

Follow/Mention
@HouseForeign

Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing:
“Modernizing Food Aid: Improving Effectiveness and Saving Lives.”
February 14, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

“This committee has long worked to strengthen foreign assistance as an effective way to advance our interests and values. Properly implemented, these relatively small investments can strengthen our national security and support the development of democratic governments and strong market economies overseas.

Last month, with committee leadership, the House passed the AGOA and MCA Modernization Act, which promises to create new opportunities for U.S. trade and investment and spark private sector-led growth, particularly in Africa.

Last Congress, we enacted the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act to identify what is – and what is not – working. I want to again thank Judge Poe for his leadership on that bill.

This committee also led the way on pushing for reforms to one of the central elements of our foreign assistance – the Food for Peace Act. These reforms enabled USAID to chip away at monetization and provided limited flexibility for NGOs to use market-based tools.

But much more remains to be done to truly modernize the Food for Peace Act. We must completely end the inefficient process known as ‘monetization’ – where local aid groups sell donated U.S. food to support their operations. This policy, along with requirements that all aid provided through Food for Peace be purchased from U.S. farmers and sent overseas by U.S. shippers, harms local markets and slows our response to emergencies.

These restrictions also needlessly drive up costs. By modernizing the Food for Peace Act, and prioritizing flexibility and efficiency, we can free up \$300 million. This will enable us to reach almost 10 million more men, women and children who would otherwise face death in places like Syria, Yemen, Northern Nigeria and Somalia. Hunger in countries such as these fuels conflict and instability, so helping people get the food they need not only helps save lives – it also strengthens U.S. national security.

Modernizing U.S. food assistance will also help reach people immediately after disaster strikes by allowing us to purchase food closer to areas in crisis. Under current law, it can take 14 weeks for U.S. food to reach those in need. As I saw in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan, we don’t have 14 weeks to respond after disaster strikes. We need the flexibility to purchase food in the region and get it to impacted areas within hours, not weeks. Saving time means saving lives.

Additional reforms are also worth considering. In South Sudan, committee staff saw how others provide assistance through secure debit cards, which recipients use to purchase food locally. Providing assistance this way helps build economic infrastructure that can endure after aid ends.

That said, no one is talking about completely cutting the American farmer out of our food aid programs. In places that suffer from cyclical drought, like Ethiopia, food grown in the U.S. is critical. But this is not always the case.

Sometimes we will need to provide U.S. commodities. Other times we will need to buy local or use vouchers. More often than not, we will need to do both. But we cannot keep supporting outdated, unnecessarily expensive requirements. Such deliberate, unjustified waste does not serve our national interests or save lives.

I now turn to our Ranking Member, Eliot Engel, who has been a partner in these aid efforts, for his remarks.”