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Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and
International Economic, Energy and Environmental Policy
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"The Four Famines": Root Causes and a Multilateral Action Plan

Introduction

Good afternoon. Chairman Young, Ranking Member Merkley, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important, timely hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to join this panel and hope that my testimony helps bring more attention to the increasingly dire situations in the four famine-threatened countries, the impacts on neighboring countries, and the need for urgent action. I'm particularly honored to testify in front of this subcommittee and both Senators Young and Merkley who have both fought so hard for additional funding to prevent famine and save lives and find diplomatic solutions to end these crises.

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization that specializes in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programs. We operate in more than 40 countries around the world, including throughout the East Africa region and in all four countries considered at risk of famine in 2017. At Mercy Corps, we believe that a better world is possible. Our team of almost 5,000 people around the world work to put bold solutions into action, help people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within.

Famine Warnings

Global Context

At the start of 2017, 70 million people were projected to need emergency assistance based on known threats to food insecurity. **Particularly disturbing was that the threat of famine was the highest it has been in decades.**¹ Unfortunately, the early warnings did not trigger enough urgent funding and action, and now at the halfway mark of the year the situation continues to devolve.

FEWS NET revised its Global Food Security Alert on June 21, estimating that 81 million people will need emergency food assistance in 2017. A few of the reasons cited for the additional 11 million people at risk include a drier rainy season in the Horn of Africa; ongoing conflict in South Sudan, Yemen, northeast Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); and increasingly severe outbreaks of cholera in Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Nigeria.²

A credible threat of famine continues to jeopardize the lives of an estimated 20 million people – approximately the populations of Indiana, Oregon, Arizona and New Mexico combined.

¹ <http://www.fews.net/global/alert/january-25-2017>

² http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/FEWS%20NET%20Global%20FS%20Alert_20170621.pdf

Approximately 2.5 million children are at imminent risk of death from severe malnutrition without immediate action by the international community.³

That is why Mercy Corps has joined forces with seven other leading U.S.-based international nonprofits to form the Global Emergency Response Coalition, a first-of-its-kind U.S. humanitarian alliance. The coalition launched a two-week campaign targeting the American public from July 17 through July 28 to raise awareness and funds to respond to the massive hunger crises threatening the lives of 20 million people in Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and neighboring countries.

By combining our efforts into a joint, two-week appeal, members of the coalition hope to amplify the urgency and scale of need and raise unprecedented funds, which will be split evenly across all eight participating organizations (CARE, International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children and World Vision). We are stronger together, and we believe our organizations, alongside the American people, can bring new attention and resources to reverse this looming catastrophe.

In all four countries, man-made causes⁴ are driving famine and food insecurity, including a deadly mix of conflict, marginalization, displacement, violent extremism, and climate change. Moreover, insufficient investment in conflict prevention and management, resilience and sustainable development activities allows these problems to fester, extending these crises unnecessarily. Within each of these contexts, the capacity and ability of the individuals countries to respond varies. While still overwhelmed due to lack of rain, it is also important to note that the pro-active governments of Kenya and Ethiopia are in far better positions to respond because they took action and have been responding to early warnings and current needs.

These massive multi-country humanitarian crises will have far-reaching impacts on security and stability in already volatile regions of Africa and the Middle East. Besides the tragic human costs, refugee flows are increasing. As members of this committee have seen on a recent trip to the region, Uganda is now home to the largest refugee camp in the world. Approximately 1.8 million refugees have fled from South Sudan alone since the conflict erupted at the end of 2013, half of whom were in Uganda by mid-June.⁵ These crises are stretching an already overwhelmed humanitarian system, almost to the breaking point.

