

**Statement for the Record by Jon C. Brause,
Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Democracy,
Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance
U.S. Agency for International Development**

Responding to the IDP Crisis in Pakistan

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Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on Pakistan's internally displaced persons and the humanitarian assistance efforts of the United States. Operating in support of the Government of Pakistan, the whole of the United States Government - from the State Department and Department of Defense, to USAID and the Department of Agriculture - is working to ensure assistance is provided to Pakistanis in need.

Assistant Secretary Schwartz and his staff are dedicated to providing assistance to refugees, conflict victims, and stateless people worldwide. Throughout the recent crisis in Pakistan, USAID has worked in close coordination with Assistant Secretary Schwartz's bureau to ensure the needs of the displaced are being met in a complex and rapidly evolving environment.

We appreciate the continued support of the Congress and the supplemental funding recently enacted for both humanitarian assistance and P.L. 480 Title II food aid, which has permitted us to aggressively respond to this crisis.

USAID is the lead agency within the U.S. Government for providing assistance to, and promoting the protection of, internally displaced persons (IDPs) internationally. With its strong operational presence in the field and decades of experience responding to a broad range of complex emergencies, natural disasters, and post-conflict situations throughout the world, USAID is at the forefront of the humanitarian community's effort to place greater emphasis on protection during the immediate humanitarian response to population displacement, as well as during the longer-term transition toward development and stability.

Since USAID adopted an agency-wide policy for internally displaced persons in October 2004, we have worked with other U.S. Government agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the international community, and the United Nations to implement and strengthen protection activities and mobilize funding for vulnerable populations.

A broad, integrated approach is required to reduce the human costs of population displacement and to foster sustainable long-term development. The provision of coherent, comprehensive assistance and a durable solution to internal displacement is a USAID priority.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT

The U.S. Government has pledged more than \$320 million in humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected individuals in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Of that amount, the U.S. has already provided more than \$171 million in humanitarian assistance, \$122 million of which was programmed by USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance.

The USAID response began in August 2008, when monsoons and military operations resulted in the displacement of more than 420,000 people. USAID supported the Government of Pakistan efforts to

assist not only those who were displaced, but also the conflict-affected communities. Our assistance included water, sanitation, and hygiene programs, basic health care, and short-term employment activities.

In early 2009, the number of people displaced by conflict continued to increase, and food was identified as the most urgent need. In response, USAID provided nearly \$30 million in food assistance, \$21 million from USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) and nearly \$9 million from USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) for the local and regional purchase of food aid. The food aid purchased locally, which is a critically needed complement to our traditional food aid, quickly addressed the acute food needs of those displaced while having an added benefit of stimulating the local economy. USAID also increased assistance for other identified needs, including basic health care, shelter, and emergency relief commodities.

As the crisis rapidly escalated in May, USAID and other U.S. Government agencies responded swiftly. With the endorsement of Ambassador Holbrooke, and at the request of Ambassador Patterson, OFDA deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to Pakistan.

On May 18, Secretary Gates approved \$10 million in Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster and Civic funding to assist relief efforts. On May 20-21, three U.S. Air Force C-17 sorties delivered 50 tents and 120,000 Halal meals to Pakistan. This was followed shortly thereafter with DoD's delivery of locally purchased air conditioners, generators, water trucks, and other items, such as sandbags and shovels, for follow-on distribution to assist Pakistani IDPs.

The DART team-composed of USAID experts with over fifteen years of Pakistan and regional disaster response experience in food aid, shelter and displacement-was charged with managing U.S. Government assistance and coordinating efforts with the Government of Pakistan and the international humanitarian community.

Upon arrival, the DART found there were no field assessments, which provide the data needed to make informed funding decisions. Security conditions prevented travel to conduct assessments in the affected areas. The typical coordination mechanisms were not operational, and other donors were providing only promises of assistance.

The team knew from experience working in Pakistan on the 2005 earthquake response that the displaced would shelter with host families. And the DART's experience proved true. The majority of internally displaced persons-more than 87 percent-had moved to host communities, while the remainder resided in 32 organized camps, more than 4,000 schools, and numerous spontaneous camps or transit locations.

The DART moved immediately and decisively to provide rapid, robust and creative assistance programs.

With the strong support of Ambassador Anne Patterson and USAID Mission Director Bob Wilson, the DART spent its first days on the ground assessing the humanitarian situation and partner capacities. Due to significant security constraints, the team devised creative ways to gather the necessary information, gleaned facts from regular consultations with humanitarian partners and government officials, supplemented by-and ground-truthed with-limited field assessment.

Because coordination is critical, the DART assumed responsibility for partner coordination efforts in support of the Government of Pakistan. Combined with USAID's funding to strengthen the humanitarian coordination system, these efforts helped fill the initial coordination gap in Pakistan.

Once the DART identified needs and reviewed proposals from partners, they were able to fund programs within 3 to 5 days. After two months on the ground and despite enormous security constraints, the DART successfully programmed more than \$116 million in assistance through twelve nongovernmental organizations and six UN agencies.

