

**Written Statement of Irene R. Kaplan, Chair, Government Affairs
The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
March 2013**

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Lowey, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), a US-based NGO, is the world's leading Jewish humanitarian assistance organization. Established in 1914, JDC today is American Jewry's central address for international relief and operates in Israel and more than 70 countries around the world. Our budget of over \$360 million supports programs and services in Jewish communities as well as some of the world's most vulnerable populations by:

- Providing disaster relief and development assistance;
- Combating hunger and financial hardship;
- Building self-sustaining Jewish community life;
- Rescuing Jewish communities in times of turmoil;
- Helping Israel foster social advancement and economic opportunity for all its citizens;
- Placing young, talented Americans in service fellowships worldwide

I am honored to testify in strong support of U.S. economic, humanitarian, and development assistance around the world. Across the globe, U.S. humanitarian and development aid dollars have improved millions of lives - reducing poverty, building the foundation for strong economies, providing access to healthcare for those in dire need, and responding to natural or man-made disasters. These programs leverage significant private charitable contributions for assistance and

relief programs, like those of JDC.

Over the years, JDC has worked closely with the United States Government, from helping refugees after the Holocaust; working with the US Department of Agriculture to distribute food in the former Soviet Union after the fall of communism; partnering with the US Agency for International Development on rehabilitation centers in earthquake devastated Haiti, disaster risk reduction efforts in East Asia; and working with the State Department on compensation for Holocaust survivors and Jewish communal property restitution. Through these partnerships, JDC has been able to transfer our expertise developed over nearly a century of experience helping Jewish communities around the world confronted by the most difficult challenges—disaster, extreme poverty, political instability, genocide—to create innovative programs that benefit some of the world’s neediest populations – both Jewish communities as well as other communities in need.

Over the past several years, JDC has been both a recipient of U.S. Government funding and has also contributed funding to projects in partnership with USAID. In response to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, USAID/Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) Program has supported JDC’s “Project CHERISH” to develop rehabilitation activities helping Israeli and Palestinian children regain their confidence and function in daily life. JDC has supported and partnered with USAID in the aftermath of the 2004 Pacific tsunami on projects relating to vocational training and children’s recreation, rehabilitation programs in Haiti after the devastating earthquake, disaster mitigation projects in East Asia training the first responders how cope with psychological trauma following natural disasters, women’s health empowerment programs across the world, and sharing lessons learned from the Jewish community on building Diaspora-homeland relationships with other Diaspora communities in the United States.

One of JDC’s greatest assets is that it has always been a non-partisan, apolitical humanitarian organization focused on one objective: how to effectively deliver the best programs and services to

Jewish communities and other communities in need around the world. Yet JDC has continually relied on the support and partnership of U.S. embassies overseas, and the talented ambassadors and foreign services officers stationed across the world who have helped ensure that JDC is able to deliver its services to our clients – Holocaust survivors, children at risk, people with disabilities, and other communities in need.

Supported by the Jewish Federations of North America, among others, JDC is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of prominent Jewish leaders throughout the US. JDC's strategic operating principles emphasize development of innovative, scalable, and replicable programs, leveraging of funding resources through partnerships, transparency, accountability, and sustainability in all program delivery. Collaborating with local organization around the world, private foundations, as well as the Governments of the United States and Israel, JDC pioneers high-impact, transferable programs that provide relief throughout the world.

In Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, JDC-established social service infrastructure which provides food, medicine, home care, shelter, heating, and other relief to more than 175,000 impoverished elderly and more than 30,000 children at risk and their families.

In Israel, JDC creates innovative social service models to address the educational, employment, and cultural challenges of Israel's most vulnerable populations, including: children and youth at risk, people with disabilities, ultra-Orthodox communities, Israeli Arab and Druze citizens, the elderly, immigrants from Ethiopia and elsewhere. JDC also develops joint Palestinian-Israeli programs promoting children's health, and fosters civic engagement and community among marginalized Arab and Jewish young adults.

In the Middle East and North Africa, JDC pioneered a Turkish-Israeli partnership program for deaf and blind children, provides disabled people in Morocco with assistive devices and access to care through an Outreach Mobile Team and Orthopedic Supplies program, provides educational,

economic, and community development support to the Jewish communities of Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt, and through these programs and others strengthens the relationship between the Jewish and Muslim communities.

In East Africa, JDC supports education and scholarships for women and girls training to become community health workers; builds schools and operates a potable water program in rural areas of Ethiopia, provides life-saving medical services under the stewardship of JDC's renowned medical director Dr. Rick Hodes who secures life-saving spinal surgeries and cancer treatments for the poorest Ethiopians, and built and assists the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village (ASYV), an educational, community-based residence for Rwandan orphans, most of whom survived the 1994 genocide.

In Latin America, JDC developed Argentina-based small business loan funds and job training centers to respond to the financial crisis in 2001 and expanded job centers to Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, and Europe, and ensures expert community development support for Jewish communities adapting to political and social changes.

When disaster strikes overseas, JDC mobilizes its expert professional staff and network of local, U.S., Israeli, and global partners to provide immediate relief and long-term recovery assistance to victims.

U.S. Government spending on development and humanitarian relief is less than one percent of the total U.S. budget but the impact on people's lives is immense. We are mindful of the current constraints under which the budget is being considered. Yet, deep and disproportionate cuts to development and diplomacy will harm our ability to help the victims of natural disaster, disease, and conflict. We respectfully urge this committee to oppose further cuts to the International Affairs budget and to fund the humanitarian and development accounts at the highest level possible,

including increasing funding for USAID's Office for U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and disaster risk reduction activities so together we can address the number and severity of natural disasters.

Through a robust foreign assistance budget, active and collaborative U.S. embassies overseas, JDC, and the NGOs and other faith-based organizations represented here today and the many more operating in the field, have been able to improve and enhance the lives of those most in need – wherever they may be.

Thank you for your continued support.