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Catholic Relief Services: Funding for humanitarian aid did not violate church teaching

Dennis Sadowski Catholic News Service | Jul. 24, 2012

WASHINGTON -- Catholic Relief Services said that $5.3 million in emergency funding it provided to the humanitarian organization CARE in 2010 under a U.S. government grant did not violate Catholic teaching.

In postings on its website July 20 and July 24, the U.S. bishops' international development and relief agency explained that the money it provided to CARE was specifically used for water and sanitation and food and nutrition programs for poor families in Central America and Africa and could not be transferred to other services which CARE provided.

The postings came in response to an online report that CARE provides contraceptives to women and other family planning services.

CRS said the report, which made its way to several websites, contained "inaccurate and scurrilous accusations."

"CRS is not in agreement with CARE's policy on contraception because we do not support any positions that would be in violation of Catholic teaching on human dignity and the sanctity of human life," the church relief agency said in an updated posting July 24.

"Any funding Catholic Relief Services provides to CARE or any other international humanitarian organization comes from an outside source such as the federal government or a foundation, for a specific project, and has strict restrictions on its use," the posting said.

"The grant in question with CARE was used to provide vitally needed food, clean water, sanitation services and basic nutrition programs to desperately poor families in Zimbabwe, Madagascar and five countries in Central America. Make no mistake about it, these programs are saving lives," the posting continued.

John Rivera, director of communications at CRS, declined further comment on the postings.

"The statement stands by itself," Rivera said.

The funding to CARE is outlined in a 2010 tax form CRS filed with the Internal Revenue Service. It outlines the agency's income and expenses including grants to partnering organizations.

CRS said July 20 that it vetted its partnerships with CARE and other organizations in 2011 with John Haas, president of the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia and a consultant to the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities. The agency said the center's review concluded:

-- None of the grants to partnering organizations constituted support of or involvement in immoral activities.

-- There is "little to no risk" of grant funds being used for programs outside of the grant request or for freeing up

money at the receiving organization for immoral purposes.

-- There could be a risk of "scandal over such partnerships if people become confused and wrongly assume that CRS was endorsing a partner's position on other issues."

CRS explained that it continues to work with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the bioethics center to address such risk.

Officials at CARE did not comment immediately on the report about its relationship with CRS.

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