

**Testimony of U.S. Agency for International Development
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"Africa's Displaced People"

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on USAID's assistance to displaced populations in Africa. Thank you also for your support for USAID's humanitarian and development programs around the globe. Thanks to your assistance, we are not only saving lives, but restoring a sense of dignity and hope for millions of displaced families striving to reknit the fabric of their lives after bearing witness to untold horrors.

Introduction

Today, we are grappling with the largest global displacement in recorded history. Nearly 60 million people have been uprooted from their homes, fleeing across borders as refugees or within their own countries to escape rampant violence, persecution, and destruction. More than half of all refugees are children, too many of whom have had their innocence stripped away after suffering abuse, seeing parents or relatives killed, or leaving their homes in the chaotic fog of war.

More than a quarter of all of the world's displaced persons are in Africa. Conflict is now driving enormous numbers of people from their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. In Mali and Nigeria, governments are struggling to beat back the scourge of violent extremism, especially in communities where weak governance and lack of economic opportunities provide breeding grounds for radicalism. South Sudan is mired in a spiral of brutal violence and retribution that has left more than two million people displaced, hungry, and terrorized. Political unrest in Burundi has caused 150,000 people to flee to neighboring countries. Today's flashpoints are layered on top of decades-long instability in Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that continue to drive millions from their homes.

Behind these staggering figures and enormous challenges are the individuals in search of peace, such as the women and children—including girls from Chibok, Nigeria—who are lucky enough to escape the grips of Boko Haram and are trying to rebuild their lives, pursue an education, and overcome the chilling horrors of captivity, rape, and forced indoctrination. Imam Omar, Archbishop Dieudonné and Reverend Guerékoyame from the Central African Republic (CAR) are bringing communities of all religions together to heal the scars of war and find faith in the power of forgiveness. The children of Bor, South Sudan—continue to learn in their native tongue, Dinka Cham—through USAID's *All Children Reading* mobile literacy program. Their resilience in the face of brutality reminds us why we must do more to help Africa's displaced people regain a sense of normalcy and prospects for a better future. We are compelled to help

not only out of a sense of humanity but also as a national security priority to foster stability and peace in the world's youngest continent.

Today, I would like to share what USAID is doing to save lives and alleviate the suffering of Africa's displaced communities, including the most vulnerable among them—such as women, children, the elderly, and the disabled. I will focus on our efforts in three countries—South Sudan, CAR and Nigeria—where the needs are particularly acute and USAID has invested significant resources. I would also like to highlight our efforts to address the root causes of conflict, which is driving record-level displacement.

Humanitarian response

Over the past five years, violent events, including terrorism and civil unrest, have exploded across Africa. Protracted conflicts in South Sudan, Nigeria, DRC, and CAR—coupled with complex crises in the Middle East—are straining the humanitarian system like never before. In 2014, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and the Office of Food for Peace (FFP) responded to four Level Three—the United Nation's most severe emergency designation—humanitarian crises, including in South Sudan and CAR, as well as West Africa's Ebola outbreak. Our contributions to addressing global crises, as well as those of other donors, however, are outpaced by the rate at which needs are growing. As violence across the continent shows no signs of abating, many Africans have been uprooted more than once and will likely be unable to return home for years, if not decades. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the average duration of forced displacement is 17 years.

The sheer scale and protracted nature of displacement, and growing demands on stretched humanitarian budgets, present special challenges for meeting the needs of Africa's displaced. Often, we struggle to gain access to those most in need, whether they are dispersed in remote areas cut off from reliable transportation routes, or among host communities generous enough to take them in. Our humanitarian partners are increasingly operating in dangerous environments, and attacks against them are increasing accordingly. In the past decade, the number of aid workers reportedly killed, wounded, or kidnapped globally has almost doubled; there were 335 major security incidents last year.

