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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 24, 2020

The Honorable John Barsa
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Acting Administrator Barsa,

I write with concerns about the decision-making process driving the provision of ventilators to foreign countries as part of the Administration's international COVID-19 response efforts. To date, USAID has submitted two Congressional Notifications (CN) outlining the Administration's plans to spend approximately \$202 million in Global Health Program, Emergency Reserve Funds and Economic Support Funds, provided by the CARES Act, to purchase 7,582 ventilators to distribute to up to 40 countries. While the notifications provide some details, I am concerned that the NSC's influence on these decisions both circumvents longstanding USAID procurement and accountability policies and interjects political agendas into how USAID allocates its Global Health and Emergency Reserve Fund resources.

In this time of global crisis, it is important to direct assistance to countries and communities with the most need. If we neglect the least-prepared countries and communities, COVID-19 will inevitably find its way back to the United States. To carry out its oversight role, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee must fully understand exactly how USAID is addressing this global crisis and how it will ensure that the most vulnerable countries receive assistance. Therefore, I request answers to the following:

1. What is USAID's role in the decision-making process regarding where to send ventilators? What is the NSC's role?
2. Has USAID conducted, or is it using, needs-based assessments to determine whether ventilators are the most efficient and effective use of assistance dollars, including evaluating whether recipient countries can effectively deploy ventilators? If so, please provide that information to the Committee.
3. What steps is USAID taking to ensure that countries have policies and practices in place that would ensure that patients will have equitable access to the ventilators?
4. What commitments is USAID obtaining from foreign governments receiving U.S. assistance that they will engage in science-based public health actions and interventions to bend the curve of COVID-19 infections and make information about the spread of the disease public on a sustained basis?
5. How is USAID determining the companies from which it purchases ventilators? How much is USAID paying for each ventilator?
6. Is USAID being instructed to purchase ventilators from specific manufacturers?

USAID has long provided life-saving assistance to countries facing development challenges and disasters assistance. COVID-19 has given USAID's work new urgency and importance, as no single country will be truly safe until all countries can contain the pandemic effectively.

I request that you respond by July 3, 2020. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez." The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Robert Menendez
Ranking Member