Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
Reforming Food Aid: Desperate Need to Do Better
October 7, 2015

(As prepared for delivery)

The Committee will come to order. This morning, we discuss the need to bring more flexibility, efficiency and effectiveness to U.S. international food aid.

Over the past 60 years, the United States Government, in partnership with American farmers, shippers, and nongovernmental organizations, has helped relieve the suffering of billions of starving people worldwide.

Yet, this proud legacy shouldn't blind us to needed reforms. Desperately need reforms. As we will hear today, our food aid is needlessly expensive, takes too long to arrive, and often does long-term damage to local economies.

Despite the fact that obtaining food closer to an area in crisis – or providing vouchers– can save time, money and lives, current law requires that our food aid be purchased in, and shipped from, the United States. We are the only country that continues this approach to food aid.

These requirements have real life consequences. As Andrew Natsios, a former Administrator of USAID told this Committee, "I watched people die waiting for food aid to arrive." It took four weeks for U.S. food to arrive in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan. It took six weeks to arrive in Nepal following its April 2015 earthquake. Our food aid program simply wasn't able to provide food when and where it was needed most.

Not only do U.S. purchase and shipping requirements slow us down and add unnecessary transportation costs, they can also distort local markets. In 2008, Americans saw truckloads of U.S. food being delivered to northern Kenya, where famine threatened to kill millions. What we didn't see, but now understand, is that these truckloads of U.S. food depressed local prices and pushed farmers in other parts of Kenya - who had an abundant harvest - into deeper poverty. Local purchases of food would have avoided this devastating consequence.

And this scenario has played out again and again – from Afghanistan to Haiti.

The challenges of food aid have changed since the program was established in the 1950s. More and more, in areas of conflict, food is being used as a weapon against the population. Groups like ISIS and al-Shabaab are manipulating aid. Convoys are being attacked. And some countries hosting large numbers of refugees have seen food aid destabilize their economies, making it unwelcome. Here again, the use of more flexible food aid tools could work, while U.S. food may not.

Current law has not kept pace with today's world. Our government no longer holds surplus food stocks. Agricultural prices are stable, U.S. agricultural exports are at an all-time high, and demand is expected to increase. U.S. ports are doing quite well. Using food aid as a means to subsidize our economy can't be justified.

And the "auxiliary reserve" that U.S. shipping requirements supposedly support – it has never been called up. In fact, the majority of U.S. ships that move food aid are not even "militarily useful." Those that are -- are ultimately foreign owned.

For the past three years, we have been fighting to advance common sense solutions that would enable the United States to reach more people, in less time, at less expense. We have been fighting to put the emphasis back on saving lives. We have made some progress, but it's not enough.

If we allowed for just 25 percent of the Food for Peace budget to be used for more flexible food aid approaches – like local purchase, vouchers, or transfers – we could reduce our response time from months to hours and reach at least two million more people with life-saving aid. If we bumped that number up to 45 percent, we could reach 6 million more people.

As we will hear today, we are in desperate need to do better. We need to embrace common sense reforms that allow us to use the right tool, at the right time, in the right place.

I'll now turn to Ranking Member Engel for his opening remarks.