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January 30, 2017

The Honorable Bob Corker
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6225

Dear Chairman Corker,

As President of Catholic Relief Services, Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on International Justice and Peace, and Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Migration, we urge you to support S.1580, the "Protecting Girls' Access to Education in Vulnerable Settings Act." This bill addresses human trafficking and the factors that contribute to it. Among those most vulnerable to human trafficking, early marriage, and forced labor are displaced and refugee children, especially girls. Yet we know that certain forms of protection, including education, help reduce these children's risk of trafficking and provide them with critical knowledge and skills to live productive and fulfilling lives. Therefore, we write to respectfully request that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee consider moving forward consideration of S.1580.

S.1580, introduced by Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Bob Menendez (D-NJ), will help to ensure that displaced and refugee children, especially girls, have access to education. Currently, the gross enrollment rate for primary school is 90% globally; however, among refugees it is only 61%. While educational opportunities provide stability and psychosocial support to mitigate the impact of violence and displacement among refugee children, it is vastly under-prioritized in the humanitarian sector. Pre-primary education for young children is perhaps the most critical, as the early years are when human brain architecture is built—the basis for all future behavior, health and learning.

For every \$1 invested in primary education, \$15 is generated in economic growth. Each additional year of schooling increases average wages by 10% and reduces the risk that children will be abused, exploited or conscripted into armed groups. In fact, each additional year of education for boys reduces by 20% the chance they will become involved in conflict. Further, children who are born to educated mothers are more likely to survive past their fifth birthday, enjoy better nutrition and are more likely to be vaccinated against deadly diseases. High quality education can also promote tolerance, inclusion, and address underlying causes of violence.

CRS has made education of refugee children a priority by investing in the provision of educational opportunities. We have established schools for Syrian children, for example, where Syrian refugees are the teachers. Additionally, while formal education is preferable, where it is lacking,

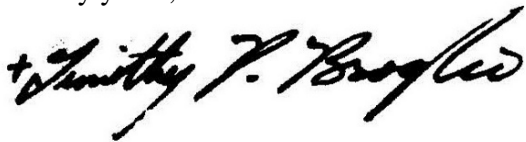
we have invested in child-friendly spaces to ensure that children have a safe space to play and learn.

S.1580 authorizes the Secretary of State and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to prioritize efforts to support access to safe, quality primary and secondary education for displaced children, especially girls, by working with multilateral, private, and civil society organizations. It will also increase host countries' capacities to prevent discrimination against displaced children going to school and would incorporate measures to evaluate the impact of education on the lives of girls with respect to reduction of child marriage, gender-based violence, trafficking, and forced labor – all factors that keep refugee children, especially girls, in poverty.

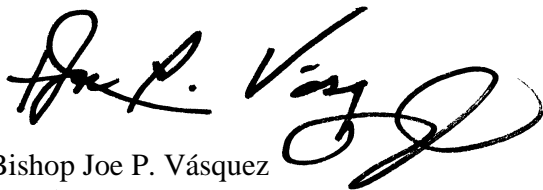
In December 2014, Pope Francis said, "... modern slavery — in the form of human trafficking, forced labour, prostitution or the trafficking of organs — is a crime 'against humanity'. The victims of this are from every walk of life, but most are found among the poorest and the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters." There are currently 65.5 million displaced people worldwide, and half of them are under the age of 18 years old. Provision of basic education is a wise and necessary use of our foreign aid resources as it reduces poverty and suffering, promotes sustainability, and enhances our own security over the long-term.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and for your courage as Chairman of the Committee this year.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Bishop Joe P. Vásquez
Chairman, Committee on Migration



Mr. Sean Callahan
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services