

TESTIMONY OF REP. JAMES P. MCGOVERN (MA-02)

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS AND RELATED AGENCIES
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

May 17, 2022

Chairwoman Lee and Ranking Member Rogers –

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on some of my priorities for the FY 2023 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

I want to thank you for how responsive this subcommittee has been to so many of my top concerns and its focus on advancing community-based development. I believe the subcommittee, and the two of you most especially, promote the very best of U.S. values and interests in our relationships around the world.

I would like to begin with the bipartisan request led by Representative Sarah Jacobs and myself, along with Representatives Fitzpatrick, McCollum, and Kim to provide \$1.1 billion for the Maternal and Child Health account, including \$290 million for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and **\$300 million for the Nutrition Account within Global Health Programs at USAID.**

I strongly urge the subcommittee to substantially increase the Nutrition Account. This request is supported by 178 bipartisan Members of Congress. In the past, while the subcommittee has provided substantial increases in both the MCH account and the Global Health Programs account, these increases have not been reflected in the amount dedicated to Nutrition. We all know that the interventions provided to infants, including severely malnourished infants, toddlers, and young children, have a tremendous “bang for the buck.” When we see the reduction in stunting, and improvements in maternal and child health from these proven interventions, for the life of me, I cannot understand why increases to the USAID Nutrition account are so difficult to achieve.

Our bipartisan request is to provide \$300 million to make up for past shortfalls. At a minimum, I ask the subcommittee to provide a very substantial increase to the Nutrition Account.

As I have done in the past, I have submitted several recommendations on Colombia and Central America. I want to thank the subcommittee for the thoughtful designations it has made in the past regarding our aid to these countries and regions. I strongly support the attention by this subcommittee to police reform in Colombia. Since last year, police abuses have continued to escalate, and reforms have failed to advance. I encourage you to maintain and strengthen your attention to this critical human rights and security issue.

I would like to use my remaining time simply to highlight a couple of **new requests** that I have submitted for your consideration for FY 2023.

First, staying with Colombia, I have asked the Committee to **designate \$500,000 for USIP's Colombia program.** I also support fully funding USIP at \$54 million. I leave the best way to allocate these funds to your best judgement.

In October 2021, USIP opened a permanent office in Colombia. In the worsening human rights situation confronting Colombia, the USIP Colombia Program has become a critical convening space for meetings with key local and national stakeholders on a range of sensitive issues in each of USIP's strategic pillars noted above. Its shoestring budget provides for minimal staffing and administrative costs at a time when expanding its programs could amplify its critical role as a good faith actor and mentor for peace, reconciliation, and reform inside Colombia.

I recognize that it is a highly unusual request to designate funds for one of USIP's many programs, but the impact of its Colombia Office and staff in advancing peacebuilding in that troubled and violent country cannot be understated. I firmly believe that it merits this designated allocation. Time is of the essence to expand and strengthen this program before the peace process stalls and violence and polarization reassert themselves. I know that none of us in Congress wish to see Colombia repeat the horrors of the 1990s.

Second, I request that **\$1.5 million be provided to the Bureau of Democracy, Labor, and Human Rights to develop a comprehensive regional protection program for Central American** judicial officials, independent media, and human rights defenders who face such extreme legal or administrative harassment that they are forced to stop work or even go into exile.

In recent years we have seen a deep erosion of judicial and prosecutorial independence in Central America along with a crackdown on independent media and the misuse of laws to restrict the work of civil society organizations. Those most affected by these trends are the individuals and NGOs leading the effort to combat impunity and corruption, protect human rights, and ensure rule of law – in other words, the very people and groups who most share our values and goals for the region.

I strongly believe it is in the U.S. interest to have in place a program or mechanism that ensures the safety of these key civil society and judicial actors so that they might continue their human rights and anti-corruption work and for them and their families to receive the support required to function professionally while in exile.

Finally, I am also requesting **\$10 million for peacebuilding, reconciliation, democracy-building, and food security initiatives in the Central African Republic.** In addition to countering several illegal armed actors in the CAR, conflict there has exacerbated religious and ethnic tensions and left 49% of the population food-insecure. While humanitarian assistance provides essential life-saving support, there remains massive gaps in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and livelihoods programming that could help support civilians to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. These civil society programs and initiatives can play an essential role in breaking cycles of conflict and displacement and help secure a more sustainable peace in the country.