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"The Situation in South Sudan"

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the U.S. humanitarian response to the crisis in South Sudan. Thank you also for your continued support for USAID's humanitarian programs around the world, which make a positive difference every day in the lives of millions.

Introduction

The U.S. government, including many members of Congress, has been a strong supporter of the welfare of the people of South Sudan for decades—throughout Sudan's civil war, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement period, and since independence in 2011. We are all deeply alarmed by the horrific violence now threatening their hard-won struggle for independence—especially today, which marks just the third anniversary of South Sudan's referendum, in which an overwhelming 99 percent of the South Sudanese people voted to form the world's youngest nation. The people of South Sudan have endured far too many years of conflict and bloodshed to see peace slip away.

The outbreak of hostilities on December 15 has since erupted into heavy fighting across seven of South Sudan's 10 states. This fighting is the result of longstanding, deeply rooted grievances in a fragile new state with nascent institutions not yet able to deliver justice or services to its people. Coupled with an unresolved power struggle that has ignited tensions along ethnic lines, we are now seeing a vicious cycle of targeted killings.

As this new fighting creates a new, vast set of humanitarian needs, it also significantly complicates our ability to meet the extensive humanitarian needs that existed across South Sudan prior to December 15. Due to decades of civil war, sporadic communal violence, and the recurrent shocks of floods and drought, an estimated 40 percent of South Sudan's population—up to 4.4 million people—were already in need of humanitarian assistance. Even before the current crisis, the lack of roads and pervasive underdevelopment made South Sudan one of the most difficult environments to work in worldwide.

Meanwhile, South Sudan has welcomed some 230,000 refugees from neighboring countries, including the more than 200,000 refugees who have fled the fighting in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states since June 2011, adding to an already vast array of needs in a country where more than half the population lives below the poverty line, and human development indicators are among the lowest in the world.

The humanitarian challenge today then is twofold: to respond to the immediate needs as well as find ways to continue our longstanding, lifesaving work targeting nearly half the population already in need. In the face of these challenges, the United States remains committed to working with the international community to respond to urgent needs of the people of South Sudan.

Today, I'd like to talk about two key areas: first, an overview of the current humanitarian conditions; and second, an update on our response efforts and critical next steps.

Current Situation

In the few weeks since heavy fighting broke out in the towns of Bor, Malakal, and Bentiu, the spreading violence in South Sudan has claimed the lives of more than 1,000 people and driven more than 240,000 people from their homes. Until there is progress on the urgently convened peace negotiations and political dialogue, there is potential for additional clashes and displacement.

According to the United Nations (UN), approximately 60,000 people—or 30 percent of those internally displaced—have sought refuge in at least eight peacekeeping bases of the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS). The town of Bor—a strategic gateway to Juba—is caught in a desperate tug-of-war between fighting factions. Ongoing violence and looting have caused thousands to seek safety at one UNMISS base, where a lack of safe drinking water and poor sanitation risk the outbreak of disease. This is the same bleak reality being experienced in other South Sudanese towns, prompting desperate families to seek refuge at UNMISS bases in Malakal, Bentiu, Bor, Juba, Pariang, and Melu.

An additional 85,000 people have fled Bor to make the treacherous journey across the White Nile River to seek shelter in neighboring Awerial County, where relief agencies initially found many people living under the hot, unrelenting sun with a short supply of clean water, food, and shelter and inadequate sanitation.

Almost 39,000 displaced South Sudanese refugees are seeking safety in neighboring Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya. New refugees are beginning to strain reception capacity but all three governments are working closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to address the inflows.

These new developments come on top of recurrent environmental hazards, violence, displacement, returnee and refugee inflows, and macroeconomic shocks over the last two years since South Sudan's independence. Nearly 160,000 individuals were displaced between January and September 2013. Nearly 75 percent of this displacement occurred in Jonglei State, where inter-communal violence and conflict between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and non-state armed actors forced an estimated 100,000 civilians to flee to remote and difficult-to-access rural areas.

Challenges to Aid Delivery

Current hostilities and regularly changing lines of control make it difficult to reach both key areas newly affected by the recent violence and areas of long-standing need, with lifesaving humanitarian assistance. While ample stockpiles of supplies are pre-positioned, security conditions on the ground are preventing international and non-governmental agencies from accessing their own warehouses, disrupting supply chains, and impeding their access to needy populations. Caught up in the violence, some partner offices and warehouses have been looted and vehicles taken by the groups engaged in the violence. Commercial drivers carrying humanitarian supplies have been killed, while our partners are routinely denied access to roads by the SPLA and armed groups. The Nile River—typically a major conduit for the movement of supplies—has been off limits for weeks as barges are no longer available for humanitarian use.

