

Statement
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International Organizations
“Update on the COVID-19 Response in Africa”
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Chair Bass, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the United States’ partnerships with the people and governments of sub-Saharan Africa to meet the urgent and unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. As I mentioned when I last appeared before this Subcommittee in November, your bipartisan commitment towards promoting security and stability, expanding trade and investment, and harnessing the incredible potential of Africa’s dynamic people is instrumental in advancing American values and expanding U.S. and African shared interests across the continent now more than ever.

I am pleased to be joined by my USAID colleague, Acting Assistant Administrator for Africa Chris Maloney. We both rely on the talented men and women of the State Department and USAID serving the American people at our missions in Africa and here in Washington. I am forever grateful for their professionalism and dedication to our mission under today’s extremely challenging conditions.

Over the past 20 years, the American people have invested more than \$100 billion to strengthen public health sectors in sub-Saharan Africa, enabling them to prepare for and respond more effectively to HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, Ebola, and other infectious diseases – and now to COVID-19. Since March, the United States has committed an additional almost \$410 million in COVID-19 response funds to the region, for activities including strengthening infection control in health facilities, supporting supply chain management of health commodities, training health workers, and providing emergency food assistance. The infrastructure of the President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief, or PEPFAR, has played an instrumental role in the continent’s COVID-19 response, providing critical lab infrastructure and health workforce capacity to address this new challenge.

At the same time, East Africa is the epicenter of a decades-high desert locust infestation that will only compound food insecurity in vulnerable countries. The United States has provided nearly \$20 million in humanitarian assistance to combat the infestation, which is currently impacting eight countries in East Africa. These commitments underscore our role as sub-Saharan Africa’s staunchest ally in promoting the health of its citizens.

This is what a long-term partnership committed to building a healthier, more prosperous Africa looks like. Our government, U.S. philanthropists and non-profit organizations, and American businesses invest heavily in Africa's health because a healthy population makes Africa — and the rest of the world — safer and more prosperous. This approach stands in sharp contrast to others like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), whose defective goods, slipshod infrastructure projects, and predatory lending habits are designed more for the benefit of the CCP than the well-being of Africans. It's no secret that China is by far the largest bilateral official creditor to African governments, creating an unsustainable debt burden, while the overwhelming majority of U.S. foreign assistance comes in the form of grants rather than loans, in order to promote transparent, private sector-led economic growth that benefits all parties. We strongly support the G-20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative and look to the People's Republic of China (PRC) to fully participate in the initiative in a transparent way. Public disclosure of official loans helps hold governments accountable for their decisions and prevents the corruption, fraud, and abuse that siphons off money that is supposed to go towards African health and development. At the same time, we recognize that other countries must provide their fair share of foreign assistance, and the Department of State is working to increase global burden-sharing to address these growing needs.

While strong leadership and early, decisive action has likely helped many countries delay the harshest impacts of COVID, we must be clear-eyed about the situation today and mindful of the difficult days that lie ahead. Soaring unemployment, increasing food insecurity, and ballooning budget deficits are also significant concerns. The secondary effects of unanticipated migration flows, declining commodity prices, diminished tourism revenues that endanger Africa's stunning environmental treasures which rely on those revenues, and rising food prices are just some of the challenges now facing African governments. Many of the same reforms the United States championed prior to the pandemic — fiscal transparency, a welcoming and open business environment, investments in health and education — will equip African nations to emerge more quickly from the current crisis.

Of particular concern, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed the Sudanese democratic transition in an even more precarious place. Avenues for international support through international financial institutions remain constrained by the international community's inability — as well as our own — to proceed with heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) debt relief. We continue to focus on efforts towards rescission of Sudan's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation which would help advance this process. Congress could support our goals in this regard through the adoption of legal peace legislation as part of any COVID-19 supplemental, which would have the added advantage of allowing a recently agreed-upon claims settlement outline for victims of the East Africa Embassy bombings to proceed. Pushing Sudan to provide compensation to these victims of the Bashir regime's acts of international terrorism is among the Department's highest priorities.

Finally, I would like to underscore the critical role of alumni of State Department professional and academic exchange programs such as Fulbright, the International Visitors Leadership Program, and the Young African Leaders Initiative or YALI. In particular, the nearly 20,000 combined alumni of the YALI Mandela Washington Fellowship and the Regional Leadership Centers in Africa, and the more than 650,000 members of the on-line YALI Network, represent a

new cadre of African leaders who are willing and ready to lead change. Many are at the forefront of governmental, private sector, and civil society efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. Continued commitment to these programs will empower Africans to take the lead on charting their future based on pro-U.S. models of governance, innovation, and development.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions and to working together to meet these enormous challenges to further advance peace and prosperity in the region.