

WRITTEN STATEMENT  
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“The Growing Crisis in Africa’s Sahel Region ”  
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Thank you Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass and Members of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations; the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa; and the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, for the opportunity to speak with you today about the complex set of developments affecting the people of the Sahel and USAID’s efforts to date. Thank you also for your continued support for our assistance programs that make a difference in the lives of millions every day.

Introduction

Last week, along with Acting Assistant Secretary Don Yamamoto, I attended a conference in Brussels where 80 nations came together to pledge support for Mali as it seeks a pathway back to democracy, peace and prosperity. President Traore of Mali began the meeting by thanking the international community for its help and expressing his gratitude for the fact that, in the north of Mali, people are no longer having their hands and feet cut off by terrorists, women are no longer being raped, and Islam is no longer being defamed as a tool of terrorists. In his speech, he emphasized that “we must learn our lessons from bad governance and realize that the collapse of this house of cards endangered our people as well as the entire region.” He commended all of us “to address the root causes of this crisis with good governance as the first priority.”

President Traore’s comments underscore the complex challenges facing the Sahel, where areas of insecurity, weak governance and chronic underdevelopment combine to result in great vulnerabilities—to drought, conflict, and terrorism—that have kept millions across the region in a state of poverty and perpetual humanitarian crisis.

Since the Fall of 2011, I have visited four of the countries that comprise the Sahel. The families I met, in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, were experiencing serious crisis for the second or third time in a decade. Thanks to your support and to the continued efforts of USAID, the State Department, and our international development partners, many of these families—mothers and their children—have been able to endure.

There are significant bright spots in the region, including the very encouraging 2012 elections in Senegal; the current energetic, democratic government in Niger; the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA); and the remarkable regreening efforts in Niger and Burkina Faso that have created important pockets of resilience to recurrent drought. However, the challenges in this highly complex, interwoven region have humanitarian and security implications that require our focused and sustained engagement.

Working closely with our colleagues across the U.S. government as well as with international development and African partners, USAID is responding to these challenges with country and regional programs that provide immediate life-saving humanitarian assistance; build resilience so households, communities, and systems can better withstand shocks; support the development of accountable, legitimate democratic governance; and analyze and address the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ drivers of violent extremism with development tools.

### **Humanitarian Crisis in the Sahel and the U.S. Response**

In the fall of 2011, thanks to mechanisms including the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET), which USAID has supported for 25 years, we saw signs that there would be a tough lean season ahead for the Sahel. The third drought to hit the region in less than a decade would affect 18.7 million people by the height of the crisis in 2012, with more than 8 million people in need of emergency food assistance.

I am confident that taking early action in response to early warnings prevented a bad situation from becoming much worse. As early as November 2011, USAID began pre-positioning food commodities and, in February 2012, I traveled to Niger and Burkina Faso to assess the worsening situation. Since the beginning of 2012 the U.S. government has provided over \$550 million in humanitarian assistance to reach more than three million people across the region. This includes more than \$181 million for Mali’s ongoing complex crisis, of which \$32 million was announced last week. The U.S. response provided food, cash and vouchers to those most vulnerable across the Sahel; supported protection and emergency assistance to Malian refugees, IDPs, and conflict-affected populations and treatment for acutely malnourished children; taught pastoralists better ways to produce fodder; and helped farmers who had lost their seed stock plant for the next season.

Our response to the most recent crisis in the Sahel was smarter, more targeted, and more market-sensitive than ever to help the communities of the region build resilience to the next, inevitable drought. Because food markets were still functioning in most parts of the Sahel, our cash and voucher programs allowed vulnerable families and communities to access locally available food and basic goods in addition to our in-kind food aid. Coupled with temporary work opportunities, these efforts supported local markets and promoted sustainable agriculture practices even while responding to acute needs. We focused on strengthening nutrition by providing new, nutrient-rich food products and by promoting key nutrition messages. Importantly, for many pastoralist

families in the Sahel, cows, sheep, and goats are tantamount to savings accounts; our emergency response continues to help families keep livestock healthy and alive.

