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"International Disaster Assistance: Policy Options"

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today to discuss policy options when political obstacles impede humanitarian assistance following a disaster.

In the vast majority of international disasters, emergency relief from the U.S. Government (USG) arrives rapidly and efficiently to help populations in distress. In the past five years alone, USAID has responded to 355 declared disasters in all regions of the world. Most of these natural and manmade disasters never make international headlines and are addressed in a straightforward manner without political interference in the affected country. Our assistance usually is eagerly accepted by thankful foreign governments and by grateful citizens as they struggle to overcome devastation and hardship.

Your hearing today is timely, however. As we speak, a difficult humanitarian response in Burma is underway, with the full collaboration of staff from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of State, the U.S. Military, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Our emergency efforts in Burma have encountered numerous obstacles, as you know. Meanwhile in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwean government on June 4 ordered the suspension of all NGO operations in that country. In Sudan, authorities last month slowed humanitarian operations by temporarily closing all airports in Darfur to humanitarian traffic.

Recent events such as these underline the importance of having policy options that can help overcome political obstructions to humanitarian assistance. Led by USAID, the USG is second-to-none in its ability to quickly mobilize resources to respond to disasters throughout the world. In order for the USG to provide humanitarian assistance, the host government of the recipient country must request–or be willing to accept–our assistance. Unfortunately, in countries where populations are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, this is not always the case.

Normal Framework for Humanitarian Assistance

In order to understand the policy options available to USAID when political obstacles impede humanitarian help, it is important to understand how the USG, through USAID, provides humanitarian assistance. The USG declares an international disaster if an event meets three criteria: the magnitude of the disaster is beyond the capacity of the host country to respond; the host country requests or is willing to accept assistance; and a response is in the interest of the USG. It is recognized as a matter of principle and practice that it is virtually always in the interest of the USG to provide humanitarian assistance where post-disaster suffering is extensive and when lives hang in the balance.

Within USAID, the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) plays the primary role in responding to emergency situations. Within USAID/DCHA, the office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is designated as the lead USG office responsible for providing humanitarian assistance in response to international disasters. The legislated mandate of OFDA is to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and reduce the social and economic impact of humanitarian emergencies worldwide. In addition, USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) is deeply involved in providing life-saving emergency food aid to international victims of disasters and other emergencies.

USAID provides emergency humanitarian assistance in accordance with fundamental, widely recognized humanitarian principles. Our assistance adheres to the "humanitarian imperative"—the core principle that human suffering should be addressed wherever it is found. USAID provides humanitarian assistance that is politically neutral, socially impartial, and is based on victims' needs rather than political factors. This is one reason that

assistance authorized under the International Disaster Assistance account may be furnished notwithstanding any other provision of law that otherwise might prohibit assistance to a particular country for political or other reasons unrelated to the need to respond to a disaster. USAID disaster response programs strive to live up to the principle of "do no harm" and seek, to the extent possible, to provide protection to beneficiaries and build local capacities. The life-saving assistance rendered by USAID always aims to fulfill our responsibility of accountability—both to the beneficiary community as well as to the American people whose resources and goodwill are entrusted to us.

It is important to understand that USAID's consistent adherence to these fundamental humanitarian principles compels us—and indeed, enables us—to provide disaster relief even in countries that have strained relations with the USG. Our adherence to these humanitarian principles opens doors internationally. For example, USAID during the past five years has responded with emergency humanitarian assistance to three natural disasters in Cuba, three emergencies in North Korea, a major earthquake in Iran, a natural catastrophe in Venezuela, six declared emergencies in Zimbabwe, as well as an emergency in Burma prior to last month's cyclone. The strictly humanitarian, non-political nature of USAID's international disaster assistance often is sufficient to overcome tense diplomatic relationships. The people of these countries are grateful for our help in their time of need.

