

**Statement for the Record**  
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**United States Agency for International Development**  
**Before the Subcommittee on National Security**  
**Committee on Oversight and Reform (HCOR)**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Empowering Women and Girls and Promoting International Security Hearing**  
**Thursday, July 23, 2019, 10:30 a.m.**

*“Societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful” - U.S. National Security Strategy (2017)*

## **Introduction**

Thank you, Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Grothman, and distinguished Members of the National Security Subcommittee of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the critical national security issue of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and the role that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) plays in supporting the U.S. Government's *WPS Strategy*. It is an honor to join my colleagues from the U.S. Departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security. I also would like to take this opportunity to recognize the newly formed WPS Caucus and express sincere appreciation to Representative Waltz (R-FL) and Representative Frankel (D-FL) for their long-standing commitment to the WPS agenda and the rights of women and girls.

## **Statement on the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 and the United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)**

Signed into law by President Trump in 2017, the Women, Peace, and Security Act demonstrates the United States' commitment to addressing the challenges faced by women and girls in conflict- and disaster-affected areas around the world. The U.S. Government developed the *WPS Strategy* as a holistic approach to advance women's meaningful participation in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism (CVE) and terrorism, and building post-conflict peace and stability. Building on the President's *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and its powerful recognition that “societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful,” the *WPS Strategy* emphasizes the critical linkages between women's empowerment and global peace and security.

## **Statement on USAID's Development Mission and National Security**

In support of America's foreign policy, USAID leads international development and humanitarian efforts to save lives, reduce poverty, and foster prosperity, security, and stability worldwide. USAID recognizes that investing in women's leadership and empowerment is critical for breaking cycles of conflict and instability that threaten global security, and for supporting communities in our partner countries on their own Journeys to Self-Reliance.

USAID's investments in WPS also support U.S. national security by providing a more stable and durable foundation on which to pursue American foreign-policy goals in areas otherwise prone to conflict. Studies show that when women meaningfully participate in peace processes, the resulting agreement is 35-percent more likely to last at least 15 years. When women have

greater parity in social, political, and economic opportunities, societies are more likely to thrive and solve challenges peacefully.

## **USAID's Implementation Plan for the WPS**

On June 16, 2020, USAID released its WPS Implementation Plan, which describes concrete steps we will take to expand and strengthen our work to empower women and girls in countries affected by crisis and conflict. Our Implementation Plan will help us advance the *WPS Strategy* through effective, coordinated actions across our development programs and humanitarian assistance and strengthen our programs to advance women's leadership in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism, and supporting post-conflict recovery.

### *Agency Commitments*

USAID's senior leadership, in Washington and in our Missions, will elevate and advocate for WPS objectives in our policies and programs. We will consult with local women leaders, civil society, faith-based organizations, and academia in countries affected by crisis and conflict to incorporate their diverse perspectives into USAID's programming in peace and security. We will integrate women and girls' perspectives into USAID's policies and programs in CVE. Finally, we will work to reduce gender-based violence (GBV) and increase support for survivors affected by crisis and conflict.

### *Regional Commitments*

Given the diversity across regions, the Agency has developed tailored regional commitments to the implementation of the *WPS Strategy*.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, USAID and our partners continue to promote women's empowerment and the protection of women and girls in conflict and crisis situations. The Agency integrates issues that affect women and girls in research, programming, strategic dialogues, and capacity-building initiatives related to trafficking in persons across Africa. For example, in the Republic of Burkina Faso, we support women as effective leaders and active participants in preventing and responding to radicalization to violence and violent extremism through literacy training, community engagement, and support for women's empowerment. These initiatives increase engagement between women and other community leaders, build knowledge on the importance of parents' roles in preventing violent extremism, and help women overcome trauma they have suffered at the hands of violent extremist organizations. USAID also will continue to prioritize working with regional organizations as a critical approach to support positive change for women and girls in peace-building and political processes in Africa.

In Asia, USAID aims to support women's inclusion in peace processes and political transitions in countries including Burma, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, and the Republic of the Philippines. Furthermore, the Agency continues to focus on women's full participation and protection in the Islamic Republics of Afghanistan and Pakistan. USAID's Missions in Afghanistan and Pakistan are addressing the needs of women and girls affected by conflict and violent extremism and increasing their capacity to participate meaningfully in reconciliation and peace-building activities.

In Europe and Eurasia, USAID's assistance focuses broadly on consolidating the gains made since the end of conflicts in the 1990s. For example, USAID Missions in the region will promote the inclusion of women in decision-making processes at various levels of government and societal interventions, as well as higher participation in the labor market with a goal of achieving greater economic gender parity.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, inequalities still persist in the areas of political participation and economic security, particularly for marginalized and minority women. USAID's activities in the region will place equal emphasis on engaging men and boys in addressing GBV to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of our investments. USAID also will work to incorporate women into broader approaches to addressing the region's insecurity.

In the Middle East, USAID is advancing the objectives of the *WPS Strategy* throughout the region in collaboration with the private sector, civil-society and women's organizations, faith-based and human-rights groups, prominent women leaders, other donors, and host-government officials. USAID is committed to funding local women's organizations on democratic processes and increasing a comprehensive suite of care to survivors of torture and GBV across the Middle East.

#### *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)*

To advance the objectives of the joint U.S. Department of State and USAID *Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict*, USAID's programs in WPS are working to tackle the root cause of violent extremism. This includes understanding the opportunities for engaging women in these efforts through regional research initiatives focused on the diverse roles women play in violent extremism in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The Agency has expanded our programming to address the needs of women and girls affected by violent extremism and to increase women's participation in preventing and responding to radicalization in their communities.

