News



Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, gives the homily during Mass at the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on Feb. 6, as part of the Jubilee of the Armed Services, Police and Security Personnel. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said it would not renew its cooperative agreements with the federal government related to children's services and refugee support after its longstanding partnerships with the federal government in those areas became "untenable."

"A very sad day has dawned," said Arcbishop Timothy P. Broglio, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a guest commentary in The Washington Post. The bishops' conference "had to make the gut-wrenching decision this week to end our work with the federal government to resettle refugees and coordinate support services on the government’s behalf for unaccompanied children entering the United States."

The Trump administration this year suspended a federal refugee resettlement program as part of its broader effort to enforce its hardline immigration policies. The ensuing halt in federal funding for the conference's refugee resettlement services is the subject of ongoing litigation, and it prompted the conference to fire about a third of the staff in its Migration and Refugee Services Office in February.

"For more than a hundred years, tens of thousands of people fleeing war, violence, oppression and religious persecution have been assisted by the church in the U.S.," Broglio wrote. "It is a long and productive story of a Catholic response to the needs of those arriving in this country and drawing on the example of St. Frances Cabrini and others who saw Jesus in the stranger, the homeless, the destitute or the refugee, and sought to help them."

A spokesperson for the U.S. bishops' conference told OSV News the bishops were seeking reimbursement of more than $24 million for resettlement services that the federal government still had failed to make the owed payment as of April 7.

"This situation has been brought to us by the decisions of the government," Anthony Granado, associate general secretary for policy and advocacy for the bishops' conference, told OSV News.



The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops building is seen May 8, 2017, in Washington. The conference said it would not renew its cooperative agreements with the federal government related to children’s services and refugee support after its longstanding partnerships with the federal government in those areas became "untenable." (OSV News/Tyler Orsburn)

Despite decades of partnership with the Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. bishops' conference, across administrations of both parties, including the first Trump administration, Granado said, "We've been placed in an untenable position now."

"It is clear that the government has decided that it wishes to go about doing this in a different way that doesn't include us, and so we were kind of forced into this position," Granado said.

Archbishop Broglio, who in addition to being president of the bishops' conference is head of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services, said in an April 7 statement it was "heartbreaking" to announce the bishops' conference would not renew its "existing cooperative agreements with the federal government related to children's services and refugee support."

"This difficult decision follows the suspension by the government of our cooperative agreements to resettle refugees," he said. "The decision to reduce these programs drastically forces us to reconsider the best way to serve the needs of our brothers and sisters seeking safe harbor from violence and persecution. As a national effort, we simply cannot sustain the work on our own at current levels or in current form."



Unaccompanied minors are seen at the Bristow facility in Virginia, in this photo provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services June 21, 2018. The shelter is one of numerous facilities housing children and youths which are funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. (OSV News photo/Reuters/HHS handout)

Citing the government's suspension of the cooperative agreements to resettle refugees, Broglio said that the conference has "been concerned with helping families who are fleeing war, violence, and oppression find safe and secure homes."

"Over the years, partnerships with the federal government helped expand lifesaving programs, benefiting our sisters and brothers from many parts of the world," Broglio said. "All participants in these programs were welcomed by the U.S. government to come to the United States and underwent rigorous screening before their arrival. These are displaced souls who see in America a place of dreams and hope. Some assisted American efforts abroad at their own risk and more seek a place to worship and pray safely as they know God calls them."

He said, "Our efforts were acts of pastoral care and charity, generously supported by the people of God when funds received from the government did not cover the full cost."

Federal law requires that unaccompanied refugee minors be cared for, and the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement historically has turned to faith-based organizations, including the U.S. bishops' conference, to carry out this work.

A spokesperson for HHS did not immediately respond to a request for comment from OSV News about its cooperative agreement with the bishops' conference.

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Granado said the conference's cooperative agreements with the federal government were "really about people."

"From the church's perspective, this is about responding to the Gospel command — Jesus says in the Gospel, 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me,' " he said, referencing Jesus Christ's words in Matthew 25:35-40 regarding his final judgement. "This has been a blessing and a beautiful part of the USCCB and the Catholic Church in the United States."

The children and refugees impacted "are real people, real families" as well as "the staff whose work will be impacted," Granado said.

As the agreements end, Broglio added, "we will work to identify alternative means of support for the people the federal government has already admitted to these programs. We ask your prayers for the many staff and refugees impacted."

The U.S. bishops' conference, Broglio said, "will continue advocating for policy reforms that provide orderly, secure immigration processes, ensuring the safety of everyone in our communities."

"We remain steadfast in our commitment to advocating on behalf of men, women, and children suffering the scourge of human trafficking," he said. "For half a century, we have been willing partners in implementing the government's refugee resettlement program. The Gospel's call to do what we can for the least among us remains our guide. We ask you to join us in praying for God's grace in finding new ways to bring hope where it is most needed."

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.