



**Catholic Social
Ministry Gathering**
**Reunión del Ministerio
Social Católico**

“Blessed are the Peacemakers” (Mt 5:9) *A Catholic Message to Congress*

In a country and a world filled with conflict and division, it is the bold and courageous who: work for peace, call for a cessation to the cycle of violence, pause to reflect on our common humanity, and consistently treat the “other” with respect so as to tackle the problems that affect us all. In his 2023 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis exhorts: *“The time has come ... to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to a good that is truly common.”*

We represent hundreds of Catholics from around the country who have gathered in person in Washington, DC for the 2023 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering. We are here to affirm the need to strive for peace and justice, to promote healing and reconciliation, to defend all human life and dignity, and to work for the common good in our society and in the world.

As we begin 2023 and lawmakers embark on the 118th Congress, we ask that you consider the following priorities:

Support children and families by passing a strengthened Child Tax Credit

The Child Tax Credit is a powerful pro-family and anti-poverty tool, but it must be strengthened so its full effects can benefit those children most in need. The credit should be expanded so it is fully refundable, prioritizes the poorest children, and continues to include mixed-status families. We urge members of Congress to engage in dialogue and work together to improve the Child Tax Credit to promote our shared goals of strengthening families and ensuring that no children grow up in poverty.

Support hungry and vulnerable people with robust international humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding assistance

Increase funding for international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian programs in Fiscal Year 2024 to address global hunger and conflict (see chart of accounts supported by USCCB and CRS). More than 48.9 million people are currently on the brink of starvation while the number of people living in poverty has increased for the first time in 20 years. Armed conflict, as well as political and economic crises, in places such as Ukraine, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Nicaragua, are also disrupting progress, driving more than 89 million people from their homes, more than ever before. This assistance, which must maintain provisions protecting life, will reduce hunger and poverty, address the root causes of conflict, and advance peace and security.

Pass legislation providing our new Afghan neighbors with a pathway to permanent legal status

During the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, thousands of Afghan nationals, many of whom risked their lives to serve alongside U.S. servicemembers, were relocated to the United States. Most entered the country with humanitarian parole, which only authorizes them to remain in the United States for up to two years, and expires in August 2023 for the majority of this population. They need a legal pathway to real and lasting safety. We ask Congress to pass legislation, such as the Afghan Adjustment Act (S. 4787/H.R. 8685), a bipartisan bill introduced during the previous Congress, to allow these resettled Afghans—who would otherwise have faced a dire future under Taliban rule—to apply to become lawful permanent residents.



Department of Migration and Refugee Services Office of Policy and Advocacy

Permanent Protections for Our Afghan Neighbors

January 2023

“Indeed, history teaches us that the contribution of migrants and refugees has been fundamental to the social and economic growth of our societies. This continues to be true in our own day. Their work, their youth, their enthusiasm and their willingness to sacrifice enrich the communities that receive them. Yet this contribution could be all the greater were it optimized and supported by carefully developed programs and initiatives. Enormous potential exists, ready to be harnessed, if only it is given a chance.”

– Pope Francis, *Message for the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2022)*

BACKGROUND:

Since August 2021, over 75,000 Afghan nationals have been resettled in the United States, following the U.S. military’s withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S. government dubbed this “Operation Allies Welcome.” For twenty years, American forces and international partners depended on the vital services of Afghans who aided with interpretation, translation, transportation, and more. With the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, these allies and their families became subject to increased danger. There have been numerous reports of Afghans who were supportive of the U.S. mission being killed or targeted because of the assistance they provided to our country.

In 2009, Congress created the bipartisan, humanitarian Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program for Afghan nationals who assisted the efforts of the U.S. government. The program offers approved applicants and their families admission to the United States, resettlement services, and legal permanent residence. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has reported that at the time of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, over 36,000 of the Afghans evacuated were SIV applicants who had been waiting for their applications to be processed, and over 4,000 had already been referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for resettlement. The remaining Afghan nationals who did not fall into these categories were family members of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents, family members of SIV holders, SIV applicants and refugee referrals, SIV-eligible persons, and those deemed eligible for USRAP. The vast majority of those evacuated were granted humanitarian parole for a two-year period. However, parole is not an immigration status and most Afghans present in the United States on parole have no direct access to a permanent status, leaving them with the complex and backlogged asylum system as their only way forward. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles involved in the asylum process. That puts tens of thousands of men, women, and children in danger of becoming unlawfully present in the United States once their parole expires later this year, not to mention the loss of work authorization and other benefits.

