June 30, 2011

President Barack Obama
Vice President Joe Biden
Speaker of the House John Boehner
House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

Dear Mr. President; Mr. Vice President; Speaker Boehner; Minority Leader Pelosi; Majority Leader Reid; Minority Leader McConnell:

In the face of historic deficits, the nation faces unavoidable choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. These choices are economic, political—and moral.

To this end, we believe the moral measure of the debate is how the most vulnerable among us fare. Poor and hungry people do not have powerful lobbies, but they do have the most compelling claim on our national conscience and common resources. As people of conscience we have an obligation to defend this claim in civic discourse, to join with others to insist that programs that serve the most vulnerable in our nation and around the world are protected.

We know from our diverse experiences—as program beneficiaries, social service providers, development workers, and community and faith leaders—that these programs meet basic human needs and protect the lives and dignity of people often relegated to the margins of the political process.

Early in the current debate about the U.S. budget, a group of humanitarian, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders joined together in a campaign of fasting, prayer and action to form a circle of protection around programs for poor and vulnerable people.

As the fasting campaign came to a close, an unprecedented coalition of Evangelical, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, African-American, and Latino Christian leaders joined together to defend the lives and dignity of poor and vulnerable people in the current budget debate, signing a joint statement calling on people of faith and conscience to form a "circle of protection" around programs meeting the essential needs of vulnerable people at home and abroad.

Today, we the undersigned stand as an even broader coalition of people of conscience to commend the collective efforts of these organizations and express our support for the following principles, outlined in the original "circle of protection" statement:

1) The nation needs to substantially reduce future deficits, but not at the expense of hungry and poor people.

2) Funding focused on reducing poverty should not be cut. It should be made as effective as possible, but not cut.

3) We urge our leaders to protect and improve poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance, domestically and internationally, to promote a better, safer world.

4) National leaders must review and consider tax revenues, military spending, and entitlement reform in the search for ways to share sacrifice and cut deficits.

5) A fundamental task is to create jobs and spur economic growth. Decent jobs at decent wages are the best path out of poverty, and restoring growth is a powerful way to reduce deficits.

6) The budget debate has a central moral dimension. Budgets are moral documents, and how we reduce future deficits are historic and defining moral choices.

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. This is our common mission, and we will strive to hold our leaders accountable to these shared priorities and principles.

Sincerely,

William M. Abrams, President
Trickle Up

Joanne Carter, Executive Director
RESULTS

Umar al-Qadi, President and CEO
Mercy-USA for Aid and Development

Edward Cooney, Executive Director
Congressional Hunger Center

Nancy A. Aossey, President and CEO
International Medical Corps

Sheila Crowley, President and CEO
National Low Income Housing Coalition

Rachel Audi, President
RISE, America!

Nan Dale, CEO
Action Against Hunger / ACF International

Abed Ayoub, CEO
Islamic Relief USA

Susan Davis, President and CEO
BRAC USA

Melissa Boteach, Campaign Manager
Half in Ten

Joseph M. Donahue, CEO
iMMAP

Jeff Bridges, National Spokesperson
No Kid Hungry

Suzanne Ehlers, President and CEO
Population Action International

Dave Evans, U.S. President
Food for the Hungry

Pierre Ferrari, CEO
Heifer International

James P. Firman, President and CEO
National Council on Aging

Helene D. Gayle, President and CEO
CARE USA

Robert Gillespie, President
Population Communication

Anne Goddard, President and CEO
ChildFund International

Rev. Douglas Greenaway, President and CEO
National WIC Association

Amb. Tony P. Hall, Executive Director
Alliance to End Hunger

Susan Henderson, Executive Director
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

Alan W. Houseman, Executive Director
Center for Law and Social Policy

Roger Johnson, President
National Farmers Union

Neal Keny-Guyer, CEO
Mercy Corps

Mary Ellen McNish, President and CEO
The Hunger Project

Ruth W. Messinger, President
American Jewish World Service

Jerry Michaud, Executive Director
End Hunger Network

Rev. Dr. Sid L. Mohn, President
Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights

Raymond Offenheiser, President
Oxfam America

Joan C. Parker, President and CEO
Counterpart International

Carol A. Peasley, President and CEO
The Center for Development and Population Activities

Linda Pfeiffer, President and CEO
INMED Partnerships for Children

Cris Revaz, Executive Director
Basic Education Coalition

George Rupp, President and CEO
International Rescue Committee

Ritu Sharma, Co-Founder and President
Women Thrive Worldwide

Kathy Spahn, President and CEO
Helen Keller International

Caryl M. Stern, President and CEO
U.S. Fund for UNICEF

Deborah Weinstein, Executive Director
Coalition on Human Needs

Michael Thiedke, Interim Executive Director
ActionAid USA

David Winder, CEO
WaterAid in America

Steve M. Waldmann, Executive Director
Society of St. Andrew

Samuel A. Worthington, President and CEO
InterAction

James D. Weill, President
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)