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*“U.S. Policy in the Pacific: The Struggle to Maintain Influence”*  
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Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for inviting me to testify on the vital role of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in advancing U.S. foreign policy priorities—including the Asia-Pacific Rebalance—in the Pacific islands.

On the globe, most Pacific island nations appear tiny—mere dots scattered over an area of ocean covering nearly a third of the world’s surface. But these small-in-size nations are as central to global security today as they were during World War II. Their strategic position in the Asia-Pacific makes them more vital than ever to the global economy. A vast proportion of the world’s shipping passes through Pacific waters, on which millions of people depend for food and income.

Many of these nations, however, are threatened as never before—by depletion of their natural resources; by health threats such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and emerging diseases such as the Zika virus, which has been detected in eight of these nations; and especially by climate change. While typhoons and cyclones have long plagued the region, changes in climate have made them more frequent and intense. Last year, Super Typhoon Maysak, one of the strongest storms ever recorded, devastated the Federated States of Micronesia, and just a few months ago, Cyclone Winston, the strongest on record to hit the Southern Hemisphere, left a deadly wake in Fiji. In addition to more intense storms, rising seas threaten the very existence of low-lying nations such as the Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu. Pacific island nations are vulnerable to sea-level rise, changing rainfall patterns and increasing drought. Further, ocean acidification and rising sea temperatures are damaging coral reefs and fisheries and consequently posing major threats to food security. Each of these impacts is expected to intensify in the coming decades.

At USAID, our mission is to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity. The key to achieving success is ensuring that development gains benefit all people—which is also critical to ensuring that development progress can be sustained over the long term. At its core, the Asia-Pacific Rebalance is about strengthening our relationships with the countries—and more specifically, with the people—of the region. USAID plays an indispensable role by helping people improve their lives and building a more sustainable, equitable future for all.

USAID’s Mission in the Philippines and its Fiji-based Regional Pacific Islands Office take the lead in managing development assistance for 12 Pacific island countries: the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Our Philippines mission works closely with other USAID entities that provide assistance to the Pacific, such as the Thailand-based Regional Development Mission for Asia and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). We work with a wide range of partners—from Pacific island governments and civil

society organizations (CSOs) to the private sector and Peace Corps—to ensure that USAID programs have the greatest possible impact. We coordinate our efforts closely with Australia and New Zealand, the leading donors in the region, as well as the European Union. We also coordinate programming through partnerships with regional organizations, including the three key regional Pacific organizations: the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

Across all 12 Pacific island countries, USAID assistance focuses on climate change adaptation, greater disaster preparedness and providing relief when disasters do strike. In the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, we also assist in reconstruction from disasters. In Papua New Guinea, USAID supports biodiversity conservation and improved natural resource management, helps combat HIV/AIDS and multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, and works to strengthen democracy, peace and security in the post-conflict Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Through our regional programming, we also support sustainable fisheries management and conservation. Next, I will provide brief overviews of each of these assistance areas.

### **Climate Change Adaptation**

The people of the Pacific islands depend primarily on tourism, fisheries, forestry and agriculture for their livelihoods—all of which are highly sensitive to changing climatic conditions. USAID is helping communities adapt to these impacts to protect lives and livelihoods in the immediate term. Since 2012, we have supported nearly 70 communities across nine Pacific island nations in making their infrastructure more resilient. This work has included drainage and flood control system upgrades, rainwater catchment system improvements, cyclone proofing of buildings, and coastal protection and erosion control projects. With an emphasis on women's participation, we are also providing grants and training to CSOs to help communities adapt to the changing climate while also addressing other community needs, such as improving livelihoods, food security or governance. For example, USAID recently supported a CSO in the Marshall Islands in expanding pearl farming as a sustainable industry for one community.

For the Pacific islands to effectively respond to the changing environmental conditions, USAID also is focused on their longer-term needs—strengthening intra- and intergovernmental capacity to successfully attract international climate adaptation financing and implement resultant programs.

