

February 12, 2025

The Honorable John R. Thune, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, House Minority Leader
United States Capitol, Washington, DC

Dear Senators Thune and Schumer, and Representatives Johnson and Jeffries:

As former U.S. government officials who served in national security and humanitarian positions in both Democratic and Republican administrations, we write to ask you to take all steps in your power to urge rescission of the Trump administration executive orders and directives aimed at freezing U.S. foreign assistance and dismantling USAID. These directives inflict irreparable damage on hundreds of millions of people around the world, harm Americans by crippling our ability to protect U.S. citizens from disease and other harms, and invite China and other competitors to fill the gap we have created, thereby increasing their power and influence at our expense.

In the some 200 countries where hundreds of millions of people have benefitted from U.S. aid, the bulk of such support has been economic and humanitarian assistance. When Presidents, Cabinet Secretaries, and Members of Congress are welcomed in countries of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and South Asia, and Europe, the concrete manifestations of U.S. government support have been the humanitarian and development programs supported by USAID and the State Department's humanitarian operations.

These operations represent less than one percent of the federal budget. At the same time, U.S. aid has amounted to between a quarter and a third of global assistance, roughly the same as the U.S. share of GDP among wealthy countries. It has given the United States enormous capacity for influence, while making our country the global leader in efforts to reduce human suffering and abject poverty.

These are the programs that President Trump and Elon Musk are decimating, as we write, while depriving the U.S. Congress of its constitutional and legislative roles.

It is difficult to capture in one letter the scope of what the *Financial Times* has accurately called the "willful sabotage of U.S. soft power." But the human suffering that these cut-offs have caused is catastrophic and heartbreaking. Elon Musk's measures have halted critical and highly effective life-saving initiatives, including programs that provide clean water to infants; healthcare to mothers who are expecting; food, shelter, and refuge for those fleeing persecution and disaster; and life-saving support to those suffering from disease.

In Kenya, Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere, aid to survivors of torture was stopped in its tracks. Children and adult victims of war and terror who have relied on the United States have been left without care. And in poorer countries around the world, thousands of women and girls will die in

the next 90 days due to complications of childbirth that might otherwise have been avoided through interventions funded by Congress and administered by USAID.

Even the highly visible PEPFAR program to combat AIDS, started by President George W. Bush and responsible for saving some 25 million lives, was frozen. Clinics were closed and HIV sufferers were denied access to antiretrovirals. While some services were resumed, crucial programs remained suspended and millions are affected.

In our own country, the suspension of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has led to tragic stories of thousands who were ready to travel to the United States, including Afghans who helped to support U.S. goals in their country. This modest and carefully managed program has revitalized declining communities and strengthened the U.S. economy, and persuaded other countries to do their fair share.

The tragic stories go on and on and on, from the curtailing of remarkable U.S. efforts to limit the spread of tuberculosis and eradicate polio, to the ending of programs that have built local economies and have thereby discouraged migration to the United States, to the abrupt halt of the USAID-supported Famine Early Warning System (FEWS), the gold standard for anticipating and monitoring famines worldwide.

Due to horror stories shared with Members of Congress about the impact of the funding freeze, Trump administration officials have added some exemptions to the ban. But this piecemeal effort is a wholly inefficient, inadequate, and cynical way to proceed with reform. It has merely left hundreds of millions around the world in disbelief at how the United States could act in such an arbitrary and cavalier manner.

History will not look kindly on this avoidable tragedy – for the hundreds of millions in need, for U.S. leadership and moral authority around the world, and for U.S. national security, as global competitors like China and Russia rush to fill the gap we have created. It will be part of the legacy of this Congress if not reversed.

We implore you to urge President Trump to rescind the freeze, which curtails U.S. efforts to provide critical humanitarian aid and development support around the world, and undermines the Constitutional authority of Congress. In particular, we ask that you urge the President to resume the funding and operations of USAID and its overseas offices, as well as the humanitarian programs of the Department of State.

Sincerely,

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