

Written Statement of  
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United States Agency for International Development  
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia  
*Examining the Biden Administration's Afghanistan Policy Since the U.S. Withdrawal: Part II*  
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Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify about USAID's efforts to save lives and deliver needed assistance to the most vulnerable people in Afghanistan.

**OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT REALITIES**

USAID's development model is, by design, a demonstration of U.S. values. USAID's continued assistance to the people of Afghanistan, thanks to the leadership and support of Congress and this Committee, embodies the compassion and values of the American people. USAID's commitment to supporting the people of Afghanistan is not only a moral obligation, but it is also in the United States' national security interest to ensure the ongoing humanitarian and economic crises do not worsen.

Our assistance also stands in great contrast to the Taliban, whose values and methods could not be further from ours—especially regarding human rights. The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the Taliban's actions to severely restrict the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, including banning women from working for the United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners that provide critical humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. We, alongside the international community, continue to call on the Taliban to immediately reverse these harmful policies.

Since the Taliban takeover on August 15, 2021, USAID has remained clear-eyed that we operate in a very challenging environment in Afghanistan. We have seen the impact of the Taliban's draconian edicts on the Afghan people. The takeover ended decades of development gains, increased economic instability, and eroded basic services. Today, half of Afghanistan's population lives in poverty and ethnic minorities and women and girls face increasing marginalization.

We remain extremely vigilant against Taliban attempts to divert and interfere with assistance delivery, which is why in Afghanistan we use additional levels of independent third party monitoring to provide oversight on the ground, beyond our standard, rigorous controls, which I will speak more about in a moment. This also includes cooperation with all oversight bodies—including Congress, both State and USAID's Inspectors General, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

## **ASSISTANCE PRIORITIES AND APPROACH**

As one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world, USAID's work in Afghanistan requires a highly adaptive and flexible strategic framework to respond nimbly to Afghanistan's rapidly changing environment, while aligning with the U.S. government's broader foreign policy priorities. I and my staff have been working on a plan that brings the donor community together around our priorities.

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the United States has provided approximately \$2 billion in humanitarian assistance to support the Afghan people amid the country's ongoing humanitarian crisis, including more than \$1.4 billion from USAID. This humanitarian assistance complements more than \$700 million in additional basic needs assistance.

## **U.S. DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES IN AFGHANISTAN**

USAID works to save lives, prevent economic collapse, and defend human rights, particularly for women and girls. We engage with a wide range of partners to develop a pathway out of the cycle of crises. We do this by supporting basic needs in education, health, livelihoods, and agriculture while working to give people a voice through independent media and support for vulnerable populations, especially Afghan women and girls.

USAID and our partners actively work to ensure that women are involved throughout the assistance delivery cycle, including delivering and receiving assistance. Where this cannot be done, our partners often voluntarily suspend operations until a solution is found. No country can function when half its population is cut off from—and cannot contribute to—its economy and workforce. Societies with greater gender equality experience faster and more inclusive economic growth, increased agricultural productivity and water security, more sustainable and effective use of natural resources, and improved health and food security.

In the past two years, we've worked with the private sector to secure employment for more than 7,000 women in the carpet, cashmere, and saffron industries. We've helped 50,000 farmers, including 15,000 women, grow staple crops such as fruits and vegetables with private sector support. We have incorporated tele-mentoring for Afghan health workers, reaching Afghan midwives and women doctors with critical information on newborn care, resuscitation procedures, breastfeeding, and follow-up care for mothers and infants. Our efforts to sustain learning for girls include more than 900 science and math lessons on YouTube, which have been downloaded more than 13,000 times so far.

## **HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE**

The United States remains the largest single donor of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and we are committed to supporting vulnerable Afghans. Our humanitarian assistance emphasizes the protection and inclusion of women and girls, and focuses on food assistance, health, and nutrition services for communities of greatest need across the country.

For example, in northern Afghanistan, families struggle to meet basic needs due to consecutive years of drought and economic decline. In one household, a mother makes a living weaving carpets and her husband is a mechanic. They have seven children, but following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and the subsequent economic downturn, they rarely make more than 60 cents in a day. Two of their children are female twins, and are afflicted by severe acute malnutrition and recurrent illnesses.

