

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF
THE HON. PAIGE EVE ALEXANDER**

**NOMINEE FOR
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST
UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
MAY 13, 2014**

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Risch, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today as President Obama's nominee for Assistant Administrator of the Middle East Bureau at the United States Agency for International Development. It is a privilege to appear before this Committee again and I am grateful for the confidence that President Obama, Administrator Shah and Secretary Kerry have placed in me.

I also want to recognize Deputy Assistant Administrator Alina Romanowski, who has been serving as Acting Assistant Administrator of USAID's Middle East Bureau for over a year. Her vast knowledge and dedication, acquired across a more than 30 year career in the United States Government reflect the best qualities of the Career Senior Executive Service.

I would especially like to thank my family, friends, and professional colleagues whose support and encouragement have allowed me to pursue this opportunity. In particular, I would like to recognize my husband and best friend, Steve Grand, and our children Rachel, Carly and Josh. They all know the importance of public service and I am here today with their full support, which means the world to me.

The experience I have gained over a more than 25 year career in international development, including nearly 11 years within USAID, as well in posts at private foundations, academic institutions and non-profit organizations, has prepared me well for the new responsibilities I will take on, if confirmed.

For the past three years, I have had the honor and privilege of serving as USAID's Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia. In this role, I have come to appreciate and respect the

importance of interagency cooperation and collaboration. I have forged effective working relationships throughout, and would expect this strong interagency collaboration, which will also span the length of Pennsylvania Avenue, to continue to be an integral part of how I would effectively approach USAID's work to move countries from assistance to cooperation and partnership.

Indeed, my current position has given me an even greater appreciation for the critical interplay between Congress and the Executive Branch. I have benefited greatly from the advice and counsel I have received from Members of this Committee and others in the House and Senate. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to seek your guidance and counsel on the critical challenges facing us in the Middle East.

Four years ago, President Obama set forth a new vision of a results-driven USAID that would lead the world in development. The Agency has since risen to this challenge, pioneering a new model of development that brings a greater emphasis on partnerships, innovation, and results. We are guided in these efforts by a new mission statement: we partner to end extreme poverty and promote resilient democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly with the dedicated men and women of USAID to continue to fulfill this goal.

Although these goals are not new, they reflect a unique moment in development today when exciting opportunities are emerging to change what is possible. In a time of fiscal restraint, we are applying the new model to seize this moment and reach more people, save more lives, and leverage more private investment than ever before—delivering results for the American people and those in greatest need around the world.

President Obama's national security strategy recognizes development not only as a moral imperative, but as a strategic and economic one. In perhaps no other region is that more relevant than the Middle East and North Africa.

The challenges that the countries of the region face are complex—weak democratic institutions and processes, high unemployment, underperforming economies, and water scarcity. For the past three years, calls for transition and change have reverberated across the region. In this time of transition, the United States must remain an engaged partner with the governments and people of the region to provide support for economic and political reforms and to promote security and stability in the region.

USAID's Middle East Bureau advances U.S. national and strategic interests with programs in 11 countries and territories with an annual budget of over \$1.3 billion. If confirmed, I will provide strong oversight of USAID's programs in the Middle East, which respond to the needs and aspirations of the people in the region by facilitating more inclusive economic growth, supporting democratic processes, strengthening civil society, and addressing other key challenges, such as the impact of the Syria crisis.

Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, tepid or stagnant economic growth and high unemployment among young people remain major challenges. Twenty-four percent of young people are unemployed—the highest rate of youth unemployment in the world. Education systems fail to prepare young people for the workforce, reducing the region's ability to compete in a global economy. USAID programs work to address these barriers.

The Agency's programs target private sector growth through economic empowerment programs that provide small and medium enterprises training in business skills, start-up seed capital, and regional networking opportunities. For Egypt and Tunisia, USAID is managing grants to Enterprise Funds that will provide investment in the Egyptian and Tunisian economies and will seek to leverage the involvement of other financial institutions and global investors. In Libya, USAID has expanded the business potential of women micro-entrepreneurs and women-owned small and medium scale enterprises.

USAID is also working with regional governments and local partners to create business-enabling environments that reduce barriers to starting a business and support them once they are operational. For instance, in several places, USAID is investing in "one-stop shops." In Egypt

these “shops” have reduced the time it takes to register a business from over a week to about an hour, and in Iraq the registration period has gone from six months to less than two months.

To prepare the region’s young people for employment, USAID programs provide job training and workforce skills development for growing economic sectors. In Tunisia, USAID is encouraging job creation in the high-impact information communications technology (ICT) sector. USAID’s work with this sector has already generated over 2,600 new jobs. In the West Bank, USAID has supported the establishment of nine Palestinian startups and increased ICT exports by \$1.4 million. In Iraq, USAID has assisted 5,300 Iraqi jobseekers to find positions in over 550 Iraqi businesses, by providing training modules that bridge skills gaps and supporting an online jobs portal in partnership with Microsoft.

