

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

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Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and
International Economic, Energy, and Environmental Policy
"The Four Famines": Root Causes and a Multilateral Action Plan
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I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Young, Ranking Member Merkley, and the members of this subcommittee for holding this important and timely hearing today. Refugees International (RI) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people in parts of the world impacted by conflict, persecution and forced displacement. Based here in Washington, we conduct fact-finding missions to research and report on the circumstances of displaced populations in countries such as Somalia, Iraq, Uganda, and Turkey. RI does not accept any government or United Nations funding, which helps ensure that our advocacy is impartial and independent.

I've had the great honor to be involved in efforts to assist vulnerable communities, as a congressional committee staff member, as the senior humanitarian official at the White House during the 1990's, as the UN's Deputy Envoy for Tsunami Recovery between 2005 and 2007, and as Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration some years ago.

In a career spanning more than three decades, I've dealt with many vexing issues. But I have never been more concerned about the international humanitarian challenges confronting the United States and the world. And I have never been more uncertain about the collective willingness within the United States government to continue to assume the mantle of global leadership that has been so critical over the past many decades.

We have reached the highest global displacement numbers ever recorded, with over 65 million displaced as a result of conflict, persecution, violence or human rights violations. Some 22.5 million of the displaced are refugees. Lack of humanitarian access continues to complicate responses and aid workers are working in both difficult and often very dangerous environments. And new emergencies, combined with protracted crises, are making more demands on the international humanitarian architecture.

Conflict and persecution are primary drivers of displacement, but RI is also deeply concerned about the impact of climate change on desertification and on food production, especially in poor countries with populations that rely on rain-fed agriculture to survive. Unfortunately, these

regions are often characterized by poor governance, fragility and conflict, which together with more frequent and severe drought, creates a lethal combination that will put millions more at risk of famine in the coming decades.

As members of this subcommittee know, the United States has a proud history of providing humanitarian and development assistance. The support and leadership of the United States in humanitarian response has never been more essential and I want to thank this Congress for appropriating an additional \$990 million in the Fiscal Year 2017 omnibus to better support the famine response in Northeast Nigeria, Yemen, Somalia, and South Sudan.

In fact, Congress has long been a stalwart supporter of assistance to vulnerable communities around the world, based certainly on an understanding that the United States has security interests in promoting reconciliation and well-being in circumstances where despair and misery threatens stability. But informed by my conversations with Members and staff over many years, it is clear to me that such support also reflects a simple belief in the importance of saving lives and exercising world leadership in doing so.

For this reason, the massive cuts proposed in President Trump's Fiscal Year 2018 budget, particularly regarding support for international organizations involved in humanitarian response, for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account and for the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account, are deeply alarming. Proposed cuts would dramatically compromise the capacity of the United States to support friends and allies seeking to address food security and risks of famine as well as broader humanitarian challenges and would send a dangerous signal. While I am heartened by the forceful and bipartisan nature of the pushback on such drastic proposed funding cuts, the effort to maintain funding must continue – as the voices of the world's most vulnerable populations must be heard.

I only hope that in any negotiations on the humanitarian assistance budget, Members of Congress avoid splitting the difference between what has been proposed and what expanding needs require. Splitting the difference, for example, between current U.S. humanitarian assistance levels and the Administration's proposal would still mean draconian cuts at a time of extraordinary humanitarian challenges, and at a time in which, at current levels, our humanitarian assistance constitutes far less than one percent of the federal budget.

Conflict, Persecution and Displacement -- and Risks of Famine

To be sure, food security is an economic development challenge which is being exacerbated by the effects of climate change. But it is also, to a much larger extent, a challenge related to governance. In short, where there is an absence of repression and an absence of conflict, there is also an absence of famine. In places like Somalia, Northeast Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen, it is the very characteristics of persecution and conflict that create the risks of severe food insecurity or famine: destruction of crops, the need to flee land that has provided livelihoods, and restrictions on access to information about populations in need, restrictions on freedom of movement for the displaced and restrictions on humanitarian access for those providing aid. Where those characteristics are not present, such risks recede dramatically.

So what is the general lesson from this observation? It is that investments in prevention are critical to improving governance and thereby preventing food insecurity and famine. Some twenty years ago, the Carnegie Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict identified two kinds of prevention: operational prevention, or “measures applicable in the face of immediate crisis,” and structural prevention, or “measures that ensure that crises do not arise in the first place or, if they do, they do not recur.”