In November 2015, USAID launched a five-year project in partnership with SPC, PIFS and SPREP to strengthen regional cooperation and coordination among the Pacific island countries on climate change. This project will also help strengthen their ability to successfully apply for and effectively utilize climate financing by improving systems and introducing necessary tools at the national level. We are also poised to launch another project this fall that will assist all 12 Pacific island countries in matching their needs with available financing while also updating their legal frameworks to improve implementation of adaptation strategies. This project builds on our success since 2011 helping facilitate seven projects that have mobilized more than \$263 million in financing in Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

## **Emergency Response, Disaster Preparedness and Reconstruction**

Across the Pacific when natural disasters occur, USAID delivers humanitarian assistance, which includes food, emergency shelter materials, safe drinking water and hygiene kits. Drought has been a particular challenge since the onset of the climatic phenomenon known as El Niño. For example, in response to a severe drought in Palau that reached a crisis point in April, USAID has responded with support for the International Organization for Migration to aid vulnerable communities. In Papua New Guinea, drought following El Niño-related frost has exacerbated flooding from seasonal rains. USAID responded with emergency and other assistance, in addition to refocusing our existing disaster risk reduction programs to directly address El Niño effects in the country.

To help reduce the need for humanitarian assistance in response to disasters, and complementing USAID's climate change adaptation assistance, we also support communities across the Pacific in effectively preparing for, responding to and mitigating the impacts of natural disasters. Accordingly, OFDA has worked in the Pacific islands for more than a decade to strengthen disaster preparedness and response. In FY 2016 alone, USAID provided nearly \$10 million in disaster risk reduction programming to the Pacific islands. These programs improved hazard monitoring and early warning systems, engaged students in disaster preparedness efforts and drills, trained community volunteers on basic disaster response like first aid, prepositioned emergency relief supplies, and helped communities develop hazard maps and disaster plans. Our assistance has made a difference. For example, USAID disaster risk reduction investments in Vanuatu enabled communities to prepare in advance of Cyclone Pam in early 2015, which significantly contributed to avoiding loss of life.

In the North Pacific, under the Compacts of Free Association, as amended, between the United States and the Federated States of Micronesia and the United States and Republic of the Marshall Islands, USAID provides supplemental disaster and reconstruction assistance to the two countries. This assistance includes prepositioning humanitarian relief supplies in warehouses from where assistance can be mobilized quickly in times of need, developing and improving disaster response and reconstruction plans, and training government employees and civil society representatives in disaster response best practices. Our support under the compacts includes reconstruction efforts in the wake of natural disasters following a Presidential Disaster Declaration (PDD). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) covers USAID's costs in cases when a PDD is issued. For example, through the FEMA-funded \$30 million Typhoon Maysak Reconstruction Program, USAID is helping Micronesian communities rebuild after last year's super typhoon.

## **Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation**

It is estimated that over 200 million people in the Asia-Pacific are directly or indirectly dependent on fisheries for food and income. Yet illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is one of the major identified threats to fisheries in the Coral Triangle region, which spans six Southeast Asian and Pacific countries and contains one of the greatest concentrations of marine biodiversity in the world. This illegal fishing can also play a major role in fueling human trafficking in the region.

In support of regional, sustainable fisheries management, USAID is helping to develop an electronic traceability system to ensure that fish and other marine resources are legally caught and properly labeled. Currently, we are piloting this system in Indonesia and the Philippines, and once it is operational, we have plans to expand it to other countries, including island nations in the Pacific. In announcing the USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership (known as USAID Oceans) in August 2015, Secretary of State John Kerry said, “Traceability is an essential part of our global fight to conserve marine resources and protect the health of our oceans.”

As part of USAID’s overall assistance to the six-nation Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security, USAID supported the development and use of a mobile phone app in the Solomon Islands to manage the country’s inshore fisheries. Without precise and centralized data, fisheries management had previously proven difficult in this geographically dispersed island country. Paper entries were sometimes wet and illegible and data were not entered into a consolidated database to support management decisions. But with the mobile phone app, surveyors are now able to take stock each day of fish arriving by canoes and boats at local markets and feed this information into a database that gives government and the fishing industry vital information needed to manage fisheries.

