

## Two Letters from USAID family to NYTimes in today's edition, 8 Feb 2025

### To the Editor:

Re “[Trump Calls Directly for Closure of U.S.A.I.D.](#)” (live updates, [nytimes.com](#), Feb. 7) and “[Plan Slashes About 10,000 From Staff of Aid Agency](#)” (news article, Feb. 7):

Like so many, I awoke on Monday to this post on X from Elon Musk: “We spent the entire weekend feeding USAID into the woodchipper. Could gone to some great parties. Did that instead.”

Abominable grammar, but his point is clear. He is gleefully destroying the lives of millions of the world’s poorest, and denigrating the service of thousands of highly educated, loyal and dedicated workers. It is nauseating — if not maniacally unbalanced.

What kind of person gloats as he destroys an organization that has helped save millions of people from AIDS, Ebola and other infectious diseases? That responds to disasters with lifesaving assistance? That trains health care workers and election workers and government leaders? That shares our democratic values? An agency whose symbol of a handshake appeared on millions of bags of food commodities shared in times of famine, earning America gratitude and admiration?

As a U.S.A.I.D. spouse and a retired State Department Foreign Service officer, I witnessed firsthand the gratitude that U.S.A.I.D. recipients felt, in Nicaragua, Guatemala and particularly Uganda, where my husband, Paul D. Cohn, helped develop the first successful AIDS program in Africa, saving thousands of lives. One winter, working in Washington, he helped save the people of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from freezing when the Russian-built central heating system ran out of coal. He was just one of many who did what had to be done.

Those being discharged in the most belittling manner are people who work in the most challenging circumstances, often at great risk to themselves. In the years that I served, I lost many whom I considered friends: Two were murdered; one was kidnapped by Al Qaeda and held captive for four years before dying in an American airstrike; one died of pneumonia; one was killed in a motorcycle accident; one child was electrocuted; one spouse died of malaria, and others, including my husband, were infected but survived. Others were killed in embassy bombings or plane crashes.

People who demonstrate the best of American values are being discharged by an unrestrained, cruel billionaire calling them criminals, at the behest of our president. Do they think we won’t notice?

Irene Posner Cohn  
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### To the Editor:

Elon Musk has been leading the Trump administration’s attack on the United States Agency for International Development. U.S.A.I.D. was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy after Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act. It is funded by Congress and works under the laws and regulations of the United States. Importantly, it provides the soft power to support the foreign policy interests of America.

I was a commissioned Foreign Service officer with U.S.A.I.D. from 1986 to 2010, working on health programs in six countries, and have been associated with U.S.A.I.D. for 37 years. During that time, I have helped U.S.A.I.D. control polio and malaria, and reduce H.I.V./AIDS, infant, childhood and maternal mortality and other health initiatives that improved and still improve world health — including American health. I was not a member of “a criminal organization,” as claimed by Elon Musk.

Mr. Musk has a personal vendetta against U.S.A.I.D. He rightly claims that U.S.A.I.D. helped overthrow the apartheid government of his native South Africa. Now, he is extracting his revenge, enabled by President Trump. Unfortunately, they are destroying an incredibly important institution of America’s foreign policy.

Is this what America voted for?

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