

Statement of Ambassador Power
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
House Appropriations Committee: Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations & Related
Programs
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INTRODUCTION

Madam Chairwoman, Representative Lowey, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to testify. I am grateful for this panel's firm and time-tested commitment to American leadership at the United Nations and throughout the international system.

At my confirmation hearing and from my first day in office, I have emphasized the critical importance of assertive American leadership at the United Nations in order to maximize our ability to address the global challenges of the twenty-first century. I pledged to work hard for a UN system that would help to advance America's national interests, including the maintenance of international peace and security, the advancement of human rights, and the promotion of human dignity; a UN that would operate more effectively, more efficiently, and more transparently; and a UN that would be less weighed down by bias and hypocrisy. I know you share these critical goals.

I will outline these goals in greater detail as well as the progress that we've already been able to achieve. However, I want to be clear that our ability to exercise leadership in the UN – to protect our core national security interests, to champion budget discipline and transparency, to promote fairness and end bias, and to ensure that the UN stands up for human rights and human dignity – is directly tied to meeting our financial obligations.

It is within this context that I respectfully request full funding for the Administration's FY15 request for three accounts: Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA); Contributions to International Organizations (CIO); and International Organizations and Programs (IO&P). I also strongly urge you to support the newly proposed Peacekeeping

Response Mechanism (PKRM), which will allow us – in partnership with you – to respond to unforeseen crises.

I recognize that your consideration of the FY15 budget comes at a time when both the Administration and Congress are committed to fiscal restraint. You are making difficult choices about what to fund and what to cut. The Administration has had to make similarly hard calls about what to propose and what to refrain from proposing. Of course, the United Nations – and our financial support to it – must receive rigorous scrutiny. In this tight budget climate, our budget request is a clear signal of the value that the United Nations provides to the United States by helping advance U.S. national interests around the globe.

PRESERVING INTERNATIONAL STABILITY AND PEACE

The first – and most critical – measure of the value of the United Nations is how it helps the United States to advance our national security interests, and to keep Americans safe. Events in recent months provide a clear reminder of the continuing threats to international peace and security – from the diffusion and spread of terrorist groups especially into areas of unrest, the aggressive actions of a large power looking to extend its influence, and the persistent challenge of countering the proliferation of the world’s most dangerous weapons. In each case, the United States is leveraging the United Nations to help mobilize global action to address these shared challenges, in a manner that shares with other countries the costs and burdens of international action.

Syria. In the past three years, the brutal civil war in Syria has claimed the lives of an estimated 140,000 people, injured tens of thousands more, left hundreds of thousands barely surviving while under siege, and driven upwards of six million from their homes. The depth of this human catastrophe is well known; what may be less visible are the diligent efforts being undertaken by UN agencies and programs to ease the suffering. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has been coordinating relief operations outside Syria for more than 2.5 million refugees. The UNICEF-led “No Lost Generation” initiative is striving to shield children from the fighting, reunite broken families, and develop opportunities for education. The UN Human Rights Council authorized creation of the Syrian Commission of Inquiry, an expert group whose reports have

opened a window on events that have shocked the conscience of the world, including the Assad regime's reliance on abductions, torture, rape, and murder, in addition to the systematic shredding of the doctrine of medical neutrality.

Because Russia has blocked significant UN Security Council (UNSC) action, we have tried to make the most of the assets and capabilities of other parts of the UN system. However, at our persistent urging, the Council did vote unanimously on February 22 to demand an end to efforts by both sides to prevent the delivery of food, medicine and other supplies to endangered civilians. We are also insisting that Syria fulfill its obligations - under UNSC Resolution 2118 - to eliminate its chemical weapons program and to cooperate with the international community in that effort. To date, the Joint Mission put together by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, has verified the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons-production equipment, the machines that mix the components, and the removal of nearly half of Syria's declared stockpile. The mission's goal is to complete the removal of declared chemicals as soon as possible in April and the verified destruction of these chemical weapons and materials by June 30. We are pushing aggressively toward this critical deadline as CW in Syria are in nobody's interest.