But this is not “new” news. In 2014, international agencies warned that South Sudan could fall into famine. And, we knew in 2015 that 2016 would be a bad year for food security. We knew in 2016 that 2017 was going to be worse. And I’m sad to say that current end of year projections

³ <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/famine-threatens-25-million-children-africa-and-middle-east/32005>;
<https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO-JuneStatusReport2017.pdf>; https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/22/world/africa/why-20-million-people-are-on-brink-of-famine-in-a-world-of-plenty.html?_r=0

⁴ <https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/03/18/opinion/sunday/that-food-saved-my-life-and-trump-wants-to-cut-it-off.html>

⁵ <http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/regional.php>; <https://ugandarefugees.org/>; <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2017/2/589dba9f4/number-refugees-fleeing-south-sudan-tops-15-million.html>

indicate that 2018 will likely start out with emergency levels of assistance (IPC Phase 4) still necessary.⁶

While the immediate priority must be continuing to save lives, building resilience and addressing conflict and violence cannot wait any longer. As the international community, national governments and local responders mobilize to respond, we ask that the US Congress simultaneously:

- Provide urgently needed assistance and remove obstacles to humanitarians accessing populations in need – especially diplomatic obstacles;
- Invest in building the resilience of vulnerable communities to prepare for, withstand and recover from shocks and stresses; and,
- Address the root causes of conflict and violence.

South Sudan

South Sudan is a prime example of how, when left unaddressed, long-term conflict can produce devastating consequences. After decades of conflict, South Sudan experienced a brief moment of stability post-independence before conflict broke out once again in December 2013. Since then, tens of thousands of South Sudanese civilians have been killed and the ongoing civil war has forced nearly 4 million people to flee their homes.⁷ Nearly 2 million people have fled to neighboring countries (63 percent of whom are children), including to Uganda (which is now hosting the largest refugee population on the continent), Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, the DRC, and CAR, with the latter two countries managing displacements from internal conflict as well.⁸ After more than three years of war and repeated warnings about the deepening of the crisis in South Sudan, we now have one final chance to prevent a famine from spreading and engulfing more than one million people.

Of the many humanitarian needs within the country, the magnitude of food insecurity and malnutrition experienced by South Sudanese is unprecedented. Despite fertile land, conflict has made it impossible for farmers to tend their fields.⁹ To make matters worse, militias have been accused of intentionally destroying crops, looting cattle, burning homes and villages, and damaging vital water sources.¹⁰ Currently, 6 million people are without enough food (IPC Phases 3-5), and of that some 45,000 people are experiencing famine.¹¹ This is 500,000 more people in need of emergency assistance in the country than had been originally projected at the start of the year.¹²

⁶ http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/June%202017_FAOB%20Final.pdf; <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/alert/july-6-2017>

⁷ <http://www.unocha.org/south-sudan>

⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2017/3/58cbfa304/refugee-crisis-south-sudan-worlds-fastest-growing.html>; <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-situation-regional-update-1-15-june-2017>

⁹ <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/famine-south-sudan-understanding-food-insecurity-unity-state>

¹⁰ <https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/03/20/south-sudan-needs-peace-much-food>

¹¹ <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-detail-forms/ipcinfo-news-detail/en/c/471308/>

¹² <http://ipc-globalalert-issue8.squarespace.com/>

We are deeply concerned about the speed at which conditions are deteriorating for the people of South Sudan. In just four short months, the number of people on the brink of starvation has risen from 700,000 to 1.7 million. Despite the levels of need in two areas of South Sudan in Unity State being reduced from outright famine, the overall situation in the country is rapidly worsening, with 50 percent of the population now being recognised as food insecure, the greatest number ever recorded in South Sudan. Sadly this has happened while the world has been watching.

What we know is that we have a very short window of time between someone being very hungry, to being on the brink of starvation, to actually dying from hunger. We cannot wait for people to be starving to act.

Somalia

Somalia has been ravaged by decades of conflict and insecurity, making access to many parts of the country difficult. When overlaid by multiple years of failed rains, the effect is catastrophic – as we saw in the 2011 famine that killed nearly 260,000 people.¹³ This year, rains have failed again – and we have seen the tripling of water prices, the wiping out of crops and the death of livestock.