By establishing a more streamlined process for Afghan parolees to apply for lawful permanent residence, the Afghan Adjustment Act would alleviate the ongoing fear and uncertainty faced by this population, giving them permanent protections and the ability to integrate fully within American communities.

USCCB POSITION:

Our Afghan brothers and sisters, like all persons created in God's image, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Therefore, government policies that respect and promote that dignity are necessary. Not providing the certainty of full legal integration for our new Afghan neighbors is contrary to this principle.

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has spoken extensively on the issue of migration and the Catholic Church's commitment to an "ever wider 'we.'" Praying for those fleeing the dangerous situation in Afghanistan, the Holy Father stated: "In these troubled times that see Afghans seeking refuge, I pray for the most vulnerable among them. I pray that many countries will welcome and protect those seeking a new life...may all Afghans, whether at home, in transit, or in host countries, live with dignity, in peace and fraternity with their neighbors." In his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, the Holy Father highlights "the plea of the stranger" and the scriptural call "to recognize Christ himself in each of our abandoned or excluded brothers and sisters."

For these reasons, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops supports legislation granting a direct pathway to permanent legal status for Afghan parolees present in the United States.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Urge Congress to pass legislation providing Afghan humanitarian parolees in the United States with a pathway to permanent legal status, such as the bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act (S. 4787/H.R. 8685), which was introduced during the previous Congress.

RESOURCES:

- Backgrounder: [Our New Afghan Neighbors](#)
- Statement: [U.S. Bishops' Migration Chairman Calls for Swift Passage of Afghan Adjustment Act](#)
- Letter: [USCCB Letter of Support for Afghan Adjustment Act](#)

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**Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of International Justice and Peace**

**Background on International Poverty-Reducing
Humanitarian and Development Assistance - January 2023**

“...to live better lives after the Covid-19 emergency, we cannot ignore one fundamental fact, namely that the many moral, social, political and economic crises we are experiencing are all interconnected... Consequently, we are called to confront the challenges of our world in a spirit of responsibility and compassion. We must revisit the issue of ensuring public health for all. We must promote actions that enhance peace and put an end to the conflicts and wars... 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...” - [Pope Francis, World Day of Peace, 2023](#)

BACKGROUND:

U.S. sponsored international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has provided opportunities for countless millions around the world to move out of poverty. Of the more than \$4 trillion U.S. federal budget, Congress allocates half of 1% towards poverty-reducing international assistance with strong bipartisan support. This small fraction of the federal budget supports the poorest and most vulnerable communities around the world through agricultural assistance to help farmers feed their families; medicines to ensure people living with HIV remain healthy; cost-effective vaccines to prevent diseases; and mosquito nets to avert malaria. Moreover, these funds assist orphans and vulnerable children; early childhood development; people facing the risk of famine; populations devastated by conflicts; communities at risk of increasing floods, droughts, and other climate change impacts; and peacekeepers to protect innocent civilians.

While U.S. sponsored international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has saved millions, incredible challenges remain, especially related to global hunger and conflict. The United Nations World Food Program estimates that 48.9 million people are currently on the brink of starvation while the number of people living in poverty has increased for the first time in 20 years. Extreme hunger has more than doubled since 2019, with surging food, fertilizer, and energy prices further constraining household purchasing power and agricultural productivity more recently. Climate change has proven a threat multiplier--disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable--by destroying agriculture and natural resources, disrupting livelihoods, contributing to mass displacement, and increasing the risk of conflict. Conflict, as well as political and economic crises are also disrupting progress, driving more than 89 million people from their homes, more than ever before.