U.S. Government Response

In the midst of these extensive constraints, the U.S. government is working closely with the UN and with our partners to examine all possible ways to meet current, acute needs due to the worsening crisis, while also planning ahead for the upcoming rainy season. Moreover, we continue to work closely with the State Department to push for the humanitarian access and respect for humanitarian workers, which is so vital to providing urgently needed aid. The U.S. government continues to insist that immediate, unconditional, and unfettered humanitarian access be allowed throughout South Sudan. Our partners have been blocked from the Nile and from flying into Bor from Juba. The UN must be given access via air, road, and river to deliver urgently needed humanitarian supplies and personnel and to reach all populations in need.

Immediately after the violence began on December 15, USAID stood up an eight-member Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) of experienced humanitarian staff based in Nairobi, Kenya as well as a Response Management Team (RMT) in Washington to monitor mounting needs and work with international partners to respond to the growing numbers of displaced persons. Despite a still highly volatile and uncertain environment, the UN and some NGOs have chosen to keep staff in-country to implement the response.

With continued support from the U.S. government since South Sudan's birth in 2011 and decades of work in the region, our UN and NGO partners have honed the logistical and technical expertise essential to operate in the challenging South Sudan environment to help those most in need—where roads routinely close during the rainy season and communities are effectively cut off for months. To date, the UN reports that relief agencies have reached an estimated 167,000 newly displaced people with humanitarian assistance, primarily those people at UNMISS bases or in neighboring counties where security and access have permitted the delivery of aid.

In response to the new violence, we have strategically funded the UN and NGOs in support of an efficient and nimble platform, which allows agencies to respond to increased need on the ground. Despite access challenges posed by armed groups, humanitarian organizations are working to overcome hurdles and optimize all means possible—including road, air, and barge transport—to deliver life-saving assistance. On January 3, the Department of State and USAID announced an additional nearly $50 million in humanitarian assistance for South Sudan, bringing the total U.S.

commitment to more than $318 million for fiscal years 2013 and 2014. This new funding supports a multi-sector humanitarian response operation, including the provision of food, safe drinking water, emergency health care, vaccinations, improved sanitation, and shelter as well as the protection of civilians and support for survivors of violence. This new funding will also help manage sites for the displaced, support reunification of families separated by the fighting, and fund programs to help ensure the protection of the most vulnerable populations, including women and children. This work will be carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UN agencies including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Program (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Importantly, this new funding also helps support additional logistical capacity including to the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), currently ferrying aid workers and supplies to seven UNMISS camps housing 51,000 internally displaced persons. The eighth camp in Bor just yesterday received three flights but these are not yet sustained and reliable.

In addition to new funds, we are using the full flexibility of our larger humanitarian portfolio, allowing our partners to redirect or reprogram funds to meet rapidly changing needs in a volatile environment—and to change course to meet the most urgent needs while still planning longer term. We know that in complex environments like South Sudan, partners need the flexibility to redirect resources and assess how their own programs can best adapt.

In response to a continually changing environment, in 2010 USAID stood up a Rapid Response Fund (RRF) that allows us to quickly route funding to international and national NGOs working on the ground as part of our ongoing humanitarian assistance efforts for the people of South Sudan. Since the recent crisis began, USAID has awarded nearly $1.5 million in grants for six emergency projects through the RRF to make an immediate difference. At the UNMISS base in Juba where tight living conditions could risk disease outbreaks, USAID is funding two South Sudanese NGOs through the RRF to provide emergency healthcare, clean water, and improved sanitation and hygiene to internally displaced persons. Outside Bor, in rural areas of Awerial County where tens of thousands have sought refuge from the violence, another USAID-funded South Sudanese NGO called AWODA is digging emergency latrines, constructing hand-washing facilities and bathing shelters, and distributing hygiene kits—all to prevent the spread of disease.

We are currently at the outset of the dry season, ordinarily a time when our partners would begin to use this five-month window of dry weather to replenish and preposition relief supplies before roads become impassable with the start of seasonal rains in June. The response to this current crisis has benefitted from the existing stockpile of warehoused supplies. Looking ahead, if the violence persists, USAID will work with partners to seek all means of identifying ways to restock and resupply critical supply chains, both to address the current violence as well as address the ongoing critical needs of communities throughout one of the poorest nations on earth.

Conclusion

As USAID works to meet urgent humanitarian needs in light of recent events, we are also reviewing our portfolio of development activities—and we look forward to staying in close contact with Congress as we undertake this deliberative process to determine the best way forward.

Looking ahead, increased access to those in need will be the key determinant of our success. The United States remains steadfast in our decades-long commitment to the South Sudanese people. As my colleague Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield has noted, we are using our full diplomatic efforts to negotiate an end to the violence as well as press all sides to respect the humanitarian supplies, personnel, and efforts essential to saving South Sudanese lives. The South Sudanese people deserve their rights to be protected and to live in communities free from harm.

As President Obama aptly stated, "too much blood has been spilled and too many lives have been lost to allow South Sudan's moment of hope and opportunity to slip from its grasp."

Thank you for your time today and for the vital Congressional support that makes our life-saving work possible. I look forward to your questions.