The Government of Somalia declared the drought a natural disaster at the start of March after 110 people died within 48 hours within the Bay region.¹⁴ This ongoing drought shows how climate change risks further exacerbating food insecurity in this region in the future as communities struggle to cope with increasingly frequent and unpredictable extreme weather patterns causing flooding and droughts or the outbreak of new pests and diseases that threaten crops.¹⁵

In addition to the food needs, 4.5 million people are in need of water, sanitation and hygiene services (WASH) and nearly half of the populations are in need of food security assistance.¹⁶ A severe cholera outbreak is ongoing in East Africa and over 50,000 cases have been reported in Somalia alone since January 2017.¹⁷ Since the beginning of this year, risk of acute malnourishment for Somali children has increased 50 percent. In 2017, an estimated 1.4 million children have or will face acute malnourishment, including hundreds of thousands whose condition is life threatening.¹⁸ Any significant interruptions in ongoing food assistance activities risk triggering a famine, and additional assistance is needed especially to address disease outbreaks and health and sanitation needs.

¹³ <http://www1.wfp.org/countries/somalia>

¹⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/05/somalia-prime-minister-110-dead-hunger-past-48-hours-drought/>

¹⁵ <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/SSCI%20Unclassified%20SFR%20-%20Final.pdf>

¹⁶ <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Somalia%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%209%2C%2016-30%20June%202017.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/alert/july-6-2017>

¹⁸ https://www.unicef.org/media/media_95918.html

Over the last two years, Somalia has seen increased refugee returns (both UNHCR supported and spontaneous returns) from the neighboring countries, primarily from Kenya (Dadaab). As of May 31, 66,647 Somali refugees had returned home from Kenya since December 8, 2014, when UNHCR first started supporting voluntary return of Somali refugees in Kenya. UNHCR supported 26,759 in 2017 alone.¹⁹ The conditions in many parts of Somalia are not conducive to mass refugee returns due to ongoing conflict, insecurity, and humanitarian conditions that have now been exacerbated by the worsening drought and possible famine, leading to further internal and external displacement of the local communities and returnees.

Nigeria

Ongoing conflict and instability in North East Nigeria, including the presence of violent extremist group Boko Haram, has destroyed markets and agriculture, and kept millions of people trapped in poverty and insecurity. Some 1.9 million people are displaced after fleeing their homes – including 1.7 million in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe – and approximately 8.5 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.²⁰

Many of them live in dangerous and hard-to-reach places, and a disproportionate number are children. Almost half a million children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition.²¹ Famine likely occurred at the end of last year, but it was not reported until after the fact due to severe constraints on access to these conflict areas. Since then, although the scale of conflict has declined recently, allowing trade to increase and signs of some people returning to homes, many areas continue to remain inaccessible to humanitarian actors, especially in Borno State.²² As of this March, 50,000 people were projected to experience famine unless food assistance needs were met.²³

Yemen

Due to ongoing conflict between the Houthi rebels and Saudi-backed Hadi government, approximately 75 percent of households in Yemen need humanitarian assistance. The complexity of the conflict, and its impact on human suffering, is enhanced by the presence of Islamic State affiliated groups with transnational terrorist aims. Of the 20.7 million people living in Yemen, 17.1 million are food insecure and 7.3 million need immediate emergency food assistance.²⁴ UNICEF reports that nearly 2.2 million children are malnourished including half a million suffering from severe acute malnutrition.²⁵ The situation in Yemen is now so dire that a

¹⁹ <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/57557.pdf>

²⁰ <http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/lake-chad-basin-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-19-fiscal-year-fy-2017>

²¹ Decreasing child mortality and improving maternal health depend heavily on reducing malnutrition, which is responsible, directly or indirectly, for 35% of deaths among children under five. See: <http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/malnutrition/en/>

²² <http://www.fews.net/west-africa/nigeria>

²³ http://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/nga_fss_dashboard_may2017.pdf

²⁴ <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-12-fiscal-year-fy-2017>

²⁵ https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_95886.html

child dies every ten minutes of a preventable disease.²⁶ Parents are forced to make horrific decisions, including whether to pursue medical attention for one sick child over buying food to feed their other children; they are forced to choose which children live and die.²⁷

