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Remarks on “Africa’s Current and Potential Famines”
Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations
June 14, 2017

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to address you today.

I want to first thank both Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Bass for travelling to the famine and war-ravaged areas of South Sudan, as well as areas dealing with impacts of refugees such as northern Uganda. As I can personally attest to, there is no substitute for seeing these things with your own eyes, and witnessing these tragedies is the first step towards finding meaningful solutions.

We have made tremendous progress in combating hunger in this world. Over the past 30 years, we have cut worldwide food insecurity nearly in half. This, along with the 50% reduction in extreme poverty, is due in no small part to the exceptional leadership of the United States government and the generosity of our citizens.

Now, we find ourselves at a crossroads. Tens of millions of people in Africa and the Middle East are on the verge of starving to death. Famine is something that is hard to truly comprehend unless you have seen it with your own eyes. I know that many people here today have heard me talk about my witnessing of famine in Ethiopia in the 1980’s, but it was a truly lifechanging experience. Over the course of just one afternoon, I saw two dozen children die in a tragedy that could have been prevented.

These famines that we are facing today are manmade. It was a failure of leadership that led to these crises, and it will take global leadership to respond. This is not only because of a sense of moral responsibility, but frankly – and as sick as it makes me feel to have to argue this – saving lives makes strategic sense as well.

My good friend David Beasley, the former governor of South Carolina and the new Executive Director of the World Food Program visited my organization, the Alliance to End Hunger, last week; along with the FAO Director General Graziano da Silva. David spoke frankly and convincingly about the importance for the United States to take the lead in responding to these famines – stating that where there is hunger, there is migration and extremism, and that food security programs are a powerful weapon against these forces. He even went as far as to say that as a conservative Republican, he could confidently tell policymakers that funding for food security programs—both relief and development—can do more to prevent and combat extremism than many other measures the U.S. takes.

David is not alone in this outlook. Just this week, Admiral Mike Mullen (Ret.) and Gen. James Jones (Ret.) co-authored a piece in Politico that stated that “in the 21st century, weapons and warfighters alone are insufficient to keep America secure.” They go on to say that development assistance is a “modern national security tool,” and that cuts to USAID would “increase risk to Americans and to our brave military service members.”*

This is something that many, if not all, of us generally agree on. Earlier this year, thanks to the leadership of Members of Congress in this room, a budget was passed that provided nearly \$1 billion in emergency famine relief. This follows last year’s bipartisan support for the Global Food Security Act, which will help to provide critical development projects and funding through an efficient whole-of-government strategy.

This leads me to my next point. We cannot talk about addressing current famines without talking about how we will prevent them in the future. We have said “never again” too many times. There have been troubling conversations and proposals recently around cutting, and even eliminating, much of our international development funding. There are some who argue that we should restrict development to those countries that provide “strategic advantage” to our defense and economic agendas. But I tell you this, if we choose to cut development, then we choose to disengage with a significant percentage of the world’s population. This is not strategic, it is poorly-informed shortsightedness.

If we choose to scale back our development activities in the world, other countries would not be shy about stepping into the gaps. Just last month, China’s Xi Jinping pledged more than \$100 Billion for development projects in Asia, Europe, and Africa – adding poverty-focused programs and emergency aid to a list of infrastructure plans to link China more closely with the developing world.

In an increasingly globalized world, with refugee situations and migration constantly in flux, and the threat of extremism threatening our own citizens and our allies, there is no corner of the world that is not strategically important. We must end these famines now, and bolster development that will both save and improve lives and livelihoods. The United States must continue to be the leader in global relief and development.

Thank You.

* Mullin (Ret.), Adm. Mike and Gen. James Jones (Ret.). "Why foreign aid is critical to U.S. national security." 12 June 2017. *Politico*. <<http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2017/06/12/budget-foreign-aid-cuts-national-security-000456?cid=apn>>.