

**Statement by Kathryn D. Stevens**  
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**before the**  
**Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal**  
**Workforce Committee on Oversight and Accountability**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**“Oversight of Federal Agencies’ Post-Pandemic Telework Policies: Part**  
**II” November 29, 2023**

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Mfume, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development or USAID. The Agency appreciates the opportunity to share how our dedicated and talented workforce continues to represent the generosity of the American people and address some of the most unprecedented global challenges of our time.

Since its founding in 1961, USAID has extended the reach of peace, prosperity, and human dignity globally. We are immensely grateful to Congress for your continued bipartisan support and partnership in our efforts to save lives, strengthen economies, promote resilience, and bolster freedom around the world. USAID’s work is a demonstration to the world that America cares about the plight of others, and that we can effect profound change in ways that no other country can. But the work we do abroad also matters to Americans here at home—it makes us safer and more prosperous, engenders goodwill that strengthens alliances and global cooperation, and creates a better future for the generations to come.

USAID’s organizational reach spans over 80 countries with over 13,000 staff working to bolster U.S. national security and improve the lives of millions of vulnerable people. USAID’s employee experience scores illustrate our staff’s deep connection to our mission, with a positive score over 88% in 2022; and strong connection to our organization, with a positive score of 72%. Our ability to successfully drive progress and ensure human dignity around the

world depends on our most valuable resource, our people.

People, who over the past three years, have responded to 75 crises in more than 70 countries, providing food, water, shelter, health care, protection, and other critical aid to people who need it most. People whose dedicated efforts to improve maternal and child survival have led to a remarkable 58% decline globally in under-five child mortality, and 42% maternal mortality since 2000. People, who since 2008, have helped 64.9 million people gain access to sustainable drinking water and 50.8 million people access sustainable sanitation services.

Today, our people are coordinating with partners to ramp up the safe delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians in grave need; working to bolster the Ukrainian people and their economy in the face of Russia's brutal war; and responding to natural disasters in real time, with the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria and Hurricane Otis in Mexico as some of the most recent examples.

USAID is unique among our counterparts in the federal government in that we are lucky to rely on a truly global workforce. To position them to most effectively deliver on our mission, we are focused on rebuilding and strengthening this workforce by reducing our overreliance on a myriad of short term contracting mechanisms, recruiting and retaining outstanding talent, and streamlining the bureaucratic processes that undermine our effectiveness. Over the last three years, we have expanded professional development offerings and learning opportunities, provided our managers with updated leadership tools and training, and created career pathways for our locally employed colleagues, who constitute around 70% of our overseas workforce.

We are also modernizing our operations, including reducing our physical space footprint at headquarters and utilizing secure technology platforms to keep our teams connected and delivering positive impact. USAID has received 8 "As" on the Government Accountability Office's Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (or FITARA) scorecard, for providing groundbreaking cloud collaboration solutions and managing cybersecurity risks while operating in challenging overseas environments. In fact, USAID successfully moved our

operations to a secure government cloud environment more than a decade ago, creating a nimble and secure operational platform for our global workforce and partners. Our experience in this area has positioned us to offer a range of telework options to our domestic workforce and ultimately create a truly flexible and hybrid workplace. Our overseas staff utilize the workplace flexibilities and adhere to the protocols established by the Ambassador at each embassy.

As with many other U.S. Government departments and agencies, USAID's employees had the option to telework prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Coming out of the pandemic when the majority of our staff were in maximum telework status, USAID updated its telework policies to meet the operational needs of the Agency, providing policies that promote a mix of in-person work and telework. These workplace flexibilities have been a valuable recruitment and retention tool for strengthening our operations.

Recognizing that the scale and complexity of the global challenges facing us demanded greater and more meaningful in-person collaboration and problem-solving, and leveraging the opportunity presented by OMB M-23-15 (OMB Memorandum on Measuring, Monitoring, and Improving Organizational Health and Organizational Performance in the Context of Evolving Agency Work Environments), earlier this year USAID took additional steps to further increase in-person presence at our headquarters. Specifically, we required all headquarters-based staff be in-person a minimum of three days per week.

Retaining some telework flexibility has positioned USAID to attract, retain, and invest in the crisis-ready, development and humanitarian experts today's global challenges require. And the increased in-person presence, complemented by intentional engagement and support, has helped us: focus on strengthening the social capital and One USAID culture that was altered by the pandemic; provide additional in-person training, mentoring, and coaching, particularly to the many new and junior staff recruited during the pandemic; and test and refine the tools, technologies, and practices needed to deliver on USAID's mission.

While we are proud of our progress to date, we will continue to evaluate and adjust our policies and approach as needed. Specifically, our senior leaders will leverage our Organizational Health Index, the tool we use to monitor USAID's

programmatic and operational effectiveness, to evaluate the impact of our efforts to improve operations on the performance of their teams. In closing, we at USAID pride ourselves on quickly answering the call when disaster strikes, protecting the vulnerable, strengthening democracy, and creating opportunities for all. An enhanced work environment and strong policies that balance in person and out of office work prepare and support our workforce to deliver on this ambitious mission. Thank you for this opportunity, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.