

**Assistant Secretary Julieta Valls Noyes for the Bureau of Population,
Refugees, and Migration (PRM) Before the House Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability**

September 19, 2024, 10am

Good morning, Chair Mast, Ranking Member Crow, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. I am pleased to be here today to talk to you about how the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) implements the Department of State's grants and award management process.

CONTEXT

PRM has primary responsibility for leading and formulating U.S. international humanitarian diplomacy. We implement U.S. policy and programming on protection and assistance to refugees, stateless persons, conflict victims, and the most vulnerable migrants. We promote humanely managed, safe, orderly, and regular international migration. We also manage the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. PRM's core mandate is to provide protection and life-sustaining assistance to meet basic human needs, such as shelter, nutrition, health, water, and sanitation, and to find solutions for displaced persons, including integration in countries of first refuge, voluntary return, or refugee resettlement.

PRM carefully monitors our programming worldwide, using a variety of tools, including traveling to evaluate the effectiveness of crisis responses firsthand. As the PRM Assistant Secretary, I personally take part in these monitoring trips. It's an honor to see in action the humanitarian assistance so generously provided by Congress and U.S. taxpayers.

In March, for example, I traveled to Ethiopia and Chad to witness the response to the Sudan displacement crisis, the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. Over 8 million people are forcibly displaced, 25 million people require humanitarian assistance to survive, and the brutal conflict is increasing those numbers rapidly. The human toll is unimaginable. In response, PRM provides critical life-saving assistance including food, water and sanitation facilities, shelter, medical services, and protection to Sudanese fleeing the conflict. I spoke to refugees who shared stories of their harrowing journeys to Chad fleeing unspeakable horror in Darfur. Women and children arrive at the UNHCR site in Adre on Chad's eastern border with Sudan with literally nothing but the clothes on their back. Since that trip I have briefed Congress on several occasions. I meet regularly with the donor community and humanitarian actors to coordinate on the response and find new approaches to address growing gaps in the humanitarian situation.

In May I travelled to Guatemala where I met with our implementing partners, including the UN Refugee Agency -- UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, and the Guatemalan Red Cross. There I met a Venezuelan family who arrived in Guatemala in 2018, obtained asylum in Guatemala with PRM-funded UNHCR support, and started a small business making sweets. That family is now integrated into their community Guatemala and is thriving. I also met two Honduran brothers who had attempted to migrate irregularly to the United States and who were kidnapped and extorted twice along the route by criminal gangs who demanded ransom from their families to release them. They were later apprehended and deported by Mexican immigration authorities. The two men sought help to return safely to Honduras and were determined to restart their lives in their own country. PRM worked with partners to facilitate their voluntary return to Honduras. These are just two examples of the many monitoring trips I went on this year.

WORK WITH PARTNERS

As authorized by the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, PRM administers and monitors U.S. contributions to international organizations (IOs) and funds cooperative agreements with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While IOs are our primary partners globally, NGOs also play an essential role in humanitarian responses worldwide, complementing activities performed by governments and multilateral institutions and expanding the overall reach of U.S. government humanitarian assistance. NGOs undertake a wide range of assistance projects globally for PRM and for our IO partners, including projects that provide shelter, water, nutrition, and livelihood programs, among others. In all instances, PRM coordinates closely with USAID on assistance to displaced populations, addressing issues related to food security, integration, and other programming.

OVERVIEW OF GRANTS PROCESS

To implement our NGO projects globally, PRM competes assistance award opportunities in accordance with Federal regulations and Department of State policy in a full and open manner. We do so through publicly advertised notices of funding opportunity, demonstrating the Bureau and Department's commitment to transparency and fairness. This process allows us to select those organizations best qualified to effectively and efficiently implement taxpayer-funded programs.

PRM's funding notices outline the key foreign policy priorities and humanitarian needs the proposals must address. We screen all proposals through a technical review to determine whether applicants meet basic

eligibility requirements and have submitted all required documents. As part of the application, applicants are required to submit a risk analysis and monitoring and evaluation plan. PRM actively works with applicants on their monitoring and evaluation plan, objectives, and performance indicators to align them with PRM requirements and priorities.

Next, an impartial merit review panel comprised of a minimum of three people -- representing at least two PRM offices and at times involving experts from other Bureaus, embassy officers, or agencies -- evaluates the submissions. They review the proposals to determine how well they meet U.S. humanitarian and national interest priorities.

