



A woman waves a "Christians for USAID" poster Feb. 5, 2025, at a rally near the U.S. Capitol supporting the U.S. Agency for International Development, known as USAID. The agency, a top funder of Catholic Relief Services and other humanitarian work worldwide, is under threat as the Trump administration moves to dismantle it. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)



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Catholics joined other Christians who participated in a mass rally Feb. 5 near the U.S. Capitol protesting the Trump administration's ongoing effort to shutter the U.S. Agency for International Development. The agency, known as USAID, is a top funder of Catholic Relief Services and other humanitarian work worldwide.

"I wonder if those who are making this decision, starting with President [Donald] Trump and Elon Musk and all of the others who have agreed to this very ugly way of moving into office, have they ever spoken with the people who are the recipients of USAID in other countries?" said [Marie Dennis](#), senior program director of Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, who was at the event. "I mean, name a country in the world where people are suffering and USAID is not there. I think it's just heartbreaking."

Contact NCR if you were affected

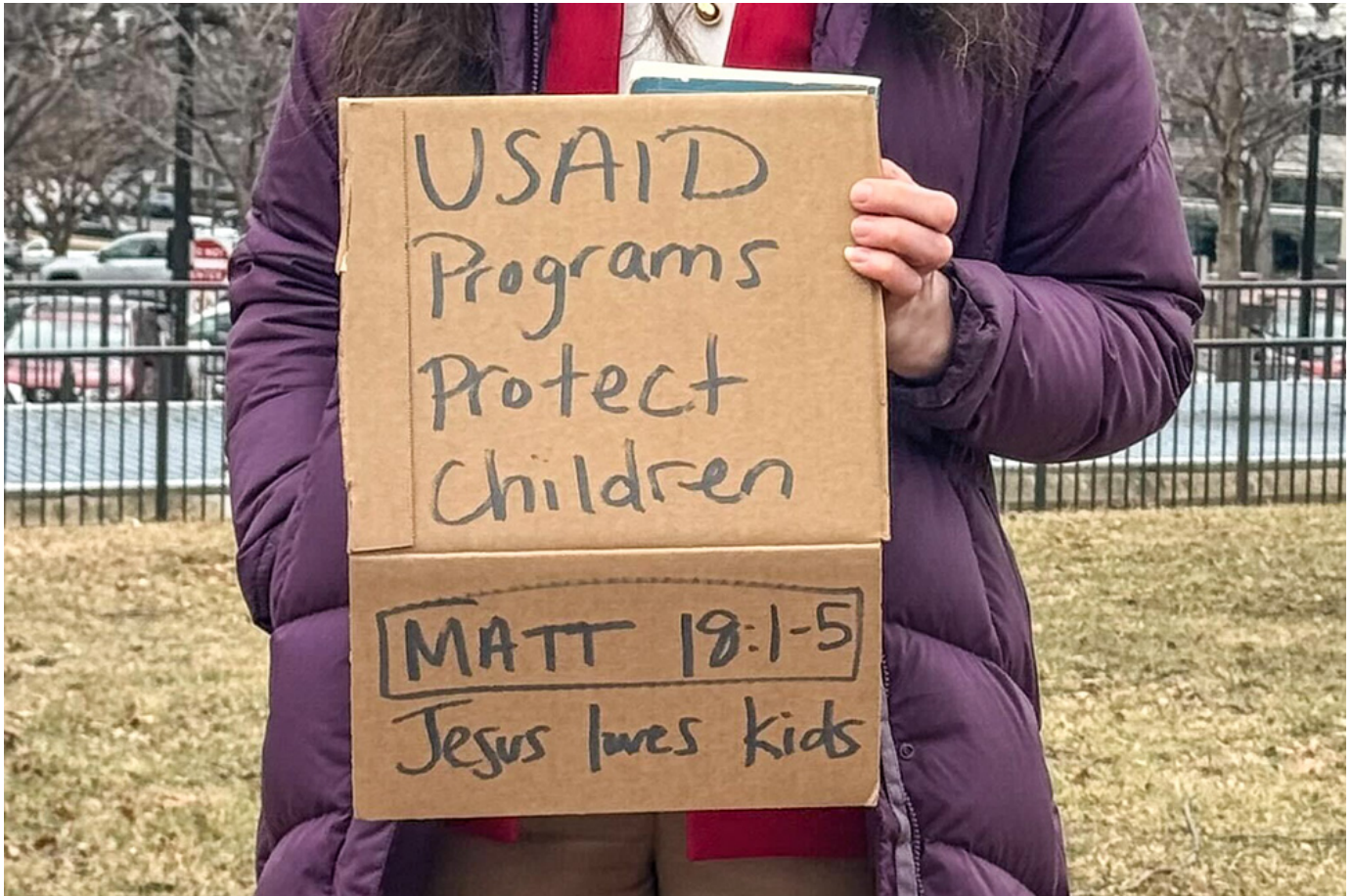
NCR is looking to speak to anyone affected by the layoffs and program shutdown from Catholic Relief Services. Please email us at [**ncr_editor@ncronline.org**](mailto:ncr_editor@ncronline.org). We can protect your confidentiality if you request it.