Cholera - a diarrheal disease associated with malnutrition - has killed 1,300 people. With less than half of the country's medical centers functioning, the disease is spreading at an extreme rate. There are more than 96,000 suspected cases of cholera, and the startling rapidity of the spreading outbreak is reflected by the fact that the number of deaths is three times higher since April 27 than was reported between October 2016 to March 2017.²⁸

Lack of political will and bureaucratic hurdles impede humanitarian operations. Port Hodeida, through which 80 percent of Yemen's food supply enters the country, is at serious risk of full closure. If this happens, the humanitarian crisis will significantly escalate. In this context, with the economy also on the verge of full collapse, humanitarian assistance alone will not stave off famine in Yemen for long.²⁹

Responding Urgently

Saving Lives Now

In all four countries, Mercy Corps is working with our local partners to quickly deliver food, water, sanitation supplies, hygiene promotion, health care, and education in emergencies. Our emergency interventions are impacting 350,000 people in South Sudan, Yemen, Nigeria and Somalia. We are also working on solutions that address the heart of the problem: training farmers, educating health workers, managing conflict, and helping people increase their incomes. Our long term interventions are helping millions of people across Africa and in Yemen overcome the chronic threat of hunger and build stronger, healthier lives.

For example, in South Sudan Mercy Corps is providing emergency relief and, where security allows, supporting reviving local markets, traders and families to rebuild farms and livelihoods. in Unity State where Mercy Corps is one of the largest humanitarian actors, we provide clean water and hygiene services (including functioning latrines) to more than 50,000 displaced people and host communities in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site. We also provide water and sanitation services to 38,500 people in rural areas of Southern Unity State. In Koch and Panyijar Counties, we have further expanded WASH programming to 74,000 people, and have a ready to respond emergency cholera outbreak response team. In Panyijar and Rubkona Counties, Mercy Corps has begun an urgent school feeding program that gives hot cooked

²⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38767874>; <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-12-fiscal-year-fy-2017>

²⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/in-yemens-war-trapped-families-ask-which-child-should-we-save/2016/11/30/c2240cf4-7d60-4132-989f-2128b077efbb_story.html?utm_term=.386a383ff036

²⁸ <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-12-fiscal-year-fy-2017>

²⁹ <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKBN15P2D0>; <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/yemen>

meals to 4,000 children five days a week in seven different schools, increasing school attendance rates so children keep learning even amid conflict.

Our food security and livelihoods project in Panyinjar, the region in South Sudan that continues to receive the majority of people displaced by the ongoing violence, is directly responding to the famine and helping families facing hunger, malnutrition and destitution. We will provide 6,000 households (approximately 36,000 people) with vegetable and fishing kits, and will supply 10,000 crop kits to meet the needs of 60,000 people. The kits offer people a means to catch and grow their own food and are provided to the most vulnerable displaced families, and 60 percent of the households will be women-headed.

Over the next three years Mercy Corps will reach more than 70,000 people and their communities to help them re-establish traditional food production practices, introduce cultivation techniques and promote vegetable gardening to prevent hunger. Where appropriate, we try to provide cash assistance that allows families to buy the items they need most while supporting and stimulating local markets and businesses. Even amid the conflict it is vital that markets remain open and functioning so that in the short term people can access food and supplies and in the long term economies are able to recover and grow. Since the declaration of the famine, we have scaled up our response in the counties that are at heightened risk of famine in order to not miss this last chance to save lives. Yet we are barely scratching the surface of the need.

Humanitarian Access

Part of this is because without safe access to deliver food, water and vital supplies, especially in areas which are on the brink of starvation, our efforts to save lives are severely impeded and sometimes not possible. Safe, uninterrupted humanitarian access in conflict zones continues to be the primary concern as aid workers continue to be killed, injured and harassed and are prevented from reaching the most vulnerable communities in need.

