

Testimony by Ambassador Kip Tom
Committee of Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives.
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Honorable Chairman Bass and Distinguished Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee I thank you for your time today and it is an honor to share my observations of the Covid Pandemic impacts, affecting Africa.

Serving as the US Ambassador in Rome to the UN Agencies and along with our staff at USUN Rome we played an important role working with USAID, USDA and State Department supporting the World Food Program and the Food and Ag Organization. Together, we worked to advance U.S. policies and support UN efforts in the areas of emergency food assistance, sustainable agricultural development, food safety standards, fisheries, forests, and financing for rural development.

Rome, as headquarters of the three principal international organizations dedicated to food and agriculture, is at the center of international efforts to promote sustainable development and combat world hunger and since March 2020 we have been on the front lines during the Covid Pandemic. As the largest contributor to the UN system worldwide, the United States works to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the organizations to ensure that their activities complement and enhance U.S. national and foreign policy objectives.

So you would ask how is food security related to the Covid Pandemic in Africa? I will share with you a number of major elements amplifying the impacts of the Covid Pandemic as I have witnessed it first hand in my travels and work across Africa:

Let's first understand however:

The COVID-19 pandemic is responsible for a fourfold crisis in Africa: (1) a health crisis: the victimization of frontline healthcare workers and the looming caseload and death tolls. (2) a social crisis: with the violation of human rights, the killing of citizens by security forces and increased crime. This, in turn, exacerbates social inequalities, the breakdown of households, instances of social unrest, and general impoverishment; (3) an economic crisis: manifested by a decline in GDP and mass unemployment; (4) a political crisis: implementation of measures that may not be appropriate for Africa, discrimination of refugees and immigrants, evacuation of citizens to their home countries, resulting in distrust of political leaders and postponement of national elections, and mounting cases of conflicts and unrest.

Here in this testimony I will focus on a number of those elements and their impacts but more narrowly on food insecurity as a result of the COVID pandemic.

1.) The Covid Pandemic is indirectly impacting the ability of people to afford food with nearly 350 million people now un-employed on the continent since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. People need income to have access

to food. Global income has dropped about \$5 trillion because of the pandemic, while food prices —as they always do in famine situations — have climbed.

Global food prices are at a six-year high. The higher those prices go, the lower the purchasing power at WFP and the fewer people that they can feed.

So, for every 1% increase in hunger, mass-forced-migration increases 2%: the WFP can't feed starving people if they can't find them, and their costs mushroom.

So, what are the effects? human trafficking, arms and illicit drug trade, and terrorist activities increase.

Governments, on whom the WFP rely for funding, have also shifted trillions of spending away from humanitarian aid and development to economic stimulus for their own nations' economies.

By the World Food Program estimates, 30 million people are in hunger-emergencies today. That's the population of New York plus LA plus Chicago plus Houston plus Phoenix plus my rural home county in Indiana. These folks are always hours or at the most days away from starvation and death. While they are in this condition, they are permanently damaging their health and productivity and ability to recover ever.

So, 690 million people are hungry in our world today. Think of every single person in Western Europe and the United States.

At the WFP, they have to serve the 690 million and the 270 million and try to keep the desperate 30 million alive, many of which are in Africa. The WFP under the leadership of Executive Director David Beasley of the United States has been charged by the UN to keep people from sliding down from one category of hunger to the next, and Executive Director Beasley and his staff at the WFP have done a remarkable job in performing their humanitarian duties as they most recently recognised and received the Nobel Peace Prize. But what they can't do is print money.

The bottom line:

The cost of addressing hunger in the world is the gap between rapidly rising humanitarian needs and falling global humanitarian spending.

There are also other major elements driving hunger, it is the African Farmers lack of access to modern agriculture innovations to deal with climate change, pest and the many other challenges farmers face across Africa. Why has this occurred? The European Union continues their malignant propaganda promoting the EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork Initiative activity across Africa promoting food systems that are an indulgence of the rich, indefensible scientifically and indefensible morally. The EU's promotion of this food policies is a crime against humanity and we are seeing the impact first hand across Africa to the world's most vulnerable. It is time to break the continual cycle of poverty and subsistence living and need for

humanitarian aid and create economic opportunities that supports individuals, families, communities and nations.

We have also seen the African Desert Locust pest of biblical proportions across the horn of Africa consuming massive amounts of crops and food putting upwards of 24 million people at extreme levels of food insecurity. A small swarm (1 km²) can be made up of 80 million locusts and can consume the same amount of food in one day as 35,000 people, while a large swarm can eat up to 1.8 million metric tons of green vegetation, equivalent to food enough to feed 81 million people. Just another example of some of the many challenges we face in Africa.

So, these are the elements which are driving food insecurity and cause the WFP to need an additional \$5 billion above and beyond what they have already planning on, or famine will come to millions and millions, in dozens and dozens of countries.

Finally, as we look to the contrast of conditions in rich countries in the West, the lives of many Africans are based on the daily routine of obtaining enough food to survive. Subjecting African communities to lockdown at home for extended periods is impossible, as people need to access their fields or otherwise find a way to acquire food. For instance, in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, many have violated the lockdown measures and moved through public spaces like restricted areas in towns and market places in large numbers to search for or collect their daily food, despite such moves being forbidden. While lockdown is

intended as a measure to reduce the outbreak of COVID-19 and prevent its transmission in the affluent world, it represents a race against death to survive among many in Africa, where life has become an “avoidance–avoidance” conflict situation; be locked in at home and die of starvation, or violate the lockdown regulations to work and collect food and die from the disease. Whatever citizens choose to do, the race is against death, from starvation, or the virus.

As one Sudanese person said to me on my last visit to Sudan in January of this year, “I would much rather die of COVID than of starvation”.

For the US and the rest of the developed world time is running out for us to have a positive impact on lives and livelihoods across Africa.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my observations.

US Ambassador Kip Tom