

From USAID Administrator Power

How USAID Is Responding to the Crisis in the Middle East

Dear Colleagues,

The crisis in the Middle East—the horrific terror attacks in Israel and war between Israel and Hamas, the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and the violence and instability that many countries in the region and the West Bank are now experiencing—is affecting USAID staff in profound ways. Some of our colleagues are mourning the devastating loss of family members and friends. Some are praying for the safe evacuation of loved ones who are trapped in Gaza. Some have had to uproot their lives to keep themselves and their families safe. Some now carry with them the fear of being targeted for what they look like, for what they believe, or for the fact that they work for the U.S. government (USG).

As we confront these immensely challenging circumstances, I want to recognize how intensively your USAID colleagues in the region and Washington are working to address the crisis.

For reasons that I know all of us who work in government can understand, the vast majority of our efforts are happening behind the scenes and very often without much attention. But even though we are limited in the details of what we can share Agency-wide, it is important for all of you to know about the truly indefatigable work that your colleagues are doing to address this crisis as part of the broader USG response.

To be clear: given the scale of need and sheer extent of the human suffering in Gaza and Israel, as well as the potential for expanded conflict, none of us is satisfied with where we are. Nor are we looking to conflate inputs—including efforts described below—with the actual outcomes we seek as a leading humanitarian agency and in support of President Biden's strong commitment to addressing this humanitarian emergency.

But in the past few weeks, I have seen the best of USAID: colleagues working at all hours, with all the tools available to them, to solve incredibly complex problems and make a difference for people in need.

On October 7, USAID's **Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance** immediately engaged partners on the ground for urgent response needs. Following engagement with the interagency and our international partners, we stood up the Administrator's Crisis Action Team (ACAT) to coordinate within USAID, and BHA activated a Response Management Team (RMT) and Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to coordinate U.S. relief efforts and strengthen the humanitarian system for the West Bank and Gaza. The DART is deployed to both Israel and Egypt, and is working with Israeli and Egyptian authorities and trusted partner organizations to help meet urgent needs for medical commodities, shelter, access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and food. As of the end of the day on October 28, some 84 trucks with assistance have made it into Gaza. As we all know and as President Biden has made clear, the pace of these deliveries is far too slow and so much more is needed—our objective is 100 trucks a day, and the current rate is woefully short of that. We have to close this major gap, and BHA leadership, the DART, and RMT are truly working around the clock to clear diplomatic and operational obstacles, present solutions to all kinds

of emerging problems, provide leadership on humanitarian advocacy, and significantly scale up this response to where it needs to be.

Both on the ground and in the highest-level discussions, the USG's strong advocacy on issues like water restoration, fuel and electricity, deconfliction, protection of civilians, and humanitarian access are being informed and driven by USAID's teams. Our leadership is also a core part of Special Envoy David Satterfield's team—a senior BHA official serves as one of his Deputies—that has been working around the clock to secure sustained and unhindered humanitarian access and restoration of essential services to Gaza. Our teams are also closely connected with the Israeli government on Israel's humanitarian needs, and while the government has not sought our assistance in this domain, we remain prepared to step up at any time as needed.

Our **USAID/West Bank and Gaza (WBG) Mission** is coordinating U.S. assistance efforts and playing a central role in the U.S. response. In particular, our team on the ground is prioritizing efforts to protect civilians and provide operational and technical solutions to bring essential services online in Gaza. Mission leadership and staff are working directly with Special Envoy Satterfield and USAID's DART to inform and elevate advocacy points and address bottlenecks and inefficiencies in moving humanitarian assistance, including through constant engagement with the UN and Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories.

Since the first days of the conflict, the Mission has also been a core part of the broader USG effort to help secure the wellbeing and eventual safe passage of USG local staff, their families, and international staff working for non-governmental organizations in Gaza, including USAID implementing partners. This advocacy has been relentless—and it is ongoing. In parallel, the Mission team has begun planning program pivots to respond to the significant socio-economic impacts of the crisis in Gaza and the West Bank, and is supporting USAID implementing partners to navigate the many new operational challenges they now face. Moreover, the Mission is advising the humanitarian response, through our staff's deep sectoral knowledge and contacts with Palestinian ministries engaged in technical work, and coordinating at various levels across the donor and partner community on joint advocacy, program priorities, and ways to minimize escalating instability in the West Bank.

Egypt is of course a critical diplomatic hub and staging ground for the humanitarian response, and the **USAID/Egypt** team has been working tirelessly to facilitate the initial humanitarian access into Gaza, expedite a humanitarian assistance distribution platform in el Arish, and advocate for safe passage of individuals who are able to be evacuated from Gaza. Mission leadership, staff, and members of USAID's DART based in Cairo are meeting constantly with the Government of Egypt, Egyptian Red Crescent, UN, other donors, and partners to clear the path for humanitarian access to North Sinai, improve humanitarian coordination and information sharing, and increase the flow of humanitarian supplies at the border crossing at Rafah.

In Lebanon, clashes between Israel and Hezbollah have already claimed lives and displaced communities, and the risks of escalation are deeply concerning. Our **USAID/Lebanon** team is pivoting programming to address these challenges—for example, facilitating support for over 20,000 newly internally displaced persons, and

working with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to support learning for thousands of students affected by school closures in the south. The Mission is also working with key medical centers on ways to sustain crucial health services in the event of a wider conflict. In Jordan, which is home to many Palestinian refugees and where almost everyone in the country has a connection to the West Bank and Gaza, including some 70 percent of our Mission staff who are of Palestinian descent, **USAID/Jordan** is reviewing how programs could be re-aligned to address the economic impact of the crisis.

At the center of much of this work is our **Middle East Bureau**. ME is working along eight distinct lines of effort to address both immediate and longer-term challenges, with numerous staff dedicated solely to this crisis. They are engaging donors, representing USAID in daily interagency coordination meetings, pivoting existing programs and identifying the funding gaps created by the rapidly evolving needs, supporting Washington-facing outreach and Hill engagement, mobilizing TDY support for affected Missions, and facilitating the return of staff on Authorized and Ordered Departures in close collaboration with the **Bureau for Management** and **Office of Human Capital and Talent Management**. And given the critical importance of getting assistance to people in Gaza while avoiding diversion or misuse of commodities, ME is also working with USAID/WBG, the Office of Inspector General, and our General Counsel on how to further enhance our robust risk mitigation measures for assistance delivery.

Every decision we are making is taken with the aim of getting life-saving assistance to those in Gaza who need it most while supporting our regional partners and elevating the protection of civilians, as well as the humanitarians who are also in harm's way as they execute this response. No matter what you work on or what Bureau you are in, you probably came to USAID because you wanted to make a difference in the world—and the steadfast advocacy from all our teams is making a difference every day, elevating the humanitarian imperative in crucial decisions.

While this overview captures only some aspects of the lifesaving work our colleagues are doing, I hope it will give those of you not working on the response a sense of how dedicated our people have been since the very beginning of this crisis. From the **Bureau for Planning, Learning, and Resource Management** canvassing donor partners to provide more humanitarian support, to the **Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs** working overtime to keep our Congressional colleagues informed about how we're responding and the additional humanitarian funding the President is seeking, we are tapping the resources and expertise of this Agency in countless ways not represented in the overview above. There are also [opportunities to join](#) the Israel-Gaza Conflict Task Force for those interested in playing a role. And while we are taking this chance to lift up all that your USAID co-workers are doing, it should go without saying that the effort and commitment of our colleagues at the White House, NSC, State Department, Defense Department, and other USG agencies is just as remarkable and dedicated.

The Agency's leadership and our Front Office team have been building off of this tremendous effort. In the daily ACAT meetings I am chairing, representatives from every part of this response bring ideas, perspectives, and requests from the field for discussion and urgent action, reminding us every day the breadth of talent and experience we have at USAID. In support of President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and Ambassador Satterfield's diplomacy, my team and I are also engaging government, Congressional, multilateral, and

humanitarian leaders to raise key asks, coordinate around the needs that your USAID colleagues are elevating every hour, and push for providing additional resources to our humanitarian efforts. While progress has been halting and we must achieve so much more in light of the catastrophic situation, these calls and meetings have helped build consensus around the need for specific humanitarian actions, and have included UN officials, our development and humanitarian partners in Gaza, many members of Congress who want to support the U.S. response, and counterparts from Australia, Canada, Denmark, the EU, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Through very close collaboration with the White House, NSC, and State Department, our Agency leadership is able to personally bring USAID's comparative advantages to the table in these and other key discussions, such as daily NSC-led sessions focused solely on troubleshooting humanitarian issues. The Deputy Administrators, Counselor, and I are also continuing to meet with USAID staff at our Missions and DC-based colleagues, including leaders and staff from directly-impacted communities, to hear perspectives on USAID's work.

This work remains focused on our core objectives. The flow of assistance must increase dramatically, and food, water, medical care, fuel, and other essential services must reach civilians in truly dire need. Israel, Hamas, and all the parties to this conflict must respect international humanitarian law and protect civilian lives in Gaza and throughout the region. As Secretary Blinken said earlier this week, "There is no hierarchy when it comes to protecting civilian lives. A civilian is a civilian is a civilian, no matter his or her nationality, ethnicity, age, gender, faith." We must get civilians out of harm's way and be able to undertake more fulsome humanitarian operations, by helping to strengthen humanitarian deconfliction, humanitarian pauses, and other opportunities to prevent escalation that puts civilians and the region at even greater risk.

The challenges facing your USAID colleagues working towards these and other goals are vast. Still, for those of you who aren't seeing up-close the exemplary public servants of USAID responding to this crisis, I hope this note will at least help reveal some small part of what our workforce is doing—and will continue to do—to support Palestinians, Israelis, and the region at large.

—Administrator Samantha Power

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