In 2017 alone, there have been 492 reported access incidents in South Sudan. June recorded the highest number in one month so far in 2017 with 100 incidents reported. NGO compounds have been forcibly entered and looted, staff members physically assaulted and robbed, and vehicles ambushed on the roads.³⁰ Humanitarian aid workers in South Sudan are at greater risk of experiencing physical violence (murder, violence-related injury or kidnapping) than anywhere in the world: between July 2016 and June 2017, there have been 96 incidents of violence against civilian aid workers in South Sudan -- that's more than twice as many than have been reported in Syria in the same time period and four times as many reported in Afghanistan.³¹ At least 14 aid workers were killed since the start of this year in South Sudan.³² Unless the guns fall silent and conflict stops, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate.

³⁰ OCHA South Sudan: Humanitarian Access Snapshot (June 2017)

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/ss_20170709_access_snapshot_june.pdf

³¹ <https://aidworkersecurity.org/>

³² <https://aidworkersecurity.org/incidents/search?start=2017&detail=1&country=SS>

Securing access for the humanitarian response not only saves lives, it also brings down the cost of the assistance. It allows for a full suite of tools and resources to bring the best tailored response instead of what has happened in parts of South Sudan where the only option has been one of the most expensive: air dropping assistance.

The difference access makes on mitigating famine risks can be seen when comparing the constraints in South Sudan to the proactive response of the government of Ethiopia to the drought. The levels of food insecurity and malnutrition in Ethiopia are sobering, but they would be even worse if politics were not allowing the most vulnerable to be reached and contributing their own resources to the response.

Humanitarian Plus: Layering and Sequencing for Impact and Sustainability

Preventing Violence and Resolving Conflict

Considering the level of need, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. We at Mercy Corps, though, are pushed to action. And we continue to find evidence that our efforts to save lives and reduce poverty are having positive, sustainable impacts.

Conflict directly and indirectly impacts hunger in all four famine threatened countries. Conflict prevents people from accessing land and markets safely or it causes them to flee, separating them from their livelihoods and normal sources of food. It interrupts basic public services - such as healthcare, education and water. Conflict then interacts with other factors to perpetuate complex crises, including weakening governments and eroding social capital and social cohesion.

This is especially true when insecurity due to conflict makes it difficult to respond to natural disasters like drought and floods which are happening more frequently in parts of the world especially vulnerable to climate change. This risks becoming a vicious cycle as conflict weakens governments and then places increased pressure on access to limited resources. A recent study found that during drought times, violence against civilians increases by 41 percent, showing a positive correlation between natural disasters and conflict.³³ But, there are ways to break the cycle. One way is using conflict management skills to reduce the impact of climate-shocks on communities. Mercy Corps' research from Ethiopia during the 2011 drought found that households in communities where we were helping to build conflict management capacities were better able to access key natural resources during the drought and were therefore more food secure than comparison households.³⁴

Not only do we need to address conflict where it is happening, but we also need to mitigate potential spillover effects that could further stress resource strapped neighboring countries and

³³ <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/691057>

³⁴ https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/from_conflict_to_coping_-_final.pdf

further exacerbate food insecurity. This is why Mercy Corps enhances the capacity of people and institutions to prevent and manage conflict.

For example, in one of Mercy Corps' humanitarian programs in Yemen, where tribal conflicts – particularly over land – have existed for centuries, villagers in the Haymah Dakhliyah district of Sana'a Governorate decided to use aid distribution as a way to bring the village together. They agreed to hold distributions and education sessions across lines of division. Even more surprisingly, they agreed to leave their guns at home. The hope is that by rebuilding trust between villagers, local-level outbreaks of violence that prolong suffering and limit the area's development can be prevented when the larger conflict ends between the Houthis and the Saudi-led coalition backing the government.³⁵

Truly tackling complex crises and hunger ultimately means we need to address the root causes of conflict and violence. This includes investing in effective conflict management skills and systems as well as social cohesion. And my experience in South Sudan has driven me to believe this has to happen now. It is not something that can be programmed down the line after the humanitarian crisis has ended. To me this work must be "humanitarian plus." Humanitarian and peacebuilding must go hand in hand in these complex environments to truly be effective.