After the merit review panel makes its recommendation and prior to making a Federal award, PRM checks whether the organization is eligible for a grant through the System for Awards Management – or SAM.gov. PRM also reviews organizational audits of the proposed partner and evaluates a project-specific risk assessment submitted by the applicant. We may conduct additional due diligence depending on the individual program and context. For all potential awards, PRM conducts our own risk assessment to identify any significant risks, develop mitigation measures, and adjust program design if necessary. PRM then creates our own plan on how we will monitor any risks identified.

Only once these processes are completed, and following my approval as Assistant Secretary, will PRM issue an award to the partner. The large majority of PRM funding to NGOs is awarded through cooperative agreements, not grants. Such agreements enable more active collaboration and greater programmatic oversight on the implementation of a project than a grant agreement.

Monitoring of all Department assistance awards is mandatory. In PRM, monitoring is a critical aspect of our approach, integrated throughout the lifecycle of our awards. Our goal is to determine three things: (1) Is the recipient's performance and financial management on track? (2) Are they accomplishing the intended activities, goals, and objectives of the program? and (3) Is the recipient complying with statutory requirements? Typically, PRM requires NGO partners to submit written performance and financial reports each quarter. They submit performance indicator data with each report to demonstrate how they are meeting the targets we established for them. In addition, PRM requires final program performance and financial reports, as well as other documents, including annual audits.

PRM funds IO partners through voluntary contributions to global appeals that describe the programming and support needed to meet the needs of forcibly displaced and stateless people. For each and every global appeal that PRM funds, IO partners must submit performance reports on the collective results they have achieved with U.S. and other donor funding. The indicators and targets set out in the appeal are the criteria against which we measure successful performance. Our awards specify the scope of the contribution and our requirements for programmatic, financial, and fraud reporting. We establish mechanisms for monitoring and oversight of the awards, including an annual external audit.

For our IO partners, including UN agencies and their implementing partners, PRM follows Department policies regarding reporting, oversight, and compliance. We assess IO performance in the field through direct monitoring of PRM-funded activities, including site visits such as the ones I described at the beginning of my testimony. We also coordinate regularly with IO counterparts, review their program reports and operational updates, and conduct other evaluations. Meanwhile, we provide institutional oversight of each agency's global processes at the headquarters level

through membership on their governing boards and regular meetings with their leadership.

MONITORING TRIPS

As part of PRM's comprehensive monitoring and evaluation activities, PRM program and grants officers and our teams based in the field conduct site visits and monitoring meetings. During those visits, we talk to people other than the funded partner, including members of the affected population, to get their views on the partner's performance. We learn directly from recipients of PRM-funded aid whether it is meeting their needs and to confirm program and activity implementation. We ask aid recipients whether they know how to report fraud or sexual exploitation. In places where safety or security conditions do not allow direct U.S. government access, PRM has processes in place to provide alternatives for in-person monitoring. These include the use of third-party monitors, remote technologies, and/or more frequent written reporting. That said, PRM staff do make monitoring and evaluation trips to areas and regions that parties to conflict consider to be active conflict zones, including that trip I made to Chad. This is the degree to which we place an emphasis on monitoring and evaluation.

The combined results of all this monitoring inform both current award management and future funding opportunities. PRM requires a review of past performance at least annually before additional funding is approved for a continuing program. PRM also requires staff who manage awards to take one week of bespoke mandatory training on award management and monitoring and evaluation, in addition to other training requirements and offerings throughout the year.

Let me give you some examples of what this monitoring looks like in practice in our hemisphere. PRM's Humanitarian Coordinators based in Mexico make monitoring trips to examine the work of our partners in-person and assess program performance at least twice a month. Our officers in D.C. also go out into the field to monitor. As of the end August, PRM staff had conducted five monitoring trips from D.C. to Mexico this calendar year in addition to the frequent in-country monitoring by our Mexico City-based team. During FY 2023, our Ecuador-based team conducted 32 monitoring trips to the eight countries they cover in South America. On their most recent trip to Brazil, Refugee Coordinators traveled to five cities to conduct site visits with each PRM partner, including IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, and four NGOs, and to meet with local government and military officials. In addition to our own field monitoring, PRM supports and accompanies CODELs and Staffdels who are conducting congressional oversight efforts.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I'd like to emphasize PRM's and my personal commitment to responsibly managing the Migration and Refugee Assistance resources Congress has generously provided. This is critical to showing American taxpayers that their hard-earned tax dollars are effectively meeting the humanitarian needs of the millions of people around the world affected by conflict, displacement, and statelessness. As the daughter of refugees myself, I know how much my family owes to this great country, and I am determined to fulfill these obligations to the best of my ability. I thank the members of this Subcommittee for the opportunity to discuss PRM's life saving work done through our grants and other awards. I look forward to your questions.