

UAA Statement in support of our overseas local staff

February 15, 2025

Throughout our careers and as American foreign service officers, we have benefited greatly working with our staff who are citizens of the country where we are posted. The staff are our colleagues and team members. They serve at all levels of a USAID mission overseas, from warehouse maintenance to technical advisors in economics, health, and agriculture. They are often our interlocutors with counterparts, especially in remote communities. They often provide advice to senior Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, on sensitive matters such as human rights, trafficking, and corruption. They are frequently targeted by their own law enforcement and intelligence agencies because they work for the U.S. Government.

After their service to USAID, our local staff often move on to serve in high level positions in their governments, including President of the supreme court, member of cabinet, and elected members of parliament. Our local staff often have graduate level education and are professors at distinguished universities. Their detailed knowledge of rural communities, ethnic and tribal dynamics, and cultural behavior are critical to U.S. foreign policy.

UAA has learned that because of recent decisions by the Secretary of State, local staff are uncertain of their employment status and at risk of being dismissed without cause. We understand that in some missions local staff have already been dismissed. This is unconscionable and short-sighted. The U.S. government will lose some of the top talent available in a country, not just the technical knowledge to make sensitive policy decisions, but also the trust and confidence that has been carefully and patiently built over decades.

In an astounding move that can only be characterized as purposefully inhumane, local staff have received little to no advance notice. The staff are hired keeping in mind and adhering to complex local labor laws, including strict due process for dismissal. It appears these laws have been ignored, possibly in violation of laws and policies of the host countries. Any question, as benign as asking for additional information, is perceived as grounds for immediate dismissal, leading to an atmosphere of fear and confusion. Given the economic conditions in most of the countries where USAID has a presence, there are few if any options for employment. Many of the local staff are not only the sole income earner for their family, but they also carry the burden for an extended family with no other source of meaningful income.

We urge the Secretary not to endanger the lives of those who have served America honorably, immediately pause this mass dismissal, follow the local labor laws, and provide career transition options for staff.