

2023 Year in Review: In a Challenging Year, FCNL Advocates Led the Way for Peace and Justice

Written by Amelia Kegan | December 2023

In many ways, 2023 was a challenging year. Conflict was felt in nearly every arena, globally and on Capitol Hill. A divided Congress ground through a showdown over raising the debt ceiling. The government nearly shut down more than once, and the House cycled through two contentious Speaker elections, all while war and violence spread across the globe.

Through this, FCNL's lobbyists and advocates have remained steadfast in their work to advance peace and justice through public policy. We refused to be distracted, and as a result, our advocacy marked real progress. As we look towards a new year and Congress enters the second half of its 118th session, we see the potential for significant legislative victories at the beginning of 2024.

What follows is a status update on some of our top priorities for the 118th Congress (2023-2024).

Bill to Repeal the 2002 Iraq War Authorization Passes in Senate *Outcome: Win*

After years of sustained engagement by FCNL's grassroots advocates and lobbyists, on March 29, 2023, the Senate voted to repeal the 2002 Iraq War authorization, also known as the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) Against Iraq, for the first time.

In a decisive bipartisan vote of 66-30, the Senate passed S. 316, led by Sens. Tim Kaine (VA) and Todd Young (IN). Sen. Kaine thanked FCNL on the Senate floor for our persistent advocacy.

The bipartisan House version of the bill, led by Reps. Barbara Lee (CA-12), Chip Roy (TX-21), Abigail Spanberger (VA-7), and Tom Cole (R-4) currently has 70 cosponsors, including 26 Republicans—the largest ever number of cosponsors for a 2002 AUMF repeal bill.

Building Momentum for Investments in Peace and Justice *Outcome: Final Decision Pushed to January*

The congressional appropriations process is one of the most important public policy tools we can use to advocate for the world we seek. Using their insights and expertise, in 2023, FCNL's lobbyists developed a set of funding priorities that seek to bolster human rights and dignity, alleviate suffering, strengthen diplomacy, and reinforce our nation's values and global leadership.

We expect debate about FY2024 spending bills to extend into 2024, but thanks to your advocacy, we have seen significant progress toward protecting our priorities in the draft bills so far.

International Peacebuilding

FCNL's Advocacy Teams lead our work to protect critical investments in peacebuilding accounts. Collectively, they met with Congressional offices more than 500 times in 2023. Thanks to their effort, as of this writing, we have secured the following:

- \$25 million for Reconciliation Programs to support the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic, religious, and political groups in conflict-affected communities in House and Senate draft bills.
- \$60 million in the Senate for the Complex Crises Fund, which allows for the quick mobilization of funds to countries at risk of violent outbreaks.
- \$6 million for Atrocities Prevention, the State Department's only funding dedicated solely to the prevention of mass atrocities and genocide, in the House.
- This progress puts us on a path to protect these three critical accounts in final negotiations.

Stopping Gun Violence and Building Safer Communities

Violence interrupter programs are community-based initiatives that use peacebuilding approaches to help mitigate violence before it happens. The young adult advocates at FCNL's 2023 Spring Lobby Weekend helped lead our advocacy for investments in these life-saving initiatives. In an appropriations process marked by severe cuts in the House of Representatives, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed a modest increase to the Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVI) that funds these programs.

International Climate Finance

As one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, the United States has a moral responsibility to assist the developing countries bearing the worst impacts of the climate crisis. We welcome the Senate's strongly bipartisan investment of \$760 million for direct U.S. investments in renewable energy, climate adaptation, and conservation in developing countries. We are hopeful that, as Congress moves towards reconciling the House and Senate's very different bills, we will retain the strong funding levels within the Senate's bill and reject the House policy riders that preclude funding from confronting the climate challenge.

Protecting the U.S. Asylum System

Outcome: Final Decision Pushed to January

Congressional leaders are working to hammer out a bipartisan deal to provide aid to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan. However, in exchange for military and humanitarian aid, some Republicans are demanding harsh changes to U.S. immigration policy.

Bipartisan negotiations continue with proposals that would make it extremely difficult for people fleeing violence and persecution to claim asylum in the United States and put many more individuals at risk of deportation without due process. Instead of closing borders and eviscerating the U.S. asylum system, the

White House and Congress should focus on investing in refugee protection and resettlement and ensuring a humane and orderly asylum system.

Extending and Expanding the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act *Outcome: Final Decision Pushed to Spring 2024*

After two years of focused advocacy alongside directly impacted communities, Congress excluded a key provision from the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, which would have expanded the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA).

This initiative, which earned bi-partisan support in the Senate (61-37), would extend crucial financial and healthcare support to victims of nuclear weapons testing, uranium mining, and nuclear waste. The exclusion of the bipartisan provision to extend and expand RECA was not just a policy failure but a failure of empathy and responsibility. With RECA set to expire in May 2024, the absence of this extension means many affected communities risk losing vital health coverage and compensation. Our work in supporting these communities is far from over. FCNL will continue to advocate for RECA's expansion to be included in alternative 2024 spending packages.

Expanding the Child Tax Credit to Reduce Child Poverty *Outcome: Final Decision Pushed to January*

For years, FCNL has urged Congress to expand the Child Tax Credit (CTC). There is growing bipartisan momentum to do so, and we are pressing legislators to focus on expanding the CTC for families who currently do not receive the full credit because they do not earn enough money. It is very possible we could see a tax deal come together in January 2024 that includes tax breaks for businesses while also expanding the Child Tax Credit.

Responding to the War in Israel and Palestine *Outcome: Work Ongoing in 2024*

We are heartbroken by the months of violence in Israel and Gaza. We unequivocally condemn Hamas' attack and inhumane treatment of civilians and call for the release of all hostages. We also condemn the indiscriminate and violent Israeli response that has already claimed the lives of thousands of Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

More war and weapons won't bring peace. Thanks to growing grassroots pressure, more than 60 members of Congress have publicly called for a ceasefire. FCNL advocates have led the way, holding dozens of meetings with their members of Congress, publishing letters and opinion pieces in local newspapers, and sending more than 430,000 letters to lawmakers.