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Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

USAID is deeply committed to supporting democratic governance in Africa as part of our mission to end extreme poverty and promote democratic, resilient societies. Africa is on the rise, the continent has some of the youngest populations and fastest growing economies in the world, yet extreme poverty remains concentrated in its fragile states. Development is not sustainable without a legitimate, responsible government that can deliver services in an inclusive manner as well as a vibrant civil society that channels citizen interests and promotes accountability.

Elections are not the sole marker of democracy—especially as some incumbents in Africa and elsewhere narrow or close altogether the space for competition, participation, and a free press long before an election is held. A healthy democracy requires checks and balances—a strong judiciary and legislature, competitive political parties, a free press, respect for human rights, and an engaged civil society.

That is why we support reformers who push forward democratic progress and citizens who seek to have their voices heard. We partner with peacemakers like Imam Omar, Archbishop Dieudonné, and Reverend Guerékoyame from the Central African Republic (CAR) who facilitated inter-faith dialogue in advance of recent elections, which helped solidify a fragile peace. We support young leaders like Ako Essan Emile who volunteered at a radio station to counter fear and misinformation during Côte d’Ivoire’s 2015 elections. We collaborate with officials like Nigeria’s Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Attahiru Jega who helped instill voter confidence in the electoral process. These change agents—and the communities they empower—are the drivers of democratic progress in Africa.

USAID is a leader in democracy and electoral assistance around the world, including in Africa. Over the past decade, we have provided electoral assistance to over 34 countries on the continent, including more than a dozen countries in 2015. Today, I will highlight democracy trends in Africa both positive and negative, USAID’s strategic response to them, and the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Trends

As you are well aware, there have been important democratic transitions and opportunities for progress in the democracy, human rights, and governance sector as well as some setbacks across Africa since the Committee’s hearing last year. Many national and regional institutions have

improved their capacity to facilitate credible, free, and fair elections. In part due to our support, electoral bodies—such as those in Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire—have made great strides in facilitating inclusive and peaceful voting processes. We increasingly rely on experts from countries like Ghana and Senegal to share lessons learned with their peers in developing democracies. African regional institutions are playing a more positive role in encouraging credible elections, negotiating democratic transfers of power, and anticipating the potential for electoral conflict. They are also more vocal and decisive in condemning unconstitutional seizures of power and coups. For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are carrying out increasingly sophisticated election observation missions that are in line with international and regional standards.

Citizens are more engaged politically, including traditionally marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and people with disabilities. Citizens are more connected than ever. A recent Pew study found that roughly two-thirds or more of citizens in seven African countries (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda) owned a cell phone. Youth in particular are leveraging technology to engage and demand greater accountability. In Nigeria’s 2015 elections, candidates appealed to youth through targeted social media and canvassing. With support from USAID and other donors, domestic election observers have leveraged digital and SMS technologies to improve the transparency and credibility of electoral processes. Our observation partners often use tablets, SMS, and other technology tools to quickly and accurately transmit electoral data, analyze results, and report information. They are increasingly using advanced techniques, such as parallel vote tabulation, or quick counts, to confirm election results. In Nigeria, USAID and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development” have partnered for more than 5 years on support to support increasingly sophisticated domestic observation groups and quick counts. In Zambia and Côte d’Ivoire, we also supported parallel vote tabulations.

Several countries saw progress in the conduct of recent elections. Shortly after your hearing on this topic in March last year, Nigeria’s elections culminated in the first successful democratic transfer of power from an incumbent to an opposition leader in the country’s history. Côte d’Ivoire held peaceful elections in October 2015, avoiding a return to conflict. Burkina Faso’s November 2015 elections led to the first new leader in almost 30 years. The Central African Republic (CAR) overcame three years of brutal conflict to hold elections that allowed for a democratic hand-over from a transitional government. These transitions are an inspiration to others in the region.

Nevertheless, Africa continues to face important challenges that threaten to erode democracy and development gains. Africa’s youth desperately want economic opportunities and the chance to have a say in their future. As President Obama highlighted during his trip to East Africa last summer, Africans will surely be better off if their leaders allow new blood and new ideas to take hold. Yet, several African leaders refuse to pass the baton, changing the rules of the game to maintain their grip on power. This is especially troubling in a continent where there is a youth bulge and leadership often does not reflect the demographics of the population. The average age of the ten oldest African leaders is 78.5, while the average age of an African citizen is 19.5. If provided the necessary support and opportunities, young people can be incredible partners in

development, helping to sustain our efforts for generations to come. Indeed, young people are the driving force for positive change in many societies today.

