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**Chairwoman Barbara Lee**

**Subcommittee on Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs**

**Hearing: Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request for the Department of State**

**April 28, 2022**

*\*As Prepared\**

## Chairwoman's Opening Statement

Once again, good morning and welcome to today's hearing with Secretary of State Antony Blinken regarding the President's proposed Fiscal Year 2023 budget request for the State Department, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

On behalf of my colleagues, I want to thank you, Secretary Blinken, for joining us today and for your ongoing leadership and service to our country and our global community.

The international challenges we face today are obvious and immense. The COVID-19 pandemic still ravages the world. Fundamental democratic values are under threat—not least in Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, but also in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Climate change and war are fueling a looming food crisis. And division, violence, poverty, and natural and man-made disasters seem on the rise on just about every continent.

Your budget – that of the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and our other international agencies – is tasked with responding to all of these challenges. That is why I have long argued that our international affairs budget should be equal to, if not greater than, our military budget. Our military tools should be used as the last resort, whereas the resources we provide to diplomatic, development, and humanitarian efforts are on the front lines every single day working to save lives, promote stability, and increase engagement.

Congress must work harder to provide an international affairs budget that better addresses today's global problems from the climate crisis to unprecedented levels of human suffering, while at the same time working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The SDGs are an opportunity to frame the work the United States does around the world in support of these consensus goals such as gender equality, ending extreme hunger and poverty, and improving public health. This Subcommittee will continue to push all of the agencies under our jurisdiction recognizing we will only succeed on the SDGs with U.S. leadership and our partners working together toward common purpose.



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While I hope we can improve on what we were able to secure in Fiscal Year 2022, we are likely to continue to face limited and over-stretched resources. So today we will discuss the Administration's request for \$65.77 billion for Fiscal Year 2023 – a modest \$7.8 billion increase above the enacted Fiscal Year 2022 level.

The request includes notable increases for humanitarian, global health, climate, and democracy programs. It also recognizes that these and our other development and diplomatic goals can only be achieved with a workforce that is fully staffed, well trained, committed to the mission, and representative of the diversity of the American people. I'm pleased that the request increases funding for diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts at the State Department and USAID and much-needed increases in staffing positions and operating expenses. I also want to commend you, Mr. Secretary, for naming Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley as the Department's first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, and for your work to prioritize diversity in our diplomatic corps as well as systemic changes that will hold the Department accountable to its commitments.

Mr. Secretary, today's hearing will provide Members of our Subcommittee a timely opportunity to hear directly from you on the latest efforts by the Biden-Harris Administration to pursue a diplomatic end to the vicious and gratuitous assault on Ukraine by Russia.

I also hope you will provide an update on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, including vaccine delivery and distribution, and helping developing countries recover from the pandemic's devastating impacts across all aspects of life and livelihood. You've heard me say that I think our response was too slow, and now we face a situation where funding for international efforts has been either de-prioritized or deleted from the discussion altogether. This is unacceptable and short-sighted. I have always said, what affects one, affects all. We will not turn the page on this pandemic without helping the rest of the world recover while we in the United States do so as well.

At the same time, we should all be working as hard as possible to avoid a global food crisis, which experts warn is increasingly likely after so many compounding crises, including the pandemic, supply chain shortages, high energy costs, climate shocks, and of course the war in Ukraine. The United States has always been the global leader in delivering lifesaving assistance but averting a global food disaster will require our allies and other donors to step up as well.



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Mr. Secretary, it's evident the Administration has worked very hard over the last year and a half to restore America's global reputation, promote engagement and dialogue with international organizations and partners, and return to policies that were making progress and producing results before the previous Administration took us in another direction. I applaud your efforts to bring both the United States and Iran back into compliance with the JCPOA. I know the ongoing negotiations are extremely difficult given how much time and trust has been lost, but I urge the Administration to continue to engage with Congress on the latest developments in Vienna. I also believe that the Administration and Congress need to work better together to address the causes of irregular migration from Central America in a way that is just, humane, and sustainable. We lost time and progress during the previous Administration's suspension of assistance to the region, and yet we still face challenges supporting locally led efforts to end endemic corruption and impunity while investing in human security and durable development outcomes.

I am also eager to discuss this Administration's ongoing approach to continually underprioritized regions of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, both of which represent untapped potential in terms of partnerships and economic opportunity. I also want to express my appreciation for the strong request for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria for their next replenishment cycle. I am eager to hear how we will motivate other donors to match the ambition being shown by the United States.

Mr. Secretary, these are just some of the many issues that are top of mind, though there are certainly many more, but I know we can't keep you here all day. I want to thank you, again, for your tireless work on behalf of our country, and for being with our Subcommittee today. I look forward to your testimony.