Event

USAID Administrator Power on the State of Global Food Security and Nutrition

DATE
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FEATURING

Samantha Power
Administrator, USAID

William Moore
CEO, Eleanor Crook Foundation

Catherine Russell
Executive Director, UNICEF

Mariama Diallo
Acting Office Director for Humanitarian Assistance, USAID/Niger

Henrietta Fore
Chairman, Holsman International

CSIS EXPERTS

Caitlin Welsh
Director, Global Food Security Program, CSIS

Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com
Caitlin Welsh: Good morning, everyone.

Audience: Good morning!

Ms. Welsh: Good morning! In partnership with the Eleanor Crook Foundation, I'm pleased to extend a warm welcome to CSIS for today's event, a keynote address from USAID Administrator Samantha Power on the state of global food security and nutrition. I'm Caitlin Welsh, director of the CSIS Global Food Security Program.

And today, I'm also the responsible safety officer for this event. (Laughter.) So in that spirit, before we begin, I want to share with you some information about our building safety precautions. Overall, of course, we feel very secure in our building, but as a convener we must prepare for any eventuality. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with our emergency exit pathways for this room, which are behind me to the right and also in the foyer behind you to your right in the back corner. Should the need arise, please follow my instructions and move toward these exits.

And one second announcement before we begin, following today's keynote address we will welcome questions from the audience in person and online for Administrator Power. If you'd like to ask a question, please submit it at the Ask Questions Here button on the event page, which for those of you in the audience, as you can see, can be accessed using the QR code on the screens. We do encourage questions and look forward to addressing them in a short while.

Without further ado, it's my pleasure to introduce the Honorable Henrietta Fore, CSIS trustee, to welcome you to CSIS for today's event. (Applause.)

Henrietta Fore: On behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies Board of Trustees, welcome to those of you in the room and many more of you attending online. We have a terrific meeting before us. Our topic is the state of global food security and nutrition. It is an important meeting for three reasons.

First, the topic. It is essential for the world to focus on nutrition for our youngest citizens. Stunting and wasting are far too prevalent in far too many countries in the world. The prevalence of wasting among children under five years of age was 6.7 percent, 45 million children, in 2020 – more than double the 2030 global target of less than 3 percent. This challenge has been exacerbated by the brutal war in Ukraine and other conflicts, the converging challenges around climate change, droughts, food systems, and COVID-19, with supply chains stopped, snarled, or impeded. Conflict and droughts are
forcing the migration of populations of families moving from one village and
crowing into another. And this number is likely to increase.

The second reason is that the United States leadership is essential and, I
would say, indispensable to solving this crisis. The current crisis could affect
a generation of children. In the longer term, a global malnutrition crisis could
lead to lifelong effects on education, diet-related chronic disease, and a
decline in people’s capacity to thrive and contribute to their country’s
economic growth. When coupled with massive immunization gaps, we are
facing a child survival crisis around the world. When I was at UNICEF, we
began to make this case. And in our world today, there is no time to waste.

The third reason why this meeting today is important is the leaders involved.
You will see very capable women leaders before you in Executive Director
Catherine Russell and Administrator Samantha Power. And their agencies,
UNICEF and USAID, have been in the forefront of nutrition for decades. They
are exceptionally strong partners throughout the world and, along with the
Eleanor Crook foundation, we have the chance to change the trajectory of
millions of lives. They are issuing a call to action for every one of us today.

So may I introduce my friend, the eighth executive director of UNICEF, who
has one of the most heartbreaking and rewarding jobs in the world. Her first
trips were to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and she is developing innovative
policies and programs for underserved communities around the world.
Please join me in welcoming Executive Director Catherine Russell.
(Applause.)

Catherine Russell:

Thank you all so much. It’s so great to be back at CSIS. And of course, it’s
fantastic to follow Henrietta. It’s becoming a habit for me. (Laughter.) So I
really am happy to see her face and to hear her voice, which was such a
strong, important voice in this world for children. So I am just delighted to
follow her. I also want to thank Samantha Power – Administrator Power, and
our friends at CSIS, and of course the Eleanor Crook Foundation, for bringing
us here today. And not for a small thing, but for taking urgent action to
address the global and growing nutrition crisis.

So of course, as Henrietta mentioned, we are seeing the harsh impact of this
crisis in a rapidly increasing number of children under five who suffer from
severe wasting. One child has become severely wasted every minute of every
day since the beginning of this year. In the 15 hardest-hit countries, over 8
million children under the age of five – (coughs) – excuse me – may die from
severe wasting unless they receive immediate therapeutic care. If you’ve
ever seen a severely wasted child, that image will never leave you. I have
seen that many times, but really most recently I saw very fragile children in
recent missions to Ethiopia and to Afghanistan. And, you know, those are, as
I said, things that you would rather forget. But I’m so glad that I saw it and I’m so glad that others around the world are seeing it as well.

Those children are among millions suffering from wasting around the world today. Children suffering from severe wasting are too weak and too sick to eat ordinary food. They cannot be saved with bags of wheat or soy. To survive, they need urgent therapeutic nutrition, what we call RUTF.

This situation is truly critical. The conditions that created this crisis – the crushing economic impact of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and other parts of the world, and climate-driven drought – are putting children at risk every single day. Rising rates of severe malnutrition are serious enough, but this is coinciding with sharply decreased rates of immunization against childhood diseases for children around the world. And that is truly a lethal combination for malnourished children. This could quickly become more than a nutrition crisis. Without rapid action, we could be facing a child-survival crisis.

Ahead of the G-7 leaders’ summit in June, UNICEF appealed for $1.2 billion to prevent and treat severe wasting of millions of children in desperate need. The G-7 collectively pledged generous support to tackle the food crisis, but it’s still unclear how much of the pledged support will help us reach children with lifesaving foods, including, as I mentioned, the RUTF, while there is still time to save their lives.

The United States has consistently played a pivotal role in addressing malnutrition, and we are incredibly grateful for their leadership in addressing the growing crisis. U.S. support has been instrumental in helping UNICEF and our partners scale up early prevention, detection and treatment policies and programs.