In South Sudan, several of our partner staff have gone missing. The South Sudanese government recently expelled the United Nations (UN) top humanitarian official Toby Lanzer for speaking out against the senseless violence and rampant impunity that has left the country one of the most food insecure places in the world. Increased violence has closed off essential routes for aid delivery by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and other partners. To stave off famine, we have had to resort to delivering aid through air operations, which are significantly more expensive than delivering aid by trucks. In another example, in Boko Haram-affected areas of Northeast Nigeria, the presence of trained, capable humanitarian workers has expanded but is still limited.

Despite these challenges, we are doing everything possible to reach Africa's displaced communities with life-saving assistance. Our efforts primarily focus on providing relief for internally displaced persons (IDPs), those who flee their homes due to conflict, human rights abuses, or natural disasters but who have not crossed an international border. We do this in

concert with the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, which targets the needs of refugees.

In Fiscal Year 2014, USAID provided more than \$481 million in humanitarian assistance to Africa, helping tens of millions of IDPs. We leveraged flexible tools such as Rapid Response Funds—which provide quick routing of funding to partners in emergency situations—to mobilize timely responses to newly displaced populations in South Sudan and elsewhere. We delivered emergency health services to IDPs across Africa to combat the spread of disease in conflict zones where healthcare systems have been decimated. We provided support to shared UN services that facilitate larger international relief efforts, including the UN Humanitarian Air Service to support humanitarian staff movements, the UN Department of Safety and Security to conduct security assessments, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to track population movements.

We also delivered approximately \$1.2 billion in emergency food assistance across the continent, including to millions of both internally displaced people and refugees. Thanks to reforms in the Farm Bill that increased the amount of cash available under Title II food aid programs, we were able to reach an additional 600,000 people with food assistance in Africa and worldwide in 2014. These flexibilities, along with our Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP) funded through the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account, meant that we were able to use a mix of U.S. in-kind, regionally purchased, and cash-based food assistance to meet growing demands for food aid across Africa. These flexibilities and the additional 25 percent increased flexibility in Title II funds requested by President Obama in the 2015 and 2016 budgets are essential to ensuring we can respond swiftly, effectively, and efficiently to combat hunger in Africa in a time of complex crises around the world.

Nigeria, which faces numerous conflicts within its borders in addition to the Boko Haram insurgency, has nearly 1.8 million people displaced either internally or to neighboring countries. We have provided nearly \$56 million in humanitarian assistance to help those in the region affected by the conflict and more than \$1.4 billion in other foreign assistance over the past two fiscal years. In Northeast Nigeria—where Boko Haram has spread a brutal brand of terror, sadism and destruction—we are supporting humanitarian, transitional, and development efforts in collaboration with the Government of Nigeria at both the federal and local level. We provide displaced and host communities with health and vaccination services, water and sanitation, food assistance, and support to informal education centers for IDP children.

Our Office of Food for Peace, which is the lead office providing food assistance to both refugees and IDPs around the world, is providing cash transfers and food vouchers to over 100,000 displaced persons and host communities in Yobe, Gombe, and Adamawa states of Nigeria, targeting pregnant and lactating women, female-headed households, and households with children under five. This cash-based assistance allows people to buy nutritious foods in local markets, thereby helping to combat malnutrition and restart economic activity in areas ravaged by Boko Haram. Through voucher-for-work programs, we are also trying to empower displaced and host families that have had their livelihoods disrupted by violence and instability. We also launched village savings and loan groups and trained farmers in herd management, animal health, and livestock feed conservation so that they can rebuild their assets and get back to farming.

As Boko Haram expands its reach into neighboring Cameroon, we have responded adeptly to help those in need. For instance, our partner IOM used its Displacement Tracking Matrix—a database that tracks population movements—to target and provide relief items to more than 2,000 people in Cameroon’s Far North Region, where both Cameroonian IDPs and Nigerian refugees have fled Boko Haram incursions over the past year.