Thanks to a USAID-funded activity, both twins are now receiving nutrition treatment from a mobile clinic, which visits their community once a week. The twins will continue to receive treatment until they have recovered, and the mobile clinic will work with the parents to promote healthy eating practices to support them well into their future. This is the story of just one family, in one community that demonstrates the impact that humanitarian assistance has on the lives of the people of Afghanistan, and exemplifies our work to prevent catastrophic starvation across the country.

USAID's humanitarian partners remain operational in Afghanistan and are providing life-saving food, livelihoods, shelter, and essential health care—including services for people impacted by gender-based violence—to respond to the humanitarian needs generated by conflict, drought, recent devastating earthquakes and poor governance. And despite significant challenges we continue to implement high-caliber programs through our experienced partners on the ground.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

USAID takes its duty as a steward of U.S. taxpayer funding seriously and holds implementing partners to the highest standards to ensure that funds are used wisely, effectively, and for their intended purposes.

In Afghanistan, beyond our standard, rigorous controls and assurances in all USAID programs, we use independent third party monitoring to provide additional levels of oversight on the ground to ensure that our assistance reaches intended recipients and that activities meet their goals. We also require our partners to have robust safeguards, risk-mitigation systems, and reporting procedures in place to ensure that development and humanitarian assistance reaches those who need it most. USAID requires partners to report all incidents of diversion, fraud, waste, and abuse to USAID's Office of Inspector General. USAID monitors these reports, and staff continually assess identified incidents to safeguard resources and take appropriate action as needed. While our partners have reported ad hoc attempted diversion and interference, such as Taliban pressure to hire certain job candidates or use specific vendors, we have found our partners' responses—which can include their own temporary suspension of activities—to be swift, appropriate, and effective at allowing aid to continue being delivered to intended families in principled ways.

USAID does not provide any assistance to or through Taliban authorities. We continuously analyze the operational environment to prevent and mitigate risks of fraud, diversion, and abuse—and to ensure that USAID assistance does not reach the Taliban. Because of safeguards

in place, U.S. assistance has been delivered on the ground to prevent unprecedented levels of acute food insecurity, ease the burden of the humanitarian and economic crises, and to the extent possible, protect vulnerable populations—particularly women and girls—from the Taliban’s assault on their most basic rights and liberties.

To be clear, our partners must pay incidental transactions to operate in Afghanistan, such as fees, import duties, licenses, and utilities – just as they do in other countries. These necessary operational costs are authorized for Afghanistan under General Licenses issued by the Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and make it possible for our partners to provide lifesaving support and basic needs assistance to the Afghan people. These transactions allow our partners to maintain and secure office space and warehouses, import and distribute commodities, and provide lifesaving support and basic needs assistance to the Afghan people. It is important to distinguish the payment of these incidental transactions from the rare instances of attempted assistance diversion.

## **OVERSIGHT**

Consistent with President Biden’s deep commitment to transparency for the American people, USAID has been and remains committed to cooperating with all oversight bodies to protect against fraud, waste, and abuse.

Since the fall of Kabul, we have had more than 370 formal engagements with SIGAR ranging from verbal interviews and entrance conferences to written responses to information requests, reports, audit recommendations, and lessons learned. This does not even include the informal, sometimes daily, calls we have with them to ensure a shared understanding of information requests and production schedules. Although we no longer share a physical space with SIGAR as we did in Kabul, we maintain a strong working relationship with team members built over the last twelve years.

Further, we always welcome the opportunity to engage with Congress on our assistance to Afghanistan. We are working assiduously to provide detailed responses to inquiries and letters from Congress, including the House Foreign Affairs Committee on the withdrawal from Afghanistan and have provided thousands of pages so far. This is in addition to responses to recent Congressional inquiries on topics ranging from our cooperation with SIGAR to humanitarian access to the inclusion of women in aid implementation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The situation in Afghanistan continues to pose serious challenges. USAID remains steadfast in our support to the people of Afghanistan, and pragmatic in our approach to providing assistance. We welcome continued cooperation with Congress and this committee in these efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to your advice, counsel and questions.