



*Bringing the Good News to a Broken World:
The 2007 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering
February 13, 2007*



**Loving Our Neighbors
A Catholic Message for Congress**

Catholic leaders from across the country come to Washington this week to urge decision-makers to make concern for our neighbors in need and a commitment to peace throughout the world top national priorities. Respect for every person is both a reflection of our convictions and at the heart of our nation's traditions. We seek policies that demonstrate respect for human life and dignity and that help build justice and peace, particularly in four key areas: **Immigration Reform, the 2007 Farm Bill, Global HIV/AIDS, and Peace in the Middle East.**

Throughout the world, poverty and violence threaten lives, communities, and nations. In our country, a land of great wealth, too many of our neighbors cannot meet even their basic needs. Along the Gulf Coast, families and communities continue to suffer without effective help to recover from the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. They deserve more attention and support. But the Gulf Coast is not the only place where the poor and vulnerable have been left behind.

As a foundation of our commitment to human life and dignity, we are working to end the destruction of innocent human life and doing everything possible to restrict and restrain abortion, especially by preserving abortion funding restrictions like the Hyde Amendment and measures such as the Hyde/Weldon conscience protection amendment. We also support serious efforts to reduce abortions through improved supportive services and protection for women and unborn children, without imposing misguided contraceptive mandates.

The Catholic community's positions on issues of human life, human dignity, justice and peace are shaped by a consistent moral framework and extensive experience serving our brothers and sisters in need in this country and throughout the world. In light of our commitment to loving our neighbors, we come to Capitol Hill to urge action in four key areas:

Immigration Reform

Our immigration system is broken. Eleven million undocumented persons reside in the United States. Most of these people work in industries vital to the U.S. economy. But their undocumented status leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination. Most immigrants seek a better life for themselves and their families. They contribute to the U.S. economy and their communities. We oppose punitive measures that will do little to fix a broken immigration policy. The Catholic community urges support of important and useful reforms in the U.S. legal immigration system including:

- a temporary worker program with appropriate protections for both U.S. and foreign workers;
- a broad-based, earned legalization for the undocumented who have proof of U.S. employment and a proficiency in English;
- reduced waiting times for family reunification; and
- restoration of fundamental due process for immigrants.
- policies which address the root causes of migration so persons can remain at home and live in dignity.

We also support creating economic opportunities in sending countries through foreign aid, debt relief and just trade policies.

2007 Farm Bill

In 2007 Congress must reauthorize a sweeping piece of legislation known as the Farm Bill. This legislation sets U.S. policy in major areas that affect domestic farmers and food producers, domestic food consumers, and farmers in developing countries. Reauthorization of the Farm Bill presents an opportunity to reshape our broken agricultural policies to build a more just framework that better serves rural communities and small and moderate-size family farms in the U.S., promotes good stewardship of the land, overcomes hunger here and abroad, and helps vulnerable farmers and their families in developing countries. Working with our partners in the Catholic community, the Catholic community's policy priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill include:

- increasing investments that combat rural poverty and strengthen rural communities;
- strengthening and expanding programs that reduce hunger and improve nutrition in the United States;
- strengthening and increasing investment in policies that promote conservation and good stewardship of the land;
- providing transitions for farmers to alternative forms of support that are more equitable and do not distort trade in ways that fuel hunger and poverty;
- protecting the health and safety of farm workers;
- expanding research related to alternative and renewable forms of energy; and
- providing direct food aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people in other nations

U.S. Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria

A year ago 40 million people were living with HIV and AIDS; 2 million of them were children. Each day, some 1,500 children worldwide become newly infected with HIV. In the face of this humanitarian crisis, Congress should reauthorize the U.S. Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act that expires in 2008.

USCCB and CRS support:

- Reauthorization of the US Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief that offers morally appropriate programs to combat HIV and AIDS;
- An effective conscience clause to ensure that religious organizations can access funding in ways that respect their religious or moral convictions;
- A recognition that abstinence and fidelity must be principal components of prevention education in order to help curb the spread of HIV; and
- Robust funding for the Plan that ensures continued U.S. leadership in fighting AIDS in the worst affected countries without reducing other important foreign aid funding.

Peace in the Middle East: Iraq and Israel-Palestine

A key moral question for our nation is: "How can the U.S. bring about a responsible transition in Iraq?" Bishop William Skylstad, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has insisted that "any action or failure to act should be measured by whether it moves toward [key] benchmarks and contributes to a responsible withdrawal at the earliest time, or whether it is likely to increase divisions, violence, and loss of life." The benchmarks for progress toward a responsible transition in Iraq include:

- minimally acceptable levels of *security*;
- *economic reconstruction* that creates employment for Iraqis; and
- *political solutions* that help overcome divisions, broaden participation, and increase respect for religious freedom and basic human rights in Iraq.

Each strategy or plan ought to be evaluated in light of the traditional principle of "probability of success."

While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is clearly distinct from the conflict in Iraq, peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel would contribute greatly to stability in the region. The U.S. ought to make a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians a central priority of U.S. foreign policy.

For more information, contact the Department of Social Development and World Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at 202-541-3380 or sdwpmail@usccb.org.