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Chairman Young, Ranking Member Merkley, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to come and speak with you today about the unprecedented food security crisis the world is facing.

My name is Matthew Nims, and I am the Acting Director of USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP). The United States has long been the largest provider of emergency food assistance in the world and we are grateful for your continued support to humanitarian efforts and raising awareness to the struggles of the world's most vulnerable people. USAID uses a mix of tools to respond to emergency food needs, including U.S. commodities, locally and regionally procured food, vouchers, cash transfers and other complementary activities to reach the world's most food insecure with lifesaving aid. We also support development programs that address the root causes of hunger in areas of chronic crisis to build resilience and food security of local communities.

Global donors continue to be confronted this year with major humanitarian crises around the world, which demand an immediate, substantial, and collaborative response. The USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, warned early on that 2017 would see an unprecedented 81 million people across 45 countries in need of emergency food assistance, largely due to persistent conflict, severe drought and economic instability. South Sudan experienced famine earlier this year and three other countries—Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen—face the threat of famine, putting a combined 20 million people at risk of severe hunger or starvation. In terms of scale, more than twice the populations of New York City and Washington, D.C. combined are at risk.

Over the past year, I have traveled to some of these countries and others facing severe food insecurity to see firsthand the situation on the ground. Today I want to share with you more about the ongoing crises in these countries, what we and others in the international community are doing to respond, and the challenges these countries face.

**SOUTH SUDAN**

Let me start with South Sudan, where famine was declared earlier this year in two counties. This crisis is man-made. More than three years of horrific violence in South Sudan has transformed the world's youngest nation into one of the most food-insecure countries in the world. Despite our efforts throughout the conflict to stave off famine in collaboration with the UN World Food Program (WFP), UNICEF and other partners, famine was declared for about 100,000 people in parts of the country in February due to the on-going conflict and lack of safe and sustained access for humanitarian workers. The international community responded by scaling-up humanitarian activities and, in June, it was announced that famine conditions had subsided. However, during that period, overall food security across the country continued to deteriorate and life-threatening hunger has spread in both scope and scale. An estimated 6 million people—more than half of South Sudan's population—now face life-threatening hunger.

People continue to be driven from their homes by violence, and many are forced to eat water lilies and wild grasses to survive. Innocent civilians are targeted by violence from armed actors on all sides of the conflict, and have little to no access to basic services. Despite numerous cease-fire proclamations, the fighting has continued. It has disrupted markets and harvests, and the South Sudanese people—having exhausted all their resources—are left with little or nothing to survive. Many face a choice no one should have to face—stay where they are and starve, or run for their lives, potentially into mortal danger, so they can find food.

The warring parties of this conflict are responsible for this situation. Nearly four million South Sudanese have been displaced from their homes internally or as refugees, and the exodus of 1.9 million South Sudanese into neighboring countries—including into conflict areas of Sudan—shows the desperation they face as the geographic scale of the conflict spreads. Schools have emptied out, leaving 1.8 million children out of school and 17,000 children recruited into armies.

Nearly 1 million Southern Sudanese have fled to Uganda, more than half of them just since January. The Bidi Bidi refugee settlement did not exist this time last year yet is now home to more than 270,000 refugees, who continue to arrive at an average of more than 1,000 each day. I had the honor of traveling with Chairman Corker and Senator Coons to Bidi Bidi in April where many refugees bravely shared their harrowing stories with us. At the intake center where refugees are registered, many were grateful for the food they were provided by WFP with U.S. support, the first food many had had in days or even a week as they made their trek from South Sudan to Uganda. We met young girls who ran from conflict with their younger siblings and now were the sole family caregiver. We also met with young women, who were raped as they fled or as soldiers ransacked their villages, and who were now pregnant and trying to rebuild their lives on their own; and we met with many who just wanted peace, to return home and resume being productive members of their community.