None of the actions we have taken has stopped the slaughter in Syria, and the Administration is not remotely satisfied with what we see on the ground. We continue to support Joint Special Representative Brahimi's dogged efforts to facilitate meaningful negotiations within the framework of the 2012 Geneva communique. Ultimately, a political solution will be needed to end the suffering.

Ukraine. Since the beginning of last month, the UN Security Council has met ten times to discuss Ukraine. Our primary focus has been on the Russian Federation's illegal and unjustified attempt to annex Crimea, and other threats directed at parts of southern and eastern Ukraine. In this troubled period, the Security Council has served as a platform not only for exposing the immense gap between Russian rhetoric and reality, but also for demonstrating Russia's international isolation. This was made very clear when, on March 15, Russia alone opposed the Resolution sponsored by the United States to underscore that the Crimean referendum was

invalid and to reaffirm support for Ukraine's territorial integrity. Just last week, this judgment was reinforced when the UN General Assembly adopted a similar resolution by the overwhelming margin of 100-11. Meanwhile, UN observers have deployed to Ukraine to monitor the situation and Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has visited the region, urging Russia to avoid further provocations and on all sides to refrain from violence.

United States policy is to support Ukraine's political and economic stability and to make clear that Russia's decision to willfully ignore international law will carry costs. To that end, President Obama has joined with leaders in Europe, Canada and elsewhere in imposing a variety of sanctions against individuals and institutions in response to Russia's attempted Crimean land grab. We have also taken steps to assure our NATO allies that the United States will fully meet its Article V obligation should threats to their territory arise.

Iran and North Korea. The United States has also used the United Nations as an essential platform for countering the global threat posed by nuclear proliferation. Over the years, we have learned that the tool of sanctions is most effective when imposed multilaterally, and U.S. leadership has led to global sanctions against Iran and North Korea. Importantly, sanctions approved by the UN Security Council bind all countries.

Such a sanctions regime has played an important part in the international community's efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to concerns over Iran's nuclear program. So far, the so-called "P-5 plus 1" negotiations have resulted in a Joint Plan of Action by which Iran agreed to halt uranium enrichment above 5 percent and not add to its stockpile of 3.5 percent enriched uranium. Further, Iran committed not to increase the number of centrifuges it has in operation, and not to install or use any next-generation centrifuges. The P5+1 and EU agreed to provide limited and targeted relief in return. This arrangement has created space for a second round of negotiations – now ongoing in Vienna – that is aimed at achieving a comprehensive solution to the nuclear issue. Here, let me emphasize that, as President Obama has repeatedly said, the United States will not allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon. Both the UN sanctions committee and International Atomic Energy Agency have been important components of this effort to resolve our concerns with Iran's nuclear program.

Similarly, UN sanctions against North Korea have made clear that the international community is united in opposition to Pyongyang's dangerous nuclear program, and that to end its isolation North Korea must refrain from provocative actions, including launches using ballistic missile technology, and it must denuclearize. Strong Security Council resolutions have provided the basis for mobilizing assertive international action to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

PREVENTING CONFLICT

Preventing deadly conflict is in the best interest of the United States, and the United Nations is a key partner in this effort. We know from history and our own experience that small wars can grow into big ones; that unrest provides targets of opportunity for aggressors, criminals and terrorists; that hundreds of thousands of lives can be lost in a matter of weeks; and that unresolved conflicts can spark the displacement of millions, draining the world's economic and humanitarian resources. UN peacekeeping is not the answer in all cases, but well-designed and -conducted operations do allow us to share with others the costs and risks of containing conflict and preventing its recurrence.

Today, more than 115,000 personnel serve in fifteen UN peacekeeping missions worldwide, protecting civilians from violence, facilitating lifesaving humanitarian assistance, and keeping a lid on combustible situations in countries where conflict already has killed millions, and could do so again if left unchecked. Many of these missions operate in countries where government institutions are weak or nonexistent; where infrastructure is lacking or absent; and even sometimes where violence remains rampant. The United States' share of the cost of these and other international peacekeeping activities is largely financed through our CIPA account. For 2015, we estimate requirements of \$2.52 billion in FY 2015, including the cost of fully accrued U.S. commitments for each mission.