Recent reports from the Nigerien government say some 800,000 people in Niger will require food assistance in coming months despite above average rainfall and crop production in 2012. While still too high, this number is significantly lower than the 6.4 million Nigeriens in need at the peak of the crisis last year.

Looking ahead, the interrelatedness of West African markets and insecurity will continue to have a strong effect on food security. Flooding in the regional breadbasket of Nigeria and conflict in Northern Nigeria and Northern Mali are affecting markets and trade flow region wide. In Nigeria's Borno and Yobe states—the epicenter of the Boko Haram conflict—high staple food prices coupled with conflict-related declines in crop production, cash incomes, and market trade flows are expected to result in crisis levels of food insecurity. While food prices are likely to increase atypically as demand outpaces supply, the good news is that last year's plentiful harvests have allowed many across the Sahel to earn more from sales and keep a little for themselves.

### **Building Resilience to the Region's Recurrent Crisis**

Childhood malnutrition and underdevelopment are endemic in the region under even the best of circumstances, so one poor harvest can push millions of the most vulnerable into severe risk. As a result of climate change, areas that used to experience severe drought once every ten years are now affected every two or three, meaning food prices have been continually high since the food crisis of 2008. When drought hit its peak in 2012, many families were still struggling to recover from food crisis in 2010. The farmers of Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, and their neighbors were forced to borrow money to buy food or the seeds to plant during the rainy season saddling them with crippling debts and perpetuating a vicious cycle of need.

Recurrent crises like we have seen in the Sahel erase development gains we cannot afford to lose. USAID is determined to get ahead of these kinds of chronic crises by doing business differently. We cannot prevent drought in Niger or flooding in Nigeria, but we can and are working to create better solutions and build greater resilience among the most vulnerable.

In Dakar, Senegal, we have brought our humanitarian and development teams together to form a regional Joint Planning Cell (JPC) to undertake joint analysis and joint planning for a more comprehensive approach to programming in the region. They are working to layer, sequence and integrate our relief and development resources and activities for a greater, long-term impact. With the goal of tackling drivers of vulnerability—poverty, marginalization, weak governance, low rainfall, population pressure and high population growth, food price volatility and climate variability—our JPC is driving forward a resilience strategy that builds on successful adaptations and innovations already underway to reduce risk, build resilience, and facilitate inclusive

economic growth in targeted areas. The goal is to reduce humanitarian caseloads in the region by several hundred thousand while benefiting millions.

USAID's resilience work in the Sahel is part of a larger, international Resilience Agenda galvanized by the 2011 crisis in the Horn of Africa. Together with our development partners, we committed to the shared goal of building resilience to get ahead of chronic crisis, protect development gains, and make populations around the world less vulnerable to inevitable shocks. This renewed focus on resilience is vital to building food security—tantamount to human security—for so many across the Sahel.

### **The Vital Role of Transparent, Accountable Governance**

As we have seen in crises around the world, the lack of good governance in the Sahel has been a core contributor to the region's instability—and compromised local governments' ability to prevent the onset and escalation of crisis. The March 2012 coup in Mali, coinciding with a regional food security crisis well under way, reflected the fragility of Mali's democratic development and exacerbated humanitarian need region wide.

Disillusionment with the government's inequitable delivery of basic services and management of the Tuareg rebellion in the north made the country vulnerable to political upheaval. Previous iterations of the Tuareg rebellion had been handled with limited political concessions and promises, while the physical distance between northern and southern Mali enabled Bamako to underplay the problems of security and poor governance in the north.

Ordinarily, frustrations with the incumbent government's performance would have been expressed through a change of leadership and parties. An influx of fighters and weapons from Libya, among other factors, made this time different. Ultimately, the deficits of a government that was not inclusive, accountable, or responsive to the needs of its people were laid bare when an under-resourced and poorly equipped Malian army illegitimately took power in a coup d'état, disrupting 20 years of democratic rule.