In addition to the above principles, humanitarian efforts by the international community, including USAID, are bolstered by international humanitarian law that imposes on States certain obligations with respect to humanitarian aid. The Fourth Geneva Convention requires an Occupying State to the fullest extent of the means available to it to ensure food and medical supplies for the occupied civilian population. For States Parties to Additional Protocol I, there is the added requirement of providing, to the extent feasible, clothing, bedding, shelter, and other supplies essential to the survival of the civilian population. And the Fourth Convention recognizes the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in protecting civilians and providing relief, subject to the consent of the Parties to the Conflict.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, although lacking the force of international law, are based on IHL and human rights instruments and are widely recognized as a useful framework for addressing

the needs of populations displaced by natural or manmade emergencies. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement state that "international humanitarian organizations and other appropriate actors have the right to offer their services" and that "consent thereto shall not be arbitrarily withheld, particularly when authorities concerned are unable or unwilling to provide the required humanitarian assistance." The UN Guidelines further state that IDPs should enjoy safe access to food, potable water, shelter, clothing, and essential medical services and sanitation, and that authorities in afflicted countries "shall grant and facilitate the free passage of humanitarian assistance and grant persons engaged in the provision of such assistance rapid and unimpeded access…"

Proper adherence to these principles and protocols would go a long way toward eliminating restrictions on humanitarian access imposed by some governments.

Why Obstacles Occur

Instances occur where a foreign government does not request emergency humanitarian assistance from the USG or where a foreign government accepts USG help grudgingly and with numerous obstructions that undermine our efforts. Based on our many years of experience in hundreds of disaster responses, it appears that these obstacles occur for at least five general reasons:

First, some governments do not request USG disaster assistance because they already possess sufficient capacity to respond. This is partly due to the relatively unheralded success story of USAID's long investment in local disaster preparedness and local disaster mitigation efforts in Latin America, the Caribbean, and South Asia. USAID/OFDA has helped provide training to more than 40,000 disaster specialists in 26 Latin American and Caribbean countries during the past 18 years, helping to build local response capacities. USAID is seeking to replicate that capacity-building strategy in six of the most disaster-prone countries of Asia.

For example, when flooding and landslides hit the second-largest city in Bangladesh last year, the Government of Bangladesh and organizations in that country possessed the capacity to conduct emergency relief operations without a formal appeal for assistance from USAID. Similarly, when tropical cyclone Sidr struck Bangladesh in November 2007 and killed 3,300

persons, the tragic loss of life was dramatically lower than the 125,000 death toll when a cyclone of similar strength had hit Bangladesh in 1991. Disaster preparedness and mitigation programs supported by USAID in Bangladesh over the years played an important role in the reduced loss of life. Therefore, a government's decision not to seek USG disaster assistance—or to seek only limited help—can be a welcomed sign of local preparedness and expertise that, in many cases, USAID helped to nurture over many years.

Secondly, some governments do not request USG humanitarian assistance—or severely limit the assistance they will accept—due to a sense of national pride, a poor understanding of the scale of disaster, or an inflated sense of local emergency response capacities.

Thirdly, some governments coping with a local disaster are wary of USG help because they are slow to understand and trust that USG humanitarian assistance is genuinely grounded in the principles of neutrality and impartiality, as discussed above. The Burmese regime has limited our ability to provide humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, claiming that our assistance could not be trusted.

Fourthly, some countries are slow to request USG assistance because of their own political chaos. Somalia has been such an example for much of the past two decades.

Fifthly, in some instances a government does not want USG emergency assistance—or raises constant obstacles to undermine effectiveness of assistance that does arrive—because that government has chosen to trigger or exploit the emergency to marginalize or punish a portion of its own population. The Government of Sudan has a long history of employing this tactic dating back to the 1980s. Zimbabwe has a more recent track record in this regard.

These impediments can slow humanitarian assistance or, in worst-case scenarios, block it altogether. As a result, large numbers of innocent people die unnecessarily or are forced to endure additional suffering because the food, plastic sheeting, blankets, medicines, and other essential relief commodities are stacked up in warehouses or on ships, blocked from timely distribution to populations in dire need.

However, it is important to point out that even in situations with restricted humanitarian access, at least a portion of the desperately needed emergency relief commodities usually manage to reach disaster victims. In the current Burma cyclone emergency response, for example, USAID has been able to overcome constraints imposed by Burmese authorities to provide $28.3 million of assistance to 13 UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for shelter, food aid, emergency health services, and water, sanitation, and hygiene programs targeted at more than 1 million beneficiaries. We are distressed by the unacceptable delays imposed on us and our humanitarian partners in the field, and the scale of assistance allowed into Burma has not been commensurate with the overwhelming humanitarian need on the ground, but even in Burma our humanitarian efforts are no longer totally blocked.

