

**STATEMENT BY
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**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS,
AND RELATED PROGRAMS
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

MARCH 1, 2013

Madam Chairwoman,

I am David Glassman, a volunteer member of the Board of Trustees of Helen Keller International, and it is a pleasure to testify before the Committee. I urge the Committee to recommend in fiscal year 2014 at least \$3.0 million for blind children; \$100 million for Neglected Tropical Diseases; at least \$23 million for vitamin A; and the use of funding under accounts for HIV/AIDS to ensure adequate food and nutrition for people with HIV/AIDS. I also urge you to support at least \$750 million for Child Survival and Maternal Health and increased funding for nutrition programs.

Headquartered in the United States, Helen Keller International (HKI) currently offers programs in 21 countries in Africa and Asia, as well as the United States. Co-founded in 1915 by the deaf-blind crusader Helen Keller, HKI is a leading nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing blindness and reducing malnutrition worldwide. Our programs serve tens of millions of vulnerable people each year. But the need is still great to do more.

BLIND CHILDREN

One child goes blind every minute. According to the World Health Organization, one and a half million children are blind and almost 19 million children suffer from low vision and uncorrected refractive errors.

Throughout their lives, blind children in developing countries must depend completely upon their families and government health systems. They are often neglected and rarely receive opportunities to attend school or develop the skills needed to become productive members of society. For the vast majority of these children, their blindness is avoidable. Helen Keller International uses cost-effective, proven strategies to prevent and treat vision loss in children. Many children can be helped through simple and inexpensive operations and vision correction. This House Subcommittee has consistently supported a program for blind children in developing countries. In partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the program has helped to save the sight of hundreds of thousands of children. I urge the Subcommittee to continue the Blind Children funding at a level of at least \$3.0 million for fiscal year 2014.

VITAMIN A DEFICIENCY

It is estimated that every year 670,000 children will die from vitamin A deficiency (VAD), and 350,000 children will go blind. Vitamin A is essential for growth, eye health, cognitive development and immune system function. It is a key determinant of maternal and child survival. Providing vitamin A to children between six months and five years of age reduces mortality by an average of 25%, and helps prevent blindness and vision impairment.

HKI's programs to address vitamin A deficiency are known for their efficiency and success in reaching large numbers of children. With the support of USAID, HKI has become a recognized leader in distributing vitamin A capsules to mothers and children in countries across the world.

Vitamin A supplementation is considered one of the most cost-effective public health interventions in the world. At a cost of approximately \$1 per child per year, it takes just two high-dosage vitamin A capsules to prevent vitamin A-related blindness and improve a child's

chance of survival. I urge the Subcommittee to provide at least \$23 million for vitamin A for fiscal year 2013.

NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) blind, disfigure, disable, stigmatize and can kill, trapping the more than 2 billion people who live on less than \$1.25 a day in a cycle of poverty and disease.

Research has shown that eliminating NTDs can allow millions to climb out of poverty, particularly by increasing access to education and improving economic performance.

The USAID Neglected Tropical Diseases program has already made possible the treatment of more than 160 million people worldwide as part of large scale disease control and elimination programs. Through USAID programs and the generous support of the pharmaceutical manufacturers who have donated their products to NTD programs, more than 250 million NTD treatments have been disseminated in 14 countries since 2007. Generous donations have come from GlaxoSmithKline, Merck and Pfizer. The US has become the global leader by taking the lead in increasing access to medicines to treat the most common NTDs. Helen Keller International supports addressing all of the diseases in the current targeted program for NTDs, through existing grant mechanisms.

For decades, Helen Keller International has been a recognized leader in addressing blinding trachoma and onchocerciasis. Globally, trachoma – which is the leading cause of preventable blindness – has left over 7.5 million people irreversibly blind and almost 50 million in need of treatment. HKI supports the provision of sight-saving surgeries for thousands of individuals suffering from trichiasis (the blinding phase of the disease) in Africa and works with its local partners to consistently improve surgical quality and patient outcomes.

Parasitic worms are estimated to infect one billion people worldwide, causing chronic, disabling and often disfiguring diseases that lead to a downward cycle of poverty and deprivation. Since school children bear the highest infection loads, Helen Keller International implements school-based de-worming programs that have an enormous positive impact on the community. I urge the Subcommittee to continue the United States' leadership in Neglected Tropical Diseases control during fiscal year 2014 by supporting continued funding of at least \$100 million.

NUTRITION

One in three women and more than 170 million children under the age of five in the developing world suffers from undernutrition. More than a third of child deaths are a result of undernutrition. Micronutrients and other interventions are now providing assistance to more than 10 million infants, children and women every year. HKI supports the continuation and expansion of these programs and asks that the Subcommittee recommend increased funding under the Nutrition-specific account within global health programs for fiscal year 2013.

HIV/AIDS, MICRONUTRIENTS AND NUTRITION

There is clear evidence that lack of nutritious food for individuals with HIV/AIDS diminishes the effectiveness of prevention, care and treatment strategies. Adequate nutrition – food with essential vitamins and minerals – is a key component of care and treatment of people with HIV/AIDS. HKI has demonstrated that its Homestead Food Production program can be tailored to meet the nutritional needs of people living with HIV/AIDS. Based on this evidence, I urge the committee to support the use of HIV/AIDS accounts for programs that address the development and implementation of nutrition support, guidelines, and care services for people living with HIV/AIDS.

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Investments in food security and agriculture programs that explicitly focus on improving nutrition in vulnerable populations through access to nutritious foods can produce long-term gains in child survival and health, income enhancement, poverty reduction, and broad-based economic growth. I urge the Subcommittee to support a food security and agricultural strategy which includes improvements in nutrition as a central objective with measurable outcomes and puts the focus on supporting small-holder families, particularly women farmers, and other vulnerable populations.

CHILD SURVIVAL AND MATERNAL HEALTH

Each year, nearly 7 million children die before their fifth birthday. Maternal and child undernutrition is an underlying cause in one third of these deaths, and continues to be a cause and consequence of diseases and disability in the children who survive. I urge the Subcommittee to recommend funding of at least \$651 million for Child Survival and Maternal Health in fiscal year 2013.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, Helen Keller International has saved the sight and lives of millions. Today, we are as determined to accomplish even more on behalf of children and adults in developing countries. Helen Keller may have said it the best, "*Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.*" Thank you for your consideration.