USCCB and CRS POSITION:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance. USCCB and CRS support international assistance because it is effective in upholding the sacredness and dignity of all human life and nurturing peaceful and just societies. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reminds us all that, “What we need in fact are states and civil institutions that are present and active, that look beyond the free and efficient working of certain economic, political or ideological systems, and are primarily concerned with individuals and the common good.” The Church views international assistance as an essential tool for promoting human life and dignity, reducing poverty, advancing global solidarity, and

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enhancing peace and security throughout the world. International assistance is a moral responsibility to assist “the least of these” (Matthew 25). Therefore, assistance must be an expression of our solidarity with all people living in poverty, not an exercise in short-term self-interest, or self-promotion.

CRS operates in over 110 countries and is a key implementing partner of the U.S. government. Among numerous programs around the world, CRS provides food assistance to conflict affected people in South Sudan and Ethiopia; supports education in Guatemala; delivers emergency assistance to families impacted by the war in Ukraine; helps children with HIV thrive in Cameroon; and provides support to drought affected families in Afghanistan.

USCCB and CRS’ experience affirms the idea that the U.S. can play a constructive role in advancing peace, justice, and wellbeing. The numerous global challenges we face today demand a strong U.S. response. U.S. leadership will be critical to end global hunger; prepare for future health crises; care for our common home and address climate change; mitigate human suffering and address the root causes of conflict and instability; and strengthen local capacity to bring about transformational change.

We commit to working with Congress to uphold human dignity, to stand in solidarity with the poor, to be good stewards of the earth, and to prioritize the common good. We have grave concerns about providing taxpayer funding for activities inconsistent with the Catholic faith and basic human rights. Therefore, we strongly urge Congress to maintain the Helms Amendment and other long-standing policies that protect human life in the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations bill. The USCCB will oppose any bill that expands taxpayer funding of abortion, including any appropriations bill.

STATE OF PLAY:

In December, Congress passed Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations, almost three months after the start of the fiscal year. While Congress provided small increases to many of the core accounts that USCCB and CRS support and included supplemental humanitarian assistance for people impacted by the war in Ukraine and other emergencies, delayed appropriations do impact the effective delivery of critical humanitarian and development assistance.

At the beginning of February 2023, we expect the President to submit his Fiscal Year 2024 budget request to Congress. This submission will kickstart a months long process of conversation and debate on Capitol Hill about spending for the upcoming fiscal year, which starts October 1, 2023. This means that our timing on Capitol Hill is ideal to share our perspective on the Church’s international funding priorities for Fiscal Year 2024. Moreover, given the difficulty of moving legislation through a divided Congress, it is more important than ever that we speak with a moral voice to all members of Congress about the importance of international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance and U.S. leadership.

ACTION REQUESTED:

Urge your member of Congress to support increases to international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian assistance in Fiscal Year 2024 to address global hunger and conflict (See chart of accounts supported by USCCB and CRS).

RESOURCES:

Visit: www.usccb.org/IJP. Contact: *Steve Hilbert*, USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace, shilbert@usccb.org, 202-541-3149.

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Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development
Office of Domestic Social Development

Background on the Child Tax Credit
January 2023

“Family-friendly social, economic and cultural policies need to be promoted in all countries. These include, for example, policies that make it possible to harmonize family and work; tax policies that acknowledge family burdens and support the educational functions of families by adopting appropriate instruments of fiscal equity; policies that welcome life; and social, psychological and health services that focus on supporting couple and parental relationships.”

- Pope Francis, Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 2022

The Church presents a vision, shared by many Americans, of a society that is authentically life-affirming and oriented to supporting children and their parents. The Child Tax Credit is a prime example of such a policy. Every year, the credit lifts millions of families out of poverty, helping them live in dignity and with greater economic security. The credit could be made even stronger to reach more children that are currently excluded from its full benefits. A proven tool that could lift millions more children out of poverty, the Child Tax Credit should be used to its full potential.