The worrying trend of abolishing term limits continues. Almost two-thirds of African countries had two-term presidential limits in their constitutions in 2000. Since then, eleven countries have had sitting presidents try to remove those limits, with eight having succeeded. In Burundi, President Nkurunziza's insistence on seeking a third term set off a political crisis that has plunged the country into violence and undermined the implementation of the Arusha Agreement. In Uganda, once a promising democracy, the ruling party continues to pursue steps to extend President Museveni's presidency and is increasingly intolerant of dissent. Uganda's main opposition candidate was arrested last week and charged with treason, in an environment of closing political space.

Many incumbents are employing tactics to create an uneven playing field long before they face an election. They misuse state resources for political gain, harass and detain opposition candidates, restrict civil society groups, block independent media, and jail journalists and bloggers. Leaders are sharing "worst" practices, including using surveillance technologies and imposing complex legal and fiscal restrictions on civil society. While many countries face real concerns about violence and conflict around elections, we have also seen a worrying trend by governments to restrict independent media and civil society in the name of national security.

As more citizens go online to stay informed and civically engaged, authorities have increasingly restricted internet access. Last week, Uganda blocked access to Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp during its presidential inauguration, repeating a similar shutdown that occurred during polling in February. Authorities in Congo-Brazzaville and Chad similarly blocked internet and phone access during recent elections. During Tanzania's October 2015 elections, authorities cited a controversial cybercrime law to arrest and detain domestic observers and opposition parties.

These tactics not only dampen voter confidence in political processes, but also reduce the credibility and legitimacy of governments. From Burundi to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), government attempts to impede democratic progress have resulted in massive citizen protests and violent crackdowns. These government abuses are a threat to democracy and security. The principal drivers of political violence and violent extremism are rooted in injustice—including discrimination, corruption, and abuse by security forces—according to a recent Mercy Corps study. Addressing these democracy deficits will be critical to helping ensure Africa's progress is not eroded by political instability and conflict.

USAID Support

For decades, USAID has partnered with African governments, political parties, and civil society to promote democratic political processes. Our efforts help create the enabling conditions for free and fair elections to take place. Our goal is to support a legitimate, peaceful, and inclusive process, not a particular outcome.

These efforts would not be possible without our international electoral assistance partners including the National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), who will also testify today. These and other partners leverage their vast networks and decades of expertise to maximize our collective impact. We increasingly partner with local organizations, many of whom have benefitted from technical and capacity building assistance from our international partners. Local partners play a critical role in helping to sustain democratic gains and avert backsliding.

USAID recently outlined our strategic approach to electoral assistance in Africa in a report to Congress required under the FY 2016 appropriations law. Our strategic approach to electoral assistance in Africa is informed by several lessons learned. As I mentioned earlier, elections are not an isolated event; they play out in the context of larger political processes. A poorly run or violent election is a symptom of broader governance problems. **So first, USAID's electoral investments are tailored to the specific political context of a country, embodied in country level strategies. They are informed by long-term partnerships with host governments and civil society to support the foundations of democratic government.** For instance, the positive impact of our recent electoral efforts in Nigeria and Zambia was the result of many years of broader, sustained engagement in both countries.

USAID's cadre of democracy officers across more than 27 Missions in Africa is attuned to local contexts and informs our strategy to maximize opportunities to expand democratic gains and overcome challenges that might hinder progress. Our officers, in partnership with our strong local staff, help design multi-year election and political processes programs that integrate lessons learned from previous election cycles and incorporate best practices from other countries.

Our electoral assistance complements our longer-term investments to enable democratic processes to take hold. Recognizing that there is great variation in country circumstances and political histories, our broader efforts are guided by USAID's Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance. For instance, in relatively well-performing democracies, such as Ghana, we help consolidate democratic institutions. In countries where the space for civil society is closing, such as Uganda, we expand avenues for citizens to have a say in government decisions. In fragile and conflict-affected states, including Liberia, we improve governments' ability to deliver services, build confidence in government, and reduce tensions. In closed spaces, we monitor human rights abuses and support civil society and media. These are illustrative examples of how we tailor our efforts, since we also invest more broadly in each context and adapt to shifting political dynamics.

