April 15, 2021

Secretary of State Antony Blinken
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Acting Administrator Gloria Steele
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Blinken and Acting Administrator Steele,

The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP), the leading nonpartisan global network to end violent conflict and build sustainable peace, on behalf of its 130+ members working in 181 countries and the 67 undersigned organizations, urges the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to ensure conflict prevention and peacebuilding programs are robustly funded and integrated in the U.S. government’s COVID-19 strategy and supplemental funding from the American Rescue Plan.

COVID-19 is more than a public health emergency it’s stabilization in reverse for countries globally. The United States was severely impacted despite being highly rated on the infectious disease vulnerability index. Fragile and conflict affected states are even more at risk to the whole-of-society destabilizing impacts of the pandemic. The global pandemic could lead to an additional 13 countries experiencing conflict through 2022—a 56 percent increase compared to pre-COVID forecasts. The potential for more conflict wrought by the pandemic is compounded by the fact that major violent conflict events have tripled since 2010 due to a rise in intrastate conflict and non-state armed groups.

During a time when democracy was already under threat, the COVID-19 pandemic has, in many countries, accelerated democratic backsliding and allowed autocrats to further consolidate power. These developments may have lasting impacts well beyond the pandemic. Violent extremist groups have sought to weaponize the global crisis, and have called on supporters to step-up attacks and spread the virus itself. Furthermore, online recruitment and dissemination of propaganda, disinformation, and conspiracy theories have skyrocketed during the last year and increased the reach of violent extremist organizations and networks.

The international community’s strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic has been insufficient to integrate the lessons learned from previous disease outbreaks. To contain and prevent the pandemic and reduce and prevent conflict globally, conflict prevention and peacebuilding must be integrated throughout the U.S. government’s pandemic response. The former Administration’s USAID and State Department joint COVID-19 strategy did not address the whole-of-society...
destabilizing impacts of the pandemic on conflict affected and fragile states by only prioritizing protecting American interests, bolstering health systems, and addressing complex humanitarian crises. Such a linear and siloed strategy treated peacebuilding, stability, and conflict prevention as a second-order priority after the distribution of health and humanitarian aid. However, a holistic approach is necessary in order to effectively mitigate the drivers and effects of violence, extremism, and violent conflict.

Even without adequate foreign assistance during the current global pandemic, peacebuilders are working to ensure conflict-sensitive distribution of aid and healthcare, pivoting to online engagement, applying lessons learned from previous health crises such as Ebola, and developing new ways to disseminate reliable information. Peacebuilders are collaborating across sectors to catalyze positive change, promote stability, and combat democratic backsliding. These efforts are vital to containing and preventing the spread of COVID-19, as well as preventing and reducing increased conflict dynamics destabilizing regions already at risk for violence, extremism, and violent conflict.

AfP urges the Department of State and USAID to prioritize conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the U.S. government’s COVID-19 strategy and foreign assistance funding provided for in the American Rescue Plan in tandem with health and humanitarian aid. Failure to do so will have significant long-term implications on global instability and U.S. national security.

Sincerely,

+Peace
Alliance for Peacebuilding
Amani-Institute ASBL
Aware Girls
Brigada de Voluntarios Bolivarianos del Peru - BVBP
CDA Collaborative Learning
Center for Nonviolent Solutions
Center for Peace Advocacy and Sustainable Development (CEPASD Africa)
Center for Policy Analysis of Horn of Africa
Center on Conscience & War
Charity & Security Network
Chemonics International
Citizens for Global Solutions
Clearinghouse on Women’s Issues
Alliance for Peacebuilding

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
DC Peace Team
Desmond Tutu Peace Lab, Butler University
District of Columbia
EIHR: The Educators' Institute for Human Rights
Food for the Hungry
Free Watch Afghanistan Organization
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Generations For Peace
Global Communities
Global Water 2020
Grace Initiative Global
Hands of Peace
Humanity United
Institute of World Affairs
International Association for Political Science Students (IAPSS)
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
International Medical Corps
International Youth Foundation
iPEACE
Karuna Center for Peacebuilding
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
MENA Coalition for YPS
Mercy Corps
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Partnership of Children and Youth in Peacebuilding
NewGen Peacebuilders
One Earth Future
PartnersGlobal
Pax Christi USA
PCI, a Global Communities Partner
Peace Catalyst International
Peace Direct
Peace Initiative Network
PRBB Foundation
Saferworld
Search for Common Ground
ShelterBox USA
Stimson Center (Global Governance, Justice & Security Program)
Tanenbaum
The Alliance for Middle East Peace
The Borgen Project
The Bridgeway Group
The Carter Center
The DC Student Consortium on Women, Peace, and Security
The Fund for Peace
The HALO Trust
The National Association for Community Mediation
The Youth Cafe
UN Association of the National Capital Area
Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security, and Conflict Transformation
Y Coalition, Bangladesh
Yemeni Youth Forum for Peace
Young Adult Empowerment Initiative (YEI)
Youth Initiative Against Violence & Human Rights Abuse-YIAVHA

CC:
Amb. Samantha Power, USAID Administrator Designate
Senator Robert Menendez, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Senator James Risch, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Congressman Gregory Meeks, House Foreign Affairs Committee
Congressman Michael McCaul, House Foreign Affairs Committee