

July 11, 2023

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
House Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee,

We, the 35 undersigned organizations, urge you to safeguard and invest in critical funding for peacebuilding, human rights, humanitarian aid, migration, foreign climate aid, poverty-focused development assistance and related accounts in the Fiscal Year 2024 State Department, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPs) appropriations bill.

As organizations committed to promoting peace, advancing and protecting human rights, and supporting human dignity, we are gravely concerned by the House Appropriations SFOPs Subcommittee's proposed cuts. Thoughtful and measured spending prioritizes programs that prevent and ameliorate international crises and safeguard civilian lives. The House bill takes the opposite approach, undermining the United States' legacy of compassionate aid.

The bill features untenable cuts to consequential peacebuilding programs, such as the Complex Crises Fund, at a time when the world is facing some of its highest levels of violence and conflict since the end of World War II.ⁱ Rather than abandon U.S. leadership on critical peacebuilding and conflict prevention work, we urge you to invest fully in these accounts.

As the climate crisis continues to drive poverty, violent conflict, and migration, the House proposal also prohibits any funding to be used for the Green Climate Fund and severely limits funding available for climate-related bilateral programs. As one of the leading historical emitters of greenhouse gases, the United States has a moral responsibility to address the global climate crisis. We urge the Senate to instead fulfill the United States' international commitments and support strong investments in climate adaptation and mitigation for the Global South, which bears the worst impacts of increasing storms, floods, and drought with fewer resources to respond.

The United States' deepest values instruct investment in life-sustaining humanitarian aid that also uplifts global stability. Accounts such as Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) and Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) enable the United States to aid forcibly displaced communities seeking refuge from life-threatening situations and respond to sudden humanitarian needs. Irresponsibly, the House bill excludes ERMA and cuts MRA funding by more than 40 percent. ERMA is a critical emergency draw-down that was recently used to support the Afghan evacuation, the response to the earthquakes in Syria and Turkey, and rising forced migration in the Western Hemisphere; the fund has now been depleted and without additional funding the United States will be unable to respond to unforeseen crises.

Similarly, to ensure continued support for some of the world's most vulnerable people as they seek refuge from natural disasters, conflict, and other unforeseen tragedies, we encourage robust funding for International Disaster Assistance. Since its foundation, the United States has seen itself as a haven for those fleeing persecution and seeking a better life—we urge you not to reject this value and fully fund this necessary aid.

The House proposal would also eliminate funding for the United Nations' (U.N.) regular budget and several U.N. bodies, including the U.N. Development Programme, the World Health Organization, the U.N. Environment Fund and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). These cuts would dramatically diminish the United States' global standing and diplomatic influence. Now is a time when collective action is critical to addressing global challenges. We urge Congress to fully fund U.S. commitments to the U.N., to enable the United States to strengthen its credibility and goodwill at the U.N. by uplifting its diplomatic goals—rather than relying on threats and coercion. In particular, Congress should sustain UNRWA's vital work as a lifeline to Palestinian refugees by increasing, rather than reducing, levels of support by imposing unrealistic reporting requirements and drastically reducing key accounts that sustain its work in the FY24 budget and beyond.

Congress must preserve global security through proven preventive means. As United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres succinctly statedⁱⁱ, “Instead of responding to crises, we need to invest far more in prevention. Prevention works saves lives and is cost-effective.” The United States must continue to lead globally in these efforts.

The challenges of our time are interconnected—none of this work can be done alone. Collectively, these accounts invest in and bolster our nation's values, global leadership, and security. Several undersigned organizations have requested a meeting with your subcommittee staff and offices to continue this conversation. We look forward to meaningfully addressing these concerns. Thank you for your leadership and continuing support for the vital work of the State Department and USAID.

Sincerely,

Afghans For A Better Tomorrow
Better World Campaign
Bread for the World
Bridges Faith Initiative
Christian Connections for International Health
Church World Service
Churches for Middle East Peace
Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services Inc
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
Educators' Institute for Human Rights (EIHR)
The Episcopal Church
Faiths for Safe Water
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation

HIAS
Human Rights First
Immigration Hub
Interfaith Welcome Coalition
Invisible Children
Islamic Relief USA
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jewish Activists for Immigration Justice of Western MA
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Oxfam America
Peace Direct
Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Public Witness
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
The Episcopal Church
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
UNRWA USA
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Women's Refugee Commission
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation

**The signatories have various mandates that may not cover the full scope of the recommendations*

CC: Chair Granger, Vice Chair DeLauro

ⁱ Our World in Data. (n.d.). *State-based conflicts, World, 1946 to 2020*. Our World in Data.

<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/the-number-of-active-state-based-conflicts>

ⁱⁱ UN News Centre. (n.d.). *“Instead of responding to crises, we need to invest far more in prevention,” says UN chief*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/news/%E2%80%98instead-responding-crises-we-need-invest-far-more-prevention%E2%80%99-says-un-chief>