Second, our long-term electoral assistance is coupled with the flexibility to respond to unforeseen challenges and windows of opportunity. USAID's Elections and Political Processes (EPP) fund allows the Agency to meet unanticipated needs, address windows of opportunity before they close, and pilot innovative programs. For example, EPP funds were used to support last year's snap elections in Zambia caused by the death of President Sata. In less than 90 days, USAID and its partners were able to organize civil society election monitoring and a quick count. In Guinea, U.S. diplomatic efforts to broker a peaceful election were strengthened because USAID was able to deliver crucial support to the process, including civil society observation and an extensive peace messaging effort. When results were delayed, we

quickly mobilized EPP funds to keep reporters in the field broadcasting the vote count, which kept the public informed and reassured opposition parties that the process and results were fair.

Third, our early and robust conflict mitigation efforts have made a difference in averting electoral violence. The USAID Election Security Assessment Framework has been employed in various countries throughout the region to identify conflict risk factors and inform our response in advance of elections. In light of security challenges in West Africa, USAID has invested in early warning systems. In cooperation with the State Department, we support initiative for ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding to monitor and mitigate violence triggers before they escalate, including around elections. For instance, in advance of Burkina Faso's November 2015 elections, civil society groups from the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding monitored and generated reports of local incidents that could set off broader violence. Thanks to the early warning, we increased support to over 14 radio stations across the country to promote peaceful messages and counter hate speech.

USAID leverages its flexible response funds—including its Complex Crises Fund and Transition Initiatives account—to complement its longer-term electoral assistance with strategic investments in conflict mitigation. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, USAID efforts to promote messages of tolerance and inclusive engagement helped usher in peaceful elections. Leveraging arts and media to engage citizens and promote peaceful messages, especially among youth, proved highly effective. USAID supported multimedia campaigns to promote engagement by all political and ethnic groups, and especially by women, youth, and traditional figures. Ivorian artists—like singer Bamba Ami Sarah and rapper Nash—helped spread a message of peaceful participation through concerts, billboards, popular TV shows, and a music video that went viral on social media. These messaging activities engaged over 280,000 people in 61 communities.

In Nigeria, we integrated conflict mitigation across all programs. Coupled with concerted U.S. outreach to stakeholders at every level, these efforts helped ensure a successful outcome. Our innovative #VotenoFight campaign, led by Nigerian musician 2face Idibia in partnership with NDI, reached 62 million Nigerians via radio, social media, and grassroots events. Alongside IRI, we facilitated the Abuja Peace Accord, a non-violence pledge signed by all candidates.

The role of Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission was also critical in securing peaceful, credible elections. Although the introduction of biometric voter cards led to delays and there were problems with the electronic card readers, INEC had contingency plans in place to resolve issues when they arose. In collaboration with the State Department and IFES, we assisted INEC in its security coordination across the Nigerian government. Despite attacks in the northeast and long lines, Nigeria's citizens set out bravely and patiently to have their voices heard. In the midst of blackouts in some polling stations, election officials used flashlights and car lights to continue counting until every vote was in. INEC Chairman Attahiru Jega's steadfast leadership was pivotal in ensuring the security and integrity of the elections.

Fourth, we proactively empower political parties, civil society, and the media to combat efforts by incumbents to close the space for political engagement. Efforts to chip away at fundamental freedoms can seriously impede Africa's democratic trajectory. In countries where elections are simply not competitive because incumbents stack the decks in their favor, support

for civil society is essential to longer-term democratic development. Alongside the State Department, we are committed to advancing President Obama's Stand with Civil Society Initiative to expand the space for civil society. For instance, in Uganda, USAID supported civil society to advocate for legislative improvements to the country's highly restrictive NGO bill. We are also dedicated to supporting the Open Government Partnership (OGP), through which governments partner directly with civil society to improve transparency, accountability, and fight corruption. African countries in OGP working with civil society to promote reform, and are embracing tools such as open budgeting, open contracting, open data and access to information to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. Ten African nations are members of OGP, and that number continues to grow, with Nigeria's announcement this month of its intention to join. This year, South Africa has played a global leadership role as the OGP co-chair, and we have seen other African countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia embrace OGP as a mechanism for reforms by building new platforms for good governance initiatives and engaging with civil society in collaborative ways.

In partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Aga Khan Foundation, and South Africa-based CIVICUS, we are creating a hub for African civil society organizations to share tactics to overcome common restrictions they face. In partnership with Counterpart International, our global Information Safety and Capacity Project monitors internet freedom trends and has trained and mentored over 250 African civil society organizations and individuals—including at-risk LGBTI activists—to improve their digital and mobile security.

Civil society plays an important watchdog role in elections through domestic election observations. With our assistance, NDI and Nigerian civil society partner Transition Monitoring Group deployed over 3,000 citizen monitors during Nigeria's elections. They conducted a quick count that independently confirmed the outcome of the election and was viewed as a high quality source by other election watchers and donors.