USAID’s education programs link directly to USAID’s economic growth work, as keeping young people in school is key to regional economic growth and stability. The Agency is partnering with ministries of education and schools to implement early grade reading programs that will increase literacy rates, encourage retention, and expand girls’ access to education. In Morocco, our early grade reading program aims to increase the recruitment of female teachers, improve the retention rate, and provide opportunities outside of school to promote reading by engaging with and supporting community based groups. In Egypt, USAID has supported advancements in early grade reading and secondary science, technology, and math skills. Our support is helping improve the reading fluency and comprehension of approximately 4.5 million Egyptian elementary students by introducing new teaching approaches and training teachers.

USAID projects in democracy, rights and governance in the Middle East aim to support democratic transitions by promoting resilient democratic societies and strengthening weak institutions and processes. USAID projects in Libya and Iraq provide elections assistance to their respective elections commissions, helping with elections operations, voter registration, campaign finance, electoral dispute resolution, and the drafting of regulations and procedures. In February 2014, the Government of Iraq committed funds to support the USAID-sponsored Legal Clinic Network which has provided assistance on over 14,000 legal cases on behalf of vulnerable individuals such as female-headed households, internally displaced persons, and ethnic and

religious minorities and educated over 26,000 Iraqis on their legal rights. USAID has supported Yemeni women in asserting their rights throughout the political process, and thanks in part to USAID's efforts, a 30% female participation quota was established for the National Dialogue Conference. USAID is also providing support for international elections observers and domestic monitoring for Tunisia's historic presidential and parliamentary elections, which should take place at the end of this year.

The Middle East is also facing substantial natural resource challenges, encompassing 12 of the world's 15 most water scarce countries. Further compounding the problem, the region has the world's second highest population growth rate and excessive water mismanagement, increasing competition for a scarce resource in a region. In Jordan, the influx of Syrians into local communities has increased the pressure on limited and already strained water availability. A USAID project has set up a revolving credit fund so families can access loans to install cisterns for harvesting rainwater. Repayment rates are high and half of the borrowers are women. This effort has helped tens of thousands of people secure access to water. In Yemen, USAID has established 16 water catchment sites throughout the country, which collect approximately 2 million liters of water per year.

The crisis in Syria has become a regional challenge of daunting proportions, with 6.5 million people displaced inside Syria, 9.3 million in need of humanitarian assistance, and over 2.6 million refugees spilling over into neighboring countries. USAID is providing more than \$669 million to help over 4.2 million people inside Syria and more than \$232 million to help Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. USAID has responded to the needs of the most vulnerable in all 14 Syrian governorates and Syrian refugees in five neighboring countries—Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt. In addition to humanitarian aid, our response to the conflict in Syria is comprehensive – combining humanitarian, transitional, and development interventions to address the needs of conflict-affected Syrians and host communities both within Syria, and regionally. Supporting neighboring countries as they cope with both the short- and long-term effects of the Syria crisis must continue to be a top priority.

Of the 600,000 refugees in Jordan, nearly 480,000 Syrian refugees live within Jordanian host communities, rather than in camps, and these host communities face tremendous challenges. USAID has provided critical assistance to these communities to alleviate increased demand for services, including hospital renovations and water infrastructure repair. A USAID community engagement project is in place to help alleviate tensions in host communities by promoting dialogue and reducing community stressors including trash removal, and limited small scale infrastructure projects to reduce traffic and create jobs. In Lebanon, where Syrians now make up more than 25 percent of the total population, USAID assistance focuses on water and education as well as a value-chain development program to advance small-scale agriculture. Since January 2013, USAID has rehabilitated thousands of Lebanese-owned residential units for refugees, increased access to water or other municipal services for over 125,000 people and reached nearly 100,000 children and at-risk youth through supplemental education activities.

As is well understood in the literature and in practice, development is a continuum. It extends from humanitarian relief through recovery and reconstruction, to investments in building sustainable institutions delivering economic, health and education services for the citizens of that country. Aid can begin at any point on that continuum and can make short-term interventions or invest in the long term, depending on the needs. While development is on a continuum, it is not necessarily a linear process. Major development challenges and the threat of backsliding still persist. We must nurture critically-minded citizens, engage youth, and find opportunities that include the use of new technologies to hold governments accountable. If confirmed, I will make it a priority to focus and concentrate USAID assistance in areas where it can achieve maximum results that align with our strategic objectives.

In this region, USAID's development objectives are clear. The Agency's mandate is to promote open and transparent governments that are accountable to their citizens, foster private sector development, and strengthen civil society organizations capable of investing in the current and future lives of the people they represent, during this critical period of change. The United States' continued engagement with the people of the region is critical for lasting growth, prosperity and peace.

I am keenly aware of how technical assistance providers and grassroots organizations are important partners in implementing U.S. development and diplomacy objectives. Sound approaches to development must permit rethinking, reforming and recalibrating our work in response to changing environments. If confirmed, I will continue to focus on finding scalable solutions that can affect development globally.

The Middle East region poses many challenges, both politically and developmentally, and also presents enormous opportunities to showcase what has been done right through American assistance.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome any questions you might have.