



Circle of Protection
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Press Release

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Religious Leaders Meet with President and ask Him to form ‘Circle of Protection’ around Programs for those in Need

Washington, DC, July 20, 2011 – In a meeting with President Barack Obama and senior White House staff, national Christian leaders asked the president to protect funding for programs for hungry and poor people in the ongoing budget debate and in any deal concerning the default crisis.

All agreed that we can get our fiscal house in order without doing so on the backs of those who are most vulnerable. The shared concern was to cut the deficit in a way that protects the safety net, protects the vulnerable, and maintains our investments in the future.

Christian leaders at today’s meeting included representatives from the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Council of Churches, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bread for the World, Sojourners, the Alliance to End Hunger, the Salvation Army, the National African American Clergy Network, the National Baptist Convention of America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. They are part of the “Circle of Protection,” a nonpartisan movement that insists budgets are moral documents and that poor and vulnerable people should be protected—not targeted—in efforts to reduce long-term deficits. White House staff in the meeting included Senior Advisory Valerie Jarrett, Director of Domestic Policy Council Melody Barnes and Director of the Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Joshua DuBois.

Leaders have been urging policy makers to recognize that a commitment to protect vulnerable people is a moral—not partisan—concern. They will continue to talk with policy makers as well as educate other Christians and voters about the moral issues at stake in the budget.

“As Christian leaders, we are committed to fiscal responsibility and shared sacrifice. We are also committed to resist budget cuts that undermine the lives, dignity, and rights of poor and vulnerable people,” the leaders wrote in a joint statement. “Therefore, we join with others to form a circle of protection around programs that meet the essential needs of hungry and poor people at home and abroad.”

President Obama agreed that the sacrifices needed in reducing the deficit must not be borne by the “least of these.”

The Circle of Protection statement has been signed by more than 60 heads of Christian denominations and religious organizations, and endorsed by 45 heads of development agencies as well as leaders of other faiths. The Circle of Protection movement has worked to uphold the bipartisan consensus that has long prevailed in deficit-reduction agreements—that programs serving poor and hungry people should be protected and exempted from any automatic cuts.

“As Christian leaders, we urge Congress and the administration to give moral priority to programs that protect the life and dignity of poor and vulnerable people in these difficult times, our broken economy, and our wounded world,” they write.

The Circle of Protection leaders have met with both Democratic and Republican leaders of Congress, and they have requested meetings with House Speaker John Boehner and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Circle of Protection leaders will host a teleconference tomorrow, July 21, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Media are invited to dial 888-296-4205 to participate. Speakers during the press call will include most of those who were at the White House meeting. For more information on the Circle of Protection and to view the full list of signatories, visit www.circleofprotection.us.

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The Circle of Protection is composed of more than 65 heads of denominations, relief and development agencies, and other Christian organizations. To download the pastoral letter, visit www.circleofprotection.us