Strategies and Tactics to Overcome Obstructions

It is worth examining the toolkit of strategies and tactics that enable USAID to deliver disaster assistance despite obstacles erected by the governments of affected countries.

■ Ensure Cooperation Between USAID and Department of State

Constraints on humanitarian access often can be alleviated through discussions at the diplomatic level. International diplomatic pressure, particularly when done in coordination with regional leaders or key partners of the country in question, often is an effective tool for gaining humanitarian access. The Organization of American States (OAS) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and their constituent members are examples of key partners that can be helpful allies in advocating for humanitarian access.

During a disaster response, USAID relief specialists work to keep Department of State (DoS) colleagues fully informed about the scale of needs on the ground, specific USAID relief actions being blocked by local government authorities, specific concessions needed from the host government, and whether local officials are implementing agreements made at higher levels. Coordination between USAID and DoS works best when there is a collective understanding of the core principles underlying humanitarian assistance efforts.

■ **Channel Assistance Through Non-Governmental Agencies and International Organizations**

Emergency relief funded by USAID is overwhelmingly channeled through UN humanitarian agencies, international or local NGOs, or other international organizations such as the ICRC. This accentuates the neutral, impartial, independent nature of the USG's humanitarian assistance. Even when host governments choose to limit the access of USAID relief officials to disaster areas, USAID relief can still reach beneficiaries via these institutional partners, many of whom have ongoing programs in affected countries and therefore are well-positioned to assess needs and ensure that USAID assistance is well-targeted. To cite one example, USAID regularly channels funding to national Red Cross/Red Crescent societies in stricken countries via the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, thereby bypassing obstacles that might impede international agencies.

To be sure, UN agencies and NGOs also are vulnerable to obstructions by host-country officials. This has occurred in Burma and regularly occurs in Sudan. The Government of Zimbabwe ordered NGOs to suspend their operations two weeks ago. In such situations, a combined advocacy effort by USAID, the DoS, other donor countries, and by top UN officials becomes necessary. Currently in Zimbabwe, for instance, USAID is urging the UN to take a more active advocacy role on behalf of NGOs struggling to operate there.

■ **Maintain Civilian Lead on Emergency Response**

The Department of Defense (DoD) possesses in some situations unsurpassed logistical airlift capacity that has proven to be extremely supportive in some particularly large or challenging humanitarian interventions. When those situations arise, USAID, as the lead agency for USG humanitarian assistance response, works hard to coordinate the DoD efforts with our own to ensure that we are both addressing the most pressing humanitarian priorities using the right methodologies.

USAID/DCHA has established an Office of Military Affairs to serve as USAID's primary strategic point of contact with DoD. At an operational level, USAID/OFDA provides training on humanitarian principles and methodologies to DoD personnel and maintains ongoing interaction with DoD staff on a range of humanitarian issues. At the height of an emergency response in which military assets might be used, USAID/OFDA humanitarian assistance advisors are deployed to DoD's appropriate combat command headquarters to provide guidance on humanitarian operations in

accordance with humanitarian principles and priorities. A new USAID Policy on Civilian-Military Cooperation lays out key principles for cooperation when the post-emergency phase has been completed and long-term reconstruction and development begin.

The UN has produced numerous policy documents that can serve as references for humanitarian agencies worldwide, including "Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets in Disaster Relief" produced in 1994, "Guiding and Operating Principles for the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets in Support of Humanitarian Operations" produced in 1995, "Guidance on Use of Military Aircraft for UN Humanitarian Operations During the Current Conflict in Afghanistan" produced in 2001, and "Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defense Assets in Complex Emergencies" in 2003.

As recent experience in Burma illustrates, some foreign governments are reluctant to permit U.S. military personnel to participate directly on the ground in emergency relief operations. For that reason, a clear distinction between military personnel and USG civilian humanitarian workers can be crucial in gaining permission to access disaster zones.

