, which prevents U.S. funding of NGOs which perform and promote abortion as a family planning method in developing nations.

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Our Bishops' Conference appreciates the difficult funding decisions you will confront on these and other critical issues, especially as you work to provide assistance to the Gulf coast communities that have been devastated by hurricanes. Congress' response should reflect our moral obligation to reach out to the poor and vulnerable. At the same time Congress responds generously and quickly to those who have lost so much, we ask that you continue to work to improve the lives and dignity of those who have so little around the world. We believe our great nation has the will, the resources, and the responsibility to do both.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend John H. Ricard, S.S.J.
Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee
Chairman, Committee on International Policy



Mr. Ken Hackett
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services