In South Sudan, the U.S. government has long been the largest donor, providing \$1.2 billion in emergency assistance to conflict-affected and displaced populations since the start of the crisis in 2013. These efforts have provided much-needed food, shelter, clean water, health care, and psychological support for the people of South Sudan. Last month, we announced an additional \$115 million in humanitarian assistance, and this fiscal year alone we have provided more than 138,000 tons of U.S. and regionally procured food. Nevertheless, as fighting rages on, many are stuck in overcrowded peacekeeping bases that were meant as temporary housing for those who initially fled when the conflict erupted in December 2013. Children are not able to go to school, families have been torn apart, and farmers cannot harvest crops. Up to 4.6 million people—40 percent of the population—face life-threatening hunger this month. As a result of the conflict, USAID has redirected its development assistance, shifting from state-building to more directly assisting the people of South Sudan.

In the midst of competing priorities and strained resources, we have not lost, and cannot lose, sight of CAR, where more than one in five of its 4.6 million inhabitants is displaced. Acute violence has compromised CAR’s decades-long peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians and devastated a country that was already languishing under the weight of neglect, woefully weak governance, and some of the lowest development indicators on Earth. USAID has provided more than \$142 million in humanitarian relief and food assistance to the people of CAR in the past two fiscal years. Our efforts are focused on providing fast and flexible assistance for the displaced, as well as those seeking to return home. In a country with tough terrain and sporadic bouts of violence that complicate access, we also reinforced the humanitarian coordination and information sharing, funded transportation to hard-to-reach areas through the UN Humanitarian Air Service, and supported security analyses to help facilitate relief operations in insecure areas.

We provide a mix of in-kind food, including Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) for children with severe acute malnutrition, as well as locally and regionally purchased food and cash-based food vouchers, to IDPs in CAR and refugees from CAR in Cameroon, Chad, DRC, and the Republic of Congo (RoC). We are also providing employment opportunities, cash vouchers, as well as seeds, tools and basic agricultural training so that the people of CAR can get back on their feet.

We have seen an uptick in people returning home in CAR. Returnees like Odette Kofedanga are determined to persevere against all odds. Odette fled her village in western CAR when it was attacked by armed rebels in 2013. Her friends and neighbors were killed, 550 homes were burned and all means of earning an income were vandalized or taken away. Odette hid in the bush with her eight children for months, where she says they was forced to “live like animals,” eating wild plants to survive. Her children went without food for days at a time. When security

improved, she went back her village and enrolled in a USAID-funded WFP program in which families received food rations, as well as seeds, tools, and fertilizer to start farming again. The food ration helped Odette feed her family and avoid selling off or eating the seeds she received, so that she could plant the next harvest. She was able to grow corn and sell it to buy clothes and enroll her children back in school. Each day, there are more “Odettes” in CAR, planting the seeds for a better tomorrow.

Protecting women and children

There is a Swahili saying that says, “When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.” Across Africa, the most vulnerable communities are worst hit by violence, forced to flee in the midst of power grabs by armed forces, governments, extremists, and others who seek to impose their will by force. And we know that women, children, and the elderly often bear the heaviest burden. At USAID, we are committed to protecting women, children, and other vulnerable groups in crisis situations as part of the U.S. government’s Safe from the Start Initiative and its Action Plan on Children in Adversity. To date in FY 2015, USAID has provided nearly \$40 million in humanitarian protection activities to meet these commitments in Africa.

According to a UN report released last week, a government-led campaign in South Sudan has ratcheted up violence and acts of torture, especially against women and children, to a new level of brutality and intensity. In at least nine separate incidents, South Sudan’s army gang raped and burned women and children alive in their homes. A UNICEF report out this month documents horrific crimes against children, including castration, rape, and killings. We are appalled by these unconscionable acts committed by all parties to the conflict, and continue to stand with the South Sudanese people by providing aid to all those in need regardless of ethnicity.

Since the crisis began in South Sudan we have prioritized efforts to combat rampant Gender-Based Violence (GBV). We are providing psychosocial services for those who are displaced at the largest IDP site in the country—the base of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Bentiu—and through programs that educate women on the dangers of GBV and provide critical and life-saving health and emotional support for GBV survivors. As the majority of displaced people are sheltering in rural areas outside of UN bases, we also provide clinical and psychosocial support and treatment services to children and women survivors there.

