Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

FALL 2026

Is CANADA on track for JUSTICE?

1. What does the Catholic Church say about international development?

In the modern age, Catholic Social Teaching has consistently made a strong case for international cooperation and development. In 1967, Pope Paul VI published an encyclical called *Populorum Progressio*, dealing directly with this theme. In it, he says that wealthy nations, like Canada, have a three-fold obligation with respect to developing nations: 1) solidarity, 2) social justice, and 3) universal charity. Meeting these obligations, Pope Paul VI says, requires sharing resources and undoing structural inequalities between nations. This teaching is rooted in the fundamental dignity of all people, and in a recognition that human beings are interconnected, regardless of national borders.

Popes who followed after have deepened the bold words of Pope Paul VI. Pope Leo XIV, in his latest encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, provides a short history of the Church's teaching on development and other social issues (§§28-44). The voice of the Church is clear: international development is not a choice about what to do with leftovers in national budgets. International development is a moral obligation and a requirement for countries like Canada.

2. What does Development and Peace — Caritas Canada mean by development? How do we direct funds to increase solidarity?

The name "Development and Peace" comes from Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, which says that development is "the new name for peace." The pope's point was that solving conflict and ensuring prosperity for all requires long-term, structural solutions to the root causes of injustice. Where many approaches of development focus primarily on economic growth or integrating economies into global supply chains, Catholic Social Teaching has a much deeper understanding of this term, often referring to the idea of "integral human development." In this approach, development has to address the conditions that allow society to affirm the dignity of the whole person, such that individuals can live in meaningful connection, or integration, with other human beings and the planet.

Donor-led approaches to development have been rightly criticized as paternalistic, neocolonial, asymmetrical, and increasing dependency rather than autonomy and leadership in the Global South. Integral human development is measured by whether the most marginalized people in a society are empowered to organize and lead their own alternative solutions. As an organization headquartered in the Global North, Development and Peace — Caritas Canada (DPCC) strives to be vigilant about power dynamics, historical imbalances and prejudices, and the risk of repeating attitudes and practices that hold back authentic solidarity and alternatives.

Canada's Official Development Assistance Accountability Act seeks to ensure that ODA funds go toward reducing poverty and requires taking the perspectives of the poor into account. DPCC receives funds for these purposes, which support a wide variety of partner-led activities, from agroecology to humanitarian efforts. In addition to government funds, DPCC also receives funds from generous Canadians, which helps us to further support projects empowering communities. Having independent funding allows DPCC to stand alongside human rights and environmental defenders, some of whom are dealing with abuses at the hands of Canadian companies. DPCC

does not send its own staff abroad, but instead supports projects that are designed, organized and implemented by local partners. DPCC champions women and social movements in particular as key agents of change.

3. What kinds of DPCC partner projects are funded with resources from the Canadian government?

Through DPCC, Canadian funds are directed to a wide variety of essential, partner-led projects. Here are just a few examples (click the links to learn more):

- In the Sahel region, our partners have reached 147,000 people as part of a large-scale, six-year project focused on food and nutritional security and climate change.
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to promote greater inclusion of women in public and democratic life, our partners are carrying out concrete initiatives throughout the country, including awareness campaigns and consciousness-raising literacy programs.
- In Palestine, our partner has provided essential aid to more than 40,000 people in Gaza over the past ten years, including adequate and safe shelter as well as multi-purpose cash assistance to help those affected by the conflict meet their basic daily needs.
- Since 2017 in Bangladesh, our partner has assisted nearly 200,000 Rohingya refugees in the world's largest refugee camp, located in Cox's Bazar, by providing, among other things, decent and safe shelter as well as access to clean water and sanitation facilities.
- In Sudan and Ukraine, our partners brave war zones to provide life-saving assistance to approximately 185 000 people, including mental health support, water, sanitation and hygiene services as well as services that seek to prevent, intervene against and mitigate risks associated with gender-based violence.

4. Does Canada have an obligation to contribute resources abroad?

Yes. In addition to moral obligations, Canada has given itself a long-standing aspirational goal to increase its official development assistance (ODA) funds, and it has an important law that explains how those funds must be spent.

