

Latin American faith leaders criticize U.S. budget debate

News

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New York, August 19 (ENInews)--More than 100 faith leaders in Latin America have signed "an open letter to the Christian churches of the United States," asking fellow believers to raise their voices on behalf of poor people who would be affected by proposed U.S. budget cuts.

"We view with deep concern recent decisions in the United States that will add to the suffering of the most vulnerable members of U.S. society," the letter read. It was signed by leaders of the Latin American Council of Churches, the United Bible Society of Latin America, and evangelical and church groups in Honduras, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and other countries. It was sent to U.S. denominations and local churches, according to the communications office of Peace and Hope International in Lima, Peru. Peace and Hope International, a human rights organization that advocates for the poor, is based in Minneapolis, Minnesota (www.peaceandhopeinternational.org).

Noting that "vulnerable millions have been excluded from ... heated political debates," the letter referred to recent partisan debates on raising the United States' borrowing limit and cutting spending on such programs as Medicaid for low-income people, domestic and international food assistance and emergency response.

"Those who govern should know that the decisions made in your country have consequences for the economies of other nations around the world ... It seems to us immoral that politicians, with some exceptions, embrace only the interests of the wealthy, preferring to cut social assistance to those in greatest need," the letter said.

"We know the generosity and solidarity of the American people and the assistance programs to the poor that operate through churches and civil society organizations in Latin America. It is therefore inconceivable to us that the wealthy make no effort to take responsibility for the debt generated by the country as a whole. Paying more taxes will not bankrupt them," said the signers. The letter noted that cutting services to "the retired, the sick and others who are in need" is "brutally unjust."

The signers said the crisis is not only economic but moral, and that they stand in solidarity with American clergy and lay leaders who have signed on to a so-called "Circle of Protection" seeking to support retention of social assistance programs. (www.circleofprotection.us).