As the IDP crisis unfolded, the DART-working in collaboration with the Embassy and Mission-ensured our emergency assistance increased to keep pace with the needs. When displacement increased from 290,000 people in February to nearly 550,000 in March, USAID humanitarian assistance doubled-from \$9.4 million to nearly \$20 million. After Pakistani Taliban advances and the Government of Pakistan's military response nearly quadrupled the number of displaced individuals in May 2009, USAID again responded by quadrupling humanitarian assistance to more than \$90 million. This does

not include the assistance that Assistant Secretary Schwartz has described from State's PRM Bureau, which is also supporting the IDP populations.

USAID humanitarian assistance is driven by needs identified in the field. When the security situation allowed, we pushed to make regular visits to the affected areas to assess the situation. Our assessments and those of our partners provided us with necessary information to modify or target our assistance based on changing needs.

The DART provided assistance to address the needs in displaced persons camps, but we focused our resources to support the displaced residing in host communities and to the host communities themselves. Our assistance included water, sanitation, and basic healthcare programs. We also provided relief supplies such as hygiene kits and shelter materials to the displaced and their hosts. We also provided rent subsidies to reduce host family burdens and ensure that the displaced did not place an untenable strain on host families.

In Mardan district, host families, communities, religious organizations, and local charities were providing assistance to displaced individuals. USAID targeted its assistance to meet the needs of the displaced and host families through the provision of \$45 vouchers to households. The vouchers were distributed to more than 90,000 displaced Pakistanis residing in host communities and schools and to 5,000 host families struggling to provide not only for themselves but also for those displaced. The vouchers enabled Pakistanis to purchase exactly what they needed at local markets. Something as simple as a voucher program can provide a much needed sense of self-reliance, and it helps stimulate the local economy, which is critical to longer-term recovery.

In already overstressed host communities, houses meant for ten people were inhabited by thirty and sometimes more. So USAID provided assistance that included training and supplies for the construction of bamboo shelters, which families can easily disassemble and carry with them when they return to their homes.

When displaced Pakistanis identified food as a continuing need, USAID was able to quickly provide an additional \$26.6 million for the local purchase of food aid. The food, which consisted of wheat and beans, was purchased in Pakistan-again bolstering the local economy.

During a recent DART assessment mission to Buner, the team noted that there were few income-earning opportunities in the area, thus those who returned would not be able to make a living. To help provide jobs and boost the local economy, USAID is reprogramming funds and allocating additional resources for further cash for work programs for returnees.

Providing humanitarian assistance quickly and creatively is not sufficient. Our assistance mechanisms must also remain flexible to adequately respond as the crisis evolves or subsides. By providing the majority of our assistance through grants to partner organizations, we maintain the flexibility needed to respond to rapidly changing situations by reprogramming or retargeting our funding as needs are identified.

To ensure our ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances, USAID has supported pre-positioned relief supplies-including food, household tool kits, emergency kitchen sets, water containers, and blankets-for distribution should the situation change and currently unknown humanitarian needs develop. This includes USAID support for a World Food Program logistics hub and warehouse in Punjab Province to ensure that our partners are ready to respond to potential displacement from Waziristan.

USAID also realizes that unknown needs will continue to be a challenge in Pakistan. To prepare for possible future needs, USAID has established an umbrella grant that allows for sub-grants to local NGOs, international NGOs, or UN agencies. This mechanism is designed to provide rapid response funds for possible humanitarian needs anywhere in the country.

There are significant operational challenges to providing assistance in Pakistan, but USAID continues to address the challenges head on, allowing us to provide timely and appropriate assistance to Pakistanis in need. Operating in support of the Government of Pakistan's efforts, USAID's singular ability to quickly respond to the Pakistan IDP crisis with fast, flexible and creative programming prevented further destabilization in NWFP and FATA.

Before discussing our returns and early recovery programs, I want to point out that the security

situation is the number one challenge to humanitarian operations in Pakistan.

The fluid security situation in NWFP and FATA means limited, and at times no, humanitarian access to the conflict-affected communities. The risks are high, with recent kidnappings and killings of humanitarian staff. Just this month, gunmen killed a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees staff member and his guard, while wounding another staff member. Sadly, other aid workers have also been killed or wounded while working to meet humanitarian needs. NGOs are reluctant to hire personal security details or use armored vehicles for fear of negatively impacting programs and becoming larger targets. UN agencies are using armored vehicles, but even these do not adequately mitigate all risks.

Our NGO partners report that their ability to travel in the affected areas has become significantly more difficult since April. Security incidents have targeted both local and international aid workers, and the female Pakistani staff are particularly concerned for their safety. Since the June 9 bombing of the Pearl Continental Hotel in Peshawar, increased responsibility has been placed on host country nationals to carry out operations in areas considered unsafe for international staff.

The security challenges faced by our implementing partners in Pakistan are real, and we continuously consult with them to learn what additional options might be available to mitigate their risks. USAID remains willing to support additional security training, increased operational security analysis, and efforts to improve humanitarian security coordination. USAID also continues to work with the donor community to ensure security precautions are adequately resourced.