I truly want to thank Administrator Power for being such a powerful advocate for children at all times, and certainly in this crucial time. We need other governments to follow suit. We need everyone to affirm that children’s lives actually matter. For if we don’t, we will see decades of progress in child survival slip through our fingers. None of us should or can tolerate that, not when we know what to do and we know how to do it. We really don’t have a moment to waste.

So I want to thank you all for your attention here, for being here, for caring about this issue. And I’d now like to hand over the podium to our wonderful colleague and supporter, Will Moore, who’s the CEO of the Eleanor Crook Foundation. Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

William Moore: Thank you, Executive Director Russell.
It’s pretty cool to follow not one but two UNICEF executive directors. I should probably just retire after this. I don’t know if I can top that.

Just 10 days ago, I traveled with members of Congress to a wasting-treatment clinic in Unity State, South Sudan. That center has seen a fourfold increase in the number of severely malnourished kids just in the last six months.

As Edie Russell said, if you’ve ever spent time with a wasted child, you know it’s a God-awful thing. Severe wasting is a state of multiple-organ failure, loss of brain mass, loss of vision. Your hair becomes brittle and your skin starts to peel. You lose your appetite. You become exhausted, eventually unable to move.

Although I’ve made many visits to clinics like this over the years, it still takes everything I’ve got to keep it together. You smile to the children who have recovered enough to move their heads and make eye contact. You nod to the mothers whose eyes speak of struggle you can’t imagine. You ask the nurse some questions. How old is this child over here, who looks like he couldn’t be older than eight months, and she tells you he just turned two.

When we left the clinic, as we boarded the U.N. cargo plane back to our lives and places where death from wasting is ancient history, one in our group said I don’t understand how there could be a God on this earth with suffering like that.

Right now, tens of millions of children are suffering from wasting. But this stuff, this packet, offers hope. RUTF, it’s a relatively complicated name for what it is – peanuts, milk powder, oil, sugar, a blend of micronutrients. That’s it. But these simple ingredients combine to offer a potential revolution in child survival.

Before RUTF was invented, families were forced to travel tens, sometimes hundreds, of miles to regional feeding centers where there was very little to be done. Mortality rates in these centers were often upwards of 90 percent. RUTF changed all of that. It contains all the nutrients that a child’s body needs to recover. It’s portable, it’s long lasting, it’s heat resistant, and it can be administered to wasted children write in their own homes. And it’s highly effective. At that treatment clinic in Unity State, of the hundreds of local wasted children who have come in since the start of this year just one has died.

In life, there are no silver bullets. But when it comes to stopping kids from dying from wasting, RUTF is as close as one comes. But we haven’t invested in it. Of the 50 million wasted children in the world today less than one in four currently receives treatment, so millions die. Severe malnutrition is
estimated to cause a child to die every 11 seconds and those who survive face lasting damage to their health, to their bodies, and to their brains.

Today, we’ll hear from Administrator Power on the truly historic steps USAID is taking to finally scale up treatment of wasting. Thanks to their leadership, the next year is poised to be the most transformational year in the history of wasting treatments, ever since our RUTF was invented back in 1996.

I’m also proud that the Eleanor Crook Foundation is here today to represent a whole group of philanthropies including philanthropist Chris Hohn, CRI Foundation, the ELMA Relief Foundation, who are investing in this historic initiative right alongside USAID.

There are many problems in this world that will take decades to solve sustainably. Ending child deaths from wasting is not one of them. This is something we can do now.

It’s now my honor to introduce Ms. Mariama Diallo. Mariama joined USAID Niger in 2011 where she now serves as the acting director of the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.

So, Mariama, over to you. (Applause.)

Mariama Diallo: Thank you. It’s an honor for me to be part of this event.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, good morning. My name is Mariama Diallo. I’m working at the USAID in Niger where I’m the acting office director for humanitarian assistance. Sorry.

Niger is at the heart of the Sahel, a region of the world buffeted by the combined impacts of the climate crisis, the pandemic, and increasing conflicts, and the global food and nutrition crisis created by Russia’s war on Ukraine is making this crisis even worse.

However, we Nigeriens are a resilient and courageous people and every day through my work I see inspiring stories. Let me share with you some of the numbers.

Last year’s agricultural production dropped by 39 percent and only met 40 percent of the country’s food need. The people who are hit the hardest when there is not enough nutritious food are women and children.

Our latest data showed that over 12 percent of young children are suffering from acute malnutrition that translate into 1.4 million young children who need treatment. For those children who survive from acute malnutrition,
they’re still damaged because their development is compromised. Only 43 percent of children are stunted. Over – sorry – over 43 percent of children are stunted, meaning they are not meeting their full potential.

This sounds grim, but I’m also here today full of hope. I have been working with the USAID in Niger for 11 years and I had the opportunity to visit and talk with families participating in our programs.

The Niger I grew up in was a land of peace. Sadly, for the last decade, we have been hit by insurgencies. Family displaced by these attacks in Tillabéri and Diffa regions depend on humanitarian assistance for their survival and to maintain their dignity.

But our work can also be – can also transform and help participant to achieve their dreams. Let me tell you about Hawaou, a young woman whose father ran a plant nursery. She dreamed of running her own nursery. She was trained in entrepreneurship and established her own business. And since she started, she has produced and sold over 5,000 seedlings of nutritious plant. She reinvest her revenue in her business and also saved money for her household expenses and also the social events.

For those young children who are malnourished, providing them treatment saved lives and gives hope to the families. I have visited many health centers in Maradi region, where I often see grandmothers bring in their children for treatment because mothers are busy in the village taking care of the other children. Seeing the joy of these grandmothers as their grandchildren are brought back from the brink of death gives me a lot of emotions. Working with USAID and partners gives me great hope because even more families will be able to see their children survive and thrive in Niger, but also across the world.

It is now with great pleasure that I hand over to our agency’s administrator, Samantha Power. Thank you. (Applause.)

Samantha Power: Thank you so much and a huge thanks to Mariama for her wonderful introduction and for bringing it home, bringing it from Niger to us here.

If you know anything about USAID, you know that our local staff, which are more than two-thirds of our overseas presence, bring everything. They bring so much. They bring their contacts. They bring tremendous technical expertise. They bring vision and ambition to the work that they do every day. We are so lucky at USAID. Mariama oversees, as she mentioned, the lifesaving humanitarian assistance that far too many hungry people in Niger depend on, so Mariama, thank you for your more than 11 years of service at USAID, all the years of service you did for other organizations beforehand and, above all, for everything you’ve done for the people of your country.
And thanks for being here. She’s a fellow at USAID headquarters right now –
(applause) – so we are really lucky.