In South Sudan, \$6.66 billion in aid between 2011 and 2015 could not prevent the country from slipping back into conflict.³⁶ A war which started as a political struggle between two elites has since spread throughout the country. There has been no major drought in South Sudan; the famine that was declared earlier in the year and the ongoing and increasing food insecurity throughout the country is directly caused by the conflict which makes it impossible for people to grow food and next to impossible for humanitarians to access those most in need.

And while some would rather wait for a solution to the larger political conflict, Mercy Corps believes this is missing opportunities to prevent outbreaks in violence that are localized and affect the day to day security of families. In South Sudan, as the war continues, ethnic groups are becoming more polarized and negative perceptions of the other are becoming stronger. This makes it easier for politicians to mobilize youth for violence and makes rebuilding relationships, even if a political settlement is reached, harder. The violence in South Sudan has spread even to the Equatorias, a region of the country normally known as a stable breadbasket. Mercy Corps is now implementing a UNICEF project providing strengthened formal education, life skills and psychosocial support to build resilience and improve the wellbeing of children and young people affected by conflict in Unity State (Rubkona, Panyijiar) and Western Equatoria (Mundri East) State. We are reaching more than 51,000 children (nearly 40 percent of whom are girls) with emergency education in safe and protected environment. The teachers we work with are trained to recognize signs of trauma and lead activities that help children deal with stress and resolve conflict peacefully. Working with youth is an important step in rebuilding social ties in a country where more than 50 percent of the population is under the age of 24, and where a Mercy Corps

³⁵ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/yemen-hopeless-international-community_us_581ad480e4b08f9841ad63d4

³⁶ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD?locations=SS>

2014 assessment showed youth in the country have a high tolerance for violence.³⁷ But more investment in programs to build social cohesion are needed to address other underlying issues that can lead to local outbreaks of violence, like natural resource disputes.

And this type of programming is important in other famine threatened contexts as well. Our impact evaluation of a multi-year USAID-funded stability program in Somalia demonstrates that development investments can reduce support for and participation in violence. After nearly five years, we carried out a rigorous evaluation to test the impact of increasing access to formal education and civic engagement opportunities on youth participation in and support for political violence. We found that combining secondary education with civic engagement opportunities decreased the likelihood of youth both participating in and supporting violence, by 14 and 20 percent respectively. Giving youth the ability to help their communities through activities such as service projects fulfills a desire to do something positive, meaningful and impactful.

Hunger is Complex; Resilient Solutions Must be Multi-Sectoral

Despite the humanitarian access challenges and increasing levels of violence in South Sudan and around the world, I want to emphasize that we at Mercy Corps continue to find hope in these countries because we are still seeing that our work is impactful.

And that is why I also feel that I must stress to this subcommittee the fact that we can prevent and mitigate food security crises if we act urgently, especially when the warning signs first appear. Mercy Corps has been implementing a variety of programs to strengthen a community's resilience to drought and other effects of climate change. Resilience programs help communities survive crises and stop the cycle of recurrent humanitarian disasters. And, non-emergency Food for Peace Title II programs are absolutely critical to building the resilience of families and communities to food insecurity. This kind of resilience programming is also extremely cost effective: a study by the British government in Kenya and Ethiopia estimates that every \$1 invested in resilience will result in \$2.90 in reduced humanitarian spending, avoided losses and development benefits.³⁸

In partnership with Food for Peace, Mercy Corps is implementing a five-year \$26 million Food for Peace "Non-Emergency" program in Uganda, called Northern Karamoja Growth, Health and Governance (GHG). The program is addressing the complex drivers of food insecurity in the region, including through a range of economic, health, governance and peacebuilding initiatives that will build a foundation for broader self-sufficiency, while targeted food aid for pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of two. Mercy Corps works through a 'market-systems' approach that analyzes markets beyond basic supply and demand principles; instead, looking at how they are influenced by behaviors, government regulations and rules, relationships, and the environment to understand why markets do not work for the poor. This

³⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/od.html>;
<https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/South%20Sudan%2C%20Through%20Youth%27s%20Eyes%20-%20Youth%20Assessment%20%20%282014%29.pdf>

³⁸ https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/032217_Gottlieb_Testimony_REVISED1.pdf

approach then facilitates structural or 'system' changes that increase the the ability of vulnerable populations to participate in markets and lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Lessons from this program are helpful for Congress to consider when thinking about breaking the cycle of famine and food insecurity. For example, last year, a drought in the Northern Uganda caused 60 percent of the crops to fail. With poverty rates of 51percent--74 percent in the North East subregion alone--buying food was already difficult for vulnerable families and their children.³⁹ While some traders were starting to raise prices on commodities- in effect price gouging- Mercy Corps worked with traders to keep the price of commodities low. Using smart subsidies for transportation and storage, we partnered with traders not interested in price gouging and taking advantage of a drought, and were able to further lower their costs, keeping the price low of commodities they were selling on the open market. Other traders had to follow suit as their commodities were overpriced, causing the price of commodities to stay affordable. Poor families throughout the region were able to continue to purchase food on the market, despite the drought.

These type of interventions are smart, cost-effective and have far reaching effects. Food for Peace has been an essential partner in fostering these types of interventions. Title II non-emergency programs, (especially in conjunction with Community Development Funds that provide cash and limit the need to monetize) have proven time and again that multi-year, flexible funding enables programs to address hunger within complex, interrelated systems effectively.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Even as we respond urgently to the crises in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere, we must continue to invest in opportunities to build communities' abilities to cope with shocks and stresses in the future. By helping these communities deal with risk, we can save lives from future famines and reduce the need for costly humanitarian investments over the long-term.

This innovative resilience approach to food security was also embraced by Congress one year ago when the Global Food Security Act (GFSA) was passed to improve upon the successes already seen in the whole of government Feed the Future Initiative. I have to take a moment to thank this Committee for their help in passing that important bill into law so that we can continue to build and support more programs that deliver similar, powerful impacts.

Public Awareness and Funding

With levels of need already alarmingly high and projected to worsen, we deeply appreciate the additional \$990 million appropriated by Congress in FY2017 for famine response and prevention. President Trump recently pledged part of this funding for the famine response at the

³⁹<http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/381951474255092375/pdf/Uganda-Poverty-Assessment-Report-2016.pdf>

G20 Summit,⁴⁰ where world leaders also included a commitment to act urgently in the leader's declaration.

Given this subcommittee's interest in multilateral affairs, in addition to the ongoing fundraising efforts by WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA and others, it is also worth noting that the World Bank, FAO, and other multilateral actors traditionally known more for development work than humanitarian actions are also stepping forward with funding that meets urgent needs and builds resilience to mitigate future vulnerability. For example, this year the World Bank used International Development Association funds for the first time to meet humanitarian needs.⁴¹ In South Sudan, \$50 million in these funds were approved to go to UN agencies to reach 580,000 people with an emergency food, nutrition, and livestock project that also lays the groundwork for crop and livestock recovery when possible. These are positive signs that world leaders recognize the need to do more and do it in a new way.⁴²

In addition to government funding, private donations are also essential to fund this response. While Mercy Corps has been responding in all four countries with urgency, there is simply not enough funding to meet the vast level of need Mercy Corps and our peers are facing on the ground. To date, of the four famine threatened countries, only South Sudan has received even half of its requested needs as outlined in the humanitarian response plan.⁴³ And despite its scope and urgency, the crisis has thus far received little media attention in America, therefore failing to register with the U.S. public.

Policy Recommendations

We can and should do better as a global community in responding now to address the urgent needs. Congress has an integral role to play in helping prevent the spread of famine and create conditions that mitigate food crises from happening in the first place.

