

*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

# Judge orders Trump administration to pay millions in USAID funds

Officials have one day to resume foreign aid payments after a contentious hearing in which a government lawyer couldn't say if funds had been unfrozen.

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By Annie Gowen

A federal judge on Tuesday ordered the Trump administration to pay hundreds of millions in foreign assistance funds that have been in limbo despite his previous directive that such aid resume — action targeting President Donald Trump’s broad pause in aid, which has led to chaos globally and dire warnings about escalating famine.

U.S. District Judge Amir H. Ali gave the government until 11:59 p.m. Wednesday to fulfill its contractual obligations and restart payments to contractors whose work in impoverished parts of the world had been largely stopped during an ongoing legal battle. Administration officials must also provide examples of communication sent to partners on the ground about resuming assistance, Ali ruled.

His order applies to work done before Feb. 13.

Aid groups that are plaintiffs in the case provided evidence that the government has not lifted its suspension of funding, Ali said, and the defendants did not rebut that Tuesday.

The Trump administration asked for a stay on the court order in a filing late Tuesday, noting that the total amount owed organizations by the U.S. Agency for International Development is nearly \$2 billion and that officials will not be able to make the Wednesday night deadline because completing the payments will take “multiple weeks.”

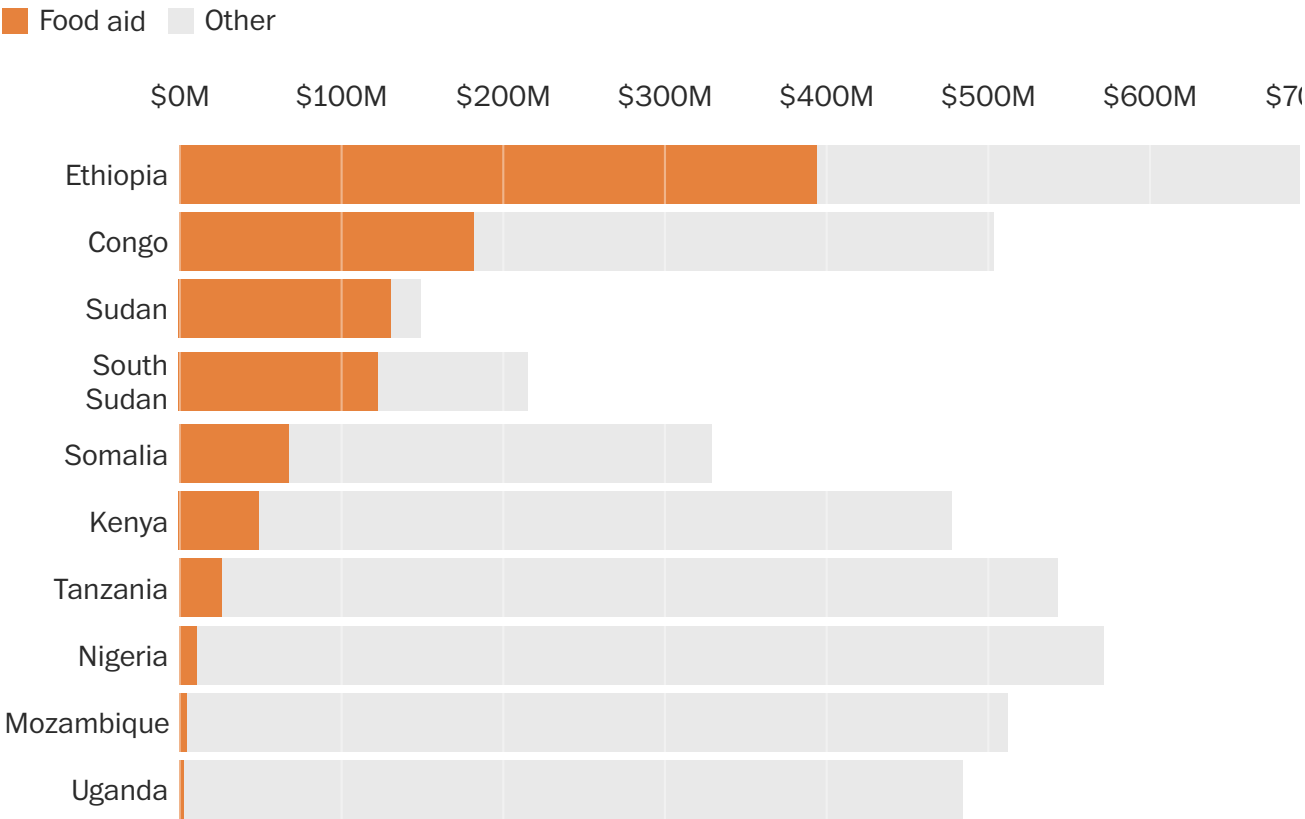
Separately, the U.N. World Food Program — the largest distributor of food aid — is owed more than \$820 million, officials confirmed this week. The WFP is not a party to the lawsuit.

During the contentious 90-minute hearing, Justice Department lawyer Indraneel Sur told Ali he was “not in a position to answer” whether the Trump administration had taken needed steps to allow the assistance to begin moving. Sur said the administration would provide further details in a status report due at noon Wednesday.

“I don’t know why I can’t get a straight answer from you,” Ali responded. “We are now 12 days in. You can’t answer me whether any of the funds ... covered by the court’s order have been unfrozen?”

More than 10 days of delays have wreaked havoc on some of the world’s poorest and sickest communities. People with HIV have lost access to lifesaving medicines. Those in famine-stricken areas of Sudan and other countries are without food.

Foreign aid provided to select African countries in 2023



Source: [ForeignAssistance.gov](https://www.foreignassistance.gov)

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In an emergency request Monday, the partner organizations said they face possible eviction and threats to worker safety because of the administration’s ongoing defiance of Ali’s federal court order.

“What the government has revealed is that the government has done nothing to make the flow of payments happen,” Stephen K. Wirth, one of the plaintiffs’ lawyers, said in court.

The groups allege that instead of complying with Ali’s directive, the Trump administration “chose to take a series of new actions” around access to a key reimbursement system, adding new approval processes and terminating “hundreds of critical personnel” — “all but halting the disbursement of foreign-assistance funds,” according to their emergency motion.

Despite the State Department granting a waiver for certain lifesaving aid to resume, the plaintiffs contend, the payment system remains down, with employees seeing a variety of error messages when they try to submit invoices. Many organizations have not been paid for expenses incurred in the fourth quarter of 2024, before Trump returned to the White House.

Should the government not comply by Ali’s new deadline, “we are in uncharted and dangerous territory,” Lauren Bateman, another attorney for the plaintiffs, noted via email after Tuesday’s hearing.

The case is among several in which legal experts say the administration has come close to the red line of disobeying judicial orders as Trump and his allies assert vast presidential powers.

Thousands of federal workers have lost their jobs in recent weeks, adding to the chaos. On Sunday, the administration sent notices that it would eliminate 1,600 jobs at USAID and place all but a small number of the remaining employees on leave, after a different federal judge ruled that the job-cutting efforts could move forward.

Aid advocates believe the Trump administration is determined to dismantle USAID, the chief U.S. agency for foreign assistance, which provides \$40 billion in help each year. The president and billionaire adviser Elon Musk have both derided the diplomats’ work, with Trump calling them “radical lunatics” and Musk vowing USAID must “die.”

*Aaron Schaffer contributed to this report.*

### **What readers are saying**

The comments express strong criticism of the Trump administration's refusal to comply with a federal judge's order to resume USAID payments, highlighting the severe impact on global communities, particularly the most vulnerable. Many commenters emphasize the humanitarian... [Show more](#)

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