Thank you to CSIS for hosting us today and for their continuous thought
leadership on strengthening food systems and nutrition, and to Caitlin, who I
look forward to speaking with later.

To my friend Henrietta Fore – Henrietta’s commitment to caring for
individuals in need is the stuff of legend, and her pioneering legacy across
decades of public service in development is unmatched. As the first woman
administrator at USAID, she certainly paved the way for me to be here today.
She left incredibly big shoes to fill, something I know that Cathy Russell can
relate to uniquely. And Cathy, to you, we and the Biden Administration miss
you more than words can convey, but we also know how incredibly blessed
the world’s children are to have you in their corner as their champion. So
thank you for your partnership and thank you for your friendship. Finally,
hearty thanks to Will and the team at the Eleanor Crook Foundation for co-
hosting this event. For 25 years now the Eleanor Crook Foundation, with
Will as its very first employee, has dedicated itself to combating global
hunger. The foundation has fought for the malnourished when the world’s
attention was elsewhere. They fought during the last global food price spike
in 2008. They have fought with friends on both sides of the aisle during
Republican and Democratic administrations and they have fought because
they believe what Eleanor herself believes, that, in her words, our elected
officials should all share a worldview of justice, a worldview where no one is
hungry.

That world once seemed so very near. In 10 years, from 2005 to 2015, the
number of people going to bed hungry each night fell by nearly 30 percent
from around 805 million down to still too many, but nonetheless down
substantially, to 590 million people. Think about what no longer going to be
hungry meant for those individuals involved. Unfortunately, the U.N. two
weeks ago shed light on just how much ground we have lost. Today as many
as 828 million people are hungry. A decade of progress obliterated with 238
million people newly hungry – a 150 million of whom became hungry in just
the past two years, since the outbreak of COVID-19.

And today we are confronting something even more devasting. As not only
are tens of millions more people facing that grave hunger, many of them are
at risk of outright starvation. The Richter scale defines the severity of
earthquakes. The Fujita scale measures tornadoes. And to measure severe
hunger, as many of you know, the world devised a new scale. In 2004 the
IPC, or Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

At phase one, a community is food secure. More than 80 percent of
households can meet their basic food needs. At phase two, they are
borderline. Households are skipping meals or liquidating what little they have to feed their families. Malnutrition spikes. Phase three is crisis. Hunger prevails so intensely that lives and livelihoods are at risk. It's at this stage that the world's humanitarian relief organizations kick into overdrive, providing the kind of assistance that for most is the difference, quite simply, between life and death.

That is where we find ourselves today, staring down a global food crisis. In 2021, a record 193 million people in 53 countries across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America faced at least this third crisis phase of hunger. That number reflected many things – job and income losses and supply chain disruptions from COVID-19, climate shocks, long-simmering conflicts, governments restricting humanitarian access to people in need. But it didn't account for the latest accelerant of human misery, Vladimir Putin's unconscionable assault on Ukraine.

We know that last year's number of people in food crisis could grow now by as many as 40 million people. Putin’s war has already driven millions of Ukrainians from lives of relative prosperity to destitution and dependence on humanitarian aid. But through his actions he is also waging a war on the world’s poor, spiking food, fertilizer, and fuel prices while taking Ukrainian grain off the market. So things are going to get worse.

The next phase of severe hunger, phase four, is what we call emergency. People, children especially, facing severe malnutrition, their bodies beginning to consume themselves on what little stores of energy they have left. Many growing so weak that they are unable to eat food that is put in front of them. And after that the final phase we call catastrophe, a phase in which families eat less than half of the food that they need to survive. They have exhausted all means to cope with hunger. A phase in which 30 percent of children face the deadliest form of malnutrition, as we've heard, a condition called wasting.

There's a word for when catastrophic hunger is widespread. And that word is famine. The Russian scholar Pitirim Sorokin survived a famine in the early 1920s, following the revolution. The starvation he witnessed was so severe, he wrote, “it reduced a man to a naked animal upon the naked earth.”

The U.N. secretary general has said multiple famines may be declared this year, and 2023 may be even worse. So the question before the world, the question that brings you all here today and causes so many of you to do the work that you do every day, the question for the world is simple. Today we are in a global food crisis, no question. What can we do together to avert a global food catastrophe?
To start, we have to understand the forces that have led us to this current precipice, the most existential of which is climate change. Each day seems to bring a new report of climate catastrophes, like the brutal heat waves we’re seeing in Texas, the wildfires tearing through Europe, or the parts of the United Kingdom receiving red-alert heat warnings for the first time in their history.

But it turns out the biggest threat climate change poses to the world’s hungry isn’t a sudden shock. It is a long-sustained onslaught – droughts that don’t just last for a season but for years. And extreme temperatures and of normal rainfall patterns have affected the crops of breadbaskets like the United States, France, India, Brazil, and China in profound ways.

But nowhere is the pain of drought being felt more acutely than in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia, countries that are part of a region known as the Horn of Africa. The Horn region has two rainy seasons per year. These are the times when farmers sow their seeds and fatten their livestock on new pasture. Since the year 1900, when people began recording these things, on seven separate occasions this region, the Horn, has experienced three drought seasons in a row. However, never, not once before, has the region experienced four consecutive failed rainy seasons until right now.

And our best forecasts tell us that the next rainy season, which usually begins in October, will bring poor rains as well; one record shattered immediately after another. And this is all coming, of course, on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has deepened economic downturns within countries’ decimated national finances, ballooned public debt, and weakened currencies used to import food, fuel, and fertilizer, leading, as we know, to spiraling prices.

There’s a saying in the Horn, the animals die first. And today pasturelands are turning to dust. And in near-biblical scenes, weakened farm animals are dying of disease. To date, at least 7 million livestock have already died in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. There just isn’t enough water to quench their thirst or enough grass to feed them.