The tools of the first kind of prevention – operational prevention – are largely reflected in measures such as early warning and response, preventive diplomacy, United Nations peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance, among others. Unfortunately, the Administration’s proposed budget cuts will have a dramatic impact on the United States ability to support these kinds of measures.

And the tools of the second kind of prevention – structural prevention – are reflected, for example, in the longer term development and resilience building efforts of the U.S. Agency for International Development. And here too, the Administration’s proposed budget cuts will severely impact USAID’s capacities in this area.

Thus, at the risk of repeating myself, we must be very aware that cuts in budgets for development, including climate change adaptation, for peacekeeping, for humanitarian response, and for refugee aid will only mean greater risks of food insecurity and famine, and greater needs for food aid.

Somalia

Overview: A report from the Famine Early Warning System earlier this month paints a very troubling picture, indicating that a food security emergency is expected in the Horn of Africa through early 2018, resulting from poor rains and attendant challenges. This is expected to result in “a continuation of Emergency (IPC Phase 4) acute food insecurity in southeastern Ethiopia and Somalia,” with a risk of famine. By some estimates, more than six million are acutely food insecure. Separately, OCHA has reported some 3.5 million in stress and 3.2 million in crisis and emergency, as well as 353,000 acutely malnourished children under the age of five.

Principle obstacles to addressing this need, which increases the risks of famine, are access to affected populations, especially those who may be in areas under militant control, and adequate aid resources. To date, a humanitarian response plan of \$1.5 billion has a gap of some \$952 million. RI recommends that the United States lead efforts to ensure that funding gaps are effectively addressed.

RI Field Mission and Observations: A team from RI was in Somalia just last week. Recurrent drought, combined with ongoing conflict and weak governance, has forced over 760,000 Somalis to flee from their homes. Most have fled from rural areas, controlled by Al-Shabab and/or clan militias, to urban centers with limited or nominal government control – including the cities of Mogadishu and Baidoa.

Despite significant and generous funding from the United States, the United Kingdom and other donors at the onset of the crisis, the humanitarian situation in Somalia remains urgent. The newly

elected Somali government, the United Nations and humanitarian agencies deserve credit for raising the alarm of pre-famine conditions back in November 2016 and, with the support of donor governments, rapidly pushing out food aid to the worst-affected areas. Their efforts avoided what undoubtedly would have been massive loss of life and an even larger level of displacement. The early injection of humanitarian funding, combined with increased areas of government control/access, contributed to limited cross-border movement.

While the return home of some internally displaced persons (IDPs) in April 2017 to plant crops offered some hope the situation might stabilize, the underperformance of the latest rains sent many back to IDP camps. More than 22,000 people were displaced in the first three weeks of June alone. In May, UNICEF said that 1.4 million children in Somalia are projected to suffer acute malnutrition in 2017.

Many of Baidoa's new arrivals have come on foot, some walking for over three weeks. Some did not make it. Earlier this month, one local aid worker told RI, "It really affects me when I hear some of the stories, how they had to leave their parents – even their own children – on the road when they could go no further. But they had no choice if they were to survive."

Many of the IDP sites – especially for the newest arrivals – lack basic services, including durable shelters, latrines, and lighting. Incidents of gender-based violence are rampant and the unsanitary conditions have contributed to a widespread cholera epidemic among IDPs and host communities alike. The gap in the protection response is particularly significant. Protection interventions remain minimal in some IDP sites and non-existent in others. And it should be noted that some locations for possible return often remain unsafe for IDPs.

RI is recommending better coordination among operational agencies providing water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), shelter, and protection at the field level; better planning for local integration in urban areas and support for access to existing local services where available; and support of local government capacity to respond in key IDP locations, such as Baidoa.

Cooperation with Somali authorities and focus on resilience: While capacity is limited, the national and local governments have demonstrated an intention to respond to the emergency and to work collaboratively with international donors and aid organizations. At the federal level, the government established a new ministry – the Ministry of Humanitarian and Disaster Preparedness. At the state level, the Interim South West Administration is developing an IDP policy that focuses on durable solutions. Government cooperation and partnership with international actors on the drought response is an encouraging story amidst all of the challenges. The focus on resilience – the capacity to withstand and adapt to shocks and to recover – by humanitarian agencies and in the National Development Plan must be supported and scaled up. Resilience measures vary, but can include, for example, improved technologies and management practices.

