

**Written Testimony for the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee
Submitted by:**

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Thank you, Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Rogers and the members of this subcommittee who have contributed to building a safer, more just, and prosperous world. The impact and successes of the programs and policies supported by this subcommittee cannot be overstated. With great foresight, for decades you have championed key investments -- in young people and their education, in opportunities for women and girls, in the rule of law, universal rights, and transparent institutions, and other critical building blocks of stable economies and societies worldwide.

The Twenty First Century and its Paradoxes of Progress

As the third decade of this millennium begins, global trends present a paradox: While poverty alleviation programs have brought tens of millions out of the middle class in the past two decades, progress is stalling in certain key geographic areas. In these hot spots, local, national, and international conflicts converge; governance is weak, corrupt or absent; and economic resources, including the profits from natural resources, are inaccessible or siphoned off by the elite. The poorest of the world's poor now reside in these geographies – areas that also tend to be critical to the pursuit of U.S. national security objectives.

Other paradoxes abound. The United States, and other donors, in partnership with local governments, are helping to educate more youth around the world than ever, including up to post-secondary high school education, but the numbers of unemployed educated youth, or under-employed youth, is growing. This is especially true in some parts of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East where the average age of the population hovers between 18 and 25 years of age. Meanwhile, educated youth unable to find appropriate jobs find their voice by protesting government inadequacies and inequities. Citizens from Lebanon and Sudan have emerged as key agents of change over the past few years.

Meanwhile, in Asia, trade deals and inter-state trade is at a global high. Yet the open borders and interconnected economy can be brought to a halt by a deadly virus, overwhelming the international epidemiological response and threatening trade, aid, and international cooperation.

Climate change is exacerbating a global refugee and migration spike that shows no signs of diminishing. In part due to enduring wars in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, the DRC and elsewhere, 70 million of those on the move are fleeing war and oppression. Yet millions more are leaving on their own, searching for better economic opportunities. A rapidly changing climate is forcing many to leave their agricultural areas in order to feed their families. And these migrants often cross borders, joining millions of others in search of a better life in mega-cities. From the highlands of Guatemala to the pastoralist regions of Ethiopia, the changing nature of climate is also generating rapid urbanization, putting pressure on city leaders to feed, employ, educate and provide healthcare to new communities of migrants.

The trends in warfare are equally paradoxical. While wars between states have become less prevalent in the twenty-first century, civil wars have grown more deadly, complex, and enduring. International actors and neighboring states are more likely to respond via proxies in these civil wars, complicating diplomatic efforts to end conflicts. Conflicts, from the DRC, to Syria to Yemen, no longer involve two parties. Instead, dozens of armed actors appear on the battlefield, and many of them shift sides, make deals, temporarily abide by cease-fires, and then escalate again. Post-conflict environments have become a momentarily quiet stage before a new round of fighting begins. The fog of war endangers the innocent, and so too does the murky, uncertain quality of the violence. State and non-state actors no longer abide by decades-old international norms regarding the protection of civilians and civilian sites. Belligerents target potato chip factories, emergency hospitals, and even schools – unleashing a level of fear and trauma that not only triggers greater refugee rates, but makes the prospects of sustained peace nearly impossible.

Diplomats are working hard to achieve peace. Yet the nature of conflict means that they often aspire to simply reducing the level fighting, even momentarily, even in just one town or city. The complex, murky nature of twenty-first century warfare has lowered the diplomatic bar, as officials struggle to rein in state-led authoritarianism, dangerous relationships between revisionist regimes and their local proxies across borders, and militias and terrorists. The growing complexities to warfare – and the increasing erosion of the international rules governing warfare – is a significant trend in modern international relations. It will yield unknowable effects on international security – and indeed on the safety of all Americans – in the coming decades.

Implications for U.S. Foreign Assistance

Amid these challenges, on behalf of Mercy Corps' nearly 6,000 teammates across the world, I urge this subcommittee to fully fund the State-Foreign Operations appropriations bill at \$57.4 billion. U.S. foreign assistance, as well as the operating budgets for the State Department and USAID, are more critical than ever. The hollowing out of these institutions has directly weakened U.S. influence. It has also detrimentally affected the entire international community's ability to confront the trends described above. The budget overseen by this Subcommittee offers the foundation for diplomats and aid workers working in increasingly insecure environments, responding and managing global challenges like pandemics, civil conflicts, terrorism, environmental degradation, and cyber risks.

To address these growing global challenges, we respectfully request that this subcommittee prioritize poverty-focused and humanitarian accounts that provide lifesaving assistance and address the root causes of human suffering worldwide. As wars endure and the frequency and fury of disasters increases due to the rapidly changing climate, we continue to see global humanitarian need rise: The United Nations predicts that over 165 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2020. We urge you to provide high levels of support to the accounts that provide lifesaving assistance and appropriate the International Disaster Account at no less than \$4.4 billion and the Migration and Refugee Assistance account at no less than \$3.6 billion.

As we confront global challenges that are driven by inequality and weak governance, we must invest in programs that support communities, especially in fragile environments, with the tools they need to escape poverty and participate equitably in society. For this reason, we ask that you

fund the Development Assistance account at \$3.4 billion and the Economic Support Fund at \$4.1 billion. These accounts support longer term programs that address some of the most dangerous global trends: climate change and enduring conflict.

Today, our hard-fought development gains are threatened due to the rapidly changing climate. We know that climate change is a threat multiplier and a destabilizer. It amplifies existing vulnerabilities like poverty and hunger, creating a greater strain on resources. For example, new cycles of droughts and flooding threaten the livelihoods of farmers across Central America and Africa who depend on the rains to feed their families. These changing weather patterns have contributed to rising migration rates, as families uproot themselves in search of a steady paycheck. We urge the subcommittee to appropriate \$200 million for climate change adaptation, especially for communities in fragile countries. These funds ensure that the people that depend the most on the climate for their lives and livelihoods are able to adapt to the inevitable changes that will come as temperatures continue to rise.

We also see that violence continues to be a driving force of human suffering. It requires a new paradigm for assistance that reflects the changing nature of conflict. The Global Fragility Act is designed to fill the gap and reorient U.S. policy and assistance to address the root causes of violence. To support the development of the Global Fragility Strategy and its implementation, we urge you ensure that the funds authorized within the Global Fragility Act are appropriately funded including:

- Appropriating \$50 million for the Complex Crises Fund to ensure that USAID has the resources to respond quickly and flexibly to violence and crises,
- Funding the Prevention and Stabilization Fund at \$200 million and directing the State Department to ensure that at least half of this account is used for implementation of the Global Fragility Act; and,
- Providing \$25 million for the newly-authorized Multi-Donor Global Fragility Fund. This relatively small investment would allow the State Department to leverage, receive, coordinate, and program funds provided by other donors and private sector partners to carry out the purposes of the Global Fragility Strategy.

Thank you very much for your consideration and the leadership of the Chair, Ranking Member, subcommittee members and staff who continue to fight for a better, safer world. We would be happy to provide further details of our research or programming.