We know that children, those least equipped to deal with a lack of food, are also beginning to suffer. At least 1,103 children have already died in these three countries. And without a massive infusion of resources from around the world, UNICEF has predicted an explosion of child deaths. In February, weaker harvests and COVID-19-induced swings in demand led to a new record high in the FAO Global Food Price Index. At that point, prices were 40 percent higher than they were before the pandemic began. That was bad. And then Vladimir Putin decided to invade Ukraine and hold food hostage, breaking the Global Food Price Index record yet again.
Since the war began, the Russian military has destroyed and mined Ukrainian farmland, bombed agricultural storage and processing facilities, and effectively blockaded Ukraine’s Black Sea ports, leaving 20 million tons of corn and wheat locked in silos and shipyards. Trillions of calories are literally sitting in storage while people go without food. With storage facilities still full, this year’s summer harvest – an expected 50 million tons of grain sowed by courageous Ukrainian farmers wearing flak jackets and wielding demining equipment – those tons of grain have nowhere to be stockpiled.

Ukraine and the European Union have hustled to enable the export of at least some of the trapped grain, and we are working side by side with them – about 2 million tons a month now getting out through a patchwork of routes and a lot of ingenuity. And while Putin’s fleet maintains its blockade, the United Nations and Turkey have been working for weeks to try to secure a diplomatic agreement to reopen the Black Sea ports and let the food go.

But just as sinister as Putin’s stranglehold on Ukraine’s grain is are the less-noticed bans on the export of Russian fertilizers. Russia is the world’s largest exporter of fertilizer, but starting in November last year Russia began to restrict some of its supply to global markets, contributing to a near tripling of fertilizer prices over the past year. With higher fertilizer prices, farmers can only afford to buy less fertilizer, meaning that they plant less, meaning smaller harvests and smaller future incomes. Farmers in Africa especially will be forced to cut back on fertilizer at the worst possible time, leading to a predicted shortfall in their harvests of 20 percent, worth some $11 billion.

Now, Putin will tell you that Western sanctions are to blame even though we purposefully created carveouts for Russian fertilizer and food. But the truth never deters Putin from espousing its opposite. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn once put it in his Nobel Prize speech, “Anyone who has proclaimed violence as his method must inexorably choose falsehood as his principle.”

Today, faced with what may be the most alarming global food crisis of our lifetimes, the United States and our allies choose a different principle. While Putin bombs grain silos and seizes produce from hardworking farmers, we are working to bring Ukrainian grains and oils to market. The Ukrainian minister of agriculture and I will have more to say on this tomorrow. But we know that these efforts will not be enough to avert a catastrophe. To do that, we must battle together on three fronts: providing immediate humanitarian aid to the severely hungry and malnourished; providing sustained investment in global agriculture that will help farmers boost their harvests; and undertaking concerted diplomacy so that we mobilize more resources from donors, avoid export restrictions that can exacerbate the crisis, and lessen the burden on poor countries. Aid, investment, diplomacy –
three areas where the United States is leading but where others must urgently step up.

Let’s start with the humanitarian aid that the United States is providing to those in the most dire conditions. The Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust is an emergency reserve shared by USAID and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is designed to be used when extraordinary food needs arise in the world. After Putin began his war, for the first time ever we drew down this trust fund entirely – all $282 million of it – to purchase American food aid and to send that food aid to countries facing the most severe food insecurity, including many in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. At the G-7, President Biden and our allies announced contributions of more than $4.5 billion to address global food security, with more than half of those commitments coming from the United States.

Today I am announcing here a surge of nearly $1.2 billion in funding that will be dispatched to meet the immediate needs faced by the people of Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. This is on top of the more than $507 million we’ve already given to the Horn response. Later this week, I’ll be traveling to the region to see up close how we can better help those weathering this historic crisis. Some of this assistance is going to take the form of food aid – staples like sorghum and split peas and enriched cooking oil that can help sustain those who lack access to food.

But as the global community has long realized, hunger cannot be fought with food alone. Even in very difficult situations, markets that sell food still function. Immediate cash assistance can be faster and more effective at staving off hunger, while also boosting local economies that need all the support that they can get. Some countries already have social safety nets in place that can quickly send money to people’s mobile phones. Here too we are supporting efforts to quickly get cash into people’s hands.

We also know that in severe food crises, more people die from disease than hunger. They become so weak from a lack of food that their immune systems can’t fight off disease like pneumonia, diarrhea, cholera, measles. So as part of our assistance, mobile health and nutrition teams will rapidly expand access to vaccines and treat the severely ill. And they’ll also provide clean water and sanitation kits to stop deadly waterborne diseases that are more likely to spread when sources of fresh water dry up – as in droughts like the ones these countries and these communities are confronting.

We also know that when food is scarce, women and girls are going to be hit the hardest. They will be the first to go hungry, and often the last able to access assistance. Many are at risk for sexual violence as they search for food and water for their families. Many already have been subjected to such violence. That’s why our assistance also includes child protection and family
reunification services, as well as training for health care workers and counseling and medical support to survivors of sexual violence.

But perhaps the most immediate lifesaving humanitarian aid we can provide is assistance to revive severely malnourished children. In my hand and in all of your seats today is something called a MUAC band, which stands for middle upper arm circumference. When a child is malnourished and they appear ill, we measure the severity of their condition by placing this band around their arm. At a certain point, the range marked in red, we know that the child is severely malnourished. Their arm, in fact, becomes so reedy and thin that it measures just 11.5 centimeters in circumference. This is the size of the face on a man’s wristwatch.

As Cathy mentioned, visiting a clinic that treats severely malnourished children, is an experience that stays with you. As Will mentioned, one can barely hold it together. It is to see children on the edge of death. Many lie still, barely breathing, too weak even to eat or to drink. In some beds, the children have already succumbed, their bodies covered only in shrouds. Voices in these places rarely rise above a whisper. The children are just not strong enough, and the parents struggle to overcome their horror and grief. It is to visit a nursery filled with silent screams.

But, as others have mentioned, we do have a solution so that these children might avoid ever having to enter such a clinic. The solution is a packet of highly enriched paste that can reverse child wasting within weeks. With three packets of so-called Ready to Use Therapeutic Food, or RUTF, a day for roughly six weeks, the vast majority of severely malnourished children – some 90 percent – are able to recover, as opposed to the some 90 percent who now perish.

