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“U.S. Policy Towards Morocco”

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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for inviting me here today to discuss how the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) continues to support U.S. foreign policy objectives and national security interests in Morocco and the MENA region through our assistance. Thank you also for your continued support for our USAID Mission in Morocco. I am pleased to be here with my colleague, Bill Roebuck, with whom I work closely every day.

Introduction

When our Administrator, Rajiv Shah, testified before you earlier today, he talked about USAID’s mission around the world—partnering to end extreme poverty and to promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our security and prosperity. This mission is one that USAID has embodied in Morocco, one of our oldest Missions, since 1958.

For the past 56 years, we have partnered with the Government of Morocco to build a strong bilateral relationship that focuses on promoting economic growth, improving educational opportunities and strengthening the effectiveness of civil society’s political engagement. During this time, we have also worked together to make substantial improvements in the lives of everyday Moroccan citizens, including significantly improving maternal and child health, constructing two major dams, transforming thousands of semi-arid acres into productive agricultural use, and developing the microfinance sector in Morocco through high profile credit guarantees. We are proud and remain committed to this partnership, which is why in 2013, USAID and the Government of Morocco completed a new five-year Country Development Cooperation Strategy, or CDCS, that affirms this commitment.

During last year’s visit of King Mohammed VI to Washington, DC, we jointly launched USAID’s CDCS and reaffirmed our long history of cooperation and collaboration. The CDCS is a strategic plan developed in collaboration with the Moroccan Government, civil society, and the private sector designed to create a prosperous future for the Moroccan people. The strategy responds to the needs of Moroccan citizens and focuses on three key objectives. First, we want to increase youth employment, a challenge across the region. Second, we want to enhance civic participation in governance; and, third, we want to increase access to and improve the quality of education for children in primary schools.

As we focus on these three objectives, we recognize that we must be strategic in our investments amid an increasingly strained budget outlook. Therefore, we are focusing like never before on strengthening alliances with key regional allies and building public-private partnerships including Microsoft, Volvo, and Chevron. Partnerships with the private sector and regional allies promote stability and economic growth.

Increasing Youth Employment while promoting Economic Growth and Job Creation

USAID's economic growth programs are aimed at directly addressing the issue of youth unemployment. Morocco is in a paradoxical situation: large numbers of graduates are unable to find jobs commensurate with their education and training, while employers complain of skills shortages and mismatches. Young people make up approximately 30 percent of Morocco's population — about 10 million people. Youth unemployment rates estimated at approximately 28 percent have historically resulted in serious social and political tensions. Moreover, without a trained workforce capable of increasing productivity, Morocco cannot generate sufficient shared prosperity through private sector growth. This cadre of unemployed youth with education degrees of 9th grade or above is best positioned to drive the desired structural transformation of the Moroccan economy. The disproportionately high rate of unemployment among secondary and post-secondary graduates is linked to labor-force and education-system factors in addition to the challenging job growth situation. The absence of career services and the lack of integration of work preparedness in the curricula of Moroccan universities and vocational schools exacerbate the situation.

To address this and other obstacles, USAID/Morocco is preparing to launch a new initiative, the USAID Youth Employability Project, to improve the employability of university and vocational school students by increasing access to and improving the quality of career services. Through this initiative, USAID will facilitate partnerships between government ministries, Moroccan universities and technical institutes, as well as local NGOs and the private sector to develop demand-driven workforce development services that reach a broad range of youth. An example of this type of programming is our current work with 40 start-up and growth stage Moroccan businesses, helping them locate new markets and realize sustainable flows of revenue. This program recently awarded its first grant to the American Chamber of Commerce to develop an Export Lab for Moroccan businesses interested in breaking into the American market. They have also begun to facilitate preparations for the annual Global Entrepreneurship Summit, which will be held in Morocco in the fall 2014.

Increasing Civic Participation in Governance by Supporting Democratic Institutions and Promoting Civil Society

Morocco's new constitutional requirements have created an incentive for more inclusive governance, and civil society and political parties are now constitutionally empowered to participate in governance. USAID's democracy and governance programs respond directly to the Government of Morocco's push to strengthen political parties and increase the roles of civil society organizations enabling Morocco to implement its reform agenda in a peaceful and sustainable way. The USAID mission is currently working with more than 80 local governments, known in Morocco as communes, and creating platforms for dialogue between Moroccan

citizens and their locally elected officials, especially for youth and women. USAID's engagement in this sector includes training that encourages increased transparency and accountability by officials and opportunities for enhanced responsiveness to citizens' demands as well as women's leadership roles. For example, USAID's leadership training helped a female parliamentarian in the province of Fez to develop greater expertise in local governance. Over the past two years, this parliamentarian has become involved in the creation of a network of locally elected women officials who promote collaboration and knowledge sharing among women. These women hope to bring together three existing local networks to further unify their advocacy efforts into a regional network that promotes women's participation in local governance.

