Virtual Voices 2020: COVID-19 Supplemental Background

Loving Creator, help and heal all impacted by the coronavirus: patients, healthcare and aid workers, vulnerable families and communities around the world.

Overview

CRS believes that our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. Together, we are called to encounter Christ in the members of our human family most in need and to share the Good News with others, becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good.

We have launched campaigns to lead the way on the global issues of hunger, forced displacement and migration. Our Lead the Way on Migration campaign is focused on ensuring our brothers and sisters on the move can exercise their right to lead dignified lives, and ultimately thrive. Our Lead the Way on Hunger campaign calls forth a vision where all people have the conditions they need to regularly access healthy food, ensuring optimal nutrition to ultimately thrive. Your advocacy actions will be opportunities for you to take part in these campaigns to support our human family suffering from poverty, hunger, forced migration and displacement, especially as these issues are compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an opportunity to stand with migrants, refugees and those experiencing hunger, your advocacy actions will focus on urging Congress to provide at least $12B for the international response to COVID-19 in the next supplemental package.

COVID-19 and the Issues of Migration & Hunger

The unprecedented global challenge of COVID-19 will require a comprehensive and extraordinary international response to save lives, care for those affected, and ensure human dignity. COVID-19 is particularly dire for communities that are already vulnerable, including refugees, migrants, and those suffering from food insecurity. According to the UN, there are almost 80 million people forcibly displaced around the world, 26 million of whom are refugees, and 135 million people requiring emergency food assistance, the international community already faced daunting challenges in 2020. COVID-19 exacerbates these existing hardships. As COVID-19 continues to spread around the world, CRS and our partners are adapting programs to address the needs of older adults and vulnerable children, refugees and migrants, people with compromised immune systems and their caregivers, as well as other high-risk populations.

Pope Francis reminds us, “This is not a time for indifference, because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic.” Serving more than 159 million people in 114 countries in 2019, CRS can attest first-hand to the significant challenges poor and vulnerable communities encounter, especially those who are hungry or have been displaced, and to the impact of poverty-reducing foreign assistance. To end poverty, hunger, and disease, and to support migrants and the forcibly displaced, CRS provides shelter to refugees, helps farmers to grow better crops in the face of climate change or drought, promotes peace in communities divided by differences, creates opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn about nutrition and how to support their children’s development, and provides immediate response in emergencies. CRS is proud to partner with the U.S. government to bring hope and safety to communities—from refugees fleeing Syria to farmers seeking opportunity in El Salvador.
COVID-19 continues to devastate families and communities across the United States and world. While needs increase in the United States, we are deeply concerned that the impact could be far greater in the developing world, where families and communities face daunting barriers to access needs and services. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, COVID-19 threatens fragile health systems and the virus has the potential to infect nearly a quarter of a billion people over the next year. With devastating impacts on health systems, COVID-19 also threatens to undo the progress made in fighting AIDS, TB, and malaria. Furthermore, the impacts on livelihoods and hunger could be catastrophic. With the support of the Catholic community in the United States, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its partners are working tirelessly to respond to COVID-19, knowing that we cannot ultimately protect the vulnerable here if we do not protect the vulnerable everywhere.

Across more than 40 countries, in partnership with the local Church, governments and other organizations, CRS’ global response includes:

1) Addressing the immediate health crisis by working with health systems to provide essential services and support in preventing the spread of COVID-19:
   - Working to ensure awareness of accurate health information.
   - Providing critical hygiene supplies for prevention.
   - Training health care staff and providing support—including supplies and protective equipment—for local health institutions.
   - Strengthening capacity for local partners to address needs.

2) Helping to mitigate social and economic impacts:
   - Strengthening food security, or consistent access to nutritious food, and meeting basic needs.
   - Minimizing the impact of job loss
   - Strengthening overall psychological well-being and relationships and cohesion among different community groups.

CRS aims for a locally led COVID-19 response that helps ensure people survive with dignity, rebuild their lives and communities, and strengthen their long-term stability and resilience to future crises.

CRS focuses on mitigating the risks facing the highest-risk populations, like vulnerable children, elderly people, people with disabilities and refugees and other people uprooted from their communities who are often in densely congested areas, confined living spaces or multi-generational households with limited access to water, health services and infrastructure. Where possible, CRS is adapting existing programs to continue to meet people’s needs beyond this crisis, while not contributing to the spread of the virus during the delivery of critical assistance.

COVID-19 and Congress

Congress has acted to respond to the growing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of the beginning of July, Congress has passed four bills providing much-needed aid, particularly for U.S. workers and businesses, and sick and vulnerable low-income persons. The first and third emergency packages also included initial funding, roughly $1.6 billion, to support preparedness and humanitarian efforts abroad. While Congress continues to prioritize U.S. domestic needs in discussions around the next supplemental package, Congress recognizes that to address COVID-19 we need to resolve the pandemic everywhere. This includes U.S. global leadership in providing additional funds for international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance.

The House-passed HEROES Act on May 15 did not include funding for foreign assistance. The Senate has yet to propose legislation. As the next supplemental is negotiated, it is critically important that we continue to encourage Congress to support Americans in need here in the U.S. and to urge our nation to be a global leader in addressing this pandemic around the world. We are urging Congress to provide at least $12B for the international response to COVID-19 in the next supplemental package.
Illustrative accounts for this funding in the International Affairs Budget include:

- **Lifegiving Global Health-USAID**: helps strengthen fragile health systems while preparing and educating communities confronting the spread of COVID-19.
- **International Disaster Assistance (IDA)**: funds support existing humanitarian crisis contexts and respond to emerging humanitarian consequences through water, sanitation, and hygiene programs; food security and nutrition efforts; as well as health, livelihoods, and shelter.
- **Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA)**: helps protect refugees and internally displaced persons, who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

Now is the time to bravely commit to a bold response, and to support organizations best placed to effectively address community needs.

**Talking Points: U.S. Leadership Is Needed Now More than Ever**

The Holy Father calls to us, “let us remain united. Let us make our closeness felt to those who are alone and to those who are most stricken.” This crisis has reminded us all how interconnected we are and how important U.S. leadership is to assist the poor and vulnerable both in the U.S. and around the world. We must stand with our human family and work to care for one another.

- **Thank you** for your leadership in supporting poor and vulnerable families in the United States and around the world as we all work to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. We are especially grateful for the $1.6B Congress allocated to international humanitarian response in the first and third supplemental packages.

- **Catholic Relief Services and its partners in more than 40 countries** are expanding and adapting programming to prevent the spread and reduce the risk of COVID-19. CRS and the Catholic community are committed to delivering urgent lifesaving assistance while facilitating longer-term recovery.

- **We urge you to provide at least $12B for the international response to COVID-19 in the next supplemental package. Can we count on your support to include additional funding for the overseas response?**
  - **Justification**: The threat of the virus and efforts to contain its spread have affected markets, businesses, schools and other institutions, and, most critically, the livelihoods and food security of households everywhere. Our experience from previous crises tells us that the most vulnerable communities will bear the brunt of these effects, and that existing inequalities and protection risks will be exacerbated. At least $12B of additional funds will help meet immediate health needs, as well as mitigate second order humanitarian, economic, and social impacts. The U.S. must help lead the global effort to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19.