There is perhaps no greater crime than committing atrocities against children. Yet too many children have been stripped of their innocence and suffered untold horrors inflicted by armed groups in South Sudan, CAR, Nigeria, and other conflict-zones across Africa. According to UNICEF, Africa has the greatest number—and highest rate of increase—of conscripted children in the world. There are approximately 20,000 children associated with armed conflict in CAR and South Sudan alone. Wide-scale displacement has also left many children separated from their families and caretakers. USAID provides critical assistance to help African displaced children shed the trauma of conflict. In South Sudan, we are working with a local non-governmental organization (NGO), Street Children Aid, to provide safe spaces for both host community and displaced children to learn and protect them from the risk of sexual exploitation or recruitment into armed groups. In CAR, where our partner UNICEF has negotiated the release of 3,300 boys and girls from armed groups over the past two years, we support the delivery of life-saving assistance to these children, as well as healthcare, psychosocial support,

and family reintegration assistance. We also provide older children with vocational training so that they can get jobs and avoid re-recruitment into armed activity.

In northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram continues to abduct young women, girls, and boys, forcing them through rape and terror into adopting its nihilist ideology. We are coordinating with the Government of Nigeria to provide psychosocial support to survivors of Boko Haram violence. Through a \$4.5 million, five-year (2010-15) program, we are supporting psychosocial support activities, such as counseling to survivors of Boko Haram's abuses and their families, including those directly affected by the abduction in Chibok. We and the U.S. embassy team in Abuja are also working with the Government of Nigeria to ensure that the safety, well-being, and dignity of Boko Haram survivors are prioritized during their reintegration back to their families and communities.

In addition to these stand-alone protection activities, our Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance carefully reviews all humanitarian programs to ensure that proposed activities do not create unintended dangers or cause harm for vulnerable populations, including sexual exploitation of women and children. For example, we require that grantees consult communities on how to organize distribution lines, taking into account location and ease of access, so that women and girls do not have to travel too far or at night to receive aid.

Addressing the root causes of displacement

We know that the plight of the displaced will not improve unless the root causes of violence and state fragility are addressed. At USAID, contingency funds, including our Transition Initiative Account and Complex Crisis Fund, are important resources that allow us to design sophisticated, locally-informed responses to address the root causes of complex crises. However, the growing magnitude of these types of crises around the world means that the current levels of these resources are not adequate to meet the needs.

Promoting Inclusive Governance

At the heart of Africa's simmering conflicts are unstable relationships between societies and their states. That is why USAID prioritizes democracy, human rights, and governance as a cornerstone of our development agenda. Throughout Africa, we promote inclusive political participation, so that people can speak without fear, have a say in the policies of their governments, and see their aspirations realized and facilitated through good governance, rule of law, and broad-based economic growth and opportunity.

For instance, in northern Nigeria, our Leadership, Empowerment, Advocacy and Development (LEAD) program is building partnerships between state and local governments, civil society, and the private sector to improve governance, accountability, and the delivery of essential services to citizens in Bauchi and Sokoto states.

The Nigeria Regional Transition Initiative led by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives is designed to address the conditions that have allowed extremist groups such as Boko Haram to flourish in northeastern Nigeria. Through small, strategic assistance to local groups, we are improving government responsiveness to citizen expectations, reducing perceptions of marginalization and exploring efforts to reduce youth vulnerability to extremism influences. We

are bringing young Nigerians together in sport-for-peace events that reinforce the value of sportsmanship and comradeship. We have also launched the first-ever shortwave broadcast in Kanuri, the primary language spoken in northeastern Nigeria and border areas most affected by Boko Haram. It features stories of daily life and conveys to this traditionally marginalized community that others are paying attention to their crisis. One fan recently wrote the following message to the producers: “We thank you for giving us a place to air our voice and listen in our dialect.” Without a doubt, these efforts are making an invaluable difference in the lives of communities that have been displaced, terrorized, and alienated, offering the familiar comfort of a voice in their native tongue. However, resource constraints have curtailed our ability to maintain or expand the geographic reach of these initiatives and others aimed at addressing the root causes that allow Boko Haram to exist.