■ Use Low-Visibility Tactics

Our emergency relief efforts typically engender local and international goodwill that results in helpful public diplomacy. While this is welcomed, it is not the USG's main motivation for providing humanitarian assistance. The main purpose is to act rapidly to save lives and alleviate suffering. Because of political or cultural sensitivities in particular countries, USAID sometimes eschews high-profile steps such as deployment of USAID Disaster Assistance Response Teams to disaster zones in favor of less visible steps that work through UN humanitarian agencies or NGOs. Because of local sensitivities or dangers, USAID in some disaster responses agrees to suspend some or all of its requirement that all projects and commodities funded by USAID bear the USAID logo. We utilize these tactics so that life-saving aid will not be blocked or otherwise abused by local politics.

■ Airdrop Humanitarian Commodities

When U.S. emergency relief encounters obstructions abroad, the American public and journalists frequently ask, "Why not deliver relief supplies via airdrops?" Humanitarian airdrops were temporarily used in Bosnia during the 1990s and for many years in South Sudan.

In truth, airdropping relief commodities into disaster areas is extremely problematic and is attempted only in special circumstances as a last resort. Airdrops are potentially dangerous to people on the ground. Relief supplies dropped from planes are susceptible to falling into the wrong hands and often fail to reach the weakest and most vulnerable victims in chaotic disaster situations. Airdrops are extremely expensive and inevitably result in damage on impact to a portion of the commodities being delivered. Without proper monitoring and controls, airdropped supplies such as medicines can be misused in dangerous ways. Airdrops have a chance to be of limited effectiveness only when operational air space is safe, the "drop zone" is small and well-defined, and when cooperative local authorities or trained humanitarian workers are present on the ground to organize proper distribution of airdropped supplies. Airdrops into the extensive Irrawaddy Delta of Burma after the cyclone were not considered to be a viable alternative.

■ Use Tactic of Cross-Border Relief

When violent conflict or national authorities claiming "sovereignty" block humanitarian assistance to populations in dire need, USAID and other international humanitarian agencies have resorted at times to cross-border relief efforts that use a neighboring country as a base for relief operations.

Various international agencies used a cross-border strategy to deliver assistance into northern Ethiopia (now Eritrea) from humanitarian bases in Sudan during the 1980s, into Afghanistan from humanitarian staging areas in Pakistan and Tajikistan during the 1980s and 1990s, and into southern Sudan from a humanitarian base of operations in Kenya during the 1990s.

Cross-border humanitarian operations typically require permission and cooperation from countries hosting humanitarian bases, adequate local infrastructure to facilitate cross-border travel, as well as confidence that humanitarian workers can travel across the border safely.

■ Push for Formal Negotiated Access

Ideally, the existence of IHL and widely recognized humanitarian principles should make negotiations for humanitarian access unnecessary. Unfortunately, it is all too clear that in some emergencies this is not the case.

The international humanitarian community gained access to millions of war-affected persons in desperate need of help in southern Sudan in 1989 and throughout the 1990s through a negotiated process that came to be known as Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). Despite its many imperfections, OLS was a groundbreaking achievement in the history of international emergency relief. At a time of devastating civil war in southern Sudan, OLS was in essence the world's first formally negotiated cross-border relief operation. The agreement created designated "corridors of tranquility" and pledged all parties in the conflict to permit safe and unhindered passage and delivery of relief items to populations in need even as military operations continued unabated. Although the Government of Sudan in particular frequently violated its commitments under OLS, the agreement made possible a large and long-term relief operation that saved countless lives during southern Sudan's long war.

Over the many years of conflict in Sudan, humanitarian actors have also helped negotiate temporary cease-fires to undertake vaccination campaigns and other humanitarian activities. In fact, experience in Sudan has demonstrated that establishing a dialogue between warring parties on humanitarian issues can gradually help to build the relationships and trust that warring parties need in order to jump-start the political dialogue and negotiations that can bring the underlying conflict to an end.