Citizens also need access to unbiased information to make informed choices about elections and their leaders. We work across the continent to improve the professionalization of journalists, support media managers, and improve online and offline security. We also help partners leverage technology to promote transparency during elections. For instance, in Zambia we are using cellphones to deliver pre-recorded training to political party poll watchers in conjunction with a simplified printed guide to reach more people. In Niger's elections this year, we supported efforts to educate voters and collect feedback on elections through social media.

Across Africa, we support political party development and encourage the inclusion of women and youth in politics. For instance, in Niger and Uganda, we worked with parties to elevate the perspectives of women and youth in their party manifestos. In Senegal, we trained women on how to register for party lists and run for office under the country's new gender parity law.

Finally, we coordinate closely with partners in the diplomatic and donor community to maximize impact.

Ahead of the vote in Nigeria, we collaborated with interagency and donor colleagues to ensure that displaced Nigerians would be able to vote. As a result, INEC established a task force for internally displaced persons (IDPs), which was instrumental in advising INEC to set up special voting centers in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States and to distribute permanent voter cards for IDPs. Our Mission also organized meetings with the State Department, other donors, and NGO partners to discuss and resolve issues around the voter cards and electoral security.

In CAR, we collaborated with interagency and donor colleagues to facilitate a peaceful election. We took part in concerted diplomatic efforts through the Atrocities Prevention Board to elevate attention to CAR and build support for investments in conflict mitigation, social cohesion, and interfaith dialogue. These peacebuilding activities mitigate violence in advance of elections. We also provided support to re-scheduled legislative elections, filling a critical gap so that they could be held before the transitional government mandate ended.

Challenges and opportunities ahead

Africa's upcoming elections present important challenges and opportunities. In Ghana and Zambia, USAID is providing comprehensive electoral assistance that complements our broader democracy, human rights, and governance programs. In Ghana, we are helping the Ghana Electoral Commission to improve its online and social media outreach and training journalists on election coverage. We are promoting political participation by women, people with disabilities, and other marginalized groups and supporting civil society to carry out civic education and domestic observation activities. We are also supporting conflict resolution efforts. In Zambia, we are training political parties and civil society to better monitor elections—including through a quick count—and build public confidence in the electoral system.

USAID is applying the lessons learned from our conflict mitigation strategies in Burkina Faso, CAR, and Nigeria to our electoral and democracy support in Kenya and the DRC. In Kenya, our current electoral support program for the 2017 elections includes a strong focus on mitigating ethnic polarization to avoid a repeat of 2007's post-election violence. It seeks to restore public confidence in the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission and the judiciary. We will empower women candidates so that they can garner meaningful representation under the anticipated implementation of Kenya's two-thirds gender principle—requiring that no more than two thirds of any government body be comprised of one sex. USAID remains the largest bilateral donor to Kenyan civil society, which has been increasingly restricted. We will continue to support civil society efforts to promote participation, accountability, and transparency.

We remain very concerned about political developments in the DRC, including last year's violent crackdown on protesters and the ongoing arbitrary arrest of activists. The U.S. government continues to urge the government to commit to a timely, credible election as stipulated in the Constitution. We will work with diplomatic colleagues to encourage the government to establish a credible electoral timetable and pave the way for a peaceful transfer of power through elections, which will best serve the interest of the Congolese people. We will continue to help build the capacity of political party leaders, including cultivating women and youth who can modernize Congolese parties and their outreach to constituencies. We are

training journalists to provide neutral electoral coverage and monitor hate speech and supporting those who are harassed or detained. We are also training justice officials in alternative electoral dispute resolution mechanisms.

Conclusion

Elections alone are not sufficient for democracy to take hold, but they do provide a critical moment for citizens to express their views and hold their governments accountable. Throughout Africa, we support local democracy advocates who work tirelessly to ensure citizens can have their voices heard through the ballot box. We also support them as they seek to build the pillars that safeguard against attacks on the democratic process: an independent judiciary; credible electoral officials and electoral laws; a free press and a free internet; and a vibrant civil society.

From Burkina Faso to Nigeria, this past year underscored Africans' desire for peaceful and democratic elections. Our strategic investments, while noteworthy, were only one slice of a bigger picture—without strong political will and local champions, democratic progress is not possible. As we look forward, we will continue to support and empower African democracy advocates who are committed to promoting peaceful and inclusive political participation. We appreciate your support and the resources that fund our diplomatic and foreign assistance efforts.

Thank you for your counsel, guidance, and support. I look forward to your questions.