The United States continues to be at the forefront of a robust humanitarian effort to save as many lives as possible. The United States, through USAID and the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration has provided nearly \$2.75 billion since 2013 to help the South Sudanese people. We deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) in December 2013 to lead the U.S. humanitarian response; the DART remained in place through the July 2016 violence and remains on the ground managing the U.S. humanitarian response. Throughout the crisis, and ramping-up over the past six months, the U.S. has responded with comprehensive humanitarian assistance, including food, safe drinking water, emergency medical care, critical nutrition treatment, and emergency shelter and relief supplies. So far in FY 2017, we have provided more than 100,000 metric tons of food assistance, at times using airdrops and mobile teams to reach populations in famine in highly insecure areas.

Our health, water and sanitation interventions are critical because we know that people don't only die in large numbers from hunger, but from the diseases to which they succumb when hunger weakens their immune systems, leaving them susceptible to deadly but largely preventable diseases, such as cholera and malaria. Our assistance is also helping to provide psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence, give children a safe place to learn as an alternative to fighting, and reunite families separated by fighting.

However, significant challenges remain. While a robust international humanitarian response helped roll back famine, the continued failure of South Sudan's leaders to prioritize the well-being of their people will result in continued deterioration, making a return to famine a real possibility in coming months and years. Our partners continue to face security and access challenges that make our life-saving operations more dangerous and complex. Government-mandated bureaucratic impediments, numerous road checkpoints by all parties to the conflict, weather-related obstacles, and limited communication and transportation infrastructure have restricted humanitarian activities across South Sudan. Additionally, aid workers have been harassed, attacked, or killed, and relief supplies looted by all parties to the conflict. According to the UN, South Sudan is the most dangerous place in the world for humanitarian workers--at least 84 aid workers have died in South Sudan since 2013. We call on all parties to allow safe, rapid, and unhindered access to people most in need. All parties to this conflict must stop targeting aid workers and stop impeding humanitarian response efforts.

## **SOMALIA**

In 2011, nearly 260,000 Somalis—half of them children under five— died in a famine triggered by what was at the time the Horn of Africa's worst drought in more than 60 years. Today, Somalia once again faces the threat of famine. Recent analysis by FEWS NET indicates troubling parallels to conditions which led to the 2011 famine. In many areas, vegetation

conditions are the worst on record, surpassing those observed during the 2011 crisis. Somalia's overall below-average April-to-June rainfall was insufficient to end the country's ongoing drought, which is expected to continue until at least the onset of the October-to-December rainy season. FEWS NET estimates that the upcoming harvest will be up to 60 percent below average, compounding an already dire food security situation. In addition to these factors, the situation is further exacerbated by ongoing conflict.

Despite the mitigating impact of humanitarian assistance, the number of people facing life-threatening levels of acute food insecurity in Somalia increased from approximately 2.9 million to more than 3.2 million people between February and May. An estimated 6.7 million Somalis—more than half the population—are currently in need of immediate humanitarian assistance as a result of the combined effects of the drought and ongoing conflict. An elevated risk of Famine-level acute food insecurity in Somalia persists due to the population's reliance on emergency food assistance, the high likelihood of a poor harvest, high acute malnutrition, and Somalia's ongoing cholera outbreak. Approximately 1.4 million children younger than five years of age in Somalia are projected to face acute levels of malnutrition by the end of 2017, with 275,000 facing severe acute malnutrition, according to revised projections by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

As sources of safe water dry up, cases of waterborne disease are on the rise. The UN reports more than 53,000 suspected and confirmed cases of cholera, including 795 related deaths across the country, since January 2017. In comparison, the 2016 cholera outbreak with a caseload of 15,619 was considered one of the largest and longest that Somalia has undergone over the last five years. The drought is also forcing people from their homes. According to the UN, more than 761,000 people have been displaced due to drought since November 2016. Many displaced families are not getting the emergency aid they need because the urban centers and existing settlements to which they are fleeing lack comprehensive systems to register and assist new arrivals.