■ Resort to UN Chapter VII Peace Enforcement

When situations warrant, the USG supports UN peace enforcement measures under which the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, can authorize the use of force to restore and maintain peace and security, and such measures can include creating safe conditions for humanitarian operations. Countries and areas with respect to which the UN Security Council has acted under its Chapter VII authority in recent years include Afghanistan, East Timor, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Albania, Sierra Leone, and the Ethiopia-Eritrea border. USAID's monitoring of humanitarian conditions is part of the analysis used by USG policymakers when considering whether to support a UN Chapter VII resolution.

■ Responsibility to Protect

Mr. Chairman, the Subcommittee has posed the question of whether the Responsibility to Protect concept, endorsed in 2005 at the UN World Summit, should be the basis for the Security Council to authorize the use of

force in recent humanitarian situations such as the Burma cyclone response. I will defer to the views of the Department of State on this issue, but USAID offers two points that should be kept in mind:

First, from a strictly humanitarian perspective, it is conceivable that in a situation involving genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, or ethnic cleansing, USAID might be prompted to make an internal recommendation that policy-makers consider a forceful intervention. The ultimate decision on whether to pursue Security Council action in such a situation would be made at a higher level of the USG, of course, but USAID recognizes that it does have an important responsibility to ensure that facts and analyses about dire humanitarian conditions are squarely on the table when important decisions are made.

Second, as a practical matter, USAID wishes to point out that the international humanitarian community should always take care that disaster victims do not suffer retribution from their national authorities for receiving or accepting our assistance; this concern is consistent with the fundamental humanitarian principle of "do no harm."

Conclusion

Included as an appendix to this written testimony is a review of USAID disaster responses in several case studies of interest to the Subcommittee. USAID would be pleased provide additional information on these or other case studies should the Subcommittee request.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the encouraging news is that USAID's emergency relief in most situations reaches disaster victims rapidly, effectively, and efficiently, often without headline attention. Working with partner agencies, we find a way to overcome most logistical, political, and security impediments. When obstructions to assistance grow particularly severe, USAID has developed a large and varied list of strategies and tactics over the years that have proven useful in getting relief to people in need.

The troubling news is that frustrations remain. Humanitarian access in some emergencies is not as free and unhindered as it needs to be. There can be no doubt that some disaster victims have suffered and died needlessly when life-saving relief supplies were blocked or delayed, despite our best efforts. Please be assured that USAID will continue its tradition of seeking

creative, forward-leaning strategies that will enable us to fulfill our disaster response mission of saving lives and reducing human suffering. It is a mission and responsibility we take quite seriously.

Appendix: Summary of Selected Case Studies

Zimbabwe Complex Emergency

Since 2000, conditions for most Zimbabweans have deteriorated due to the country's collapsing economy, declining access to basic social services and staple food items, the effects of HIV/AIDS, and increasing political violence. Since the March 29, 2008 presidential and legislative elections in Zimbabwe, heightened political tension has led to general insecurity and a growing incidence of targeted violence. Forces loyal to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) carry out attacks against perceived supporters and members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party. The violent instability has created new displacement and humanitarian needs, compounding the complex emergency in the country.

USAID has provided more than $58.3 million in humanitarian assistance thus far in FY 2008, focusing on agriculture and food security, relief commodities, protection, humanitarian coordination and information management, water, sanitation, and hygiene programs, as well as emergency food assistance.

In addition to attacks on civilians, the post-election violence has resulted in severely restricted humanitarian access and working space. Since the elections, pro-Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) groups have intimidated and threatened NGOs working in some areas, affecting the provision of emergency assistance and the implementation of regular programs. More recently, NGOs in Zimbabwe have faced increasing GOZ restrictions in the prelude to the second round of presidential elections scheduled for late June 2008. On June 4, the Minister of Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare ordered all NGOs working in Zimbabwe to suspend operations until further notice. These restrictions will affect aid programs that benefit more than 4 million Zimbabweans.

In response to increased constraints imposed by the GOZ, U.S. Ambassador James D. McGee and USAID/Zimbabwe have requested that

USAID send more staff to the field in marked vehicles to stay in close touch with our UN and NGO partners and demonstrate to the GOZ that the USG maintains a presence to the extent we can do so safely. In conjunction with other donors and NGOs, USAID has pushed the U.N. to take a more active role in advocacy on behalf of the humanitarian community and make a general statement about the lack of humanitarian access in Zimbabwe.

