

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

May 18, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As members of the Interfaith Working Group on Foreign Assistance, a network of over 50 Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist organizations advocating for the world's most vulnerable people, we write to you during this unprecedented global emergency. While we sincerely appreciate your recognition of our common and interdependent humanity by providing critical humanitarian, peacebuilding, human rights, and poverty-focused programs in response to COVID-19 in previous emergency supplemental legislation, we are alarmed that the House-proposed Heroes Act contained no such support.

Countries around the globe face dire human and economic consequences due to the COVID-19 pandemic, further exacerbating existing health and development issues. If we do not act the U.S. stands to lose billions in investments made over decades long work in reductions to HIV, malaria, tuberculosis, and sustainable livelihood and agricultural development. According to the U.N., the coronavirus could push an additional 130 million to the brink of starvation and has the potential to plunge as many as 420 million people into extreme poverty.

Fragile health systems where medical personnel, beds, protective gear and even water are unavailable and dangerous attacks on human rights and democratic processes under the guise of public health measures are already threatening the global poor as well as the market realities of falling commodity prices, trade, foreign investment and the abrupt loss of tourism.

As faith-based organizations on the frontlines, working alongside USAID and the Department of State, we have the community-based networks, trusted relationships and solid infrastructure to support strong country-led responses. Now is the opportunity to show American generosity and moral leadership. As you contemplate appropriating additional emergency funds, we ask you to consider the following requests:

- **Emergency assistance:** To tackle COVID-19 inside the U.S., increases to international humanitarian, global health and other forms of poverty-focused assistance are going to be critical. We urge Congress to provide no less than **\$12 billion** for the international

response in the next legislative package, that includes significant resources for emergency global health and health security activities, as well as for food security, livelihood and other programs to mitigate the economic shock of the pandemic. Within this we urge continued support to the World Health Organization, the only multilateral institution organization with the technical capacity and global mandate to support and coordinate the public health response of all countries.

- **Expedite U.S. support for MDBs that serve low income countries:** We urge Congress to expedite appropriations for the U.S. contributions to the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), which were recently authorized in the CARES Act. The MDBs are currently mobilizing significant resources to combat the pandemic, and will be critical in assisting low income countries recover from the severe economic consequences. The MDBs support the world's poorest countries through concessional loans and grants, which can be used to shore up social safety nets and bolster health systems. Expediting U.S. contributions will ensure the MDBs have the resources they need to frontload commitments to low income countries, and to continue supporting countries facing debt crises due to the pandemic.

As Bill Gates noted, “The point is not that aid directly makes poor people richer. It’s that aid helps create a foundation for growth. Along with many other factors, it helps remove some of the barriers that keep people from making the most of their talents. And when people in one place do better, the rest of us do better, too.”

Never has this been truer. The global scope and unpredictable nature of COVID-19 requires more from each of us individually and collectively through our uniquely American innovation and compassion in this historic moment.

We are reminded daily that this disease knows no borders or political affiliation. We know it is relentless in its attack, especially on the most vulnerable. Like you, every one of us is eager to see a recovery in our community’s health and economy, but recovery will be impossible without global action against the virus and its potential recurrence.

95% of the world’s consumers live outside of the U.S., and even the poorest two-thirds of the world’s population holds trillions of dollars in purchasing power. Exports will remain an essential driver for American jobs. Markets in the Global South have been growing at a far faster pace than many of our traditional partners, making them central to the future of American economic prosperity. As such, it is critical for our globally connected economy to support both emergency COVID-19 assistance and debt relief to developing nations.

- **Charitable giving:** Faith-based organizations are a critical component in addressing the domestic and global needs as a result of this pandemic. Demands on services have never been higher due to the rapid rise in unemployment and the needs of our most vulnerable caused by the pandemic. Nonprofits employ 10% of the American workforce

and are essential in providing food, housing, healthcare, and spiritual care programs and hope to millions of Americans and hundreds of millions globally.

However, the nonprofit sector is experiencing a precipitous drop in private giving, resulting in sweeping layoffs and reduction in services. We are grateful for the inclusion of the universal charitable deductions (UCD) for non-itemizers of up to \$300 in the CARES Act. However, such incentives must be increased to ensure the nonprofit sector can continue to provide critical services at home and abroad. We recommend:

- Increase the UCD, raise the above the line tax deductions for charitable giving from the \$300 per person cap to **\$4,000 per individual and \$8,000 for a family;**
- Enact a **\$500 below the line tax credit** for every American who donates at least \$500 to a 501©(3) nonprofit; and
- Ensure the non-itemizer tax deduction for charitable giving is in place for at least **three years** to ensure that nonprofits can rebuild after this devastating blow.

We are grateful for your recognition that the only way to effectively address this pandemic is to provide funding to mitigate the global need and protect the non-profit sector. Again, we strongly urge you to provide no less than ***\$12 billion*** for Department of State and USAID programs in the next response package. Grassroots networks of community leaders and volunteers will be critical in a robust, effective public health response and should be supported as much as possible.

We stand ready to provide you with additional information you may require.

Sincerely,

American Hindu World Service
American Jewish World Service
Bread for the World
Christian Connections for International
Health
Christian Reformed Church Office of Social
Justice
Church of the Brethren, Office of
Peacebuilding and Policy
Church World Service
Columban Center for Advocacy and
Outreach
Disabled Children's Fund

Faiths for Safe Water
Food for the Hungry
Islamic Relief USA
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
L.A.C.E.S.
National Council of Churches
Presbyterian Church(USA)
Union for Reform Judaism
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness
Ministries
World Relief
World Renew