In advance of Nigeria’s historic election in April, USAID invested \$51 million to work closely with Nigeria’s election authorities, political parties, and civil society to promote peaceful political participation and a free, fair, and credible electoral process. Innovative campaigns, such as #VoteNotFight, mobilized youth through radio, social media, and importantly, grassroots campaigning, to have their voices heard and promote peaceful elections. These young campaigners should stand proud: thanks to their efforts, and those of many others, Nigeria has ushered in a historic and peaceful transfer of power, a hopeful harbinger for Africa’s future.

Expanding Opportunity

Boko Haram means “Western education is unclean,” underscoring the importance the group places on denying children the opportunity to expand their worldview. In areas overtaken by this criminal gang of extremists, schools have been bombed and children kidnapped and indoctrinated. Boko Haram specifically targets girls whom it believes have no right to an education. Even before Boko Haram emerged, the educational system in Northern Nigeria was underperforming compared to the rest of the country. A recent USAID-funded assessment of reading skills in the Northern Nigerian states of Bauchi and Sokoto found that 70 percent of third grade students could not read a single word of a simple narrative text.

In an effort to address deeply entrenched grievances, cultural differences, and under-investment in education in Nigeria’s Northeast, USAID has launched several education efforts. A \$20.5 million crisis response program is providing basic education to internally displaced persons and other conflict-affected communities through informal, community-managed schools. These efforts will be reinforced over the longer-term by our new flagship five-year, \$120 million Northern Education Initiative Plus expands upon a previous effort to strengthen education systems so that they can provide greater access and improve reading among primary school children.

Fostering Peace and Reconciliation

We know that while bolstering the state’s capacity to deliver to its citizens is critical to promoting peace in Africa, most displaced communities will not return home unless they are at peace with their neighbors. Throughout Africa, USAID seeks to target its humanitarian and development programs in ways that mitigate tensions and create bridges for shared peace and prosperity between communities.

Through the Complex Crisis Fund, concerted diplomacy and early warning response through the Atrocity Prevention Board and other efforts, we have not only been able to foster peace after the outbreak of conflict, but address flashpoints of instability before they spark. For instance, USAID's Complex Crises Fund and other programs in CAR aim to prevent genocide and mass atrocities, expand the space to safely provide humanitarian assistance, and support conditions favorable to a peaceful political transition. To that end, USAID has provided \$7.5 million to empower local voices for peace, promote interreligious and other community dialogue, and help dispel rumors and fear mongering by improving access to accurate information from local media.

These are important first steps, but we recognize that dedicated long-term funding is necessary to truly transform societal relations in CAR. That is why we launched the CAR Peace Partnership last year, which will use up to \$7 million of USAID funds to strengthen locally-led peacebuilding and atrocity prevention efforts in CAR for the next five years, laying a stronger foundation for the transitional processes underway in the country. USAID has received pledges for several million dollars of cash and in-kind support for this partnership from the private sector. Day by day, these efforts are fostering peace at the community level, and making it easier for returnees to rebuild their lives.

Conclusion

At USAID, we are committing to doing everything possible to save lives and alleviate suffering among Africa's displaced communities. At the root of Africa's displacement crisis are communities that lack the political and economic conditions to prosper peacefully. That is why we are also investing in bolstering good governance and expanding the space for opportunity in Africa's most marginalized communities. These efforts support USAID's enduring mission of ending extreme poverty and promoting resilient, democratic societies where people can live peacefully and without fear of being uprooted.

We thank the subcommittee and its Members for their longstanding support, which makes our efforts possible. I look forward to your questions.