June 23, 2021

Administrator Samantha Power
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Power:

The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP), the leading nonpartisan global network of 140+ organizations working in 181 countries to end violent conflict and build peace, and the 81 undersigned organizations congratulate you on confirmation as Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). We also applaud the elevation of your position to the National Security Council. You are an incredible champion for preventing and reducing violent conflict and mass atrocities, and your leadership and significant expertise is critical now more than ever because violent conflict and violence is an urgent global threat.

The world is experiencing a 30-year high of violent conflict, which remains the primary driver of violent extremism and causes 80 percent of all humanitarian needs. As of the end of 2020, more than 82.4 million people are displaced globally and an estimated 235 million people need humanitarian assistance and protection—about 1-in-33 people worldwide—the highest figure in decades. Climate change is also a threat multiplier and acts of genocide and mass atrocities are dramatically increasing. Compounding matters, COVID-19 is stabilization in reverse—accelerating democratic backsliding, undermining human rights, causing a “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence, allowing autocrats to consolidate power, and leading to the proliferation of violent conflict and extremism.

These developments may have lasting impacts well beyond 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. Violent extremist groups have sought to weaponize the global crisis, and called on supporters to step-up attacks and spread the virus itself. Furthermore, online recruitment and dissemination of propaganda, disinformation, and conspiracy theories skyrocketed during the last year and increased the reach of violent extremist organizations and networks.
An Urgent Call to Action: Invest in Peacebuilding and Ensure Conflict Prevention Integration throughout USAID Programs:

AfP and the undersigned organizations applaud the priorities you outlined in your confirmation hearing, including conflict prevention and mitigation, along with tackling COVID-19, climate change, and democratic backsliding. To successfully prevent and reduce violent conflict, AfP believes the U.S. government must robustly invest in peacebuilding. AfP recently submitted testimony to the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee calling for substantial funding for the implementation of the Global Fragility Act (GFA) specifically, as well as violent and conflict prevention and peacebuilding more broadly.

At USAID, a strengthened and fully funded conflict prevention approach is critical. AfP strongly supported the establishment of USAID’s Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS) that elevates conflict prevention and peacebuilding as a priority for the agency. The creation of CPS, in tandem with adoption of the bipartisan GFA, are vital to addressing increasing global violent conflict and fragility. However, for CPS to be successful, it requires resources and staffing to implement the GFA, develop robust conflict prevention and peacebuilding standalone programs, and integrate conflict prevention throughout USAID’s programs, policies, and strategies, including the climate change strategy currently under development.

AfP and its partners also strongly recommend an integrated multi-sectoral COVID-19 strategy with a conflict prevention lens. The COVID-19 pandemic is more than just a health and humanitarian crisis. The Infectious Disease Vulnerability Index shows conflict is present in the 25 countries most vulnerable to infectious diseases with 22 in Africa in addition to Afghanistan, Yemen, and Haiti. Under the previous Administration, the U.S. failed to lead a global response to contain the pandemic and address the increasing instability it caused. While protecting American interests, bolstering health systems, and addressing complex humanitarian crises are imperative, violent conflict and violence cannot be relegated to a fourth catch-all pillar with numerous other issues. This linear and siloed strategy treated everything other than health and humanitarian assistance as a lesser priority to be addressed after the immediate health and humanitarian crises abated.

Peacebuilding activities are critical to addressing conflict drivers and preventing violence and extremism, as recognized by Congress in the GFA, Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Act,
and the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act (EWGAPA). However, counterterrorism laws, such as the material support prohibition, which bars a wide range of peacebuilding activities that involve interactions with members of a foreign terrorist organization (FTO)—from sharing tea at a meeting to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs that assist former members of FTOs transition to civilian life, have not kept pace with evolving security challenges or new programmatic approaches. The most recent modification of the material support prohibition in 2004 did not anticipate the Congressional focus on violence, conflict, and extremism prevention as enshrined in the GFA, WPS Act, and EWGAPA. The existing bar frustrates the realization of these laws’ intent and undermines efforts that support nonviolence, facilitate DDR, curb violent extremism, and foster inclusive peace processes. The prohibition prevents the U.S. and its NGO partners from operating in the contexts in which implementation of the GFA, WPS Act, and EWGAPA are most essential. While a formal legislative fix is necessary to facilitate the unimpeded delivery of peacebuilding and foreign assistance in the most vulnerable areas, in the interim, USAID should work closely with the Secretary of State and Attorney General, who have the authority to create exceptions, to ensure the delivery of peacebuilding assistance to reduce violence, armed conflict, and extremism.

AfP and the undersigned organizations call on USAID to increase its efforts to empower marginalized communities, such as women, youth, and local civil society organizations. Strengthening and empowering locally led, civil society-owned development is vital to preventing, managing, and resolving conflict and violence in fragile states, building peace, and ensuring sustainable development. In addition to protection and prevention initiatives, which are two key pillars of the WPS and Youth, Peace, and Security Agendas, USAID programming should enhance its efforts to include women, youth, and diverse local actors in program design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation processes, capacity-building, consultations, and other activities through the deployment of rapid, flexible funding that can effectively respond to changing local contexts.

Once again, congratulations on your confirmation. We welcome your commitment and resolve to prevent and reduce increasing violent conflict, one of the greatest challenges of our time. AfP stands ready to serve in partnership with you and the U.S. government to address these challenges and build sustainable peace worldwide. Thank you for your prompt attention to these pressing matters.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Peacebuilding
American Friends Service Committee
Aware Girls
The Borgen Project
Brandeis University
CDA Collaborative Learning
The Carter Center
Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at EMU
Center for Nonviolent Solutions
Center for Peace Advocacy and Sustainable Development
Center for Peacemaking Practice, Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University
Center for Policy Analysis of Horn of Africa
Charity & Security Network
Chemonics International Inc.
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
Civilian Peace Service Canada
Conciliation Resources
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Conseil Consultatif de Jeunes
Creative Associates International
Crossing Party Lines
Cure Violence Global
D.C. Student Consortium on Women, Peace and Security
Desmond Tutu Peace Lab, Butler University
DT Global
Karuna Center for Peacebuilding
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mediators Beyond Borders International
MENA Youth Peace and Security Coalition
Mercy Corps
Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute Foundation, Inc.
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Partnership of Children and Youth in Peacebuilding
Never Again Coalition
New York University Peace Research and Education Program
NewGen Peacebuilders
Nonviolent Peaceforce
ONE Campaign
One Earth Future
Pact
Parallel Networks
PartnersGlobal
PCI, a Global Communities Partner
Peace Appeal
Peace Direct
Peace News Network
PRBB Foundation
Education for Human Rights
FHI 360
Free Watch Afghanistan Organization
Friends Committee on National Legislation
The Fund for Peace
Futures Without Violence
Gender Equality Initiative in International Affairs (GEIA) Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University
Generations For Peace
Global Communities
Global Water 2020
The HALO Trust
Humanity United
Institute of World Affairs
InterAction
International Alert
International Association for Political Science Students
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
Interpeace
IYF
Refugees International
Renew Democracy Initiative
Rural Education and Agriculture Development Organization (READO)
Saferworld
ShelterBox USA
Tanenbaum
The Toda Peace Institute, Tokyo Japan
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
UNOY Peacebuilders
Women for Afghan Women
Women In International Security (WIIS)
World Vision US
Y Coalition-Bangladesh
Young Adult Empowerment Initiative
Youth for Peace and Development
Youth Initiative Against Violence & Human Rights Abuse (YIAVHA)

CC:
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