In fact, efforts by the United States, the UK and the European Union (EU) to focus on building the resilience of climate vulnerable pastoralist and agro-pastoral populations to more extreme weather have shown some success in the current drought, as some of the communities that received resilience-building support fared better. The challenge now will be to continue to scale up and improve the transformative impacts, combined with support for improved and expanded governance across Somalia.

But that, of course, does not address the requirements of immediate or imminent food crisis conditions, which have caused severe damage to rural populations. Entirely dependent on rain-fed agriculture to survive, they are chronically malnourished even in a good year. The government and humanitarian agencies must act with greater urgency to scale up the urgent food, water, shelter and protection needs of the displaced.

In this respect, the flexible nature of U.S. funding is critical and allowed agencies that had been working to build the longer-term resilience of communities to avoid a worsening of the situation.

A word on returns: I also want to mention the issue of Somali refugee returns from Kenya. Despite the severe crisis inside Somalia, UNHCR, supported by donor governments and urged on by the Kenyan government, is continuing to facilitate refugee returns from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya to some of the areas hit hardest by the drought. Around 30,000 Somalis have been returned in the first half of 2017. Of course, any refugee who genuinely wishes to voluntarily repatriate can and should do so. However, the consistent threat of the Kenyan government to shut down Dadaab, combined with a monetary inducement from UNHCR for returnees, brings into question the voluntary nature of the return program. Further, the situation inside Somalia threatens the viability of sustainable returns. Indeed, when RI staff visited Dadaab in late 2016, they met a number of refugees who had returned to Somalia only to flee back to Kenya in the face of violence and hunger. There have been new arrivals into Dadaab due to the drought but we do not know how many because the government does not provide refugee registration for them. Moreover, large numbers of refugee returns adds additional stress to fledgling local governments that are attempting to respond to the drought crisis. We would encourage members of Congress to raise these issues of relating to return with the Governments of Kenya and Somalia, as well as UNHCR.

Northeast Nigeria

There are increasing concerns about food insecurity in Northeast Nigeria. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), “farmers have been unable to return to the land for planting season, further aggravating the food insecurity situation,” and “an estimated 450,000 children under five are suffering from severe acute malnutrition in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe.” According to the World Food Programme (WFP), “[t]he food security situation is expected to deteriorate in July–August due to the ongoing insecurity compounded by the lean season.” With respect to Nigeria’s most crisis-impacted states – Borno, Adamawa and Yobe – WFP expects that some 5.2 million people will confront food insecurity during the lean season, and will include “more than 50,000 people who could face famine-like conditions across the three states.”

RI visited Northeast Nigeria in the spring of 2016 to examine the issue of women and girls displaced due to Boko Haram. Women and children – the majority of internally-displaced persons in Northeastern Nigeria – are disproportionately affected by the crisis, and its attendant impacts on food security. The Nigerian government has placed serious roadblocks on the humanitarian community, restricting ways in which they can access and help people in need. This has undoubtedly increased malnutrition risks. Further, the Nigerian government has categorically refused to permit United Nations agencies and/or other humanitarian actors from co-managing displacement camps in the northeast. An international presence would be extremely

valuable in these camps, especially as the federal (NEMA) and state (SEMA) emergency agencies that are responsible for delivering food and other types of aid into the camps have been accused of sexual exploitation of IDPs. Note that these are IDPs who have already escaped the horrors of Boko Haram – many of them having been subjected to forced labor and sexual slavery. The Nigerian government must provide unfettered access to humanitarian agencies to deliver food assistance and ensure the protection of IDPs. And while we recognize the challenges of reaching vulnerable populations in such an insecure environment, all efforts must be made to strengthen responses to those populations that are accessible.

South Sudan

The awful violence in South Sudan is directly related to the risk of famine in the country. Nearly two million South Sudanese are internally displaced, and a similar number are refugees who have fled South Sudan. OCHA just reported that some six million South Sudanese, about one-half the population, were expected to be “severely food insecure” this month, with 1.7 million “on the brink of famine.” OCHA also reports that 45,000 people are facing “catastrophic food insecurity,” and that South Sudan is now confronting the largest, most widespread and most deadly cholera outbreak since independence.