Despite the power of this incredible tool in the fight against child wasting, it is drastically underutilized. Most parents who are able to bring their children to clinics to seek treatment are met with a lack of supply.

Today, together, we are addressing that. The United States will provide $200 million to UNICEF to maximize the procurement of RUTFs and distribute them to the areas that most need them, including countries in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel.

With this commitment, we will help get this lifesaving care into the mouths of an additional 2.4 million children, the largest leap in coverage on record, and while this is the most significant commitment that has ever been made to treat severely malnourished children, there is still more that can be done and there are others who can chip in to help.
Today, I am pleased to share that several private partners – the Eleanor Crook Foundation, our co-hosts, the CRI Foundation, the ELMA Relief Foundation, and the philanthropist Sir Chris Hohn are joining us today to contribute an additional $50 million toward this effort. (Applause.)

Now, given the gap between global need and public sector resources, we are working tirelessly at USAID to leverage each of the investments that we make in this manner to mobilize more from foundations, high net worth individuals, bilateral donors, partner governments, and other stakeholders.

We, at USAID, know we need to see progress beyond what our own programs can deliver, and when it comes to leveraging our investments we are not done and nor is the Eleanor Crook Foundation.

Between now and September, when the world gathers for the U.N. General Assembly, we, together, working with UNICEF, are going to leverage the shared investment that we are making today to raise an additional $250 million. This is the target we are setting here today. (Applause.)

No child should die from malnutrition when we have the tools to stop it. It’s that simple. But reaching that goal will require others to step up. This is one of the best investments, one of the best bargains that we have in our toolkit, for dealing with hunger and for dealing with the need for more nutrition and for – ultimately, for development.

Those are just some of the vital steps that we’re taking to provide this kind of immediate relief to the severely malnourished. But to prevent not just this catastrophe but those yet to come we have to go beyond emergency assistance and make substantial investments in agricultural productivity, and this is the second front in our response.

This is a hard-won insight. For decades, the world turned to humanitarian aid as its main weapon in the fight against hunger. As such, aid went from constituting a relatively marginal share of total development assistance – less than 1 percent of total foreign aid back in 1970 – to more than 20 percent today. Unfortunately, as global support for lifesaving humanitarian aid, which is so important, but as global support for that increased, investments in long-term agricultural productivity – the kind needed to turn poor countries from food importers to exporters – dried up.

Agricultural development assistance dropped from an average $20 billion in the 1980s each year to less than $5 billion in 2006.
Whoa. That is a major drop, and the problem with this trend is that while humanitarian aid saves lives it doesn’t, generally, leave countries, communities, or farmers better able to weather the next failed harvests.

Because it was clear now during the last global food price spike that the urgent had crowded out the important, President Obama launched an ambitious new food security initiative, Feed the Future. Feed the Future was designed to give countries with real agricultural potential the chance to become agricultural powers, not just to manage the next food emergency but to contribute to preventing it. Each year the United States invests nearly $2 billion toward this aim of strengthening global food security beyond humanitarian assistance. Much of this money goes into investments that are decidedly long-term: research to develop new seeds that will allow farmers to grow nutritious foods even in the midst of the highest temperatures and longest droughts ever faced by modern agriculture; private sector partnerships that create new markets and demand for the crops that small-holder farmers previously sold only locally. All of these measures can add up.

In the 12 countries where Feed the Future is active, we see stronger food systems, we see better nutrition, we see more resilience to shocks, and because agricultural development is the most effective way to raise the incomes of the very poor, some 23 million people have been lifted out of poverty. Countries like Ethiopia, Ghana, and Bangladesh that prioritized investments in agricultural productivity saw accelerated reductions in both poverty and malnutrition, putting them in a better position to deal with today’s crisis. But it turns out also that many of the steps designed to boost agricultural productivity over time can also prove critical right now. Recognizing this, President Biden and our allies in Congress approved $760 million to expand and scale agricultural programs that can help combat the effects of high food, high fuel, and high fertilizer prices today, $90 million of which, with support from Congress, will be spent in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

A key part of this effort will be expanding financing and distribution to get higher-quality seeds – the seeds that can withstand drought, extreme heat, and even floods – into the hands of farmers who currently can’t afford those seeds or just can’t find a way to access them. This year alone we are expanding the coverage of drought-tolerant maize, for example, from 13 million acres in southern Africa to 17 million acres; that is an addition that is the equivalent to all of the farmland in Rwanda. We are also using new technologies to help poor farmers waste less fertilizer. In Ethiopia, we use satellite mapping to help farmers fine-tune their fertilizer application. The result? Fertilizer waste dropped by 40 to 80 percent, while yields grew by as much as 200 percent. And we’re now working to spread this kind of precision agriculture approach throughout the continent, starting with Niger, Ghana, Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia.
We are also working with fertilizer companies to increase distribution in Africa. Today I am pleased to announce that Yara, one of the world’s largest fertilizer companies, has offered to provide $20 million of free fertilizer that USAID will then help distribute, enough to support 100,000 farmers. And we need other fertilizer companies benefiting from high prices to join them. We are also helping tackle the nearly 25 to 30 percent of global food production that is lost or goes to waste, one of the most important steps we can take to both boost available food and lower agricultural emissions. In Nigeria, where 40 percent of the country’s food production is lost, we have partnered, for example, with a local business that installs solar-powered walk-in cold-storage rooms in markets, giving farmers space they can rent to store their produce and prevent spoilage. And in Ghana, we have partnered with Vestergaard, the same company that pioneered some of the first long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets to create airtight grain storage bags that prevent pests and mold from spoiling harvests. Recognizing the significance of the benefits of sustained investment in long-term agricultural productivity, last month President Biden announced that we would expand Feed the Future’s reach to eight additional countries, bringing us to 20 Feed the Future target countries in total.

So here we are. Aid – (scattered applause) – thank you. (Applause.) Aid – thanks to President Biden – aid, this longer-term investment that can pay returns right now, these are critical tools in our fight against global hunger. But they will not succeed without collective action unless countries around the world, especially those that have the means to help, do their part.

