

**Submitted Testimony**  
**House Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs**  
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Madam Chair, Ranking Member Lowey, I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Basic Education Coalition, a group of 18 humanitarian and development institutions dedicated to ensuring that the world's children receive a quality basic education. My name is John Gillies, and I am a co-chair of the Coalition and Director of the Global Learning Group at FHI360. The Coalition deeply appreciates the Committee's continued support for international basic education programs, and sincerely thanks you for your consistent leadership in providing hope and opportunity to children around the world. You are the model of bipartisan collaboration and forward-looking statesmanship. For fiscal year 2014, the Coalition recommends a U.S. investment of \$925 million in international basic education programs, with at least \$750 million of that amount coming from the Development Assistance account. This is the same requested amount as fiscal years 2012 and 2013 and the same appropriated amount as fiscal years 2010 and 2011.

We make this recommendation fully aware of the difficult choices facing this Congress. But we believe that ensuring the world's poorest and most vulnerable children can learn to read, write, do basic math, and acquire critical life skills remains one of the best investments United States taxpayers can make in promoting international stability and prosperity for both the recipient countries and for the U.S. A reduction in basic education programs would undermine this cornerstone for success in sustainable development across all sectors. I am talking about

programs that offer hope and opportunity to millions of children, enabling them to become productive, responsible citizens.

Throughout my career, I have visited and worked with children and families all over the developing world. Over the past twenty years, I have had the opportunity to work closely with people from school principals to national policy makers in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, as these countries worked to recover from the civil wars of the 1980's. In each case, it was U.S. assistance that was critical in finding new ways to reach the marginalized rural populations with meaningful, effective education. To see an indigenous, fourth grade girl in the highlands of Guatemala serving as student president and proudly introducing her school to foreign dignitaries in a clear, confident voice is to see the manifestation of profound social change. It is really no wonder that, according to an ongoing UN survey called the *My World Survey*, citizens in nearly 200 countries around the world say that a good education should be at the very top of the priority list for development.

In addition, wherever I go, U.S. assistance is recognized and valued, especially by the people with whom we work. By focusing on youth engagement, the U.S. increases local capacity and opportunity, while building long-term trust and understanding with communities and individuals. U.S. assistance is notable for its ability to work hand in hand with local governments and communities to find solutions to critical problems. In Senegal, we have been working since 2003 to develop a middle school system that is relevant for rural youth to whom the 9th grade is likely to be a terminal degree. Working with parents and communities to build village schools, our programs provide opportunities to young people, particularly girls, to continue their education.

Educated women enhance the chance that their daughters and each successive generation of girls receive an education. For every additional year that a girl attends primary school, her eventual wages rise by 10-20%, and for each additional year of secondary school, they rise by 15-25%. When an educated woman's income increases, she will reinvest 90% of that money in her family, compared to 30-40% for a man. This significantly impacts a woman's ability to break the cycle of poverty for her family.

We cannot afford to reverse the tremendous progress that has been made with the benefit of the resources you have committed. Overall, the number of children who are out of school around the world has dropped by roughly 47 million since 1999. In Afghanistan, there were fewer than 1 million students in primary school in 1999, now there are more than 5 million, including 2 million girls. In many sub-Saharan African countries, more than twice as many students enter first grade compared to a decade ago. Since 1999, the number of children enrolled in pre-school has risen by almost half. Great strides also have been made to improve gender equality, demonstrated by the rise in girls' enrollment to over 90% in 52 countries.

USAID is now conducting basic education programs in nearly 60 countries. In FY11, USAID taught nearly 62 million learners in primary school, trained nearly 626,000 teachers and educators, and built or repaired approximately 3,700 classrooms. Between FY06 and FY11 USAID provided roughly 152 million textbooks and other teaching and learning materials. USAID is currently implementing an unprecedented education strategy which will improve reading skills for 100 million children by 2015 and expand education access for 15 million children living in areas of conflict and crisis.

Through innovative, low-cost technologies, such as interactive and long-distance radio instruction, and through cell phones, computers, and the internet, we can now reach many more

children who would otherwise remain marginalized and vulnerable. For example, programs in Liberia have improved oral reading fluency by 238%, and reading comprehension has soared by 230%. In Southern Sudan, radio-based learning and other technologies are being used to deliver quality education programs to populations ravaged by years of civil war.

In these and many other countries, U.S. taxpayer support is having a tangible impact, but our progress is not based on dollars alone. Our knowledge transfer is as important as our cash transfer. We work directly with local stakeholders, build local capacity, transfer technology and innovation, strengthen systems, and share technical expertise. USAID makes its best investment in children's education when it applies all its considerable skill and experience through direct program interventions in the field to expand access, improve learning, and foster long-term impact. Congress should support and nurture this skill and experience as much as possible.

Despite our progress, 61 million primary school-age children and 71 million youth worldwide are still out of school. Roughly half of these children either live in conflict-ridden or fragile states, and many are marginalized by gender, ethnicity, or disability. Furthermore, millions of students who have attended some school drop out before the fifth grade, often because of poor quality education, school overcrowding, and under-resourced classrooms. We must make much more progress to ensure that children complete a full cycle of primary and at least lower secondary schooling and are learning according to measurable standards.

The stakes are especially high for girls. In 47 out of 54 African countries, a girl is less than 50% likely to attend secondary school. Across sub-Saharan Africa, poor girls living in rural areas have an average school life expectancy of just 1.9 years. Yet, if all women in sub-Saharan Africa had a secondary education, an estimated 1.8 million *lives* could be saved each year.

In the long run, we make a much smarter, more sustainable, and less costly investment when we educate children and build their capacity, so they can become self-sufficient adults and finally escape the cycle of poverty and dependence altogether. For every \$1 spent on education, as much as \$10-\$15 can be generated in economic growth for the country. This has clear economic security implications for the United States. Today, developing countries represent the fastest-growing markets for U.S. goods, representing 40% of U.S. exports and one out of every five American jobs. For every 10% increase in U.S. exports, there is a 7% boost in U.S. employment. Educating the world's poor is essential to building the stable trading partners required to grow U.S. export markets.

Finally, please do not lose sight of the national security dynamic. Research indicates that each additional year of formal schooling for males reduces their risk of becoming involved in conflict by 20%. Today 200 million youth – roughly 1 in 5 – have not even completed primary school. Population growth is exploding in the countries where we also see the highest illiteracy rates, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. Without a strong global commitment to education, both formal and informal, we can expect the problem of restive, poorly educated youth to intensify even further.

Secretary of State John Kerry recently stated, “Deploying diplomats today is much better than deploying troops tomorrow.” Funding basic education where it is critically needed around the globe is our inoculation, our prevention. A U.S. investment of \$925 million in global basic education programs would demonstrate continued strong leadership and a deep commitment to children and youth around the world yearning for a brighter future.

Thank you for your support and for your consideration of our request.