Diplomacy and Access

I want to thank Senators Young, Merkley, and other members of this subcommittee that have written letters and made statements drawing attention to the need for political solutions to resolve conflict in South Sudan, Yemen, Nigeria, and Somalia. Both bottom up and top down diplomatic efforts are urgently needed to stop the man-made threat of famine. The US and key allies should provide high level support to:

- Ensure quick and peaceful resolution to the conflict;
- Guarantee humanitarian access and ensure the safety and security of aid workers; and,

⁴⁰ <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/july-08-2017-united-states-announces-addl-humanitarian-assistance-famine>

⁴¹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/fact-sheet-the-world-bank-groups-response-to-the-famine-crisis>

⁴² <https://www.g20.org/Content/EN/Anlagen/G20/G20-leaders-declaration.pdf?blob=publicationFile&v=1>;
<https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/06/09/new-way-working-bridging-aids-funding-divide>;
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/fact-sheet-the-world-bank-groups-response-to-the-famine-crisis>

⁴³ <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2017> (last accessed 7/12/2017)

- Address governance, inequality and development issues that drive conflict and violence and support longer-term peacebuilding.

Funding

Looking ahead, in addition to meeting the immediate needs of the famine threatened countries in FY2018, we ask that appropriations are also made available to fund resilience and conflict mitigation and management activities out of the Development Assistance and Economic Support Fund accounts.

The US government should continue to invest in programs that address the root causes of conflict and violence at all levels. The US government should also utilize a resilience approach to development by enabling interventions to respond and stay relevant to rapidly changing conditions and needs, provide multi-year funding (like the 5 year Title II non-emergency programs), and allow for flexible, iterative program design.

While the President's FY2018 budget did include several alarming foreign assistance proposals (including cutting approximately 40 percent of development funding), one thing it got right is it requested an increase of nearly 50 percent in smart investments in peacebuilding programs in the world's most fragile states. Thanks to the Administration giving USAID Missions more latitude in their requests, the FY 2018 request more accurately reflected *some* needs, including a request to increase conflict mitigation and reconciliation funding from \$432 million to \$632 million.

Specifically, as Congress considers the FY2018 appropriations bills it must:

- Fully fund the International Affairs 150 Account at no less than \$60 billion and ensure the 302b allocations for the State Department and Foreign Operations and Agriculture Appropriations bills are robust enough to respond to these growing crises and continue investments that mitigate against future crises.
- Within the appropriations bills in FY 2018, Congress must provide adequate funding for humanitarian and development accounts, including:
 - \$3.4 billion for International Disaster Assistance;
 - \$1.8 billion for Food for Peace, including no less than \$350 million for non-emergency programs;
 - \$3.6 billion for the Migration and Refugee Assistance; and
 - \$3.3 billion for Development Assistance and \$4.32 billion for Economic Support Fund Accounts which provide funding for conflict mitigation and reconciliation programs and resilience programs, including Feed the Future as well as critical bilateral programs that address climate change. Importantly, protecting Community Development Funds within the ESF and DA accounts will allow for continued creative programming that fights hunger more effectively.

These funding levels will ensure the U.S. can continue to lead the response and works with other donors to make sure they are also adequately contributing.

Conclusion

As I close I want to reflect on South Sudan and why Mercy Corps has remained committed to working in this challenging environment. We cannot say that our programmes will not be interrupted by violence and conflict, but should this mean that we surrender all hope to help the South Sudanese people move forward beyond urgent relief and handouts? No. It means we adapt, we change our way of thinking and working. It means that donors become more flexible in their approach and understand that when there is an uptick in violence we will need to pivot from our recovery programmes to urgent relief, and then when we can, back again. Around the world, Mercy Corps implements programs with such nimbleness to shift between relief and recovery to fit the context, but it requires trust, partnership, and commitment from our donors.

While we must have a peace deal that is firm, assuring and definite, that ensures the protection of civilians as well as aid workers, we also desperately need donors to reinvest and recommit to the future of South Sudan.

Thank you for your time and attention and I look forward to responding to your questions.