Sudan Complex Emergency

Sudan for decades has been one of the most difficult places in the world to mount emergency relief programs because of the immense scale of humanitarian need, the massive scope of population displacement, the distinct lack of infrastructure in parts of the country, the existence of ongoing conflict in some areas, and the regular cycle of obstructions on humanitarian efforts created by the Government of Sudan (GoS).

For these reasons, the international community pushed for and achieved in 1989 a negotiated agreement, known as Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), in which the warring parties agreed to allow humanitarian assistance to reach conflict victims. OLS operated as a consortium of two UN agencies—UNICEF and the World Food Program—and some 35 NGOs. Although OLS was susceptible to consistent manipulation by all warring parties, particularly by the GoS, the operation managed to deliver huge amounts of food and non-food relief commodities throughout the 1990s to populations in dire need, including to some of the most remote areas of southern Sudan.

Sudan continues to cope with the effects of conflict, displacement, and insecurity countrywide. Some of the same obstructions to assistance experienced in southern Sudan during the 1980s and 1990s are being repeated in present-day Darfur. Since 2003, the complex emergency in Darfur has affected 4.2 million people, including more than 2.4 million IDPs. Fighting in Darfur among armed opposition factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces, militias, and ethnic groups is ongoing. Since January 2008 alone, fighting has displaced more than 158,000 people within Darfur and to Eastern Chad.

The USG is the largest bilateral donor to Sudan and has contributed more than $3 billion for humanitarian programs in Sudan and eastern Chad since FY 2004. In FY 2008 alone, USAID/OFDA has provided

approximately $37 million to more than 40 implementing partners in Sudan and eastern Chad. USAID coordinates humanitarian activities with the U.S. Department of State as well as the Office of the U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan. Despite current restrictions, USAID continues to encourage the Sudanese government to allow greater access and freedom of movement within its borders.

Sudan remains a difficult operating environment. Bureaucratic obstacles imposed by the Sudanese government have impeded aid delivery in Darfur since the beginning of the crisis. These obstacles include extensive and cumbersome documentation of humanitarian activities, mandatory provision of confidential personnel information, multiple levels of required work agreements between various government entities and NGOs, and multiple levels of travel notifications and authorizations. In an important step to address these bureaucratic impediments, the Sudanese government and the United Nations signed the Joint Communiqué on the Facilitation of Humanitarian Activities in Darfur in March 2007. The Joint Communiqué resulted in some improvements for humanitarian actors initially. However, the Sudanese government continues to disregard articles of the Joint Communiqué. The Sudanese government's actions violate both its commitment to respect the independence of humanitarian actors and its promise to respect the provision of assistance and freedom of access to all people in need.

In addition, the Sudanese government has begun to create new bureaucratic obstacles for humanitarian agencies, including requiring travel permits, denying such permits, mandating that NGOs write technical agreements in Arabic, repeatedly canceling meetings to address issues related to the Joint Communiqué, and requesting additional financial information from NGOs. For the past year, Sudan has blocked the use of processed food aid containing genetically modified organisms. This has restricted the USG from providing WFP with corn-soya blend, which is used mainly to treat malnourished children. The loss of this significant commodity contribution has stretched the already tight resources of WFP. In May 2008, humanitarian operations were further hindered after government officials temporarily closed all airports in Darfur to humanitarian traffic and U.N. flights. Regional road closures also deny humanitarian actors access to affected areas and the ability to deliver emergency assistance.

Sudan continues to be a dangerous operating environment for USAID staff and implementing partners. Three USAID staff have been shot in Sudan since 2005, including the January 1 assassination of two USAID colleagues, John Granville and Abdul Rahman Abbas, in Khartoum. Darfur remains dangerous; since January 1, assailants have killed six humanitarian staff, abducted nearly 100 relief workers, and hijacked 125 NGO and U.N. vehicles in Darfur. In late May, the Sudanese government committed to increase police escorts for humanitarian convoys to a frequency of every 24 or 48 hours. Although this move was welcomed by humanitarian actors, as of June 5, the Sudanese government had not yet provided additional escorts, and food aid convoys continue to travel infrequently and unprotected.