The rally came as the Trump administration announced that all of the agency's staff around the world would be placed on leave starting Feb. 7, in addition to freezing outgoing aid that contractors and organizations such as Catholic Relief Services would use to carry out their work in other countries.

National Catholic Reporter exclusively [reported](#) Feb. 5 that because of the freeze of funds, CRS plans to cut as much as half of its staff this year. Other organizations, including many faith-based, also are facing [cuts](#).

The Congressional Research Service raised legal questions Feb. 3 about whether USAID — which helps with job training, education, clean water projects and other humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries — can be dismantled without congressional approval, even as Musk [boasted](#) on social media that he "spent the

weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper."



A woman holds a sign at a protest in Washington on Feb. 5. The administration's attempt to dismantle USAID is "hurting the cause of caring for the poor and needy," she said. (NCR/Rhina Guidos)

A woman at the event who held a sign that said, "Jesus loves kids" and "USAID programs protect children," said she was a Christian who had worked at the agency until recently, but would not give out her name.

"As Christians, what's happening with USAID is hurting the cause of caring for the poor and needy," she told NCR. "It is getting in the way of us being an influence of good and showing Christ's love in a tangible and practical way. A pause in foreign funding means lifesaving assistance is not getting to women, children and men who are trying to do what's right."

It's also affecting the right to religious freedom in some countries, she said, including places where CRS offered help to those undergoing persecution.

Others showing up to support USAID were staffers like Susan Slomback, who told NCR that her career of 33 years had been "taken away from me" overnight. While the effects were devastating, there would be no other future "unless we fight for it," she said.

She said that through USAID she was involved in workforce development, women's empowerment, private enterprise development and civil society strengthening.

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"I'm very proud of the work I've done," Slomback said. "It affects everybody in the development sector. The unemployment rate has skyrocketed."

She said that the experience has been "frightening."

In the crowd, another woman waved a "Christians for USAID" poster, as lawmakers stepped in to talk to those gathered.

Dennis said that she urged those who don't understand what the demise of USAID would mean to the world, to learn about its work and its origins, particularly through agencies such as CRS.

"Pay attention to what, for example, CRS is doing, and other organizations like Doctors Without Borders, and so many who are committed to really caring for people. Listen to the stories. These are human stories," she said. "These are not cheaters, or thieves and corrupt people. They're human beings trying to survive around the world. ... We should be proud of that, not embarrassed about it.

"We should be looking for ways to keep our programs honest and excellent in every way. We should evaluate, we should reform and adjust, but it's just devastating in people's lives to have these programs completely ended and ended in such a mean way."

Read this next: [Exclusive: Catholic Relief Services lays off staff, cuts programs after USAID shakeup](#)

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)