The crisis in Somalia also has regional effects, as people leave to look for food and support in neighboring countries. This migration compounds the already tenuous situations in Ethiopia and Kenya. We support the food security needs of refugees in these countries and are seeing high concern regarding malnutrition rates among those arriving into Ethiopia from southern Somalia. These countries are also facing inflows of refugees from South Sudan, making the impacts of these food security crises regional in nature.

Over the last several months, the United States has worked to rapidly scale up our emergency response efforts in Somalia, providing vital food and malnutrition treatment and ensuring communities have safe drinking water and improved sanitation and hygiene. The United States has provided more than \$336 million in emergency assistance to date in 2017 for Somalia.

USAID partners are distributing food rations to the most acutely food-insecure people, as well as food vouchers and cash transfers where markets are functioning. We are also strategically utilizing existing long-term development resources where possible to complement rapid emergency humanitarian assistance. USAID's assistance in Somalia is typically linked to activities designed to help build the resilience of the Somali people, including vocational training or productive asset building activities, such as rehabilitating community water and sanitation infrastructure or roads. However, due to the rapidly deteriorating food security situation, many of these productive activities are on hold until households' food security improves.

This is the first time since Somalia's devastating 2011 famine that FEWS NET has warned of an elevated risk of famine in the country. But it is important to recognize the differences between the Somalia of 2011 and now. The Somali Federal Government formed just a few years ago, while access to affected populations remains a key obstacle, there is wider humanitarian access, and investments in development and resilience have helped better position some communities to endure this drought. The United States continues to help build the capacity of the fledgling Somali Government to support its own population. The Federal and State Governments have formed Drought Coordination Committees, which work to raise funds and coordinate the delivery of assistance to communities across Somalia. The drought Somalia faces is also affecting the greater Horn. Importantly, the Governments of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia all publicly committed earlier this year to regional cooperation and cross-border collaboration to tackle both this drought and, through longer-term investments, the underlying fragility that tips vulnerable communities into crisis in recurring droughts.

## **NIGERIA**

The savagery of Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa and the ensuing conflict in Nigeria's northeast has triggered a humanitarian crisis, violations in international humanitarian law, and protection risks in northeast Nigeria and surrounding countries in the Lake Chad Basin region. The conflict has displaced over two million people and leaving more than 10 million vulnerable individuals in need of humanitarian assistance.

Food assistance and nutrition continue to be the most critical needs in northeast Nigeria. An estimated 5.2 million people face severe food insecurity during the current May to October lean season in northeastern Nigeria. The most vulnerable populations include those displaced in Borno State, where famine already likely occurred in 2016. Despite improvements in humanitarian access and partner capacity, insecurity and limited capacity continue to constrain the reach and scale of assistance available. Though insecurity limits access and information gathering, there are signs that a famine may be ongoing in parts of the state that are inaccessible to humanitarian actors. As access has improved, humanitarian agencies are encountering

communities with dire levels of hunger and malnutrition, particularly among children. In addition, a recent influx of refugees returning to Nigeria from Cameroon is causing overcrowding in internally displaced person sites in northeast Nigeria, increasing humanitarian needs and straining available resources.

This crisis involves numerous other tragedies and protection issues. We hear reports of families without shelter and on the brink of starvation, vulnerable women and girls forced to trade sex for food to keep their families alive, men and boys forcibly recruited into armed groups or killed, and children whose worlds have been shattered after months of captivity. We also have reports of girls as young as eight years old being used as suicide bombers. Yet, the severe and heartbreaking needs of these vulnerable communities far exceed the resources available to help them.

Since late 2016, the UN and NGOs have scaled up emergency operations. Since December 2016, WFP continues to reach more than 1 million people in northeast Nigeria each month with in-kind food assistance or cash-based transfers. Relief organizations have also expanded nutrition programs, including activities that train community volunteers to help screen and refer malnourished children to health centers. UNHCR and ICRC continue to provide protection to internally displaced persons (IDPs), unaccompanied children and separated minors, as well as assistance to refugees returning voluntarily from Cameroon.

