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Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. As we confront unprecedented challenges this year in the wake of the coronavirus, the work of this Committee to provide resources to agencies that are promoting our national interest is vital.

I have a number of priorities that I have made clear through the Committee's formal request process, including support for NASA and space exploration like the Mars Sample Return mission as well as the Europa Clipper mission. I also believe it is important that the Committee continue its past support for the Earthquake Early Warning system as we work to install more sensors across the West Coast region.

Today, however, I want to highlight two matters on which there have been significant new developments since I submitted my request letters, and that I hope the Committee will prioritize in the FY21 SFOPs bill – support for **Armenia and the people of Nagorno-Karabakh** and the **U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM)**.

### **Nagorno Karabakh**

I have been unwavering in my support for the right of self-determination of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. I am pleased that with support from Congress, for more than a decade the United States has supported demining in Nagorno Karabakh, clearing landmines and unexploded

ordnance from civilian areas. The demining, performed by HALO Trust, has cleared thousands of acres of land and saved countless civilians from death or maiming.

Therefore I was dismayed by the decision to end funding for demining in Nagorno-Karabakh on March 31, 2020. This decision goes against the clear guidance from Congress that this funding should continue, and the demonstrated need for additional support.

New survey results from the HALO Trust have identified 110 confirmed hazardous areas, totaling 598 acres containing contamination that must be cleared in the traditional oblast of Nagorno Karabakh and a highly populated area.

Finally, I will note my deep concern that the decision to end funding for humanitarian demining activities in Nagorno Karabakh was made while Azerbaijan engaged in increasingly bellicose and destabilizing activities. Azerbaijan continues to receive millions in military assistance through the Department of Defense, despite its horrendous human rights record and autocratic regime. I am concerned that the message being sent to Baku is that they can act with impunity and destabilize an already explosive border on the Line of Contact, risking a military confrontation with Armenia.

Considering the continued humanitarian need for this funding, I urge the Committee to provide funding in the bill requiring USAID to provide no less than \$1.5 million for demining and other humanitarian purposes in Nagorno Karabakh.

**U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM)**

I would also like to use this opportunity to express my serious concern with another agency funded through SFOPS – the United States Agency for Global Media. I have long supported the

mission of USAGM to promote democracy and free expression around the world. Public diplomacy is a cost-effective and smart way to support our foreign policy objectives.

The mission of the USAGM is as important as ever, but the events of the past week leave me deeply concerned. The newly Senate-confirmed Chief Executive, Michael Pack, fired senior management of USAGM and removed longtime Advisory Board members last week without explanation. This followed the resignation of the director and deputy director of Voice of America. These moves, as well as Mr. Pack's own history, unavoidably raise concerns that he intends to politicize USAGM's programming and mission. USAGM's strength is its ability to provide fearless and independent journalism in places where it is in otherwise short supply.

To take just one example, I have been a vocal proponent of Current Time, a 24/7 broadcast and online Russian language television station. Current Time is experiencing record viewership as it covers the COVID-19 pandemic, and its employees and freelancers work tirelessly to bring news from inside Russia and its neighboring countries to Russian-speaking populations. Current Time's strength is that it provides Russians and Russian speakers something that they cannot get from Russian state media – real, independent news and journalism.

I hope that USAGM's charter and mission will be respected. I hope that its talented staff will be allowed to do their jobs and continue to provide independent journalism without political interference.

But I do not believe we can take for granted that they will. Accordingly, while I continue to recommend robust funding for USAGM as I requested in my letter to the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee, I believe that funding must be accompanied by stringent requirements for regular reporting to the Committee, fencing of funds, and other

provisions as the Committee deems appropriate. The Committee and Congress must exercise strong oversight over USAGM in the days and weeks ahead. Its mission is too important to allow it to be corrupted to serve political ends, and the Committee is best positioned to ensure that its important work and its talented, nonpartisan workforce is supported.