We recognize that the requested amount is a significant increase from current year funding, but emphasize that this increase stems not from increases in the costs of peacekeepers (which as noted have actually decreased), but from the growing number of complex threats that UN

peacekeepers are addressing worldwide, including in Mali and South Sudan, and the continued need for UN peacekeeping in places like Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Peacekeepers are also now on the frontlines of the international community's efforts to counter growing terrorist threats in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Let me highlight several of the places where peacekeeping is directly advancing these and other U.S. national interests.

Mali. In Mali, the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) is playing a critical role in building a sustainable peace in the face of an ongoing terrorist threat. We have requested \$390 million to facilitate MINUSMA's continued stabilization of major population centers, which have been wracked by a coup, separatist movements, Al Qaeda-linked terrorism, and widespread civil violence. In February, I visited Mali with other members of the UN Security Council and found a population determined to recover from the dark days of 2012 and 2013, when a loose coalition of terrorist and militant groups killed and tortured civilians, destroyed priceless parts of the country's historic heritage, and sought to split the nation in half. UN peacekeepers and French troops have played a critical role in reversing extremist gains and have helped the country to regain its footing. The need now is to further marginalize the terrorist groups, while fostering national reconciliation, ending impunity, guarding against corruption, and laying the groundwork for a government in which all Malians can have faith. For decades, Mali served as an example of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society living in relative security and peace. Ridding Mali of terrorists and strengthening the democracy there is an effort well worth supporting.

Sudan and South Sudan. Madam Chairwoman, few parts of the world have been as politically fragmented and plagued by strife as the area now encompassed by Sudan and South Sudan. The UN played a central role in helping shepherd South Sudan to independence in 2011, and since fighting broke out in December 2013, the UN peacekeeping mission there (UNMISS) has protected tens of thousands of civilians and sought to maintain the conditions for vital humanitarian assistance to continue. Meanwhile, the UN continues to play a critical role on both sides of the Sudan-South Sudan border, especially in the long-troubled regions of Abyei and Darfur – where a joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID) is deployed. The United States and the United Nations are jointly determined, in keeping with many regional leaders, to do everything possible to resolve ongoing disputes and create a lasting climate of

stability, improved governance, and respect for human rights. Our FY 2015 requests of \$340 million for UNMISS, \$410 million for UNAMID, and \$92.5 million for the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) are indispensable to this effort.

Democratic Republic of Congo. The largest UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) is in the vast Democratic Republic of Congo, where a weak central government, poor infrastructure, rich natural resources, and ethnic rivalries exacerbated by the 1994 Rwanda genocide have produced over time a toxic mix of deprivation and violence. For some time, many in this body – and many in the DRC – questioned whether the UN operation was a worthwhile investment. In 2010, the mission was given a stronger mandate to protect civilians and humanitarian workers and to support the government in its efforts to consolidate internal peace. But it is only in the last year – when the Security Council voted in March 2013 to authorize the Force Intervention Brigade consisting of three infantry battalions and associated units -- that MONUSCO has begun making significant gains. Last December, the mission was instrumental in forcing the surrender of the dangerous M23 rebel movement, and it is now assisting the government in confronting the anti-Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces, which has ties to Islamic extremist groups, possibly including Al Shabaab. MONUSCO also has made clear its intention to take on the leadership of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, the remnants of the genocidal force that two decades ago caused such horror in that country.

Central African Republic. If and when a UN peacekeeping mission begins in the Central African Republic, it will do so as a follow-on to an African Union (AU) operation that has, since December, worked side-by-side with France in an effort to prevent mass atrocities. Due to the timing of the sharp deterioration in CAR, the administration did not include funding for a UN peacekeeping mission for that nation in its FY 2015 budget presentation. However, the new Peacekeeping Response Mechanism – if approved – could help finance the U.S. share of what will prove an incredibly important mission.