Despite clear progress, the global emergency response is still not meeting all of the widespread needs due to the scale of the crisis and the persistent insecurity that thwarts humanitarian operations. Faced with threats of ambushes, suicide attacks, and improvised explosive devices, our partners are bravely putting themselves in danger to deliver aid to those who need it most. They must be allowed to continue their important work without fear of violence. As we continue to scale up our humanitarian response to this crisis, we must work with the Government of Nigeria and the governments around the Lake Chad Basin to reach communities that have been most impacted by insecurity perpetuated by Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa.

## **YEMEN**

There continues to be grave concern about the risk of famine in Yemen, now the world's largest food security emergency, where more than seventeen million people—60 percent of the country's population—are food insecure, including nearly seven million people who are unable to survive without food assistance. Simultaneously, the people of Yemen also face the world's worst cholera outbreak.

The primary driver of this crisis is the ongoing conflict that broke out in late 2014. Fighting has also hampered commercial trade, which is particularly devastating in a country that imports 90 percent of its food and most of its fuel and medicine. The food that does make it to markets continues to be increasingly expensive, with some foods doubling in price as supplies dwindle. For one of the poorest countries, these price increases dramatically affect people's ability to buy food and are further exacerbating the food security situation.

Two years of conflict has disrupted more than Yemen's food supply. Two million people have been forced to flee from their homes, and more than 75 percent of the country is in need of food or other humanitarian assistance—including approximately 462,000 children who are severely malnourished. During a major food crisis like this, preventable disease is often the leading cause of death. In many cases, diseases like cholera also inhibit the ability to treat malnutrition, so they must be treated first. Contaminated drinking water, unsafe hygiene practices, a lack of sanitation services, and a crippled health care system are big contributors to the resurgence of a cholera outbreak that originally began in October.

To reach people in need, our humanitarian partners are navigating active conflict, checkpoints and other access constraints, bureaucratic impediments, and heavily damaged infrastructure. Despite these obstacles, USAID, PRM, and our partners are able to reach millions of people with life-saving aid, and the United States continues to mount a robust humanitarian response. Last month, USAID partner WFP reached nearly five million people with emergency food assistance. Our programs provide food vouchers and nutrition services. Mobile health clinics bring much-needed emergency medical services in a time when nearly 15 million people lack access to basic health care. We are also providing hygiene kits, safe drinking water, and improved access to sanitation services to fight malnutrition and stave off disease. In late May, WFP provided logistical support to an UN-chartered aircraft carrying 67 tons of intravenous fluids and cholera kits to Yemen. For children especially, the toll of conflict can have lasting effects. Our mobile protection teams provide treatment to children throughout the country.

There is no doubt that our humanitarian programs are saving lives. According to FEWS NET, without the large-scale, international humanitarian assistance currently being provided to partners in country, the food security situation would be significantly worse across Yemen. According to FEWS NET, if imports decrease and markets are further restricted, there is a threat of famine this year. We call on all parties to ensure unimpeded access for commercial and humanitarian goods throughout the country.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge that these four crises are our areas of greatest concern, but they represent the spearhead of humanitarian emergencies, including ongoing crises in Syria, Iraq and increasing concern in places like the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In particular, I would draw your attention to the worrying news coming

out of Ethiopia. According to FEWS NET, the situation in southern Ethiopia is deteriorating rapidly and may be catastrophic without additional intervention. This drought in southern Ethiopia comes as the country's north and central highland areas continue to recover from a severe drought last year that was triggered by El Niño and consecutive poor rainy seasons. Thus far in fiscal year 2017, the United States has provided more than \$225 million in humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, including for refugees also present in the drought-affected areas. We are continuing to ramp-up our assistance, including resilience investments to support Ethiopia's capacity to better withstand shocks like this severe drought in the future.

