

Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa  
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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget request for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). And thank you for your leadership on this Subcommittee. I am pleased to appear alongside my colleague from the Department of State, Acting Assistant Secretary Satterfield.

The Middle East and North Africa remain a key focus of U.S. foreign policy and national security priorities, particularly as we continue the fight against violent extremists. The protracted Syrian conflict and resulting humanitarian and refugee crises have significantly compounded the challenges in the region, especially in Jordan and Lebanon. In Yemen, 76 percent of the population is in need of assistance, the cholera outbreak approaches 1.1 million cases, and 17.8 million people are food insecure. Despite complex political, humanitarian, and development challenges in the region, we see opportunities for USAID's work in stabilization, economic and social development, and protecting vulnerable communities, including religious and ethnic minorities.

As we address these challenges and opportunities, this budget request aims to balance fiscal responsibility with national security imperatives. All of our work is underpinned with the principle of sustainability, to assist countries on their journey to self-reliance. And we continue to call on our partners to commit additional

resources for our shared priorities. The President's request reflects this, in places like Iraq and Syria where we are actively leveraging other donor resources, particularly that of our partners in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and in Iraq where we expect the central government to be able to take on a greater role in its own recovery and stabilization.

As you heard from Administrator Green in April, USAID's goal is to end the need for foreign assistance. There is no surer path to self-reliance than helping governments be more responsive to their citizens and more accountable in the management of public resources. To that end, the FY 2019 request will support programs that strengthen democratic governance abroad, as democracy assistance remains a fundamental element of how we help countries address critical development challenges. In order to ensure our investments are sustained, USAID's approach includes, working "by, with, and through local partners." In FY 2019, we will continue to work directly with national and local governments; civil society; and local people to help them build their own strong, stable communities across the region.

As my colleagues and I visit USAID projects and meet with partners across the region, it is clear that the people of the Middle East and North Africa appreciate our support and have hope for their future. We stand in solidarity with the people of the region as they work to build a stable, more prosperous future. With your support, our FY 2019 request of \$1.7 billion for economic and development programs in the Middle East and North Africa will help secure the enduring defeat of ISIS; further strategic partnerships with governments, civil society, business leaders, and entrepreneurs; promote good governance; and encourage stability and

economic security in the region. U.S. investment in these areas builds a bulwark against violent extremist actors and ideologies.

The President has been clear that the enduring defeat of ISIS is a national security priority, and our FY 2019 request will allow USAID to continue promoting stability and countering violent extremism across the region. In Iraq, our request will promote stabilization assistance in areas liberated from ISIS, inclusive governance, and economic reforms. This assistance will be in key in supporting the Government of Iraq's efforts to use its own resources more effectively and transparently.

As you know, the protection of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq, who have suffered greatly under ISIS, has been a top priority for President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Administrator Green. In Northern Iraq - once home to large communities of Christians and other minorities, many of whom left their homes or fled the country altogether - USAID is committed to creating the conditions necessary for these communities to return safely and voluntarily to their ancestral lands.

The FY 2019 request will enable USAID to continue to target assistance to vulnerable communities, particularly religious and ethnic minorities in the Ninewa Plains and Sinjar regions. The United States has a proud legacy of standing with vulnerable ethnic and religious minorities. Protecting people's right to choose their own beliefs and culture has been at the core of our nation's values since its founding. When minorities are attacked, such as Christians and other ethnic and religious minority groups were in Iraq, we rally local and international civil society and the private sector to join us. We strive to ensure their safety, food security, and livelihoods, and to find them a place to call home for now and ultimately

secure their return. We have already channeled tens of millions of dollars to the region, but we know the need is far greater and that we must do more to meet the urgent needs of these populations -- and we will. This month, Administrator Green will travel to Iraq to meet with leaders of these suffering communities and report back with a plan of action to accelerate aid to those in greatest need.

At the President's direction, we are currently reviewing our assistance to Syria, to ensure that funding for stabilization programs supports our national security objectives, with the goal of targeted, effective, and appropriate level of assistance. We will continue to work with the international community, members of the Coalition, and our partners on the ground to provide much-needed stabilization support to vulnerable areas in Syria liberated from ISIS.