Secretary Blinken and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield have been hard at work engaged in concerted diplomacy to rally other governments. In May, at the United Nations, the United States introduced a roadmap for global security which called on U.N. member states to contribute to humanitarian organizations, to keep their food and agricultural markets open, and avoid export bans on food and fertilizer, to increase domestic fertilizer production, to share market data, and to increase investments in long-term agricultural productivity. That was the roadmap. Already more than 100 countries have signed on to this roadmap. But we need additional signatories to join the world at the table. One country in particular stands out right now for its absence – the People’s Republic of China. Even before the war in Ukraine began, Beijing’s trade restrictions on fertilizer and hoarding of grain was inflating prices, while at the same time the government offered little of the transparency into its stocks and production that might have soothed markets.

Signing on to the roadmap, removing export restrictions in its fertilizer exports, and releasing some of its grain reserves, either to the global market or to humanitarian entities like the World Food Programme, would
significantly relieve pressures on food and fertilizer prices and powerfully demonstrate the country’s desire to be a global leader and a friend to the world’s least-developed economies.

In 2017, the last time the Horn of Africa faced a severe drought, the PRC donated $34 million to the World Food Programme’s response. Thus far in 2022, they’ve contributed $3 million to WFP, and that’s for global response. The United States has provided $3.9 billion to WFP so far this fiscal year.

The United States has long been the leader in responding to humanitarian crises, and we are proud of that leadership and incredibly grateful to Congress and to the American people for their compassion and generosity. But the world has always benefited from the generosity of other nations. It was the speedy mobilization of resources by donors that helped avert a famine in 2017.

Unfortunately, today, when the needs are greatest, assistance budgets are either stagnating or they are being cut. And some countries are rewriting the rules on what counts as development spending to shield themselves from criticism as they cut funding. Some countries that stepped up before have provided only 8 percent of what they contributed five years ago to the humanitarian response in the Horn. And with our announcements today, we are covering 86 percent of the World Food Programme’s current funding appeal for the Horn of Africa.

To be clear, many of the countries whose funding to meet food insecurity in Africa has dropped off have generously opened their doors to Ukrainian refugees and supplied direct support to Ukraine in its hour of desperate need, while dealing with the same economic blows and inflationary pressures that we are here at home. No one can question their spirit of sacrifice, to be clear.

But these are extraordinary times, and they do call for extraordinary measures. The generosity marshaled toward the people of Ukraine must also be directed to the less visible victims of Putin’s war, to those bearing the brunt of the cascading effects of his terror.

In the United States, we have twice now worked with Congress to obtain emergency funding, over and above our preexisting approved budgets, to support both Ukrainians and those hit hardest by this global food crisis. We need other countries to look beyond their approved budgets to address the current gaps in assistance, especially those countries who might have more space to do so given the returns that they are receiving from high commodity prices.
Regardless of a country’s ability to make additional financial contributions, it is also critical that all nations stop issuing new export restrictions on food and fertilizer and reverse existing ones on agricultural commodities. Since the invasion of Ukraine began, 24 countries have introduced such bans, restricting roughly 16 percent of all total calories traded in the world. These policies have blown back on the countries that impose them.

When export food bans go into place, local prices in the ban-imposing countries collapse, punishing poor farmers who now earn less from their harvest and have less incentive to plant more. Poverty grows in food-exporting countries and more people go hungry in importing countries. It’s the ultimate lose-lose. Now, in an extremely encouraging recent development, Indonesia has lifted its short-lived export restrictions on palm oil. We encourage other nations to make similar moves, especially since several of the countries instituting such bans have been unwilling to criticize the Russian government’s belligerence. Countries that have sat out this war must not sit out this global food crisis.

And crucially, we must move urgently with other bilateral creditors to provide debt relief for countries on a scale beyond what we’ve seen before. Some 60 percent of low-income countries are facing or already experiencing debt distress. This public finance is wiped away by their responses to the pandemic. If we are going to give these countries the fiscal space they need to respond to mounting challenges and to prevent broader and economic political collapse, we need relevant creditors, including non-Paris Club countries such as China, to provide debt relief and restructuring in support of a program from the IMF.

There is so much at stake. There is a long history of evidence tying rising food prices to global instability. We have already seen protests against high food prices in at least 17 countries, across nearly every continent. Just last week, unrest fueled by an awful mix of corruption and inflation led the president of Sri Lanka to resign and flee. If history is any guide, we know it won’t be the last government to fall.

Yet even though this food crisis is global in scale, there are steps the rest of us can take too. We’ve seen the generosity of diaspora communities, private companies, and individuals. We have seen them marshal billions of dollars in resources in response to past emergencies. Diplomacy can’t just occur in foreign capitals. We have to make the case to every citizen that they have a stake in mitigating this crisis and in saving lives as well. We have to make it easier for everyone to support efforts to tackle this current emergency.

And in that spirit, we have partnered with GoFundMe to launch today – (laughs) – the Global Food Fund, an online donation platform for anyone who is able to contribute to the cause. The money that this fund raises will go directly to nonprofit organizations providing humanitarian relief on the
ground, where hunger and malnutrition are at their worst. It is accepting donations now at gofundme.org. (Laughter.)

So there we have it. Aid, investment, diplomacy. If we don’t urgently pursue action all three fronts, catastrophe surely awaits those least able to confront it. The United States has boldly led, from contributing record amounts to emergency assistance to doubling down on agricultural development investments that will stave off the next food crisis, to using both international and public diplomacy to marshal a truly global response.

Now we need others to do more before a famine strikes, before millions more children find themselves on a knife’s edge. Recall that saying, the animals die first. If the world does not do more, if we do not rally together, we all know what will come next.

Thank you so much. Thank you. (Applause.)

Ms. Welsh: Hello, Administrator Power. Thank you so much. It’s an honor to host you on stage.

Since the war broke out in Ukraine – Russia’s war of aggression – you have visited Poland, Moldova, Malawi, and Zambia. What did you observe on those travels that has informed the announcements you made today on behalf of USAID?

Admin. Power: Thank you so much, Caitlin. Thank you for having us here and hosting this and, as I said earlier, all the work you’re doing.

First of all, I saw the incredible generosity that I mentioned in the speech up close. Unbelievable. Moldova struggling with energy. An energy crisis, really, very high spiraling food, gas, petrol, diesel prices, and yet took the highest per capita number of Ukrainians of all the frontline states, I mean, just, really, with all the vulnerability it was facing.

And then in Poland just every house, it seemed, just opening up its doors, people just, you know, driving – we’ve heard all of this – you know, driving to the train station, just asking, what do you need? How can I help?

And, you know, even though some of that initial wave has receded – wave of solidarity and support and, of course, things become more complicated over time, sustaining that support for Ukrainian families that have come across. And so that was just a very moving feature, of course, of the response.

And I think that, you know, most refugees, like refugees anywhere, of course, want to be able to go home and many are just looking for the conditions to exist, for example, schools to restart or to have some temporary housing or
some means of getting through the winter once we start to, God forbid, face winter conditions.

So you also see, I think, the European Union, you know, shifting more and more of its attention to supporting initiatives inside Ukraine. So that’s that aspect of it.

I think in Zambia and Malawi, I mean, just as others have done, just to humanize it a little bit, you know, when you meet with smallholder farmers and, you know, we met with a group of female small-scale farmers who just incrementally every year were producing much, selling more, you know, working with us and others to get connected to markets, and now they go – and you can just imagine the visual, right – they go in to the stand or the store where they’ve always bought their fertilizer and in one case the fertilizer is three times the cost of what it was a year ago. Generally, about double.

And so for them, it’s just linear. It’s sort of, well, I can only – I don’t have – there’s no margin, right. You know, so I was using my extra profit to, you know, be able to have additional inputs or to be able to plant more but I hadn’t counted on this. So now what?

It’s just the predicament of it all. And, you know, because they didn’t have – they had many problems on February 23rd, the day before Russia’s war, and even had, you know, increased fertilizer prices again because the export bans on fertilizer that I had described and the price of natural gas going up – I mean, a lot of that predated it. But the spike, you know, just since February 24th is something that, you know, they hadn’t anticipated – hadn’t been able to anticipate.

So it’s a question of just – it’s all these, you know, Sophie’s choices almost. You know, do I plant half as much? Well, if I plant half as much then, you know, what kind of income will I obtain? And one of the things – this is maybe a little more detailed than you asked for – but I was very struck that so many of them – and, again, these are people who are just making it out of poverty and able to begin to think about some profit, thinking about, you know, spending that profit on school fees or on uniforms for kids, I mean, really important stuff that is foundational for the next generation. And you know, I said to myself: Well, at least if food prices are up, maybe you’ll profit on that. And they’re like, oh, no, no, no, we signed our contracts with the middlemen before the food prices went up, right? And so these are the kinds of things, of course, we at USAID are thinking how can we blunt the impact of something like that. But it’s the worst of all worlds where what they get is fixed; what they have to pay is increasing, you know, daily/weekly/monthly.
So, you know, this is why what USDA/Secretary Vilsack are doing domestically to try to increase domestic fertilizer production. You know, there’s some evidence wheat prices, you know, may be coming down a little bit as more wheat is brought online. But you know, one of the things that we do at USAID is also just make sure that people have access to market information because every lag there might be, you know, between a change in price somewhere else, or a change in market price and then a change in what happens at the most local of local markets, again, is going to – is going to be eating into just the modest margins that people are living on.

Ms. Welsh: Yeah, certainly. Well, in your own words, you said that Putin is waging a war on the world’s poor, so I think you gave a great example of that from your travels.

I know we don’t have too much time for questions from the audience. We have two excellent questions, one about localization and one about climate change. So I think there’s someone in the audience from Catholic Relief Services to ask a question on localization efforts. Great.

Sara Higgins: Hi. I’m Sara Higgins from Catholic Relief Services.

So –

Ms. Welsh: Great. And we can get – we can get you a mic, Sara. Great. Thank you.

Ms. Higgins: (Comes on mic.) Hi. I’m Sara Higgins from Catholic Relief Services.

Administrator Power, you talked a little bit about the GoFundMe. Can you talk a little – a little bit more about that, and how that will involve local NGOs, and just the global food crisis response and building the capacity of local NGOs?

Admin. Power: Great. I think the precise breakdown among the nonprofits that will benefit, you know, that’s something you’d be able to find on the page. I don’t have that offhand about, you know, which organizations.

We at USAID, of course, are always careful to – in an initiative like that not to put the thumb on the scale, you know, too heavily in one direction and make sure that a number of organizations who can scale quickly – so scale and speed and absorptive capacity in a crisis like this matter, of course, a lot.

I think what we’ve done in Ukraine – and we have here the great Sarah Charles, who is in charge of our humanitarian assistance – the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance at USAID – is we have basically tried to put the call out to local organization, you know, who, you know, I think it’s fair to say our humanitarian effort in the – with the past Putin invasions, you know, weren’t
working so much with compared to, you know, the big actors like World Food Programme, ICRC, UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR. And so what that has entailed is going to our more longstanding development programming experts – who live apart from our humanitarians a little bit, but they do talk – but to see, you know, are there partners that you have worked with that, you know, have been – that have proven their ability to move resources into communities. And so, you know, that’s something that is underway.

In addition, we’ve worked with Mercy Corps to set up a kind of consortium for NGOs that we are hopeful about steering local organizations to so that they can take advantage of I think it’s about a hundred-million-dollar arrangement with Mercy Corps that we hope will be disbursed among local organizations.

And then, of course, the U.N. has its own humanitarian fund, to which local organizations can apply. And so we’re trying to use our leverage as a major donor to that fund to get them to partner in Ukraine with local organizations.

On the food-security side, I think there are – there’s slightly more of a tradition there, although not nearly enough. And so just as in the democracy space, in the global health space where a lot of progress has been made moving toward local partners, I think food security is an area that we are – we are seeking to do more. And that includes bringing more people into USAID who can sit down with those local organizations and help them build capacity to be able to obtain access to grants and contracts.

Ms. Welsh: Great. Thank you.

We do have a question about climate change from Eilish Zembilci, Duke University student. I believe is in person? Great.

Eilish Zembilci: I can belt it out without a microphone.

Ms. Welsh: Great. Go ahead. Thanks.

Ms. Zembilci: Good morning. (Off mic.) Good morning – (comes on mic) – oh, it’s on – and thank you for being here.

My question was about USAID responding to the concurrent crises that you spoke about today, harnessing Feed the Future. And what opportunities might exist to work with the new AIM for Climate Initiative to bring innovation and technology to the nutrition-response space?

Admin. Power: Thank you.
I think the – yeah, I know it feels like the supplemental, the second supplemental, passed a long time ago. Certainly, in the life of people who are hungry, it must feel like a very long time ago. We are still in the process of moving that money out into the field and actually getting – you know, this entails a lot of engagement with Congress about the particular countries and the breakdowns.

So all I can tell you at this point about the synergies is that it is increasingly – first of all, all of USAID is now a climate agency, right, because there’s not one aspect of our program, whether what the Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs is doing or what our climate and environmental specialists are doing or our biodiversity people or our conflict-prevention and stabilization people; I mean, just every aspect – global health, of course; you know, so many new crises anticipated, along the lines of what we as a planet are still going through by virtue of changing climate and so forth.

So the climate agenda really is permeating, you know, not only all bureaus, to speak bureaucratically, but all programmatic decisions, or needs to be. And that’s the direction we’re moving in as an agency.

Very specifically, I think the synergies between our food security and resilience teams and our climate-environment teams, that could not be a more inexorable connection. So I think AIM for Climate, much of the thinking about where those resources can be allocated, you know, is, in a sense, you know, combined thinking.

And so, too, if you look at the Feed the Future, the new target countries, you’ll see for the first time the Notre Dame Climate Index is one of the indicators that was used to choose – you know, this is a lot of competition for countries that would benefit potentially from the additional focus that being a Feed the Future target country brings about.

And that is – we are actually seeing in the selection of those countries and the decision about whether other countries stay as Feed the Future target countries and integration of climate need, along with, again, some of those other questions of is there a will, you know, among political leaders? Is there absorptive capacity? Do we see real potential, you know, for small-scale farmers or for the agricultural sector in general to make a move, you know, in a direction that would allow them ultimately to become exporters or for small-scale farmers to become more commercial farmers?

So in terms of how the actual food-security supplemental resources are allocated and whether there’s overlapped with the preexisting planning we’d been doing about AIM for Climate, I don’t yet have that programmatic information. But at a structural level, I mean, all of this decision-making is becoming integrated at USAID. And that’s long overdue, of course.
Ms. Welsh: Thank you, Administrator Power.

One final question and would welcome some final remarks on your behalf. But online we’ve received a number of questions about what our audience can do to support these efforts; questions from students here in Washington. We have a question from someone in Benin asking what – again, what our audience can do to support you in the comprehensive efforts you’ve announced today.

Admin. Power: Well, thank you.

You know, I think, because there has been so much pain over such a period of time with COVID – I mean, economic pain, the devastation of the health effects and all of the losses that have occurred here in the U.S., all around the world – and because we are sadly getting used to reading about heat waves and wildfires and droughts, I think the kind of perfect-storm moment that we are in when it comes to this food crisis has not struck everyone at the same time or has not yet – I mean, that’s one of the reasons that we came here today and really wanted to sort of jump up and down. Even though I didn’t actually jump up and down, this is an effort to jump up and down.

And I think that’s what you saw Congress do with particularly the second supplemental, I mean, to make an additional $4.3 billion available in humanitarian assistance, to make $760 million available on humanitarian assistance, to make $760 million available in food security assistance. But even as they did that, I think you’d probably find, you know, public awareness of campuses, in churches, in mosques, in synagogues, in schools, you know, not yet what, for example, it might have been, you know, back in the days of the Ethiopian famine, and certainly not commensurate to awareness about what Putin is doing in Ukraine. So I really think there is a public awareness dimension to this.

There will be more and more – for those of you who are students, especially – there will be more and more people, I think, traveling – whether as humanitarians, or as members of Congress, or as members of our administration, or even – you know, not even – but, you know, Will just being back as a good example of somebody who could come, who could speak, who could show photos. You know, Cathy and I, you know, both will be doing much more travel of that nature. It’s our job to bring media with us if we can, wherever we go, because, you know, these aren’t countries that traditionally get enough coverage. You might have one reporter for – you know, these days. I mean, it was better, you know, in the ’90s, frankly, when there were more foreign bureaus, and so forth. But that presence by even large media organizations has really skinny-ed down.
But you know, even with stringers and freelancers to lift up the human stories, not only in the way that Will did so powerfully here today – and I’m traveling to the Horn later this week and hope to do the same – but also the stories of impact. You know, that’s why the RUTF story is – and campaign, let’s call it, you know, is so important. And, you know, I don’t have a long background in this area. And it was when I first heard from Will in a meeting not long after I got into the job, where he described the power of this simple pack of food, and how inexpensive it was, and how many lives you could save. And it was just – we’re just on a Zoom. And I’m, like, hey, you know, why aren’t we doing more of that? And that was before the food crisis took hold. So that’s just an example of one person telling a story, both of need and of remedy, that impacted one individual that now has these ripple effects.

And these are the kinds of things that you can do, especially if we make it easier for you to be able to raise, you know, even modest sums of money if we – if we can all chip in, again, are going to account for a lot of lives saved. So I think I would not underrate the power of that awareness raising. And then, of course, it is – you know, unlike conflict, per se, where you get all the money in the world and if Putin doesn’t want to stop bombing civilians, you know, money along, you know, can’t get you the outcome you seek. In the area of averting a food catastrophe, resources really, really matter. I mean, they are, just on their own, that lifesaving. And so I think that can be motivation for us, but I also think we, again, need to provide pathways for you all to contribute.

That’s what we started to do today, and I know it’s something the frontline organizations like UNICEF do every day. They’re incredibly effective at telling the human story. And people just want to know in tough economic times that the scarce resources that they have, that they’re prepared to part with for the sake of, you know, vulnerable people, that they’re going to be put to good use. And so we need to tell those stories more effectively than sometimes we do.

Ms. Welsh: Thank you so much, Administrator Power. It’s an honor to host you.


Ms. Welsh: Thank you so much. I’d like to – thanks. I’d like to thank also the Eleanor Crook Foundation for partnering with us on today’s event, to USAID for your support, UNICEF, the lead U.N. agency on wasting responsible for all progress on this issue in the last 20 years. All CSIS teams, thank you for your support, and for our audience for joining us. This concludes our event. Thank you. (Applause.)