Going forward, government legitimacy will be essential for the sustainability of any democratic transition. USAID supports an inclusive electoral process that includes the participation of all Malian citizens. Our partners will provide support for training and technical assistance to government institutions for election administration, electoral legal reform, domestic election observation, and civic and voter education, with targeted assistance for IDPs and returned refugees. In January 2013, USAID launched a "Mali Transition Initiative," a pilot program to support the democratic process and participation in elections. USAID recently expanded the initiative to support peace and reconciliation efforts – consistent with the Section 7008 coup restrictions – through activities that facilitate dialogue at the national, regional and community

levels, bringing together traditional, non-governmental community leaders, youth, women, and religious leaders.

While we look forward to the restoration of democratic rule following presidential elections scheduled for July, Mali's political crisis has left the country unable to deal over the last year with the escalating humanitarian and security crisis within and beyond its borders. More than 300,000 IDPs are reportedly now in the country and 175,000 Malian refugees in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania. While the French intervention has increased humanitarian access to the hard-to-reach north, violence by remnants of extremist groups continue to complicate relief efforts and pose additional threats to the security of the region. Meanwhile, recent surveys indicate that displaced populations still hesitate to return for fear of reprisals, general insecurity, or the lack of basic services like education and health care. With Malians in the north still extremely vulnerable due to limited interventions over the last year, public structures decimated, and a host of actors vying for power, Mali's new democracy will face steep challenges indeed.

As the U.S. commitment to a strong, humanitarian response in the Sahel remains unwavering, our continued support for a peaceful democratic transition in Mali and support for stronger, more accountable governance across the region will be just as vital.

In Niger, USAID provided critical support for electoral and constitutional reform to help enable a peaceful transition from military to civilian rule following the February 2010 military coup, and we continue to support good governance through support for greater transparency in the extractive industries. In Nigeria, USAID prioritizes extensive elections support, ongoing civil society engagement, capacity building for key government agencies with a focus on strengthening fiscal responsibility and improving transparency, and strengthening independence of the judiciary. At both the national and local levels, transparent and accountable governance is vital for West Africa to endure the range of shocks it is confronting—from climate change to conflict to the array of extremist groups now vying for influence.

### **Development's Role in Countering Violent Extremism**

While the recent rise of violent extremism in West Africa cannot be directly attributed to drought, chronic food insecurity, or weak governance, each of these factors can indirectly exacerbate instability in the region. Just as droughts and floods result in crisis because of the Sahel's underlying chronic vulnerabilities, structural "push" factors can create the conditions that favor the rise of violent extremism. USAID's 2012 policy on countering violent extremism (CVE) defines push factors as high levels of social marginalization, poorly governed or ungoverned areas, government repression and human rights violations, endemic corruption and elite impunity, and cultural threat perceptions. Importantly, these push factors only contribute to violent extremism when combined with 'pull' factors, which often involve the appeal of an inspirational figure or material, emotional, or spiritual benefits from affiliation with an extremist group.

Since 2006, through the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an integrated interagency approach to address violent extremism in the region, USAID has worked to forge partnerships between the U.S. and African governments to empower participants to resist the drivers of extremism at the individual and community levels. USAID's work under TSCTP focuses on the four areas where we see the greatest opportunity for local partnerships and progress: youth empowerment, education, media, and good governance.

To ensure that the impact of our development assistance and CVE efforts are not undermined by the influence of drug trafficking—a clear contributor to instability in a region that has long been home to illicit smuggling networks—USAID is working with the interagency to mitigate the trafficking of narcotics and transnational organized crime and developing a USAID programming guide based on the impact of drug trafficking on development in the region. The incursion of fast drug money into the Sahel's political systems exacerbates existing governance challenges, as armed groups in the region exact security fees from drug traffickers in exchange for protection.

## **Conclusion**

To help defeat the range of shocks that has put West Africa on the front pages of international newspapers over the last year, we have increased our focus on tackling the region's chronic underdevelopment and underlying vulnerabilities. USAID is at the forefront of these efforts, working closely with our interagency partners, and doing business differently to ensure that each investment goes even further.

At the heart of progress will be legitimate, accountable democratic governance, as we are already seeing in countries like Senegal and Niger. This will be vital to ensuring an alternative to extremism and to protecting precious development gains in the face of inevitable shocks—for our own national and economic security and for the people of the Sahel who have already endured so much.

Thank for your time today, and I look forward to taking your questions.