In 1970, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution saying that economically advanced countries must spend 0.7 per cent of their gross national income on ODA, an international goal that Canada played a major part in achieving. Canada committed itself to reaching this spending goal. So far, however, Canada has never met this goal, though other countries have done so. Most recently, in 2025, even despite global international aid cuts, four member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development exceeded the 0.7 per cent goal: Denmark (0.72%), Luxembourg (0.99%), Norway (1.03%) and Sweden (0.85%). Historically, other countries, like France and Germany, have also met or exceeded the 0.7 per cent goal, showing that this is possible for peer countries. Canada should be a leader in meeting this goal as conditions change around the world.

Canada's Official Development Assistance Accountability Act also requires that ODA spending can only be provided if it:

- contributes to poverty reduction;
- takes into account the perspectives of the poor; and
- is consistent with international human rights standards.

These are essential considerations meant to ensure that Canada's funding works with and for the people who really need it.

In short, Canada has an obligation to both increase its ODA budget and to make sure that these funds are used with specific goals and methods that centre the poor.

5. How much money does Canada spend on international aid and development?

According to Global Affairs Canada, in 2024-2025, Canada spent about $10 billion on official development assistance (ODA), or 0.32 per cent of its gross national income (GNI). The government does not have a plan to achieve its longstanding goal of spending 0.7 per cent of its GNI on ODA.

Importantly, not all of Canada's ODA goes toward international aid and development. Some of it is spent on supporting refugees living in Canada, for example. Canada has also made a special commitment to supporting Ukraine with ODA funds. If we want to know how much Canada spends to support efforts like long-term development and eradicating poverty, we need to separate these other uses of ODA. If we subtract Canada's spending within its own borders, as well as Canada's exceptional spending for COVID-19 and its support for Ukraine, Canada's ODA spending in international aid and development goes down to about $7 billion.

For a detailed look at Canada's ODA spending, see the expert analysis provided by AidWatch Canada.

6. How much money *should* Canada spend on international aid and development?

Based on the United Nations resolution for developed countries to spend 0.7 per cent of their gross national income (GNI) on official development assistance, Canada should have spent a bit over $20 billion. Its actual spending of about $10 billion represents less than half of this amount (0.3 per cent of its GNI), or $0.32 for every $100 earned by Canadians.

$20 billion may sound like a lot of money. Yet Canada is a very large and wealthy country, and if we compare this figure to other figures, we can see how modest it really is.

- In 2025, Canada offered at least $10.2 billion in financial support for the oil and gas industry.
- A proposal for a new West Coast Pipeline, financed primarily with public funds, is estimated to cost between $35.2 billion and $43.7 billion.

In other words, Canada already spends less on ODA than what if offers in the form of oil and gas subsidies. There is more than enough wealth in Canada as a country to readily meet the international goal of spending 0.7 per cent of its GNI on ODA without compromising the social supports and investment that are important to Canadians. These figures may sound abstract, but they translate to direct, concrete outcomes, like building and maintaining health clinics, providing lifesaving vaccines, supporting people fleeing war and catastrophe, and working with local communities to build food sovereignty. Canada can readily afford to increase its capacity to support these necessary efforts, with plenty left to continue investing domestically in Canada.

7. How much did Canada cut from its international aid and development budget? What is most affected?

In its 2025 budget, the Government of Canada announced $2.7 billion in spending cuts on foreign aid over four years, including clear impacts on the global health sector. The government explains its decision by saying its spending was inflated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet health care needs around the world have increased rather than decreased. The government also significantly cut staff at Global Affairs Canada, the largest department contributing ODA funds, reducing its capacity to administer these funds. Expert analysis projects that by 2030, the government's cuts

could amount to as much as 30 per cent less official development assistance (ODA) funds than in 2026.

By comparison, Prime Minister Mark Carney stated that his intention to increase military spending up to 5 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product could mean spending as much as $150 billion per year. The $2.7 billion in cuts to international aid over four years amounts to less than 2 per cent of that sum. Similarly, Canada has committed to over $2 billion in new spending on public investments in AI. The question is not whether money is available, but whether Canada is willing to prioritize the basic needs of our human family.

8. Canada's security and stability are uncertain. How can we justify supporting other countries at this time?

The uncertainty of the world does mean that Canada must re-evaluate its strategies for ensuring the safety and stability of Canadians. Though it may seem strange, investing in the development of other countries is a more durable way of achieving safety and stability for Canada.