The absence of support and cooperation from the Sudanese government makes humanitarian operations in Sudan more dangerous, more difficult, and more expensive for relief agencies to undertake. Despite increased impediments, USAID remains committed to carrying out the full range of humanitarian, recovery, reconstruction, and development activities that are vital to supporting efforts to consolidate peace throughout Sudan. We are proud of the courage and dedication of our staff and implementing partners to fulfill our humanitarian mandate in circumstances such as these. We look forward to the day when the people of Sudan are not substantially reliant on humanitarian aid for their very survival and we can work together with them to realize their aspirations for development and democracy.

Burma Cyclone

Cyclone Nargis made landfall in Burma on May 2, 2008. The cyclone caused grave humanitarian conditions for more than 2.4 million people in Burma. It bears pointing out that the humanitarian crisis in Burma did not begin with the cyclone; malnourishment and endemic diseases affected many Burmese people long before the cyclone made landfall. The cyclone has not only compounded these problems, but created new ones, including urgent shelter assistance needs, lack of safe drinking water, and loss of livelihoods.

The Burmese regime lacks the capacity to respond to the scale of the disaster and provide aid for its people. The regime refused life-saving assistance in the critical days and weeks after the cyclone hit—the time period which can be the difference between life and death. In fact, the international community cannot confirm the exact number of deaths from

the cyclone due to lack of access. Since May 16, the regime has not changed the official number of dead or missing, which remains at approximately 130,000 individuals. The regime has also hindered humanitarian access to some of the worst-affected areas of the Irrawaddy Delta. These obstructions have contributed to a situation in which only approximately half of the 2.4 million affected individuals have received humanitarian assistance and many of those who have been reached have very limited and basic assistance.

Despite numerous challenges, the USG has provided life-saving assistance to the Burmese people by airlifting relief commodities, including more than $5 million worth of USAID items, to Rangoon, from where our partners secure the items for transport to the affected areas. The USG, through coordination between DoD and USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), has completed more than 150 C-130 sorties of emergency relief commodities from Bangkok, Thailand, to Rangoon, Burma. Prior to May 16, several DOD flights carrying USAID commodities were consigned to the Burmese regime in light of the urgent need to deliver assistance to affected areas immediately following the cyclone. Since that time, all USAID commodities are distributed by UN and NGO partners.

In addition to providing relief commodities, USAID is continuing to fund emergency assistance programs. In fact, on June 5, USAID announced an additional $8.1 million in program funding for the relief effort in Burma. With this money, USAID has funded 13 UN and NGO partners working in the affected areas to implement programs in ten sectors, including emergency health, shelter, food aid, and water, sanitation, and hygiene programs. These programs target more than 1 million beneficiaries throughout affected areas of Burma. USAID is confident the assistance will reach targeted beneficiaries because we provide direct funding only to NGO and UN implementing partners that have established relief operations in Burma, accountable monitoring mechanisms in place, knowledge of the operating environment and infrastructure, and memorandums of understanding with government authorities. As of June 12, the USG had provided more than $37.7 million in humanitarian assistance to Burma, including $28.3 million from USAID and $9.5 million from DOD.

At present, ongoing access problems pose the most serious obstacle to relief efforts. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) have repeatedly called for a detailed needs analysis in

affected areas. A joint UN-ASEAN-Burmese assessment finally began June 10 and is expected to conclude June 19. The lack of information collection and sharing about the type and number of humanitarian needs, a direct result of limited access, hampers the relief operations of humanitarian organizations currently active in affected areas. These organizations have a long history of providing effective and comprehensive emergency assistance under different circumstances. Insufficient knowledge of the amount of assistance provided directly through the government and private sector within Burma, and where and to whom the relief aid has been distributed, further complicates efforts to adequately address assistance gaps.

The most effective way for the UN, NGOs, and donors to monitor the delivery of relief supplies and coordinate relief programs is to gain unhindered access to affected areas, particularly the delta. Additional obstacles preventing targeted assistance to those who need it most include the constant movement of affected populations and the regime's closing of some unofficial camps for persons displaced by the storm. Reports that the regime has forced some cyclone victims to return to their devastated communities are deeply troubling.

