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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

April 5, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

Russia's reckless and illegal invasion of Ukraine is resulting in a grave global food security crisis that threatens to push millions of people into hunger and destabilize regions of strategic importance to the United States. We therefore urge the administration to take immediate action, in coordination with international partners, to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to improve the timeliness and expand the reach of international emergency and development food assistance, including by fully leveraging existing authorities, resources, and programs authorized pursuant to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151 et seq.), the Global Food Security Act of 2016 (22 U.S.C. 9301 et seq.), and the Food for Peace Act (7 U.S.C. 1691 et seq.), identifying gaps, and working with Congress avert disaster.

Russia's war in Ukraine is reducing the availability of staple food commodities upon which millions of people depend and driving an already grave humanitarian situation towards catastrophe. Market data shows drastic increases in the cost of staple grains, fuel, shipping, and fertilizer. These knock-on effects, triggered by Russia's brutal war, will tragically lead to more suffering, death, and global instability.

The cost of delivering food assistance is expected to skyrocket, with the UN World Food Programme warning that it expects an initial price increase of \$71 million per month to conduct its operations, leaving 3.8 million people without access to emergency food assistance. The impacts of Putin's war are exacerbating an already grave humanitarian crisis triggered, in large measure, by the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on global hunger and poverty. The compounding effects of these cascading events may create one of the worst food insecurity crises in decades. Of significant concern are countries like Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Somalia, which are already facing dire levels of food insecurity, and where current needs are outpacing humanitarian resources.

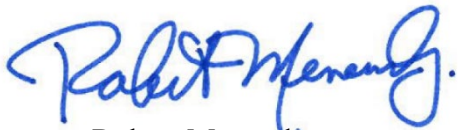
We urge the administration to tackle this crisis with a strong, coordinated, and innovative response. We therefore call on you to swiftly convene experts from across the government to devise and implement a robust, multi-pronged, actionable plan to address the increasing threats to global food security, including by improving supply chain efficiencies and shipping logistics in close collaboration with the private sector.

We further call on the U.S. Agency for International Development, as the lead for international disaster response and development, to fully leverage emergency authorities in the Food for Peace Act and chapter 9 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2292), draw down the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, and break down the existing silos between development and humanitarian actors inside the agency.

These actions should be paired with advocacy for smart investments by multilateral institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and should leverage our activities with those of our international allies and partners. Lastly, we know that protracted conflict and political instability remain the core underlying drivers of food insecurity which, in turn, drives even further conflict and instability. The U.S. Department of State must redouble its diplomatic efforts to break this vicious cycle, resolve global conflicts, and push to lift access barriers to life-saving assistance.

We stand ready to support your efforts and thank you for your work to address these issues of grave national security importance.

Sincerely,



Robert Menéndez
Chairman



James E. Risch
Ranking Member