In December, I traveled to CAR where – over the past six months -- more than 700,000 civilians have been displaced by attacks perpetrated by Muslim and Christian militias. Most of the casualties have resulted not from clashes between these forces, but by each side assaulting

unarmed civilians who are associated with the rival faith. While in CAR, I was approached by a Muslim woman who described the death of her husband, who had been hacked with a machete, then doused with gasoline, and set afire. A Christian teenager told me that on a road near his village, he had counted 22 bodies, including several cousins, who had been murdered; he was tempted, he said, to join a militia to take revenge. Alongside the Bangui airport, I visited a sprawling camp where people literally lined the runway, drawn by the promise of safety offered by nearby French peacekeepers. This was a virtual city of 40,000 men, women and children, with no infrastructure except a single tent serving as a medical clinic and one freshly-dug latrine. The night before I arrived, eight babies were delivered; two died.

The term “failed state,” when applied to CAR, is too bloodless a description. Indeed, CAR shows how devastating the human consequences can be when a government is either unable or unwilling to perform its most basic functions. Peacekeepers from the African Union and France have made a stalwart effort to restore order and protect civilians. They have had some success, but lack the resources to fully contain the fighting, especially in the more remote parts of the country. Late last year, the UN Security Council requested the Secretary-General to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate reports of violations and abuses to help ensure that those responsible are held to account. In January, the country’s transitional council took a positive step by installing a new president, Catherine Samba-Panza, who is committed to national reconciliation and to implementing a roadmap for elections and the creation of a democratic government. On March 3, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon recommended the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission with a mandate to protect civilians. Going forward, I am heartened by the concern that many Members of Congress have expressed about this chilling crisis. The Obama Administration seeks the support of this subcommittee for the earliest possible dispatch of a blue-helmeted peacekeeping mission to CAR.

Peacekeeping Response Mechanism. To be manageable, budgets are devised and debated many months prior to the events to which the relevant funding is applied. That is usually sufficient, because sadly, the continued need for many of these missions is predictable. However, as this subcommittee is well aware, unforeseen emergencies do arise; South Sudan and the Central African Republic are but the most recent examples. Periodically, it is in the U.S.

national interest to support a new or expanded peacekeeping mission for which we had no reason previously to request funding, thus making it necessary to go outside the regular budget cycle to identify the needed resources. For these reasons, the administration is requesting an appropriation of \$150 million for a Peacekeeping Response Mechanism that will support critical requirements for otherwise unbudgeted emergency peacekeeping operations and activities.

PKRM funds would be subject to a determination by the Secretary of State that additional resources are urgently needed, and in allocating any such funds we would do so only after consulting closely with this subcommittee and Congress as a whole, and of course after submitting formal notifications.

Curtailing and Closing Missions. At a time of growing demands on UN peacekeepers – and increasing costs to the U.S. Government and other financial contributors as a result – I want to note the Administration’s continued commitment to curtailing and terminating missions that have met their stated objectives. Just as peacekeeping missions are created when needed, we must insist that, when appropriate, they come to an end. Peacekeeping missions should not amount to an eternal commitment of American taxpayer resources. Since 2009, we have ended UN missions in Timor-Leste and Sierra Leone, while reducing the size of operations in Kosovo, Lebanon, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire, and Haiti. I can assure you that the administration is continuing to actively seek opportunities to reduce UN expenses by ending or reducing the size of UN missions that have achieved their goals or that have reached diminishing returns on what they can usefully accomplish.

Outstanding Commitments and Scales of Assessment. At the same time, we know that American influence at the UN is enhanced, and UN peace operations are made more effective, when the United States pays what we owe in full and on time. For example, one of the great challenges to UN peacekeeping is recruiting trained forces in a quantity and on a timetable that enables missions to achieve their mandates. The United States often encourages other countries to make such forces available, but this is a hard case to make if our own financial obligations are unmet. Over the years, this subcommittee has been extremely helpful in trying to minimize U.S. unpaid commitments in the CIPA account. I ask your consideration now for our request that

Congress lift the statutory cap on U.S. payments to UN peacekeeping missions from the current level of 27.14 percent to the UN-assessed level of 28.36 percent -- and to make this higher level applicable for Fiscal years 2013 and 2014, as well as FY 2015. This will allow us to proceed without accumulating hundreds of millions of dollars in additional unpaid commitments. In making this request, I can also assure this subcommittee that the administration and our UN mission will work tirelessly to negotiate future scales of assessment that better reflect the global economy.