SUPPORTING RETURNS AND EARLY RECOVERY

As displaced families return home, the pressures on the camps and the host communities are likely to diminish. USAID is committed to ensuring sustainable returns and successful recovery. USAID continues to assist the displaced while simultaneously refocusing programs to meet changing needs.

According to Pakistan government officials, up to 700,000 displaced individuals, representing approximately 30 percent of the government-verified displaced population, have returned to areas of origin in recent weeks, including areas in Buner, Swat, and Lower Dir districts in NWFP and Bajaur Agency in FATA.

The majority of unassisted returns are families previously living with host communities in Mardan and Swabi districts. The number of spontaneous returns to Swat remains unknown; however, the Buner District Coordination Officer reported to our DART team leader that up to 320,000 people, approximately 65 percent of Buner's displaced population, have returned to date. An additional 59,000 families returned during the July 13-22 Government of Pakistan-assisted returns process. As a result of these large-scale returns, the government closed two camps in Mardan, and announced plans to close two more. On July 21, OFDA's Principal Regional Advisor for South Asia flew over these camps and described them as "desolate."

The DART was the first donor to assess the situation in Buner and Swat, seeing the rapid spontaneous returns firsthand. After the assessment, the DART quickly reprogrammed funds to assure that U.S. assistance would follow those who were returning home.

Knowing the importance of assisting returnees and preventing a secondary wave of displacement, USAID will support quick-impact projects for the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure in areas of return. An important aspect of our early recovery strategy is to support projects designed and driven by the communities in which they will be implemented, helping provide returnees a sense of ownership and self-sufficiency.

USAID is working with communities to rebuild critical infrastructure that also provides short-term employment opportunities for affected populations. USAID funding is helping rehabilitate electrical systems, wells, and irrigation channels that are necessary before families are able to return to their homes.

Additionally, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives is supporting the Government of Pakistan's efforts to reestablish a presence in conflict-affected areas and restore essential services. We are helping rebuild public buildings and return civil servants to conflict-affected areas. And we are working with the Government of Pakistan to identify and repair the roads, educational institutions, and hospitals damaged during the conflict. By creating jobs and rebuilding infrastructure, USAID programs will help

foster sustainable returns.

Due to the local economies' dependence on agriculture, USAID will also support the provision of farming tools and grain and vegetable seeds, as well hygiene kits and tool kits to be used for small home repairs.

The Pakistan government estimates that the private sector comprised over 60 percent of the health sector in Buner alone and that the private sector will be slow to return. In an effort to provide necessary health care while services remain damaged and without staff, USAID will support mobile clinics, basic medicines, and staff-particularly female doctors and nurses-to provide assistance in areas of return.

Through the World Food Program's new food distribution hub in Buner district, food aid provided by the United States will continue to support monthly family food rations for returnees until agriculture and livelihood activities in affected areas resume. USAID's Food for Peace Office will contribute an additional \$20 million of food aid in August, which will mean the consistent flow of U.S. food shipments into Pakistan through February 2010. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has pledged a total of \$43.5 million in food assistance, which will be added to the WFP food aid pipeline until the year's end. In total, the U.S. Government has pledged \$135.5 million in food aid in response to the crisis. Our significant and timely food contributions will ensure sufficient food support to the large numbers of displaced who are now returning home and starting to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Humanitarian agencies are formulating strategies and refocusing assistance to support early recovery and returns. The key challenges include security, accurate and timely information dissemination to displaced populations, and ensuring that the returns process is voluntary and sustainable.

To help ensure that accurate and timely returns information is widely disseminated, USAID is working with the United Nations protection cluster to develop rights- and return-based messages and key information for release to affected populations. These messages, which provide information on relief assistance and returns, will be coordinated with the relevant Pakistan government departments including the NWFP Government's Emergency Response Unit.

Coordination between USAID disaster experts and the USAID Mission on reconstruction, health, livelihoods, agriculture, and education will facilitate the transition of short-term activities to longer-term development programming. USAID Mission staff are also actively engaged in initiating and expanding immediate and medium-term activities.

This emergency assistance is in addition to the more than \$4.4 billion the United States has provided to Pakistan since 2002 to improve economic growth, education, health, and governance and to assist with earthquake reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

Working in support of Government of Pakistan efforts, USAID - alongside our U.S. Government partners - provided a rapid response to a complicated, challenging, and swiftly evolving crisis. Now that the situation has transitioned from displacement to returns and early recovery, Pakistan will soon begin to focus on near- and long-term reconstruction efforts.

As the United States shifts to longer-term programs, USAID has transitioned the DART to an OFDA field office. Like the DART, the field office will continue to identify and respond to priority humanitarian needs, work to enhance coordination and cohesion throughout the humanitarian community, and evaluate response effectiveness. The field office will remain engaged and prepared to meet emerging humanitarian needs in Pakistan, while working closely with the Embassy and USAID Mission during the transition from relief to development.

Thank you.