Moroccan citizens have long been detached from their political parties due to a lack of clear policy, vision or consideration for citizen involvement, particularly of women and youth. USAID will help Moroccan political parties be more responsive to the needs of their constituents and increase the involvement of youth and women in politics. In fact, since USAID started working to strengthen political parties in Morocco, the percentage of women in Parliament has increased from less than 1 percent to over 12 percent. Moving forward, technical assistance will be provided in the effective use of public opinion to inform policy agendas, the development of youth and women's branches of political parties at the national and grassroots levels, and the development of individual plans to strengthen internal party capacity. In addition to increasing the role of women and youth in the political process, USAID will also support electoral reform initiatives.

In addition to working with political parties and on elections, USAID is also focusing on strengthening Moroccan civil society organizations (CSOs), that have the potential to contribute more effectively to public policy processes and inclusive governance in Morocco. Through its democracy and governance programs, USAID will assist Moroccan CSOs in oversight efforts and capacity development. We will also help them develop their own constituencies and memberships and to use information and communications technologies. By increasing the capacity of civil society to engage the government on behalf of its citizens and facilitating the development of institutionalized mechanisms for civic participation in government decision-making, Morocco will be better situated to implement its reform agenda in a peaceful and sustainable fashion.

Improving Educational Achievements of Moroccan Youth

The third pillar of USAID's new strategic focus in Morocco is on improving educational attainment for primary school students. USAID has helped improve access to school, especially for girls in rural areas, and strengthen school quality and performance at the elementary and middle school levels. Enrollment of girls in rural areas increased from 62 percent in 2000 to 83 percent in 2004. In target zones, girls' enrollment increased by 24 percent in 6th grade, and community support for girls education expanded. Between 2009 and 2013, the dropout rate decreased in target regions from over 15 percent to around 8 percent. Despite these gains, Morocco still faces key education challenges, including an overall literacy rate of only 55 percent.

Moving forward, in conjunction with Morocco's own education reform effort, USAID will promote higher levels of educational attainment by targeting early grade reading. Poor reading

skills increase children's chances that they will fall behind in school, setting the stage for future dropout. These early grade reading programs are designed to improve early literacy and help curb primary grade dropout rates. Classroom-based assessment and monitoring of student progress will also be an important component of USAID support. Community-based reading initiatives that support school retention will reinforce in-school learning and facilitate re-enrollment for primary grade dropouts.

USAID is now implementing innovative, completely community and school-driven development projects in over 190 schools. These projects are not based on infrastructure needs but are specifically directed to improve learning. Examples include library materials, extra-curricular programming for students, and remedial learning support. Initiatives to prevent school dropout in high-risk areas are implemented through coordination with civil society organizations and community- and parent-based groups. As a result of our life skills and employability programs for use in after-school clubs in middle schools, 670 teachers were trained through student clubs established in 191 schools, reaching 10,400 students.

USAID has been applying innovative approaches and has been using technology and partnership to promote educational solutions in Morocco. For example, in partnership with the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, L'Ecole Nationale de l'Industrie Minérale (ENIM) and the U.S. private sector firm Institute for Disabilities Research and Training, Inc. (IDRT), we supported the development of an important technology that will facilitate access to information to a large portion of Morocco's hearing impaired population. The technology provides real-time translation between Moroccan Sign Language and standard written Arabic, which will have a significant impact on the education, health, and welfare of Morocco's hearing impaired. In addition to developing this new technology, this partnership is working with linguists to further develop the vocabulary in Moroccan Sign Language.

Countering Violent Extremism

USAID is also responding to a critical fourth challenge we face in Morocco, that of countering violent extremist threats. Countering violent extremist threats in Morocco and in the region is a crucial element of both regional and U.S. national security interests. While the incidence of violent extremism in Morocco is currently low, several incidents have occurred in Morocco over the past decade that should not be ignored, and societal factors such as social exclusion or lack of economic opportunities increase that risk. Morocco has developed a nuanced approach to countering violent extremism that seeks to engage and include at-risk populations. In support of this effort, USAID programs work with at-risk youth to engage in the political process and increase economic opportunities. The program also strengthens the capacity of government and non-government institutions to improve the quality of services provided to the targeted youth group, thereby helping to ensure long-term sustainability.

In our countering violent extremism programming, we target areas of Morocco where youth suffer from social, economic and political disaffection and exclusion – often evidenced by high rates of illiteracy, school dropout, and unemployment. These areas are known recruitment grounds for violent extremist and transnational terrorist networks. To reintegrate at-risk youth into mainstream society, we support programming that gives youth a voice and opportunities in their communities. Our programming works at the neighborhood level, with neighborhood

associations, government and the youth themselves to provide a range of support: from non-formal education and vocational training, the provision of basic social services, career counseling and job placement, to advocacy training. Capacity building for public and private social service providers targeting at-risk youth will increase sustainability and expand the reach of program activities, currently focused on at-risk youth in northern Morocco, specifically in the cities of Tetouan and Tangier.

Conclusion

USAID is proud of the strong relationship we have built with the Government of Morocco over the past 56 years. Morocco continues to face significant challenges, but also significant opportunities. USAID programs will continue to provide assistance that will increase employment opportunities for Moroccan youth, build the early reading skills of Moroccan children, and advance participatory governance, in addition to countering violent extremist threats and strengthening regional stability and security.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.