PROMOTING FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Madame Chairwoman, advocating reform is also a core element of the U.S. agenda at the UN, and something to which I personally devote much energy and time. The message we convey is that precisely because of our firm support for international security, peace, human rights, and economic development, it is essential that the UN operate as efficiently, effectively, and economically as possible. In accordance with these objectives, let me highlight three elements of our reform agenda.

First, we push for fiscal discipline. Several years ago, we made clear that the decades-long pattern of increases in the UN's regular budget could not continue; since then, we have helped establish a new pattern of relative restraint on spending. In December, I personally presented the case for financial discipline to members of the UN General Assembly's Fifth Committee, which is responsible for budgetary matters. After deliberations that stretched into and beyond Christmas, we persuaded member states to approve a UN regular budget for 2014-5 that was \$50 million below the final level for the previous biennium. This budget includes a reduction of 219 staff positions, or two percent, and a further freeze in UN pay for one year and in UN allowances for two years. This is crucial because the UN's greatest asset – but also its most significant cost – is its staff.

The second pillar of our reform agenda is accountability. The UN should operate in the open as much as possible. To this end, we have successfully pushed for more robust oversight mechanisms, the online disclosure of internal audit reports, and increased whistleblower

protections. We have supported the webcasting of all formal UN committee meetings. We have increased accountability for UN personnel in the field by establishing an independent office to review peacekeeping and support operations. And we have advocated for a total prohibition on payments to UN troops sent home for sexual abuse or other forms of misconduct. The international community should show zero tolerance toward abuses committed by individuals acting in the world's name.

Our third pillar is excellence. This standard is especially vital in the area of peacekeeping, where the quality of performance dictates whether or not the lives of innocent people can be saved. Accordingly, we have promoted the Global Field Support Strategy, which has enabled the UN to streamline and standardize its support for peacekeeping missions. This has enhanced the timeliness of equipment supply so that missions are able to focus less on logistics and more on fulfilling their mandates. The result has been improved operations and savings to date of more than \$250 million. The United States has also pushed for and won reforms to rationalize troop reimbursement rates and to extend the typical troop rotation from six to twelve months, thus cutting travel and training expenses while keeping UN forces with experience in the field.

ENSURING THAT THE UN IS FAIR

The great benefit of multilateral organizations is that they vest political and legal legitimacy in the actions they authorize. The accompanying drawback is that a diverse membership can be a barrier to consensus. There are times when -- in defense of fairness and common sense -- the United States must take a stand against the UN majority. This has been the case with our country's principled fight against the anti-Israel bias that has long pervaded and tarnished the UN system -- a fight that I have made a priority since arriving in New York.

For decades, certain groups of states have used the UN General Assembly as a forum for isolating and attempting to delegitimize Israel by voting through a seemingly endless supply of resolutions that are inaccurate and imbalanced. This same hostility has colored the actions of bodies within the UN system, including the deliberations of the Human Rights Council where democratic Israel -- not North Korea, Cuba, Iran, or Belarus -- remains the only country subject to a standalone item on the permanent agenda. This misguided choice of priorities seriously

damages the Human Rights Council's credibility – as does the failure of the General Assembly to abide by its expressed intent to limit Human Rights Council membership to countries that actually respect human rights.

