



October 19, 2022

The Honorable Joni Ernst
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Ernst:

Thank you for your letters dated July 12, and September 9, 2022, regarding the staggering global food security needs and the importance of expeditious and effective use of the supplemental funding generously provided by Congress. As you noted, the world is facing an unprecedented crisis. Nearly 200 million people around the world were food insecure at the start of this year, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has left an additional 40 million people at risk of hunger.

USAID staff have been undertaking efforts to move an unprecedented amount of funding as efficiently, strategically, and responsibly as allowed, consistent with U.S. government law and policy. In FY 2022, USAID obligated nearly \$4.38 billion in humanitarian assistance from the Ukraine supplemental funding bills—more than 62 percent. In total, USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) obligated over \$11.6 billion this fiscal year, 40 percent above the amount obligated in FY 2021. In an effort to be prepared to move quickly, our development and humanitarian teams began continuous work at the outset of the Ukraine crisis to develop a food security response plan. USAID is available to brief you on the efforts we undertook to identify countries vulnerable and exposed to shock, and our calculations to allocate funds to address these challenges efficiently and effectively.

To move funding as quickly as possible, BHA has been infusing money into existing awards, with a focus on public international organizations partners, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), that have the capacity to scale quickly. We are also working with non-governmental (NGOs) partners to design essential multi-sectoral programming because food assistance alone is not sufficient to address the global food security crisis. When communities face crisis levels of acute food insecurity, it not only impacts the amount of food they can eat, but it affects the health of their families, the nutrition status of their children, and it changes the types of protection risks that women and girls face in their communities. To respond to these compounding needs, USAID provides a comprehensive package of assistance when responding to severe food security crises: treatment for acute malnutrition, health services, clean water, safe shelter, and protection programs that aim to prevent and respond to gender based violence. Given the complexity of these needs, these programs take additional time to design, but are critical to famine prevention.

USAID's Office of Acquisition and Assistance, known as M/OAA, provides Contracting Officer (CO) support to BHA and all other USAID bureaus and missions. There is no question that BHA staffing, and associated CO support, has not kept pace with the growth in humanitarian

budgets. In recognition of this issue, one of the Administrator's top priorities is to address longstanding issues in the USAID workforce, reflected in the increase in personnel in USAID budget requests to Congress.

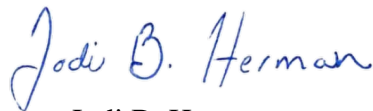
USAID agrees that there is a significant need for COs to help us build institutional capacity commensurate with USAID's role as a national security agency, in addition to many other urgent staffing needs in other critical areas across the Agency. Given BHA's projected obligation level increased by at least 40 percent this fiscal year due to supplemental appropriations, M/OAA temporarily surged additional CO support to the BHA portfolio to ensure critical humanitarian assistance awards are completed before the end of the fiscal year while the Agency works on more permanent solutions. In the medium- to long-term, BHA and the Bureau for Management are coordinating on BHA's anticipated workload and identifying where additional support may be needed. This effort will increase the number of warranted COs to seven up from 4.5 and 19 contract specialists for a total of 26 positions assigned to support humanitarian assistance programming. Finally, we are supplementing BHA's contracting needs through an additional procurement support contract within BHA.

As part of a wider effort to increase CO recruitment across the Agency, USAID is also engaging with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on accelerated competitive pay for COs to incentivize candidates to apply. This would allow for special pay rates based on Contracting Officer Certification/Warrant levels. Other efforts include targeting recruitment and retention incentives based on experience levels.

Despite these challenges, the U.S. government has provided nearly \$11 billion to address the growing global food security crisis, including \$5.4 billion in humanitarian assistance since the beginning of Russia's war on Ukraine. We remain deeply committed to meeting the needs of the world's most vulnerable and ensuring USAID's workforce is staffed to do so.

Thank you for your support for international food assistance programs.

Sincerely,



Jodi B. Herman
Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs