Center for Strategic and International Studies

“Celebrating World Humanitarian Day”

Featuring:
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OK. Let’s get started. I’m Dan Runde. I hold the Schreyer chair here at CSIS. We’re going to be having a conversation today around World Humanitarian Day.

Anybody coming in on a Monday morning in mid-August for a conversation about World Humanitarian Day probably doesn’t need me to give a long introduction to Administrator Mark Green at USAID. I think everyone here knows he was ambassador to Tanzania in the Bush administration. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, the 8th Congressional District from Wisconsin for four terms. He was a state representative.

He was well known – he is well known in the international development community. He served on the MCC Board. He did and does. He ran Malaria No More. He ran the Initiative for Global Development. And he was president and CEO of the International Republican Institute before coming to USAID. I think it’s fair to say that the international development community, but also the career folks at USAID, are thrilled to have someone of Administrator Green’s caliber and experience leading USAID at this time.

So we’re meeting at the World Humanitarian Day. And it’s very appropriate that we’re hosting this here at CSIS. My colleague, Kimberly Flowers, is very ably leading a new partnership the Humanitarian Agenda, that you’ll hear more about, in partnership – it’s a unique partnership with USAID. And USAID and the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance. Anyways, this is a very important issue.

There’s three points I want to make and then I’ll get off the stage, just to keep it brief. So I think the first is that I think the world’s going in two directions. You’ve got 60 to 80 countries going the way of South Korea. These countries are going to make it. They’re going to be rich. And I’m very interested in making sure that these countries say to themselves: When I went from fourth gear to fifth gear, the United States was my partner, as opposed to saying – these countries saying: When I went from fourth gear to fifth gear, China was there for me. So I think that’s one of the things we need to think about as these countries go from middle income to prosperous.

But the second is we got 30 or 40 tough, broken countries – we’ve got different terms for it, fragile and conflict-affected states. And we’re going to be stuck with them for a really long time. And they’re the ones that generate a lot of human-made humanitarian crises. A lot of them are not, you know, tsunamis or typhoons. It’s political or geopolitical, et cetera. And so that’s a big part of this conversation. And they’re tougher and more – these are longer lasting.

And so – but they’re also very interlinked with two things, is my final point, which is they’re very interlinked with our security. So terrorism comes – you know, breeds in these places. Lots of forced migration. Trafficking in persons. Illicit narcotics. All these sorts of things flourish in sort of these tough, awful places. So getting a handle on this isn’t just a nice to do or a hearts and flowers thing to do. This is directly linked to our national security and it absolutely touches us here at home in the United States.

Finally, though, I also think getting this stuff right are the condo fees of global leadership. Just two points about that and I’ll stop. One is, in 2004, former Administrator Natsios likes to tell the story that in Indonesia Osama bin Laden had a higher approval rating than the United States of America in 2004, before the tsunami. And then those numbers flipped because the United States of America showed up for Indonesia. And they said, hey, you know, those horrible terrorists aren’t really here for
us in Aceh, but I know the good old USA is. So this stuff matters in terms of our public diplomacy and our influence.

I’ll just say one other story. I think Typhoon Haiyan – I may get the numbers slightly wrong, but I think you’re going to get the gist of what I’m trying to say. Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines I guess about two years ago, there was a terrible typhoon. Lots of people died in the Philippines. An awful disaster. China, I think, offered something like 25 cents to respond and the United States responded with something like $50 or $100 million. So you tell me who the Filipinos were – who were they more appreciative of, the United States or the Chinese? So this is a form of our influence. It’s the right thing to do. It’s linked to our security. And it’s going to be linked to our security going forward. But it’s also geostrategically important not only in terms of our public diplomacy but also our ability to keep friends – and win friends and influence people.

So I’ll stop there. I’m going to turn the floor over to Kimberly and Administrator Green. That’s it. Thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR MARK GREEN: Thank you, Dan. I’m writing down that phrase, “condo fees for global leadership.” (Audio break) As we begin, as we used to call it in Congress, I’d like to start with a point of personal privilege. I’d like to take this opportunity this morning to express our sadness over the death of Kofi Annan. He was a giant who had spent his entire life advocating for peace and for the protection of humanitarian workers, something that we’ll be talking about today. As he so often said, people not states should be at the center of what we do. His passing makes this World Humanitarian Day even more poignant.

This morning, on behalf of USAID, I hope to convey two important messages to all of you. The first, as Dan was alluding to, relates to the rapidly evolving nature of humanitarian relief and assistance. The second, as we mark this day, is simply our deep, deep admiration and gratitude for the many heroes of our humanitarian work. They, and many of you, are truly extraordinary and heroic. I have to say that before I joined USAID I didn’t really appreciate the scope and range of what it is that we do in our humanitarian work. You can see it in some of the numbers.

In 2017, USAID responded to 53 crises in 51 countries. For only the second time in our agency’s history, we had six DART teams, Disaster Assistance Response Teams, deployed simultaneously around the world. The first time that happened was the preceding year. At this very moment, we have prepositioned resources and experts in just about every part of the world. We have seven emergency stockpiles in places like Djibouti, South Africa and Malaysia. We have full time response staff in 30 countries. We have six regional offices and 11 advisor offices, located with partners like the military’s combatant commands.

One of my most vivid memories from my first year as administrator was essentially a crash course in how some of this works. One day during the last year’s U.N. General Assembly meetings we received word of a terrible earthquake, the second one that had struck Mexico City. One evening that week, I was walking down the street between back-to-back dinners with two different mobile phones. One with the White House, one with the DART team leader. I was dodging pedestrians, I’m sure looking ridiculous, while the disaster professionals were helping me navigate something much more serious – how to rapidly mobilize an emergency response team to Mexico City to help our neighbors to the south respond to their second earthquake in just a few weeks’ time.
The government had said to us that they’d welcome the assistance of a highly specialized type of international search and rescue team – something really hard to find, especially in a hurry. But thanks to the White House, our talented team here in D.C., our network of first responders, and the DOD, we were able to transport and stand up just such a team in Mexico City before breakfast the next morning. I’m honored to be part of a network, which includes many of you, that can make something like that happen.

But as we gather to mark World Humanitarian Day this year, we have to acknowledge that natural disaster responses no longer epitomize today’s humanitarian work. We still do that, to be sure, and I think we do it well. But these days we face vast other challenges all around the world. Our humanitarian resources are increasingly being deployed not for storms and quakes and like, but for manmade disasters, from conflict-driven displacement to tyranny-driven economic collapse. Our DARTs are more likely to be deployed for those types of crises. And by far most of our humanitarian assistance dollars are being allocated for those kind of needs.

There’s the ongoing tragedy in Syria, a horrific conflict in its seventh year, and one of the most complex crises of our time. Over 13 million people – more than 80 percent of the current population – need humanitarian assistance. There’s the ongoing struggle in Afghanistan where 3.3 million people need humanitarian assistance. A recent upturn in violence has claimed 1,700 civilian lives this year alone. A dozen or so years ago I traveled to Afghanistan as a congressman. And in those days, our presence was measured by the tens of thousands of military boots on the ground. These days we still have some troops there, but our boots on the ground are increasingly humanitarian and development workers – some of whom who have been back to work at Afghanistan two, three, and even four times. Nine hundred aid workers have been killed in Afghanistan in the last decade.

There’s South Sudan, the most dangerous place of all for humanitarian workers. Seven million people in South Sudan – including 1 million living on the brink of famine – depend on international assistance just to survive. Then there are the man-made crises far closer to home. One of the most underreported catastrophes in the world today is what’s happening in and around Venezuela. More than 2.3 million Venezuelans have already fled. It’s the largest single mass exodus in the history of the western hemisphere.

And it’s ongoing. I saw this firsthand when I visited Cúcuta in Colombia and the Bolivar Bridge last month. Five thousand new migrants enter Colombia each and every day. They’re desperately seeking food and emergency medical care. They’re seeking survival. This isn’t merely Colombia’s challenge. Venezuelans are fleeing to places like Brazil and Ecuador, as we read over the weekend, and northward to the Caribbean. The list of manmade conflict-caused and regime-driven humanitarian crises goes on and on. After all, there are roughly 70 million displaced people in the world today.

Since humanitarian needs and crises are changing, we’re doing our best to change and to respond to them, with the best tools and ideas that we can find. We’re applying lessons learned over and over again. And we’re fostering innovation. This past February, USAID and our British cousins DFID joined in launching the first-ever humanitarian grand challenge. The grand challenge mechanism is a way for the world’s best thinkers, from organizations large and small, for-profit, nonprofit, business, academia, to offer new ideas on how we can deliver relief to the most vulnerable, hardest to reach communities in the world. It’s a chance for us to identify and invest in the best and the brightest.
We’ve already received 615 applications from 86 different countries, including a third from women and nearly half from lower and middle-income countries. We’re excited to see and mobilize the results. And they’re due out this fall. Given how much of our humanitarian response is in conflict zones and fragile states, we’re paying more attention than ever to the obstacles and challenges that factions, gangs, militias and corrupt officials are throwing at relief teams. Case in point, in April of this year a leading humanitarian agency reported that it encountered no fewer than 70 checkpoints on the 300-mile trip to Aden to Sana’a in Yemen. I’m sure those are just helpful citizens offering directions along the way. (Laughter)

But it’s the kind of situation that caused us to launch the Strengthening Field Level Capacity on Humanitarian Access and Negotiations Program last August. It’s aimed at helping relief team members better understand practical negotiation techniques and safe, effective field-level decision making. Because there is nothing more important to us, nothing more important to me, than the safety and security of our humanitarian network, that’s the area that we’re especially focusing on. We must stay ahead of threats and potential threats.

So we’re supporting organizations dedicated to improving security standards and training for NGO staff. We’re modifying our policies so that security costs for equipment, staff, training, and site enhancements can be more easily built into your contracts and grant budgets. We’re investing in new tools to help us map and minimize risk to operations at the most basic level – the level of, for example, moving food from a plane to a truck to a warehouse and distribution center. Let’s face it, we can take every possible step to minimize risk. We can’t make it go away. And many of you know that all too well.

One of the most inspiring and humbling parts of my job is getting to meet the heroes who know the risks but carry on just because they care. I saw it firsthand when I visited an IDP camp just outside Raqqa. I heard stories of the challenges that humanitarian heroes face each day as they strive to bring water and food and medical care to those who have been victimized by the years of conflict. With Assad’s regime still holding sway in parts of the country, there’s no real legitimate government partner with whom to work. And their path is riddled with unexploded ordnance, which is going off at the rate of roughly three dozen per day. The shelters they sleep in at night shake with the dropping of bombs each and every day. And yet, somehow, because of their commitment to others, they wake up the next morning and they do it all over again. These are the heroes that we hold high this World Humanitarian Day.

People like Iraq’s Salaam Mohammed. When Anbar and Kirkuk were liberated from ISIS at the end of last year, humanitarians were the first ones on the ground, providing food, water, and medical care. Iraq’s staff, with a U.S.-funded NGO, spend their days clearing mines and educating their neighbors about the dangers that the ordnance poses. Salaam decided to join this particular NGO after witnessing several tragedies that left some of his relatives and friends injured or killed. He was one of the NGO’s first recruits in Iraq. Every day is challenging for the deminers. Any accident can be fatal. But Salaam and his staff love their jobs and show up for work every day filled with passion, because they know what they’re doing matters.

There’s Jay Nash, a regional advisor who has lived and worked for USAID in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the past 20 years. The DRC is, as you know, no stranger to aid worker attacks, with 210 people being killed, wounded, or kidnapped since 2000. In 1999, while visiting a university in DRC, Jay was ambushed by a mob of students who thought he was a spy for neighboring Rwanda. The mob torched the U.S. embassy vehicle he had been driving, but Jay escaped after a group
of brave students made a ring around him, guarding him, until they were able to duck into the girls’ dormitory.

Sitting in that dorm, trapped for hours with a mob threatening to break down the doors, Jay said he had one thought. He thought of the children with disabilities that he was helping in his free time. DRC has a higher than average rate of disability. And he thought to himself if he died in that girls’ dorm, who would take care of those kids? After eight hours, he made a run for it and he didn’t look back. Not only did he stay in DRC working for USAID, in 2001 he started his own NGO called Stand Proud. It provides treatment and equipment to young people with disabilities, helping them gain dignity, mobility, and independence.

There’s Fareed Noori, one of the victims of last month’s attack on a government building Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The blast killed 15 people. Fareed has been working in Afghanistan since 2010 for USAID partner the International Rescue Committee, as a water sanitation and hygiene engineer. As his colleagues noted, whenever there was an emergency Fareed was the first in the field to help with whatever was needed. Fareed was at an emergency meeting at the time of the attack. He was killed doing the work of helping others, to which he had committed his life. Fareed leaves behind four children, two girls, two boys, all under the age of nine.

Another victim of that attack was Bakhtawari (sp) – it’s a pseudonym – a bright and impressive 22-year-old woman. She was working for the International Organization for Migration, another USAID partner. She had married very early and had a child by the age of 16. But despite being a young mother in a conservative community, she fought for her education and learned English. After school, she knew she wanted to help people. She convinced her family to let her not just get a job but get a career as a humanitarian.

When her husband was killed in a bombing three years ago, she continued working as a 19-year-old single mother. Her job took her to the very government offices that were often targeted by insurgents. On the day she was killed, she was attending one of the meetings that she had hoped would help her find better ways to deliver aid to people in need. The building was bombed and then overrun with gunfire. She died doing what she focused her life on: Helping people build a brighter future. Extremist insurgents in Afghanistan like to target aid workers. There’s a special place in hell.

There’s the story of the seven aid workers killed in South Sudan in March of this year. They were killed when their car was ambushed along the 185-mile route of the badly rutted roads in South Sudan’s remote – excuse me – remote east. Their vehicle had been labeled as belonging to an NGO, right down to the license plates. It didn’t matter. Six of the seven worked for a small Sudanese NGO called the Grassroots Empowerment and Development Organization, GREDO, which is supported by USAID and works to promote sustainable development at the grassroots level. Three of the victims were helping to build a youth center. Two taught English. One was also a driver and the father of a newborn. Three were new recruits. Humanitarian heroes, one and all. And there are thousands of others. And I stand in awe of what they do.

Final thoughts, why do they do it? What causes them to go out and take these risks? I learned the answer – at least one answer – when visited Bangladesh and Burma for Secretary Pompeo earlier this year. In Bangladesh, I went to Cox’s Bazar. And I saw the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who are barely surviving in that camp. They are vulnerable to monsoons and cyclones, and without the humanitarian workers, life would be very different. Bad enough already. And then I went to Burma and I traveled to an IDP camp near Sittwe. And what I saw there was the most disturbing thing I’ve
ever seen in development. I saw young families trapped. I saw young families unable to go to school and completely dependent upon the emergency food assistance that we provide.

So those workers take the risks because they are all that is standing between an even worse catastrophe and death of these young people, these victims. Today we celebrate them. Thank you. (Applause.)

KIMBERLY FLOWERS: Thank you. (Audio break) I am the director, as Dan mentioned, of the Humanitarian Agenda, which is what this event is part of. It’s a new partnership between USAID and CSIS. And we’ll – I’ll talk a little bit about that as we – as we have this conversation.

First, I want to ask you – one, congratulations. It’s been about a year now since you’ve been appointed in your position.

MR. GREEN: It’s been almost exactly a year.

MS. FLOWERS: About – exactly one year?

MR. GREEN: Pretty close.

MS. FLOWERS: So happy anniversary.

MR. GREEN: Thank you. If you ask my staff, they may give you a different answer.

MS. FLOWERS: Yeah, staff. Should we give them applause? We’re happy you’re all here. (Applause) So I can say that we’re all very happy that you were chosen to be in this position because, as Dan alluded to, you are – your deep background in international development. One of the things that you’ve said a lot in this position is talking about the purpose of foreign aid is to end the need for its existence. One of your key messages that we hear time and time again. So I want you to elaborate of sort of how that squares with humanitarian assistance, right? There’s a big difference of international development spurring, you know, economic growth and being self-reliant. But humanitarian assistance is so often, as you mentioned, driven by tyrannies and regimes and it’s about saving lives. So how do you marry those two?

MR. GREEN: Well, first off, you’re right. What I’ve said since the day that I was first announced is that the purpose of our foreign assistance must be ending its need to exist. And what I mean by that is we should look every day at ways of helping people take on their own challenges, not because we want to do less or walk away, but because we believe in human dignity, and we believe in the innate desire of everyone, every individual, every family, every community, every country to want to craft their own bright future.

In the area of humanitarian assistance, what I always say is, look, we will always stand with people when crisis strikes, because that’s who we are. I mean, that is in the American DNA. But at the same time, we’ll also look for ways to foster resilience so that we can help countries and communities withstand future shock. And we’ve seen promising results in places like Ethiopia. You mentioned on the food security front, Ethiopia is a country that’s had six consecutive years of drought, and yet not fallen into full famine. And that obviously is about much more than the work that we’re doing. But I think we’re making a difference in helping Ethiopians build their ability to withstand consecutive years of drought.
So I see the two as fitting very well together. And the other piece to it is on the humanitarian front – again, we have natural disasters. We have manmade disasters. The manmade disasters are coming at us fast and furious. It’s also about preventing the next generation of crisis and conflict. I’m often asked what it is that keeps me up at night. And what keeps me up at night are children being born in camps, and growing up in camps, and getting educated in camps. And then, God willing, the walls come down and the gate opens up. The question is, are those young people going to be prepared to take on the challenges of the world? Are they connected to the communities around them?

And so the humanitarian work that we do in many of these places is really aimed towards the future. And so I think it fits in well. It’s a longer-term view. But I see them really as all pulling in the same direction.

MS. FLOWERS: I’m actually headed out to Nigeria in a few weeks and doing some research looking at Feed the Future portfolio there, but really looking at the nexus between that humanitarian and development – you know, how that can work in a more unstable environment. So I’m anxious to see what I learn from that as well. (Audio break) But regardless of that, the U.S. continues to be and dominate as the largest donor worldwide. When you’re talking to your colleagues in this administration, what is it that you talk about in terms of why it’s so important for us to sustain this leadership?

I mean, I could throw out numbers. I’ll do a little bit. In 2018, the U.S. pledged 29 billion (dollars) in foreign assistance. Five billion (dollars) of that was just dedicated to humanitarian assistance. I was looking this morning at how that compares to others. And I mean, the U.K., we’re even twice of what they do. So, you know, we’re such a leader in this space. Why is that so important? Why should we dedicate American tax dollars to international disasters and, more importantly, to cleaning up other people’s wars?

MR. GREEN: Well, first off, you’re correct. We’re far and away the world’s humanitarian leader. And, quite frankly, two, three, and four added together don’t really add up to what we’re doing. We need other countries to do more, because those challenges that I laid out – those manmade challenges, I don’t see an end in sight, quite frankly, in any of them. So these are open-ended challenges. And while we are proud to be the world’s leader, we need others to step up to the plate.

I will tell you, what I worry about is because these manmade disasters, manmade, often regime-driven disasters, because they are open-ended there’s a real risk that it will begin to take up so much of our budget that it threatens our ability to do some of the development investments that we all want to do including, quite frankly, some of the resilience work that we want to do. So we do need others to step up to the plate. But in terms of, you know, what I say to the rest of the administration, it’s not a hard sell. I mean, I’m pushing on an open door. The administration is very supportive of our humanitarian work. We continue to be the world’s leader. That’s not going to change.

And I think it’s really – the arguments for it fall on a number of different fronts. Number one, this is an expression of American values. This is who we are and always have been. It is a projection of the American spirit, in my view. So I think that is very much alive and well in the American psyche, the American DNA. But secondly, it’s in our interest. Just take, for a moment, the assistance that we’re providing to Colombians supporting Venezuelans who have fled the border, doing the same thing in some other countries. There is a great American self-interest in supporting the ability of these communities to withstand this migration, to help afford some of those costs, because the instability that
results in not being able to provide support I think is – is an issue. It’s a diplomatic issue. It’s a national security issue.

And as you heard me mention, I think particularly what’s happening in the western hemisphere is completely underreported. When I was at the Summit of the Americas, I heard from a number of countries – including Caribbean states – that they were starting to feel the presence of Venezuelans fleeing. And while they’re all supportive of their neighbors, it clearly is not without cost. But the same thing is true in many other parts of the world. So the investments that we make on the humanitarian front are oftentimes in our self-interest. I look at the work that we’re doing on the humanitarian front with an eye towards providing a lifeline so that those who have been displaced in parts of the Middle East can return. That’s in our interest. That’s a stated – a foreign policy priority.

So, you know, yes, there’s certainly, I think, the morality that we are – expression of values that we have always supported. But I also believe it’s in our interest – in our national security interest.

MS. FLOWERS: You know, thank you for reminding us in your speech about the humanitarian heroes and what World Humanitarian Day is about. And you talked about the unfortunate situation that in today’s crises a lot of time aid workers are targeted specifically. So I want to ask you whether you feel like there’s an erosion of international humanitarian law over – you know, you talked about the evolution of humanitarian assistance. And so as the world gets more disordered, we see more and more protracted conflicts. Do you feel that both governments and nonstate actors alike are violating this law? And is there anything that we can or should be doing more, I guess, particularly from the donor, U.S. government perspective, to keep them accountable?

MR. GREEN: Well, first off, we in the U.S. demand adherence to international law, international humanitarian law. So we demand that unfettered access is provided, for example, to those who are displaced in Rakhine and northern Rakhine in Burma. So that’s always been important for us. But if you’re asking whether some of the nonstate actors like ISIS are breaking international law, yeah. Having been to both Raqqa and northern Iraq, what has been done there by ISIS – truly evil. There is simply no other word to describe what they’ve done. The desecration of graves, the desecration of churches, the disappearances of Yazidis. It’s staggering and truly evil. Of course they are breaking every standard that we all know.

Yes, it is a challenge to international law. One of the best ways that we can respond is to say that, and to say it often, and to keep coming back to it. Because I do think the American opinion matters. And to say, all across the political spectrum here in this country, that we stand united and demand adherence to those standards and that what is happening is unacceptable.

MS. FLOWERS: So you brought up demanding unfettered access. I want to let our audience know that the Humanitarian Agenda will be launching a taskforce this fall and will be focusing specifically on the issue of humanitarian access. You brought up, of course, in Yemen, the 70 chokehold points which David Miliband also talked about when he was here. We did an event in April on Yemen. I also want to say that we’re publishing a policy piece on Yemen here at CSIS. So it’ll come out this week for those of you that are interested.

I have many more questions for you, but I think I’ll turn to the audience so that we can engage them as well. So if you have a question, please raise your hand. We will take it in rounds of threes. You’ll announce yourself and where you’re from. Please keep it concise. And at the end of it, there should be a question mark. So who has a question? Let’s go right over here. Thanks, Owen.
Q: So I’ll ask a real fast question. My name’s Rob. I work for USAID. So thank you, sir.

My question’s about the environment. I’m just back from the Congo where Ebola is happening. I was in Madagascar last year for a plague outbreak. A lot of the natural – or, a lot of the disasters you talked about have an environmental component. And we’re doing some in the United States, but some people think we really need to do more. And that’s a little bit against, maybe, some people in the administration. So I would love for you to talk about your thoughts about that.

MS. FLOWERS: Great question.

More. Let’s do Julie Howard, right there.

Q: Hi. Administrator Green, thank you for your comments.

Could you comment on the recent story in The Washington Post about the potential pullback of $3 billion of foreign assistance funds, and how that may affect our ability to respond to humanitarian, as well as the resilience opportunities you described?

MS. FLOWERS: And, Julie, would you introduce yourself, for those that don’t know you?

Q: OK. So I’m a nonresident senior advisor here at CSIS. Thank you.

MS. FLOWERS: Julie and I are also going to be travel partners. When I mentioned Nigeria, it’s with Julie who’s leading that study.

Let’s take one more question, right back here. Yes, thanks, Haley.

Q: Hi. My name is Joh Nee (ph). Reporter from Voice of America.

I mean, there are a number of humanitarian assistance and also food aid to North Korea that were suspended by the United States government. I mean, what are the key principles that – of the United States government providing assistance to North Korea, and under which scenario those number of assistance to North Korea can be resumed?

MS. FLOWERS: Thank you. Why don’t you go ahead and take those, then we’ll take some more?

MR. GREEN: Sure. On North Korea, simply put, there have been no discussions that I’m aware of regarding assistance into North Korea. I certainly haven’t been part of any such discussions.

Secondly, on the pullback, I – while we haven’t received official notification of anything, I’ve heard of nothing that would change our status as the world’s leader in humanitarian assistance. I haven’t seen anything.

Third, on – first off, it’s interesting that you visited Ebola country and talk about conservation because they’re linked, obviously. I think that’s one of the reasons that we’ve seen the outbreak of Ebola and other formerly entirely rare diseases in some of the areas where we’ve seen deforestation and such. What we’re trying to do at USAID – many of you are aware – we’re developing metrics that are
aimed at helping us to better understand a country’s capacity and commitment in a number of sectors. And conservation is one of them. So we’re looking at things like biodiversity and how resources are managed, because we think it’s – we think it’s important and it’s something that we hope to be able to incentivize in the future and have conversations around.

I have a personal interest on the conservation front. And as you know, we’ve recently made some announcements regarding assistance to Colombia, and helping them on their natural resource management. So I think it’s an important area that shouldn’t be divorced from the rest of development. We think of it as one of those key areas that needs to be assessed and looked at as we help countries, in what we call, as you know probably ad nauseum as I talk about the journey to self-reliance, one of those areas is in fact conservation, biodiversity, and the capacity to manage resources.

MS. FLOWERS: Great. Let’s take another round of questions.

Q: Joel Charny from Norwegian Refugee Council.

And thank you, Administrator Green, for your excellent remarks. I’m afraid I have to follow up on the rescission question. We’re not going to let you off so easily. What’s been reported is that there’s going to be a cut of a billion dollars to UN peacekeeping operations. And that has the potential to not only disrupt work in South Sudan and Somalia and the Congo, but it also has the potential to disrupt, through further chaos and refugee flows, neighboring countries that we care about, that are our allies, such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, and so on. And I guess the argument is that even if USAID itself doesn’t lose funding or doesn’t lose out through the rescission, the work will lose out, I feel, if this really goes ahead. So if you could just offer more thought on – I mean, you said you’re pushing on an open door when it comes to international work. And honestly, it’s not always obvious to see that from the outside. Thank you.

MS. FLOWERS: Thanks, Joel. Let’s do right here in the front with the glasses. Thank you.

Q: Thank you. Hi. Good morning. I’m Nicole Goldin. I’m a senior associate here at CSIS. Thank you, Administrator Green, for your great comments.

You mentioned briefly – you touched on young people. And so give the disproportionate share of young people in these countries, and how often humanitarian crises can disproportionately affect children and young people, can you talk a little bit more about some of the focus that you’re taking in the initiatives and the work that you’re doing to remedy the situation for youth? Thanks.

MS. FLOWERS: Great. And I think there was a question right behind you, if there still is?

Q: Hello. My name is Jessica Trisko Darden and I’m a Jeane Kirkpatrick fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

You mentioned in your remarks about the manmade nature of a lot of the ongoing conflicts. And I was wondering if you could speak to USAID’s role not only in providing humanitarian response in that context, but also the active role that the agency is taking in countering and preventing violent extremism.

MS. FLOWERS: It’s a great question.
MR. GREEN: It is a great question. Joel, on the budget front, I really don’t have much more that I can provide. Part of it is I’m not attempting to duck, I just literally don’t have more. I’d refer you to OMB, quite frankly. But, again, you know, there is simply – looking at the numbers of last year and what we’re doing on the humanitarian front – there is simply no argument that we have backed away from our role as the world’s leader in humanitarian assistance. I mean, just objectively we are far and away the largest humanitarian donor. We’re the largest humanitarian donor in Syria. We’re the largest humanitarian donor in conflict after conflict.

I do think it is fair for all of us to talk about how it is that these resource needs can be met in the future. I don’t mean just the immediate future, but the open-ended nature of these conflicts and this instability and this displacement is staggering. It is what worries me, because these conflicts that we’re seeing – South Sudan, Yemen – you and I have talked about Yemen a great deal in recent months. It’s open-ended. And I do worry about it. I do worry about our ability to meet resource needs and, you know, the world meet these resource needs. They’re significant.

On the question of young people, particularly in displaced settings, we are looking at a number of ways of accelerating crisis situation education, conflict community education. We have received generous support from Congress, along with generous directives from Congress in the area of education. What we’ve been trying to do – and Congresswoman Lowey’s been a great leader on this front – is to try to make sure that we are able to prioritize these crisis needs. Because I do think it’s a crisis. It does worry me a great deal.

So we’re looking at some of the use of innovative technologies to see if that can help us in these settings. But it is a very important focus. And as we develop our basic education strategy going forward, I think you’ll see a particular focus on those areas, because it is, as you suggest, very important for the future.

In terms of preventing violent extremism, we have, as you know, an important role under the National Security Strategy. We are investing in trying to identify the drivers of violent extremism. One of my strong beliefs that comes actually from my time at the International Republican Institute, is that we shouldn’t jump to conclusions and try to draw global assumptions and lessons. Instead, we need to look at local drivers. Experience shows us that it’s often local drivers, community drivers that become flashpoints for extremism. And so we’re certainly investing in research there, in some of the preventative tools that are there.

From my days as ambassador in Tanzania, I often point out that after the terrible bombing – embassy bombing, the work that we did with our Tanzanian partners in the wake of that to take on some of the drivers of poverty and despair I believe was an important down payment to preventing violent extremism. So I’m a big believer at tackling those drivers and tackling that which can lead to despair. And so that will always be a key part of our work.

MS. FLOWERS: Administrator Green, at Davos this year you talked about the importance of tapping into the creativity of the private sector and how innovative finance mechanisms and other – you know, innovative technologies, how they can really create better development outcomes. In your speech today, you talked about the humanitarian grand challenges. Are there any specific – whether it’s specific companies or partnerships or technologies that you’re most excited about right now? Or things that you see that are happening in the field that – I mean, you’ve been in this career – I mean, you’ve had a career for decades all related to development.
MR. GREEN: Don’t say decades. (Laughter)

MS. FLOWERS: OK, sorry. You’re very young. But last year that you have been as administrator, but what are the cool new technologies that we should know about that are happening that mainstream audience has no ideas how we’re delivering with humanitarian assistance?

MR. GREEN: You know, to be honest, they are countless. During Global Innovation Week, which we had, what, I think last fall is when it was. And I had a chance to walk through the marketplace at the Ronald Reagan Building and take a look at some of the innovations – everything from lunchbox sized solar batteries that were allowing us to power work in refugee and displaced persons camps, to some of the weather forecasting stations that are created with 3-D printers. You go through there, and it’s extraordinary. And it fills you with great hope for our ability to reach out and touch more people in more settings than ever before.

In the area of financing, we announced in India last fall the world’s first development impact bond for maternal and child health. And the largest development impact bond of its kind. So what we did through that was to set outcomes that we needed to see in order to repay the investment. But in terms of the means, we turned the private sector loose. And in the follow-up conversations that we had, you could see that our partners – some of whom were based here in D.C. – were terribly excited, because for the first time they didn’t have us micromanaging each step along the way but saying: Look, these are the outcomes that we need. You go get them. And really tapping into the private sector. Nonprofit and for-profit.

Also, in the area of displaced communities, on World Humanitarian Day, the use of biometrics to establish the identification of refugees and IDPs, as well as some of the digital technologies for delivering resource assistance so that recipients have modest purchasing power in surrounding communities, thereby not only providing assistance, not only holding on to human dignity and allowing them to make some decisions, but also providing a tangible benefit to those host communities, often which are facing a disproportionate burden by those who are there. So it’s really using business principles, human nature. And I’d like to say they’re new technologies, but my kids will tell me very quickly they’re old technologies just new to someone like me. Tapping into these I think creates enormous hope for reaching into places we haven’t before.

MS. FLOWERS: I want to continue on that hope trend for a minute. So, you know, when you think about the crises – many of which you’ve already mentioned today, Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Venezuela –

MR. GREEN: Is that the hope part?

MS. FLOWERS: Yeah, no. (Laughs) Well, this is where I’m kind of headed, is, is there – is there a crisis that you have your eyes on that you do see any reversal in terms of – reversal of trends or any progress? Is there a place that you do think we’re going to be able to see some positive outcomes in the next, I should say, decade there – because I know it takes time. But is there one that you see not going the wrong direction?

MR. GREEN: Oh, sure. There are lots of promising stories. I think Ethiopia and Eritrea provide tremendous hope. One of the challenges, again, as an old democracy guy. One of the challenges that I saw was the enabling environment for civil society and NGOs in a place like Ethiopia. And with the transition to a new government, we’re having conversations that we didn’t have before in
ways that I think will be very helpful. Also, I think that their willingness to partner with us more and more will help us make some investments in those areas – those resilience areas that will not only help Ethiopia and Eritrea, but also, quite frankly, I think save us money in the long run.

So there are lots of stories like that I think all around the continent, Africa, and elsewhere. But there are. Every hopeful story is replaced by a new challenge. None of these challenges are inevitable as problems. But they do require us to be innovative. They do require us to be engaged. They do require us to invest upfront and to be innovative in our procurement methods and how we partner. All of those things need to be done if we’re going to turn – either prevent these challenges from becoming crises or turn problems into solutions.

MS. FLOWERS: Thank you. I lived in Ethiopia for three years. And I have to say, it’s quite exciting to see the changes that are happening there.

I’d like to just turn to the audience. Are there any more burning questions? No hands are shooting up. Let’s do one more right here in the front.

Q: Hi. I’m Chris Estrella (ph) with the State Department. Thank you so much for your leadership of USAID and development.

I have a question regarding the nexus between humanitarian assistance you’ve been mentioning – the nexus with conflict development, stabilization. How does humanitarian assistance fit in? Or is it just a one-piece element that is disassociated from political issues?

MS. FLOWERS: All right. And as you answer that, any other final remarks you’d like to give as well.

MR. GREEN: Sure. Thank you. And, again, thanks to all of you.

So I think from the National Security Strategy you see – also the stabilization systems review – you see, I think, a clear multiagency, multi-departmental approach to many of these challenges. Our relationship with the State Department is as close as it’s ever been. I’ve received nothing but support and affirmation from Secretary Pompeo. We are working as, you know, closely, because all of these challenges touch each of us in different ways, and we each have different capacities. You know, I think it’s probably never been more clear than in a place like the Burma-Bangladesh crisis. So you know, when Rohingya are in one place they’re IDPs, when they’re in another place they’re refugees. And of course, we all look at that and say, look, forget the labels. We have people that we need to help out and invest in. And so we do.

Also, I would say that both State and AID have as close a working relationship with DOD as we’ve had in a very long time. As many of you know, we have a couple of dozen detailees over at the Pentagon and the combatant commands. DOD has made it clear that they don’t want to do what we do or State does. And we certainly don’t want to do what they do. So I think those seamless teams and close communications are helping us. And going back to the budget question, they have to. There’s not enough money for duplication. There’s not enough money for bureaucracy. We just have to stay in constant – in constant communication. As to sort of final remarks, I really would like to leave off with where my remarks – my opening remarks led off – or left off.
On this World Humanitarian Day, I would ask that we all think of those men and women who are in far places in the world, in conflict zones and fragile settings day after day delivering emergency medical assistance and food assistance and water and hygiene, under the most trying of circumstances, difficult security situations. They do it because they care. They’re my heroes. I’m sure they’re your heroes. They are patriots. And what a wonderful expression of values and our priorities in what they’re doing each and every day. I’m in awe of them.

MS. FLOWERS: Great. Thank you very much. (Applause)

MR. GREEN: Thank you.

(END)