

**Special Envoy for Global Food Security Dr. Cary Fowler's
Testimony for Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing
on Global Food Security
March 6, 2024**

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me today to testify on the U.S. response to the global food security crisis. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this critical issue.

When the world entered the protracted ongoing food crisis, the United States—with Congress' support—led the international response. Since the start of the Biden Administration, the United States has provided more than \$22.3 billion in acute and development food assistance, of which nearly \$14.2 billion of emergency assistance in 2023/2024, and with nearly \$2 billion over the next fiscal year targeted at medium to longer-term agricultural development in addition to the most vulnerable. We provide over one third of the total budget to the World Food Programme.

As the Deputy Coordinator for Diplomacy for the global Feed the Future initiative, I lead the diplomatic agenda for our global food security development efforts. In 2023, the State Department launched the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS) with the African Union and the Food and Agriculture Organization. As a part of the Feed the Future initiative and the President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE), VACS is our comprehensive response to build sustainable food security around the world, and the approach that we have is two-pronged. We're investing above ground, identifying the indigenous crops that are most nutritious and most resilient to climate change, improving these varieties; at the same time, we're investing below ground, mapping, conserving, building healthy soils. If you get the seeds right, if you get the soil right, then you have your agricultural foundation for the future.

But for as much as we have done to bring relief to those facing the most acute need, there remains more to do. Hunger and poverty around the world are destabilizing conditions that can influence conflict. Conflict is the number one driver of food insecurity. Food insecurity impacts conditions local for our partner countries, regional security, and U.S. national security. Modern conflicts are not

confined by political borders, and food insecurity must be addressed not only because it's in our national interest, but addressing global hunger and malnutrition is in the fabric of who we are as Americans. It's part of our DNA.

More than 700 million people are hungry. Child stunting and wasting is far too widespread. Global food demand will increase by more than 50 percent by 2050 as the population approaches 10 billion, while environmental stressors and climate change could reduce yields by as much as 30 percent.

While the impact of COVID on the global food system has largely abated, other challenges continue. The costs of basic inputs for farmers to improve soil conditions and have access to basic seeds and materials continues to be out of reach. Currency devaluation across markets in developing countries have priced basic inputs for agricultural production to be out of reach for small to medium scale farmers. Additionally, Russia, through its attacks on Ukrainian port facilities, continues to raise the cost of doing business for companies to acquire Ukraine's grain exports and destroys its grain silos. We are also in the middle of a strong El Niño weather pattern, with dramatic increases in temperatures and changes to the timing and amount of rainfall, leading to water variability and scarcity or drought. Farmers across the United States, Europe, South America, and Asia are enduring some of the hottest heatwaves on record.

Such shocks will keep coming and we must be ready. Each of these challenges is proof that we need to couple our emergency assistance to help those affected in the moment with bold efforts to build systemic resilience and strengthen productivity. Resilience and strength are not built overnight; our challenges are enduring, and our solutions must be too.

At the recent World Economic Forum in Davos Switzerland, Secretary Blinken highlighted that the United States is partnering to help adapt and transform agriculture and food systems, because as vital as emergency assistance is, if we don't get at the underlying infrastructure, if we don't get at a way to produce better, stronger, more resilient crops, then we won't help solve the problem.

We need to continue investing in fundamental and transformational change—beyond our much-needed humanitarian assistance, and all inputs along the agricultural value chain, in order to scale agricultural research efforts. Presently,

we are addressing the very foundation of agriculture: crops and soils. Food security depends fundamentally on seeds and soils – specifically crop varieties adapted to withstand extreme weather and soils that are fertile, resilient to drought, and resistant to erosion.

The State Department has committed \$150 million thus far toward VACS. We've also partnered with a broad coalition of governments around the world to advance this work including Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, as well as leading nonprofits and corporations. We have successfully integrated VACS goals into the on-going discussions held at the G7 as well as advanced the larger Feed the Future agenda. We are also partnering through implementors to expand access to artificial intelligence technologies and climate modeling to deliver tailored farming and field management recommendations, given soil quality and seeds, directly to small holder farmers worldwide.

We have seen that the world is getting hotter., which have had varying impacts across the agricultural value chain. Extreme weather has reduced agricultural yields in some parts of the world, and a crippling lack of hard currency coupled with high prices of basic agricultural inputs continue to accelerate the growing numbers of globally food insecure populations. Global food insecurity continues to be a growing national security threat to the United States. There is increasing global understanding of this link, as we saw clearly at the most recent Munich Security Conference. We should capitalize on this momentum and political will to secure our economic and national security interests. We must continue to invest and expand our investment in long term sustainable agricultural production of diverse, indigenous, climate resilient food through Feed the Future programs including VACS. Failure to do so, will result in an ever-increasing annual cycle of severe humanitarian needs, acute hunger and malnutrition, and increasing civil unrest.

We must focus more on preparing and preventing – not just responding, and on root causes rather than symptoms. This will require continued bi-partisan commitment to aim high and the endurance to invest in long-term solutions. I welcome being a reliable partner and collaborating with this Committee and the Congress to advance and support these goals.