

Statement for Consultation of Religious Leaders on Poverty

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I see participation in the Consultation of Religious Leaders on Global Poverty in the context of the Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty that has been launched by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services, the relief and development agency of our bishops' conference. Let me borrow from the brochure that describes the Campaign:

“If a brother or a sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them ‘go in peace, keep warm and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:15-16)

In a world where nearly half of our sisters and brothers live in poverty, how can we say “go in peace” to a Sudanese child who has lost her parents in war? How can we say “keep warm” to an Indonesian brother and sister left homeless in the wake of a tsunami? How can we say “eat well” to a Haitian family struggling to survive in one of the poorest nations on earth?

As believers, we cannot. And because disasters and emergencies hit the poor hardest, people of faith are quick to respond generously with food for the hungry, shelter and clothing for the displaced, medical care for the suffering.

But even our generous responses to such disasters are not sufficient to address the pervasive poverty experienced by our brothers and sisters around the world. We must also work against the causes of global poverty and deprivation so that those who are currently poor can live in dignity. This ultimately requires U.S. policies to promote development for impoverished people and to overcome poverty and its devastating effects.

And it requires people of faith to call upon our elected officials and policy makers to make genuine human development for the poorest people and nations a top U.S. policy priority.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) invite Catholics throughout the U.S. to join us in our Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty as we advocate for U.S. policies that foster economic and social development for people living in poverty throughout the world.

The campaign focuses on three areas of U.S. economic policy:

- Trade: Shaping U.S. trade policies so that overcoming poverty and promoting human development are central priorities;
- Aid: Supporting effective programs that foster long-term development and empowerment of the poor;

- Debt: Eliminating the debt of the poorest countries in ways that reduce poverty and promote human dignity.

This campaign begins with an essential theme of Catholic social teaching: the preferential option for the poor. This teaching is rooted in Jesus' special concern for the "least" among us. It compels Catholics to ask basic questions of U.S. policy makers: How do our foreign policies affect the world's poor? Do they alleviate poverty or exacerbate it? Do they foster development or impede it?

As citizens in a powerful democracy and affluent nation we have the right to raise these questions. As people of faith we have the responsibility to work for answers that protect the lives and dignity of all God's children.