The impact of the Syrian crisis and ISIS has also spread to neighboring regions, and the ongoing crisis in Syria continues to strain the region, especially Jordan. Jordan is host to approximately 666,000 registered Syrian refugees, who have a significant impact on host communities. With our FY 2019 request, we will continue to work with the Health and Education Ministries to ensure that Jordanian communities, including refugees, have access to the same quality of services. Additionally, in support of our nearly eight-decade partnership with the Kingdom of Jordan, our FY 2019 assistance will help Jordan accelerate inclusive economic growth, improve delivery of public services, and promote more efficient management of scarce resources, like water. Our commitment to Jordan is evidenced by the new, five-year MOU we signed in February.

In Lebanon, the FY 2019 request will continue to build bridges between host communities and local government bodies to reduce community tensions and

improve service delivery. For example, we currently provide assistance to municipalities to implement projects prioritized by their communities. In Lebanon's recent election, USAID supported first-time voter education efforts to get out the vote, and provided training and capacity building for the Constitutional Council for Election Disputes Resolution and the Supervisory Commission for Elections for monitoring. We will also continue our work to improve access to education in Lebanon.

Turning to Egypt, which is entering its fifth decade of USAID partnership, the FY 2019 request will enable USAID to continue to invest in programs that further private sector-led growth; support the government to implement essential economic and social sector reforms; encourage the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises; and strengthen the Egyptian workforce, particularly youth and women. We will also continue investing in health and education to help the next generation of Egyptians fully realize their potential. We remain concerned about the May 2017 NGO law, which has the potential to further restrict civil society and complicate ongoing and future U.S. assistance in Egypt, if implemented, and we maintain an ongoing dialogue with the Egyptian government on issues that arise from the implementation of our work. We also continue to urge Egyptian officials to overturn or pardon the 2013 convictions of 41 staff of U.S.-funded NGOs.

In Morocco, USAID partners with the private sector, local and national government entities, and other donors to ensure that programming is sustainable. USAID's programs will continue to strengthen civil society, provide opportunities for youth in marginalized areas, support systemic education improvements, and address the workforce skills shortage that constrains economic growth.

While our assistance to the Palestinians remains under review, we will continue to support the Administration's goal of achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians by helping create the conditions for stability and security on the ground.

In Tunisia, the birthplace of the “Arab Spring”, USAID assistance will continue to work with local government structures, provide tangible economic and educational opportunities for youth, partner with private businesses to create jobs, and support sustainable economic reform. For example, we currently assist private companies in addressing the critical issue of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people.

In Libya, U.S. foreign assistance supports the political transition and stabilization efforts, including in areas liberated from ISIS. With our FY 2019 request, we will continue to support the United States’ goal of helping Libyans build a more stable, unified, and national government. Since 2011, USAID has worked to help the country recover from civil conflict, advance its democratic transition, and strengthen governance at the national and local levels. We view elections in Libya -- national and local -- and the adoption of a new constitutional framework as the central ingredient for achieving these objectives. Toward this end, USAID is helping Libyans build the foundation for electoral events and a potential constitutional referendum. For example, we are providing technical assistance to Libya’s local election commission and municipalities as they undertake municipal elections over the next year. We are also supporting the High National Election

Commission, which has successfully registered almost 1 million additional voters beyond the existing rolls (bringing the total to 2.4 million registered).

In Yemen, the humanitarian crisis continues to deteriorate in the absence of a lasting political solution. As a major donor, we are keenly aware of the importance of the humanitarian assistance and commercial goods, including food and fuel, which moves through Hudaydah port, and are determined to ensure they are not disrupted. As Secretary Pompeo reiterated earlier this week, we expect all parties to honor their commitments to work with the UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and support a political process to resolve this conflict, ensure humanitarian access to the Yemeni people, and map a stable political future for Yemen.

USAID is in the process of scaling up development assistance activities to help put the country on a path to recovery and create the conditions for lasting peace. For example, to address the continued erosion of household purchasing power, we are working to help Yemenis generate income in sustainable ways, such as helping coffee farmers and fishermen increase their yields. We are building our development activities on existing humanitarian assistance, to increase sustainability and multiply our efforts. Our FY 2019 request will continue to support Yemeni institutions to address core economic and social issues, such as access to education, healthcare services, and water.

The President's FY 2019 budget request will support USAID's work to foster inclusive development and economic opportunity. This assistance plays an important role in building stable and prosperous societies that contribute to global security and enhance economic opportunities, including for American businesses.

I thank the Subcommittee for its continued recognition of the importance of this work, and for your steadfast support. Thank you for inviting me to testify today and I look forward to your questions.