While much remains to be done, we have made some progress to more fully integrate Israel into the UN system. In 2009, Israel was invited to participate in the Geneva-based deliberations of JUSCANZ, a regional group that includes the United States, Australia, Japan, Canada, and New Zealand. In 2010, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon asked Israeli police to assist post-earthquake UN reconstruction efforts in Haiti. In 2012, Israel became a member of the Executive Board of the UN Development Program. On January 1, 2013, Israel re-joined the board of UNICEF after a hiatus of forty years. Also in 2013, Israel was invited to participate for the first time in the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) in Geneva; this is where much of the behind-the-scenes work is done in preparation for UN meetings and votes including those of the Human Rights Council; Israel had joined the New York-based WEOG in 2000. On February 27, Israel was also admitted to the Industrialized Market Economy Countries (IMEC) regional group within the International Labor Organization (ILO). IMEC is an informal but highly influential caucus in which the United States is active and which frequently speaks with one voice in ILO meetings.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to help facilitate – after being involved in many calls and meetings on the subject -- Israel's admission into the New York-based version of JUSCANZ at the UN's Third Committee. These milestones would perhaps seem less consequential if they had not been so unjustifiably delayed. As it is, they send a powerful message of inclusion and engagement at a pivotal moment in history – a message, loud and clear, that those striving to isolate Israel must not and will not succeed. To further reinforce that message, the United States has made a commitment to support Israel's candidacy for membership on the UN Security Council for the term beginning in 2019. This is not the kind of promise we ordinarily make, but we have made it to Israel, because of our special relationship, and because Israel has been denied fair treatment at the UN for far too long.

CHAMPIONING HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Finally, Madam Chairwoman, the Obama Administration believes that the UN is at its best when it is standing up for freedom, human rights, and the fundamental dignity of every man, woman, and child. The very first words of the UN Charter -- “We the peoples of the United Nations” -- emphasize the UN’s role not simply as a pact among countries, but as a pledge by all of us to respect others, even as we insist on respect for ourselves. This commitment to human dignity is in keeping with American interests and universal values; and it reflects the reality that the job of maintaining peace and security has many dimensions.

On any given day, the many parts of the UN system are hard at work trying to help governments end conflict, counter terrorism, curb nuclear proliferation, fight crime and drug addiction, foster development, prepare for elections, protect children, empower women, promote respect for human rights, feed the hungry, prevent the spread of disease, respond to natural disasters, preserve the environment, and cope with refugees. This long list of important jobs is regularly implemented by the organizations covered by our CIO and IO&P accounts. Although the Administration’s request cut voluntary funding to a range of UN funds and programs due the necessity of making difficult tradeoffs, let me highlight just some of the invaluable work that UN departments, agencies, funds and programs do in this regard:

Our contributions to the World Health Organization (WHO) assist countries in addressing critical health problems and help protect Americans from infectious diseases, such as the H1N1 and avian influenza. WHO programs have led to the eradication of smallpox and helped reduce deaths from measles by 78 percent worldwide over the past twelve years.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is a global leader in providing health, nutrition, and educational services to children especially among the neediest and most vulnerable groups in the least developed countries. Over the years, the Fund has pioneered the use of low-cost technology, education, and advocacy to improve immunization rates against the principal childhood diseases. UNICEF can be counted on to play a crucial role in responding to humanitarian emergencies, such as those we are now witnessing in Syria and the Central African Republic. Historically, UNICEF has excelled in innovation and program delivery. More

recently, it has improved its administrative efficiency, reduced overhead, and implemented reforms in the areas of accounting, staffing, and transparency.

The UN Development Program (UNDP) is the central coordinating and funding mechanism for development aid within the UN system. Its activities include support for free-market reforms, privatization, job-creation, democracy, the empowerment of women, and peace. The UNDP is also focused on the prevention of humanitarian emergencies by helping countries to anticipate famines, avoid harmful environmental practices, and foster inter-ethnic and inter-religious cooperation.

The World Food Program (WFP) is a critical international instrument for addressing the needs of more than 870 million undernourished people around the globe. It is the major humanitarian agency protecting livelihoods in emergencies, but also a key partner to the United States in addressing long-term challenges to food security and nutrition.

America's membership in and support for these and other international organizations is evidence of the many dimensions of U.S. leadership across the globe. The United States was instrumental in the founding of a majority of these bodies and has a continuing stake in the effectiveness and efficiency of their work.

Moreover, the United Nations played a key part in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals -- benchmarks for progress in such vital areas as education, women and children's health, economic development, and the environment. In the fourteen years since the MDGs were established, much has been achieved. Extreme poverty has been cut in half. Access to primary education has increased dramatically. Infant mortality rates and maternal health has improved. And yet, progress toward the MDGs has been mixed, with many of the goals far from being met.