For example, in close coordination with the National Directorate of Employment, WPS activities in the Federal Republic of Nigeria trained 150 widows of security personnel killed in the fight against violent extremism organizations. The women received training on micro-business management skills and provided business-startup kits. This multifaceted support sought to empower women who now find themselves as the heads of households with limited skills or opportunities for viable livelihoods, which rendered the widows vulnerable to the influence of violent extremists.

In the Republic of Niger, USAID's activities in WPS and CVE are supporting women's participation in local dialogue and decision-making processes that identify community priorities in regions affected by violent extremism. And in the Kingdom of Morocco, we have invested in new activities that will interrupt recruitment activities and bolster the resilience of women to counteract the influence of violent extremism organizations.

#### *Measuring Our Progress*

USAID remains ardently committed to monitoring and evaluating our efforts to support the implementation of the *WPS Strategy* to ensure the effective stewardship of taxpayer resources in

achieving our goals. Demonstrating measurable results, reassessing, and adjusting or terminating underperforming programming, and harnessing learning to inform future planning are integral to USAID's approach to development and humanitarian assistance. We are prioritizing the collection and analysis of data to help identify and address geographic and sectoral gaps, and inform reporting to key stakeholders. In addition, the Agency's specific reporting will build on the existing set of foreign-assistance indicators, including the suite of cross-cutting indicators that address gender equality and women's empowerment.

As part of these learning efforts, USAID will strive to establish approaches that help the Agency and the U.S. Government continue to move beyond outputs (*e.g.*, the number of women trained) to measure critical outcomes (*e.g.*, the measurable influence of women in peace-building and political-transition processes).

### **Achievements and Ongoing Efforts**

USAID has a long-standing history of global programming designed to empower and protect women and girls in countries affected by crisis, conflict, and violent extremism. In the past two Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 and 2019, the Agency has invested over \$200 million in programming aligned with the *WPS Strategy*, including \$27 million in dedicated funding for new activities since 2017 designed to advance women's meaningful participation in peace processes; address the needs of women and girls affected by violent extremism; and increase the protection of women and girls in areas of crisis, conflict, and instability. Since 2017, USAID's WPS activities have funded the participation of 70,000 women in political and peace-building processes and provided critical care, psychosocial support, legal aid, and economic services to more than six million survivors.

USAID's WPS activities focus on 4 lines of effort: 1) Participation; 2) Rights, Access, and Protection; 3) Internal U.S. Capabilities; and, 4) Partner Capacity and Commitment.

#### *Line of Effort 1: Participation*

USAID's activities increase women's participation in peace and political processes. For example in Burma, USAID programming addressed common barriers to women's participation in the formal peace process by providing women with childcare, transportation, training, and other resources needed to enable them to attend and influence the National Dialogue Process. This effort resulted in a nine-percent increase in women's participation in the Union Peace Conference from 2016 to 2018. In the Republic of Guinea, USAID's Cultural Cohesion for Peace and Prosperity activity, implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), in coordination with local partners, provides support to women who serve as Young Peace Ambassadors and as members of local Peace-Building Platforms. These women work alongside their male colleagues to identify and facilitate the timely, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and also lead educational-outreach events for citizens on conflict-resolution.

#### *Line of Effort 2: Rights, Access, and Protection*

USAID continues to prioritize activities to protect women and girls from violence in humanitarian emergencies, including robust funding for activities to prevent and respond to GBV. For example, the *Safe from the Start* initiative increases the quality and quantity of

interventions to prevent GBV in crises all over the world. Between FY 2016 and FY 2018, USAID spent approximately \$178 million in humanitarian assistance on GBV response and prevention activities. We increased our investment in the safety and well-being of women and girls, and other vulnerable populations, subjected to GBV. In FY 2019, the Agency directed approximately \$85 million towards life-saving GBV programs in our humanitarian assistance efforts around the world. Another way we are working to prevent GBV in crisis settings is by strengthening education. Without safe opportunities to learn, many girls are susceptible to forced marriages, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other forms of violence.

*Line of Effort 3: Internal U.S. Government Capabilities*

USAID has a robust suite of training modules for our staff focused on equality and women's empowerment and the critical role of women in supporting our development and humanitarian mission. In the past two Fiscal Years, USAID offered 80 training sessions or courses aligned with requirements in the WPS Act of 2017, which reached more than 10,000 of our staff. USAID is also committed to making WPS a central consideration in policy engagement, planning, and programming through collaborations with other U.S. Government policy processes and initiatives, including the Global Fragility Act and the Stabilization Assistance Review.

*Line of Effort 4: The Capacity and Commitment of Our Partners*

We continue to encourage the governments of our partner countries to adopt policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions. For example, USAID is working with the African Union to hold the governments of Member States across the continent accountable for their commitments under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, including to increase women's participation at all levels of decision-making processes. Through support for a Continental Results Framework, the Agency has contributed to an increase in the number of the governments of Member States that have adopted National and Regional Action Plans for the implementation of the WPS agenda.

**Conclusion**

We look forward to continued collaboration with Congress, including the WPS Caucus, the interagency, and our partners, including the private sector, civil society, and faith-based organizations, to advance this important agenda. By supporting coordinated action to implement the *WPS Strategy*, we can improve the prospects for global peace and security. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your questions.