Some progress has been made on the access front. As of June 9, the GOB had issued 179 visas to international U.N. staff, according to OCHA. The UN has not reported obstacles to visa procurement for UN staff, and as a result, the number of UN personnel arriving in Burma each week has remained static since mid-May. Even as the GOB has begun to open up to aid from international sources such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the UN, the visa process for international NGO staff continues to move slowly, with some applications pending for up to three weeks. The GOB still has not communicated clear criteria for obtaining visas. NGOs also continue to report that GOB officials are prohibiting most international aid workers who enter the country from traveling beyond Rangoon to the affected areas. The process for obtaining a permit to travel to cyclone-affected areas takes at least 48 hours, often much longer.

The USG continues to urge the Burmese regime to provide visas for international disaster experts and to allow those experts to access cyclone-affected areas. As you know, USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team to the area to assess the damage and coordinate the response, but the full team has not officially been given access. Nonetheless, USAID has been able to send in five technical specialists in

shelter, logistics, water and sanitation, donor coordination, and a liaison with UN, NGOs, and international organizations. These specialists are working with the UN and our NGO partners to oversee the USAID contribution to the Cyclone Nargis relief effort. The DART remains in Thailand working with DoD to coordinate USG assistance and participate in the UN Cluster system, which provides structure and lead organizations for each humanitarian sector. Without our full team on the ground in Burma, however, we have to work hard to identify gaps in assistance through third parties and rely on our years of expertise to make sense of what we are hearing. It is difficult to adequately assess needs and coordinate efforts with our international counterparts and local officials.

Looking ahead, USAID intends to coordinate our assistance with the international humanitarian community and work with trusted NGOs with established relief operations in the affected areas. Despite the best efforts of the international community, however, the people of Burma urgently require additional humanitarian assistance. USAID stands prepared to provide our disaster expertise through deployment of our disaster specialists. This expertise, along with the humanitarian assistance so ably provided by our partners, can save more lives and alleviate the immense suffering of the Burmese people. To this end, USAID is working diligently to surmount the challenges posed by the GOB's unwillingness to permit our staff to enter the country. We look forward to the day when political considerations no longer affect or prevent the provision of humanitarian, life-saving assistance in Burma and elsewhere.

Iran Earthquake

On December 26, 2003, a magnitude 6.6 earthquake struck southeastern Iran near the city of Bam. The quake killed more than 26,000 people, injured 30,000 others, left 100,000 people homeless, and damaged and destroyed buildings and infrastructure. The Government of Iran (GOI) and IFRC affiliates possessed large disaster-response capacity. However, the magnitude of the event, aggravated by its occurrence near an urban area with extremely low earthquake resistance, overwhelmed local disaster response capacities.

Following the earthquake, the USG offered humanitarian assistance to the GOI, and Iranian President Mohammad Khatami accepted. USAID

deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) comprising 7 individuals from USAID; 11 people from Fairfax County's Urban Search and Rescue Task Force; and a 63-person USG international medical and surgical response team. The DART arrived in Iran on December 30 and conducted needs and structural assessments and coordinated assistance with the GOI, UN agencies, and NGOs. In total, the USG provided the people of Iran with five airlifts of relief commodities and other humanitarian assistance worth more than $10.4 million.

The successful provision of U.S humanitarian assistance to Iran resulted from the combination of a number of factors, both political and opportunistic. The offer and acceptance of U.S. assistance occurred through the involvement of the U.S. and Iranian ambassadors at the United Nations in NY, which recognized the need for humanitarian assistance transcended antagonism between the two countries. The emphasis on the humanitarian nature of the mission allayed fears that the interaction would be seen as politically motivated. In the field, the U.S. team avoided any activities or statements that might be misconstrued as political and instead only addressed technical aspects of the work.

The ability of USAID/DART staff to travel locally on Iranian Revolutionary Guard aircraft and be hosted by Iranian authorities greatly eased the burdens on the DART.

In short, USAID regards the humanitarian response to the Iran Earthquake, which utilized all avenues of U.S. diplomacy to ensure that lives were saved and suffering was reduced, as an overall success.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement before you today. I welcome your questions.