BACKGROUND:

The current Child Tax Credit of \$2,000 per child under the age of 17 is not structured to help the children who need it the most. The poorest children are not eligible to receive the full value of the credit because their families’ earnings are too low. The credit is only available to families that earn at least \$2,500 and a portion of the credit is not refundable, meaning it is only available to families with tax liability, leaving behind families whose incomes are so low that they owe little or no federal income tax. This structure cuts off nearly 19 million low-income children from the full benefit of the Child Tax Credit.¹

For the year 2021 only, the American Rescue Plan Act expanded the Child Tax Credit. Congress made the credit fully refundable and removed the \$2,500 earnings phase-in so that all low- and middle-income families received the full benefit. They also increased the credit’s amount, made it available through monthly payments, and included seventeen-year-old children. Many families used the expanded credit to meet basic needs such as food, utility bills, rent or mortgage payments, clothing, and education costs.² The expansion was extremely effective at reducing child poverty, lowering it by 2.1 million children.³ In fact, 2021 saw the lowest child poverty rates on record, driven in large part by the Child Tax Credit expansion. Unfortunately, when the expanded credit expired at the end of the year, millions of families abruptly lost their financial stability, leading to a spike in child poverty.⁴

¹ Greenstein, Robert, “Next Steps on the Child Tax Credit.” The Hamilton Project, November 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/next-steps-on-the-child-tax-credit/>.

² “Most Common Uses of 2021 Child Tax Credit Payments: Food, Utilities, Housing, Clothes.” Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center, 22 March 2022, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/updates/show/294-child-tax-credit-payments>.

³ Burns, Kalee, et al. “Expansions to Child Tax Credit Contributed to 46% Decline in Child Poverty Since 2020.” U.S. Census Bureau, 13 September 2022, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/record-drop-in-child-poverty.html>.

⁴ Parolin, Zachary, et al. “Absence of Monthly Child Tax Credit Leads to 3.7 Million More Children in poverty in January 2022.” Columbia Center on Poverty and Social Policy, 17 February 2022, <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/monthly-poverty-january-2022>.

Despite compelling data and calls from advocates to renew the 2021 expanded credit or otherwise improve the Child Tax Credit, Congress has not yet enacted legislation to do so. However, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have acknowledged the importance of the Child Tax Credit and have expressed interest in working towards an improved credit, an encouraging sign as we enter a new Congress.

USCCB POSITION:

The USCCB has consistently advocated for a continuation of the expanded Child Tax Credit, emphasizing the need for the full credit to be available to the lowest-income families.

The USCCB has long supported the Child Tax Credit while calling for its improvement so the most vulnerable children can benefit from the full credit. As the U.S. bishops stated in their pastoral document, *Putting Children And Families First*, “those with the greatest need require the greatest response. This is the ‘option for the poor’ in action. While every family needs support, poor families and families facing discrimination carry the greatest burdens and require the most help. With limited resources, we need to focus assistance on those with the greatest needs.”

We ask Congress to support children and families by passing a strengthened Child Tax Credit. This can be done by:

- structuring the credit so that it is fully refundable, without a minimum income threshold, in order to have the biggest impact on the lowest-income families,
- continuing to include eligibility for mixed-status families in the credit,
- making the credit available for the year before birth,
- ensuring the credit does not undermine the building of families, and
- not cutting programs that serve those most in need in order to offset costs of the credit.

The Child Tax Credit should be strengthened because the lowest income families and the most vulnerable children are being left out. The priority must be for those children to have access to the full credit, to target the benefit to the children who need it the most. Making the credit fully refundable, so that the entire credit is available to the poorest families, is the most effective step we can take to help the credit reduce child poverty.⁵ Allowing the credit to be claimed for the year before birth would be another important improvement to help the credit reach the most vulnerable mothers, easing a burden during a period of increased financial stress and uncertainty. Meanwhile, aspects of the credit that do serve those most in need should be protected by maintaining eligibility for all families with U.S. citizen children regardless of their parents' immigration status, continuing to support and strengthen families by not financially disincentivizing marriage and being available to all children no matter the family size, and working alongside other essential programs to serve those on the margins. The Child Tax Credit has great potential to bring together all those working to support the well-being of families and children.

RESOURCES:

Visit: For additional background on USCCB advocacy on the Child Tax Credit, see: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/letters-congress-child-tax-credit-may-19-2022>

For additional background on USCCB advocacy on family policy, see: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-regarding-policies-support-women-and-families-october-26-2022>

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⁵ Collyer, Sophie, et al. “Earning Requirements, Benefit Values, and Child Poverty Under the Child Tax Credit: Eliminating the Earnings Requirement Does More to Impact Child Poverty than Increasing Benefit Levels.” Columbia CPSP, 5 March 2019, <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/2019/child-tax-credit-earnings-requirement>.