Humanitarian assistance needs in South Sudan are outstripping available resources. Moreover, the exodus of South Sudanese has created huge challenges for neighboring countries in general, and Uganda in particular. Uganda is now hosting nearly one million South Sudanese refugees, with an average of more than 2000 arriving each day, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees regional response plan is severely underfunded.

The United States continues to provide substantial humanitarian assistance, and we welcomed a new announcement of an additional \$199 million for the people of South Sudan and South Sudanese refugees. The humanitarian funding from USAID and the State Department for the South Sudan response has so far reached \$728 million for Fiscal Year 2017.

But the needs of this vulnerable population are escalating with no end in sight.

The United States can and should do much more. In particular, given the role of the United States in promoting self-determination of the people of South Sudan, it is discouraging and baffling that the current Administration has not sought to play a stronger role in efforts to end the political conflict in South Sudan. To date, the Administration has yet to appoint a Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, and has not appeared to demonstrate interest in a serious and sustained effort to seek a political solution to the crisis in the country. In fact, the President has yet to nominate an Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Although the prospects for success of renewed efforts at negotiations are limited at best, the terrible suffering of the people of South Sudan is not likely to end without it.

Yemen

Yemen may be the most dire of the four situations we are discussing today. About 75% of the population—more than 20 million people—need humanitarian aid to survive. Seventeen million

people countrywide are food insecure with 6.8 million severely food insecure. There are 2.3 million malnourished children under the age of five, with 500,000 of those severely malnourished.

The U.S. government is by far the largest donor and must continue to bring other donors to the table, as the Yemen response plan is significantly underfunded. Only one third of the required \$2.1 billion has been received. There are indeed aid agencies working inside the country, but there are far fewer and they have far less capacity than is necessary for a crisis of the scale we are finding in Yemen. Medical care and WASH programming need more support, and funding must be more flexible to address the most urgent needs.

As of July 12th there are 320,199 cases of cholera and there have been 1,742 associated deaths in the country. The cholera outbreak cannot be effectively managed with the health system that is currently in place, but the destruction of healthcare infrastructure and the severe limitations on imports of most kinds have restricted aid groups' ability to carry out a large-scale response. Most healthcare workers have not been paid in almost a year, and ongoing stipends are not a sustainable solution.

The cholera epidemic is only the most recent development in a multi-faceted crisis in Yemen that combines a humanitarian disaster with a public health emergency and ongoing diplomatic failure. More than three million people have been forced to flee their homes, food insecurity is worsening by the day and the medical care system is rapidly failing.

Respected human rights organizations have expressed serious concerns about violations of international humanitarian law by the Saudi-led military coalition operating in Yemen, and, especially in light of United States military sales to Saudi Arabia, the Trump Administration should press the Saudis on these issues. As part of this effort, the Administration should urge the Saudis to permit the delivery of essential items. In this respect, we note that the port at Hodeidah is one of the only functioning food and humanitarian aid channels into Yemen, and the Saudi-led coalition should be strongly urged to ensure that the port is permitted to play that role. There is thus far no evidence that there has been any diversion of aid by the Houthis at the port.

Conclusion:

As I've emphasized, we will not end the risk of famine until we deal with issues of governance that play such a critical role in creating the conditions of food insecurity. And, as I've mentioned, there is much the United States can do to address root causes.

At the same time, we also have to respond to immediate threats of food shortages with generous provision of resources. And at this moment in time, funding appeals, both specific to the famine and to broader humanitarian needs, are not close to being met. The 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Nigeria is currently 41% funded. The 2017 Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan is 38% funded. The appeal for Yemen is 40% funded and the appeal for South Sudan is at 52%. We know that funding resources are very stretched, but if the United States does not lead in humanitarian response, others will not fill that gap. With our active engagement and participation, we bring other donors to the table.

We can only do so, however, if we sustain and even augment annual budgetary resources aimed at supporting the most vulnerable of the world's population. Not to do so would be to walk away from an historic U.S. commitment to humanitarian leadership. On the other hand, meeting this challenge keeps faith with our values and our history, and offers a brighter future for millions of people around the world.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.