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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

November 3, 2022

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20523

Dear Administrator Power,

As you testified before our Committee in July, the food security situation for hundreds of millions of people was already extremely fragile, even before Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. Today we write to express our alarm over a historic number of people facing hunger and starvation, record-breaking levels of global humanitarian need, and to urge action specifically focused at mitigating the worst-case outcomes. We applaud the Biden administration's commitment to simultaneously addressing immediate needs while working to build resilience and sustained food security for the long term. However, we are facing another year of record hunger and loss of life. This humanitarian catastrophe must be averted. To that end, we urge USAID to prioritize the communities most at risk of famine, and ensure that food aid to malnourished children is delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible. We also want to better understand what resources USAID needs to meet this critical moment.

We know that the global food security crisis is fueled by the intensification of major drivers, including conflict, fuel and commodity costs, and climate extremes. In the past three years, acute food insecurity has more than doubled from impacting 135 million people in 2019 to 345 million people today. One million people already face catastrophic levels of hunger (IPC Phase 5 'Catastrophe') with acute malnutrition and starvation occurring daily. As food insecurity increases, so do malnutrition levels, creating a global children's crisis with the lives of more than 50 million children at risk. The highest risk of famine is concentrated in six countries: Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. Moreover, last month the UN warned Haitians are for the first time experiencing catastrophic hunger, with more than 4 million facing acute food insecurity and nearly 20,000 likely suffering from famine.

Across the Horn of Africa, unprecedented drought coupled with conflict is disrupting livelihoods, displacing communities, and restricting humanitarian access. Somalia has withstood many climate-related crises, but the compounded impacts of COVID and the Ukraine conflict has pushed 300,000 people to the brink of starvation. In October, the World

Food Program warned that it is only a matter of time before Somalia is hit with a full-blown famine. Currently, 7.7 million people urgently need humanitarian assistance, and 1.8 million children—representing 54 percent of children under five years of age—are projected to be malnourished this year. Clearly, bold action is needed, yet coordinated international action to prevent mass death in Somalia has been slow to materialize.

Our bipartisan congressional response has been swift with more than \$5 billion provided to address the global food crisis. In response, the Biden administration and our global partners have put in motion important efforts to address food security through development and humanitarian funding. In order to strengthen the U.S. government response—and ensure that our efforts are cohesive, effective, and timely—we urge the Administration to take two key steps:

- First, the Administration should continue to prioritize emergency food assistance efforts in the six nations most immediately facing famine risk and widespread acute malnutrition. The deadly 2011 famine in Somalia—in which half of all deaths occurred before a famine was officially declared—taught us that waiting for a formal declaration costs innocent lives. Therefore, we urge the Administration to call on the UN Secretary General to repurpose the UN High-Level Task Force (HLTF) on Famine Prevention to galvanize global attention, funding, and action. The HLTF should broaden its membership to include development actors, international financial institutions, donors, and NGOs to act in a truly global, coordinated, and holistic manner.
- Second, the Administration must address this children’s crisis with urgency. Roughly 80 percent of children with acute malnutrition are not being reached with low-cost, highly effective treatment in part because of a complex system of delivery. The Administration must take immediate steps to simplify the delivery of acute malnutrition products through evidence-based solutions. The current bifurcated delivery of two products between UNICEF and WFP is complicated, inefficient, and difficult to scale. USAID should lead efforts to reform our approach to treatment in order to reach more children on the brink of death.

We urge you to take these concrete steps to increase impact, accountability, and efficiency to prevent the worst-case outcomes stemming from the current global food crisis. In taking these steps, the Administration can help translate financial commitments into effective, life-saving actions. We ask that you see Congress as your partner in these efforts. We stand ready to work with you to ensure effective and efficient use of resources. To that end, we ask for your responses to the following questions:

- 1) What more is needed from Congress to ensure humanitarian assistance can be delivered as effectively and efficiently as possible?

- 2) Does USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) have the resources it needs to fulfill its mandate? Are BHA's current staffing levels sustainable? If not, what is needed to address this?

We appreciate your urgent attention to these issues and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Chairman



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United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator