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A man carries a bag of wheat supplied by Catholic Relief Services and USAID for emergency f

A man carries a bag of wheat supplied by Catholic Relief Services and USAID for emergency food assistance in a village near Shashemane, Ethiopia, in this 2016 photo. As acute hunger is expected to double in vulnerable populations because of the coronavirus pandemic, CRS launched an advocacy campaign May 14, 2020, to raise awareness about the world's hungriest people. (CNS Photo/Nancy McNally, Catholic Relief Services)



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The head of the Catholic Church's global charity arm has blasted the Trump administration's decision to gut foreign aid as "reckless" and lamented that it will likely "kill millions of people and condemn hundreds of millions more to lives of dehumanizing poverty."

"This is an unhuman affront to people’s God-given human dignity, that will cause immense suffering," said Alistair Dutton, secretary general of Caritas Internationalis in a Feb. 10 statement.

Caritas, the Catholic Church's leading social service confederation, is active in over 200 countries and territories around the globe. It is the second largest humanitarian aid network in the world after the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

According to Dutton, the Trump administration's draconian measures to effectively shutter the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will lead to a full reassessment of how and where Caritas Internationalis is able to serve.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a Catholic, has been tapped by Trump to serve as acting administrator of USAID. He has promised a full review of the organization's $40 billion dollar budget and priorities.

Meanwhile, Caritas has warned that the decision to abruptly end foreign aid — which makes up less than 1% of the annual federal budget — will "jeopardize essential services for hundreds of millions of people, undermine decades of progress in humanitarian and development assistance, destabilize regions that rely on this critical support, and condemn millions to dehumanizing poverty or even death."

In the United States, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is the top recipient of USAID funds. As NCR reported last week, the organization is preparing for massive cuts — as much as 50% this year — resulting from the reductions in U.S. foreign assistance.

In its statement, Caritas said it had stepped up its global advocacy efforts with other national governments in order to emphasize the far-reaching effects of the decision to gut USAID and to work toward a reversal.

"We remain hopeful that a constructive dialogue will lead to positive outcomes that uphold the shared goal of supporting those most in need," the statement concluded.

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