## **ROOT CAUSES AND CHALLENGES**

Throughout the hotspots highlighted, several concerning themes emerge. Protracted, complex crises are taking up increasing amounts of scarce humanitarian resources, causing unprecedented population movements, and presenting unique challenges, including to U.S. national security. USAID estimates that in FY 2017 over half of our humanitarian funding will be allocated toward just six major emergencies, nearly all conflict driven. This notable shift to conflict as the largest driver of humanitarian crisis over the past decade is remarkable. Ten years ago, 80 percent of humanitarian resources were dedicated to natural disasters and 20 percent were used in response to conflicts. Today those numbers are reversed. The number of people in need of humanitarian aid has more than doubled over the past decade, and more than 65 million people are displaced internally or as refugees as a result of conflict and persecution. This shift towards conflict-related crises brings with it different challenges such as ensuring critical and safe access to communities in need.

To address these challenges, we are adapting to increasingly complex environments, and finding ways to provide assistance efficiently and safely, in order to save more lives. USAID is continually seeking ways to make our dollars stretch further, to reach the most people with the assistance they urgently need. This includes everything from providing newly displaced families in Syria with smaller, more portable food packages, to using geolocation technology to track assistance all the way to the beneficiary; from introducing retinal scans to verify the right assistance is going to the right person to making sure our internal operations—from staffing, oversight and implementation—continues to improve.

USAID also seeks to prevent and mitigate the impact of conflict and political instability in the recognition that prevention is equally important in addressing the causes of humanitarian crisis, and is more cost-effective in the long run.

We also cannot forget the need to focus on resilience to shocks. While the crises we discussed here today are driven by conflict, building community and country level resilience to recurrent shocks, like drought, is vitally important. Building resilience to recurrent crises has emerged as a



priority for USAID and the U.S. Government, host governments, and development partners. The U.S. Government's new Global Food Security Strategy, developed last year as directed by the Global Food Security Act, elevates resilience within our work to combat the root causes of hunger, poverty and malnutrition. We have recognized that treating recurrent humanitarian crises as anomalies is extremely costly; including loss of lives and livelihoods, losses to national and regional economies, and the unsustainable financial burden of recurrent humanitarian spending in the same places. A UK study of Ethiopia and Kenya estimated that for two large droughts every \$1 invested in resilience would result in \$2.90 in reduced humanitarian spending, avoided losses and improved development outcomes over a decade. This ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

A comparison of two communities in Malawi during the 2016 El Niño drought further illustrates the point. In one community, responding to urgent, life-saving needs cost an average of \$390 per household. This community will also likely require similar assistance during future droughts. By contrast, a neighboring community in which we invested an estimated \$376 per household over five years through a Title II development program between 2009 and 2014 did not require food assistance in 2016.

What we cannot do is provide a humanitarian solution to a political problem, and we are working with our colleagues at the Department of State, our partners around the world, and the international community in order to continue to press for cessation of hostilities and enduring political solutions that bring conflict to an end. The United States relies on bilateral and multilateral channels to engage with foreign governments, international organizations and other partners to seek address the root causes of global food insecurity and famine. Only then can we move away from the dire human cost of these conflicts, and towards prosperity and stability.

Addressing humanitarian needs is also a global responsibility. As the President and Secretary of State have said, other countries need to do more to help meet these needs. The Administration continues to work with other donors to increase their share of the response. In addition, the U.S. is challenging international and non-governmental relief organizations to expedite efforts to become more efficient and effective. The Administration is evaluating needs and responding robustly and responsibly based on priorities, access, the capacity of our implementing partners, and other donors. Our priority is to ensure that funding is programmed responsibly and effectively.

Thank you for your attention to these issues and for the support Congress has provided to USAID and specifically our humanitarian programs over the years. Through your generous support, the United States at the G-20 meeting announced an additional \$639 million in

humanitarian assistance for the millions of people affected by food insecurity and violence in these countries, bringing total FY 2017 commitments so far for affected people from these four countries to over \$1.8 billion (or about 20 percent of the total FY 2017 humanitarian appropriations). We do this work not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is in the interest of the American people and promotes global stability. Please know that your support transforms and saves lives every day.