

**Statement of Megan Doherty**  
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**U.S. Agency for International Development**  
**House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East,**  
**North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism**  
**“What’s Next For Libya? The Path to Peace”**  
**December 9, 2021**

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the role of the U.S. Agency for International Development in Libya’s political transition.

Libya's political transition is neither easy nor direct. Violence, corruption, and external interference have rolled back prior progress and remain threats to stability. However, despite the challenges, there is strong support from the Libyan people to chart a peaceful path forward and end more than a decade of chaos and setbacks. Today, 86 percent of Libyans who registered to vote in national elections have collected their registration cards and nearly 70 percent of Libyans support holding elections.

**United States’ Goals and Interests in Libya**

The United States has a strategic interest in a stable and prosperous Libya. We work closely with the United Nations and across the broader international community to support the Libyan people in their democratic transition. Together, we focus on supporting a negotiated political settlement that advances Libya’s ability to establish a unified government that is capable of securing its territory, transparently managing its significant resources, providing services to all of its citizens, and acting as a capable partner to mitigate threats of terrorism and violent extremism.

In support of this goal, USAID works to strengthen the foundations for a more stable, inclusive, and self-reliant Libya through two distinct but interconnected objectives. The first is to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of key governance institutions, and the second is to mitigate drivers of instability and conflict by empowering actors across civil society, marginalized populations, media, and the private sector.

**USAID Assistance for Libya’s Path to Stability**

More than ten years after the February 2011 revolution, Libya is fractured, but still seeking to emerge from protracted civil conflict. National and local government institutions have struggled with weak legitimacy, low technical capacity, and fragmentation. Extensive foreign interference, particularly since the 2019-2020 conflict, has exacerbated instability and conflict.

Developments last year brought some promising signs of progress. The end of hostilities in June 2020 and nationwide ceasefire in October 2020 largely ended fighting and notably decreased the number of internally displaced people.<sup>1</sup> In November 2020, a United Nations Support Mission to Libya (UNSMIL)-facilitated political process—known as the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF)—produced a political roadmap for a unified government, including a plan for national

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Libya Fact Sheet, August 2021, [https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Libya%20Factsheet-August%202021\\_0.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Libya%20Factsheet-August%202021_0.pdf)

elections in December. Libyan parties have also taken important steps toward unification of economic institutions, including the Central Bank of Libya.

Despite these promising developments, significant challenges remain. The United Nations estimates that nearly 900,000 people are still in need of some form of humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup> Libya serves as a transit point to Europe for African migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. There are an estimated 600,000 migrants and 41,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Libya<sup>3</sup> who are uniquely vulnerable and often subject to egregious human rights abuses such as rape, torture, and forced labor in official and unofficial detention centers.<sup>4</sup> Smugglers and traffickers continue to exploit Libya's lawless borders. The protracted conflict in Libya caused a severe decline in access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services. Less than half of Libyan households are connected to the wastewater network.<sup>5</sup> Although more than 80 percent of the urban population in Libya now has access to electricity, blackouts remain frequent and rural access is under 10 percent.<sup>6</sup> Limited humanitarian access remains a challenge in the delivery of life-saving assistance to affected populations.

COVID has further exacerbated the country's struggles. Food costs for some basic items have more than doubled pre-pandemic levels. Access to cash, poor service provision, and lack of employment opportunities rank among Libyans' top concerns.<sup>7</sup>

Thanks to the generosity of Congress and the American people, USAID has partnered with the Libyan people to address some of these challenges, improve conditions, and strengthen prospects for longer-term stability. USAID helped unify Libya's eastern and western electricity grids and is working with the General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) to help it become a commercially viable company. For example, in the first three quarters of this year, GECOL dramatically improved by 207 percent compared to the same period in 2020. Following the liberation of Sirte from ISIS in 2016, USAID supported its stabilization by distributing food and school supplies, repairing and re-equipping government buildings, and restoring economic opportunities, enabling 90 percent of Sirte's internally displaced population to return within two years. USAID has also trained and empowered more than 100 civil society organizations to increase Libyans' engagement with governance entities and political participation of minority groups.

To address the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States, largely through USAID, has provided more than \$23 million in supplemental and bilateral funds to support Libya's response, including

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Libya Fact Sheet, August 2021, [https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Libya%20Factsheet-August%202021\\_0.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Libya%20Factsheet-August%202021_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UN IOM Libya-Migrant Report 38 (July-September 2021), <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya-%E2%80%94-migrant-report-38-july-%E2%80%94-september-2021>

<sup>4</sup> The New Yorker, "The Secretive Libyan Prisons That Keep Migrants Out of Europe," November 28, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/12/06/the-secretive-libyan-prisons-that-keep-migrants-out-of-europe>

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, Assessment of national water systems, 2019, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/libya/document/assessment-national-water-systems-libya>

<sup>6</sup> Africa Energy Portal Country Profile - Libya, <https://africa-energy-portal.org/country/libya>

<sup>7</sup> [USAID, OTI National Perceptions Survey, September.pdf](#)

direct support to health centers and medical professionals as well as the Ministry of Health to improve the agency's ability to respond to the pandemic and inform the public. As of November 28, more than 24 percent of eligible Libyans had received at least one vaccine dose.<sup>8</sup>

### **Libyan National Elections**

Much of the focus in Libya is currently on the path to national elections. While elections alone are insufficient, they are a crucial step forward for Libya and we are committed to ensuring they are held as transparently, credibly, and securely as possible.

USAID has partnered with the High National Election Commission (HNEC) on all aspects of the electoral process from voter registration and identification cards to cybersecurity. In addition, USAID has also equipped HNEC field offices across the country, trained judges and lawyers on electoral dispute resolution, and worked with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) on risk mitigation and incident planning. To counter a dangerous uptick in electoral misinformation and hate speech, USAID helped HNEC set up voter information hotlines and supported civil society organizations to create fact checking websites to ensure Libyans have access to credible, timely information to combat rumors in real time. USAID is also working with television and radio stations, newspapers and social media platforms to secure their agreement to a code of conduct preventing hate speech and promoting unbiased coverage.

Several challenges to elections remain. In addition to militia posturing, disruptions by political spoilers, threats of violence and intimidation have risen against HNEC, electoral dispute judges, and candidates - particularly minorities and women. At the same time, disputes over the legal basis for elections and continued efforts by some actors to derail the political process show progress is neither linear nor guaranteed, making U.S. assistance and advocacy critical to enable broader political compromise.

### **Beyond Elections**

In our experience worldwide and after more than a decade of work in Libya, we have learned the hard lesson that elections are important, but not an end goal - they are one critical step on a long journey to a credible, capable, and inclusive government. USAID is committed to supporting the Libyan people in their broader aspirations for stability, accountability, and responsive governance. Beyond elections, Libya will continue to face an array of challenges ranging from a fractured political landscape, an urgency to rid the country of foreign fighters, to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of Libyan militias and armed groups, and addressing the inhumane treatment of migrants. The health and economic impacts of the pandemic will also continue to challenge Libya. Government institutions will need to act swiftly to build trust and deliver change and improvements for the Libyan people. USAID stands ready to support these efforts.

Thank you for your time today and your continued support for our work in Libya. I look forward to your questions.

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<sup>8</sup> Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=LBY>