Papua New Guinea, one of the countries in the Coral Triangle area, is home to more than 5 percent of the world’s biodiversity, with the country’s forests representing the third largest expanse of tropical rainforest in the world. Papua New Guinea’s biodiversity, however, is also among the world’s most threatened. USAID has identified Papua New Guinea as one of the Agency’s priority countries for assistance in biodiversity conservation. USAID is working with the Government of Papua New Guinea on a new bilateral assistance agreement to improve capacity to manage natural resources sustainably and conserve the country’s rich and unique biodiversity.

### **Combating Infectious Diseases in Papua New Guinea**

Papua New Guinea is the most populous of the Pacific island nations and suffers from one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the region. While overall adult prevalence is nearly 1 percent, HIV infection rates are much higher among key populations, including female sex workers and men who have sex with men. Poor surveillance and lack of capacity at all levels exacerbate the enormous challenge HIV/AIDS poses to the nation’s already weak health system.

USAID addresses Papua New Guinea’s HIV/AIDS epidemic by working with the national government to link and strengthen prevention, care, support and treatment services for key populations. Our focus is on ensuring key populations are initiated into treatment and retained. We also work with those affected by gender-based violence, a key contributing factor to HIV infection in women. USAID-supported HIV prevention, care and treatment sites have served nearly 5,000 people in Papua New Guinea. We have also provided nearly 750 clients with dedicated antiretroviral therapy nurses. This strong, supportive approach to case management has paid off; the patient adherence rate for USAID-supported clinics is over 75 percent.

In addition, USAID is supporting the Government of Papua New Guinea’s recent request for assistance in strengthening its response to the country’s multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) crisis. Controlling the highly infectious, airborne disease is especially critical in light of the

country's increasing role in hosting international events. Last year, Papua New Guinea hosted the Pacific Games, and in 2018, the country is slated to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' summit for the first time. USAID is providing targeted technical assistance to help detect and treat drug-resistant TB strains, which includes providing two GeneXpert machines, American technology that diagnoses MDR-TB in hours instead of weeks. We are also partnering to bring the first TB drug on the market in more than 40 years—called bedaquiline—to Papua New Guinea to battle strains resistant to the most effective drugs available today.

### **Targeted Democracy Initiatives**

In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, USAID is helping the community achieve sustainable peace, security and development. The decade-long conflict that began in 1989 displaced more than half the population and took the lives of up to 20,000 people, leaving families and communities across Bougainville struggling with many issues that impede reconciliation, rehabilitation and development, including trauma, domestic violence and substance abuse. Over the past two years, USAID worked with women's CSOs to raise awareness of and strengthen services in mental health, trauma counseling and gender-based violence. Our assistance improved mental health services in 15 rural clinics across Bougainville and provided trauma counseling to more than 1,800 individuals. We also helped deepen public knowledge and commitment to addressing post-conflict issues through radio messages and workshops reaching more than 390,000 people.

In addition, during the months leading up to Bougainville's May 2015 general elections and continuing today, USAID has helped to increase awareness of and preparation for the upcoming referendum on full independence from Papua New Guinea that is slated to take place in 2019.

USAID also provided elections support in Fiji during the run-up to the country's 2014 national elections—the first to be held since a 2006 coup. In the weeks and months leading up to the election, where nearly half of those who cast ballots were first-time voters, USAID's Elections and Political Processes Fund supported the dissemination of voter education information to more than 260,000 Fijians. USAID also trained civil society leaders and parliamentarians to engage on policy issues in a town hall format, which led to the country's first town hall meeting in January 2015 with newly-elected parliament members.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, USAID's investments in the Pacific islands region are a critical part of the United States' vision for a peaceful, prosperous and stable Asia-Pacific. By addressing the root causes of poverty, conflict and instability, development plays an indispensable role alongside defense and diplomacy in advancing our strategic interests. Our support for the region's sustainable and inclusive development contributes to stronger U.S. diplomatic, commercial and people-to-people relations with the Pacific island countries, helping to advance our own security and prosperity.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you what USAID is doing in this important region of the world. I look forward to your counsel and questions.

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