

**Statement of Andrea Koppel
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U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee on State Department, Foreign Operations and Related Programs

My name is Andrea Koppel and I am Mercy Corps' Vice President for Global Engagement and Policy. Mercy Corps is an Oregon-based humanitarian and development non-profit organization working in over 40 countries. Our mission is to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities. We are proud partners with USAID and the Department of State, and I would like to start my remarks by thanking this committee for their leadership and support of the lifesaving accounts, including the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) and Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) Accounts that make much of our work possible.

The funding this subcommittee provides makes an immense difference in the lives of millions of people around the world. I recently returned from a trip to the Middle East to visit some of Mercy Corps' programs that are responding to the crisis in Syria and saw first-hand the good work that US programs are doing in the region. Besides highlighting our humanitarian work, I would also like to address the importance of resilience and close with a request for continued support and US leadership in humanitarian response and long-term development assistance.

Middle East

I have just returned from the Middle East, where I visited a variety of US Government funded programs that are making a transformative difference in the lives of some of the over 900,000 Syrian refugees that have fled across the Syrian border into neighboring countries. As

this crisis continues to grow, aid flows are struggling to keep up with needs. I witness this firsthand in Lebanon, which despite hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees of any country in the region, received considerably less support from international donors in 2012 than Jordan received.

There is often a stereotype of a traditional humanitarian response to crisis. The image of a smiling Western Aid worker handing out food to refugee children garbed in tattered clothes – so common in fundraising appeals from the 1980s and 1990s – may come to mind. But humanitarian aid has moved into the twenty-first century, and a great deal has changed. Humanitarian assistance is now much more sophisticated, efficient, and innovative. When possible, we avoid shipping in outside commodities and instead work with and through local markets to ensure that aid supports rather than competes with local businesses. We employ predominantly local staff; people from the country who have the know-how and technical skills to reach even the most dangerous areas of a conflict zone with needed assistance. We increasingly use mobile technology to better direct our support, build access to mobile banking services, and reduce transportation and overhead costs.

Resilience

Another way that humanitarian aid is modernizing is by focusing increasingly in addressing the needs and drivers, rather than just the effects, of humanitarian crises. Known as “resilience” aid, this creative programming helps to better support communities facing crisis. Mercy Corps works in many countries that face cyclical crises, such as recurrent droughts in the Horn of Africa or the Sahel. We have been thrilled to see USAID’s increasing focus on the concept of resilience in these regions and appreciate the strategy on resilience that USAID unveiled in December. The strategy affirms that resilience interventions must bring together

activities that have traditionally operated in silos – economic development and livelihoods, natural resource management, water and sanitation, health and nutrition, conflict mitigation, governance, risk reduction, and so on. The policy’s focus on joint planning and design of programs across different parts of USAID “turf” is a big step forward, as is the mandate that USAID’s country planning processes must consistently build in a focus on resilience.

So what does this look like in practice? It means a greater focus on understanding, and improving, how communities cope with drought and other shocks. Instead of just providing assistance that meets immediate material needs, a resilience approach also focuses on factors that affect a community’s ability to cope with crisis.

As Mercy Corps has found in Ethiopia, this often means focusing on factors that fall well outside the traditional humanitarian assistance toolkit. Last summer, amidst the Horn of Africa’s worst drought in generations, Mercy Corps received encouraging news from local officials in the Somali-Oromiya region of Ethiopia. In this area — long known for conflict, scarce resources and harsh conditions — communities that had participated in USAID-supported Mercy Corps peacebuilding efforts were reportedly coping better than they had during less severe droughts in the past.

We were intrigued, so we sent out a research team — and the findings were striking: When local conflict was addressed, people were far better equipped to survive the drought. To understand why, put yourself in the position of an Ethiopian herder. When a drought hits, you can cope in several ways. First, you will sell the weakest animals in your herd, raising cash to meet your family’s short-term needs while reducing grazing pressure on a water-scarce environment. You may migrate with the remaining herd to areas where the grazing potential is

better. Along the way, you will rely on sharing access to scarce remaining water resources wherever you go.

Yet conflict can make these coping mechanisms impossible, blocking market access, freedom of movement, and access to shared resources like water. In this part of Ethiopia, population pressure and climate change had strained resources, spurring violence that in 2008-09 resulted in massive loss of lives and assets.

In response to that conflict, Mercy Corps initiated a peacebuilding process in 2009 with support from USAID. We helped participating communities focus on establishing peaceful relations, economic linkages and joint management of natural resources.

Communities that participated in Mercy Corps' program reported greater freedom of movement and fewer barriers to accessing resources, markets and public services than did non-participating communities. They identified greater freedom of movement as the single most important factor contributing to their ability to cope and adapt to the severe drought conditions.

As one herder told us, "It is very difficult to use or access dry reserves [grazing areas] located in contending communities in a situation where there is no peace...the peace dialogues in the area have improved community interaction and helped us to access these resources."

As the subcommittee makes funding and policy decisions this year, I would encourage you urge USAID to institutionalize and fund resilience programming. I would encourage you to consult with USAID on their new resilience strategy and work with them to ensure that there is a consistent means of funding these approaches.

Community Development Funds

The Administration has put forth another positive initiative that promotes innovation and effective programming called the Community Development Funds (CDF). This program, funded

out of the Development Assistance account, provides cash resources for food security programs. CDF, coupled with traditional USDA food security programs, has allowed us to do creative programming and expand the number of beneficiaries we serve. We are now utilizing these funds in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among other countries. In the DRC, for example, receiving these funds in cash allows these taxpayer dollars to stretch 30% further than if we were monetizing food commodities. I would encourage the Subcommittee to include language in the FY 2014 bill and the FY 2013 CR that allows for more of this type of programming.

Funding

Humanitarian needs resulting from conflicts and natural disasters around the world have increased dramatically over the course of the last year. Unfortunately current levels for humanitarian assistance are not sufficient to meet these challenges, which will prove harmful to both U.S. interests and millions of vulnerable people who require lifesaving assistance. Having just seen the vast needs in the Middle East, and the difference in human terms our assistance makes to children and families that have fled some of the most horrific violence of this young century, I would strongly urge you to support robust funding for the IDA and MRA accounts in the FY 2013 bill and in the FY 2014 process. Members of this subcommittee are the most knowledgeable in this Congress about global needs and the fiscal constraints that the US government are under, but I ask that you look at the IDA and MRA accounts as not only a line item in the broader budget, but an actual lifeline to millions of men, women and children in some of the most desperate circumstances you can imagine. Thank you for time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.