In his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI explains that development is "the new name for peace." Conflict, crisis and confusion are the natural results of injustice, poverty, inequalities and discrimination. Where essential institutions like hospitals, schools and infrastructure seem scarce, violence often arises, and people are forced to flee. Investing in development, like supporting worker cooperatives, sustainable agriculture, and peace and conflict resolution, helps to sow the seeds for a more reliable and gentler world for Canadians as well as people abroad.

9. How can Canada justify spending money on people outside of its borders when the needs in Canada are also significant?

Needs in Canada are truly great, especially given rising cost of living, inequalities, displacement and toxicity due to climate change, and other factors. Yet opposition between investing internationally and domestically sets up a false choice. Canada is a very wealthy country, and it has the ability to invest in both. Moreover, strengthening communities abroad helps us strengthen communities in Canada, both by creating a more stable world for Canada to engage and by allowing Canadians to learn from other communities about how to best use resources and human talent to meet needs in creative ways. At DPCC, our partners are often at the forefront of innovative approaches to social change like mutual aid, creating social movements that help people find their voice, and exploring novel approaches to farming that work more intentionally with the land. Supporting these projects helps us share knowledge with a global community about how to take care of one another.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis put the matter well (§§137-138):

"Mutual assistance between countries proves enriching for each.... We need to develop the awareness that nowadays we are either all saved together or no one is saved. Poverty, decadence and suffering in one part of the earth are a silent breeding ground for problems that will end up affecting the entire planet. If we are troubled by the extinction of certain species, we should be all the more troubled that in some parts of our world individuals or peoples are prevented from developing their potential and beauty by poverty or other structural limitations. In the end, this will impoverish us all. [...]

We need to attain a global juridical, political and economic order which can increase and give direction to international cooperation for the development of all peoples in solidarity. Ultimately,

this will benefit the entire world, since development aid for poor countries implies creating wealth for all."

10. After decades of receiving aid, why do social problems like poverty, hunger and lack of housing persist in many countries?

Whether aid helps a country determine its own future or keeps it in a state of dependency is a legitimate question. International assistance, in the form of humanitarian aid or long-term development, can indeed risk making problems worse or taking the power to change society out of the hands of the people who live there.

For millions of people, international assistance is a matter of life and death in the short term, and a matter of being stuck in a cycle of poverty or being able to live a dignified life in the long term. Without changing the structural causes of poverty, scarcity and violence, however, financial assistance can end up treating the symptoms of inequality without ever addressing their source. This is why DPCC supports social movements and partners that also advocate for structural change, addressing the root causes of injustice and suffering.

Over the years, popes and other Catholic voices have identified many sources for these structural inequalities. For example, the terms of trade between countries in the Global South and countries in the Global North are often very unequal, favoring the interests of wealthy countries, as Pope Paul VI already identified in *Populorum Progressio* (§44). The foreign debt of many countries also holds back their development, an insight powerfully expressed by Pope John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (§19) and Jubilee 2000. The natural resources of countries in the Global South are heavily extracted in violent ways, creating what Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, called an "ecological debt" owed by the Global North to the South (§51). And as Pope Leo XVI has recently reminded us in *Magnifica Humanitas*, military spending is taking resources away from common goods like health care and education (§204) while advances in AI technologies run the real risk of deepening rather than resolving existing inequalities.

Despite decades of international aid flowing to poor countries, poverty and inequality persist because of these and other structural injustices. Poverty and inequality are not natural results of some countries lacking resources and others having resources. In fact, many poor countries are home to incredibly valuable natural resources, land and labour, yet this value is disproportionately drained into wealthy countries. Poverty is not a hole that needs to be filled with aid; poverty is a product of an unjust system. Unless these structural inequalities are addressed, social problems will continue.

On its own, aid cannot resolve these problems. If aid is offered in true solidarity, however, it can provide necessary interventions that support peoples' leadership in ways that save lives and carve out alternatives spaces while these injustices persist, laying the foundation for transformational change. International assistance, then, needs to be integrated into efforts to build strong, grassroots movements that empower local communities and countries to stand up for themselves, with the support of people in the Global North.

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