So, there remains much more to do. In his 2014 State of the Union Address, President Obama declared that, if we act boldly in building on recent gains, we have an historic opportunity in the next two decades to rid the world of extreme poverty. To succeed, we must recognize the many connections that exist between human rights, economic opportunity, democracy, and the ability

to respond to social challenges. Improvements in global statistics don't happen by accident; they depend on changes that enlarge the ability of individuals to make free choices in their own lives. For this reason, the United States will be playing a leadership role in shaping the successor goals to the MDGs – the post-2015 agenda – as it is negotiated in New York over the coming months.

Defending Human Rights and Civil Society. But even as we plan an agenda that goes beyond 2015 and the Millennium Development Goals, we are aware of a trend that may make it harder to achieve further gains in almost every arena. Within the past five years, literally dozens of countries have adopted new laws or regulations aimed at restricting the activities of civil society. Such steps undermine the ability of civil society to perform its crucial role in advancing peace, promoting well-being, and ensuring that governments are open and responsive to their citizens. At President Obama's direction, we are striving to push back both in our bilateral diplomacy and at the UN.

In 2009, we established a Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society. In 2010, we joined with partners in creating the first-ever Special Rapporteur to independently examine and report on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. In 2011, we came together with Brazil to launch the Open Government Partnership and -- with the help of philanthropic partners -- unveiled a multilateral "Lifeline" fund that has already provided emergency aid to more than 200 civil society organizations. At the UN last fall, amid the gathering of world leaders and all the urgent discussion about Syria and Iran, President Obama insisted that we carve out time for him to meet with other heads of state, foundation leaders, and opinion-makers to underscore our commitment to work together to protect civil society in the face of those who would unduly restrict it.

Supporting and defending human rights activists and civil society is a vital part of my own job. That is why I insist on meeting with groups of local activists and reformers wherever I travel and why -- in public and private -- I consistently highlight their persecution and achievements. It is why we have welcomed to our UN mission such advocates for justice and freedom as Pakistan's Malala Yousafzai, Russia's Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, Cuba's Rosa Maria Paya, and representatives of Uganda's beleaguered LGBT community. It is why our diplomats

have raised with UN officials and with our foreign counterparts many cases related to persons wrongfully imprisoned, including the U.S. citizen Amir Hekmati, who is being held in Iran. And it is why the United States is determined to make its presence felt at the UN Human Rights Council, which should be championing these cases and the cause of human rights everywhere.

While the Human Rights Council remains problematic and flawed, through U.S. leadership we have worked to focus the Human Rights Council on addressing pressing human rights crises. A principal example was its decision last year to establish a commission to investigate human rights practices in the Democratic Republic of North Korea (DPRK). The commission's findings and recommendations have generated a new and important global conversation about one of the most devastating human rights crises of our era.

CONCLUSION

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Lowey and members of the subcommittee, the Obama Administration believes that U.S. leadership across the United Nations and other international organizations is strongly in our national interests. In this, we maintain a tradition that extends back almost 70 years through Republican and Democratic administrations alike. We are the world's leading power and the primary architect of the international system, which continues to benefit the United States and the American people. Our citizens will do better and be safer in a world where rules are observed, prosperity is increasing, human suffering is alleviated, and threats to our well-being are contained. The United Nations is an indispensable partner in all of this, and U.S. leadership remains essential to an effective UN. To ensure we can maintain this leadership and its benefits for American citizens, and to effectively share the burdens of global action, I urge your full and favorable consideration of our funding request for Fiscal Year 2015. We believe that our proposals will benefit America while fully recognizing the need for fiscal discipline and reform.

To close on a personal note, I consider it both an enormous honor and a great responsibility to sit behind America's placard at the UN. And a big part of that privilege and responsibility is the chance to work closely with you, as the guardians of the American purse and representatives of

the American people – to ensure that our nation’s interests are well served. In that capacity, I cannot guarantee infallibility; far from it. But I do promise to be a straight shooter; to be accessible to you at short notice; to answer questions as promptly, fully and honestly as I can; and to represent our country with pride, vigilance, and all the energy and strength at my command.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.