

**Testimony Submitted by Sean Callahan,
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to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Africa, Global Health, Global Human
Rights, and International Organizations Subcommittee**

**Hearing on “East Africa’s Quiet Famine”
March 28, 2017**

Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Bass, on January 25, 2017, the Famine Early Warning Network (FEWSNET) issued a press release highlighting the impending emergency food situations in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen, warning that famine was possible in all four countries. The United Nations declares a famine only when 1) at least 20 per cent of households in an area face extreme food shortages with a limited ability to cope, 2) acute malnutrition rates exceed 30 per cent, and 3) the death rate exceeds two persons per day per 10,000 persons. By the time a famine has been declared, it is too late for many. On February 20th, famine was declared in Unity State of South Sudan.

As the international humanitarian and development agency of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services has operations in three of the countries listed in the FEWSNET press release – South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria. We are actively responding to needs on the ground in these countries and are working to further scale up our response. The magnitude of the challenge these countries collectively represent require a substantial and immediate response by the United States and the international community. We urge Congress and the Administration to channel resources to the region to ensure emergency needs are met and the instability they represent does not spread.

We must recognize though, that conflict is the cause of, or has exacerbated, the food insecurity in each of these countries. While there are food security and other development challenges in the countries and regions surrounding these conflict zones, those challenges are orders of magnitude less severe. Conflict, poor governance and gross corruption these countries in crisis add burdens to neighboring countries – for instance, 2.7 million people from South Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria are presently living as refugees in neighboring countries. These crises also create ungoverned spaces that offer armed actors hostile to U.S. interests safe havens, which breed conditions for further instability in the region. To address the underlying causes of these food security emergencies, efforts to build peace and promote good governance in these countries must also be prioritized.

South Sudan

For the last three years, South Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war between its two largest ethnic groups, and tens of thousands have died in violent clashes between government and rebel forces. This violence has interfered with normal food production in the country, as farmers have abandoned their fields and fled to avoid becoming victims of violence. An estimated 1.9 million are Internally Displaced People (IDPs), and at least 1.6 million people have been forced to flee to other countries as refugees and asylum seekers, including 813,000 to neighboring Uganda.

The instability caused by the civil war has resulted in severe food shortages and hyperinflation of 800%. Staple food prices have recently seen spikes of more than 10 times five-year averages in several key

markets, making food difficult to purchase when it is available. Famine was declared on February 20th in two counties in Unity State (Leer and Mayendit), with an elevated likelihood that famine will occur in two additional counties. Affecting approximately 100,000 people, the famine has forced many to scrounge for any form of sustenance, like water lilies. It is estimated that over one million children under age five are acutely malnourished and last month 12,558 children were treated for severe acute malnutrition. In fact, seven out of the country's ten states have reached the emergency threshold of 15 percent global acute malnutrition. While food assistance is important, livelihood and development support is critical to prevent further household asset depletion and reduce negative coping mechanisms. Overall, an estimated 4.9 million people (42% of the population) are severely food insecure, and this number is expected to increase to 5.5 million by July.

In addition to food insecurity and malnutrition, the spread of disease is also of concern as people are unable to access basic health services and live in makeshift conditions as they flee violence. Health actors are reporting increased cases of cholera and measles. As of March 3rd, there were a total of 5,300 suspected cholera cases, including 122 deaths, since the initial case was identified last summer. Additionally, more than 1.3 million malaria cases have been reported across South Sudan since the beginning of 2016, an increase of 350,000 reported cases during the same period in 2015. Malaria continues to be the main cause of morbidity and mortality of children under five in South Sudan.

Catholic Relief Services implements two United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded programs; the Resilience Food Security Program, funded through the Office of Food for Peace (FFP), and the Livelihoods Recovery and Resilience Program, funded jointly by FFP and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). Together, these programs reach 800,000 beneficiaries in parts of Lake State and throughout Jonglei State – the largest and most populous State in South Sudan. They provide an integrated programming approach that includes food security, water and sanitation, livelihoods, and nutrition programming, that together help communities be more resilient to the shocks their country is experiencing. A key component of the Jonglei Food Security Program is the distribution of U.S. food aid to needy families in exchange for work on community projects like road habilitation and irrigation channels. Overall, this assistance is helping to protect people from the worst effects of the crises. Catholic Relief Services has also partnered with the World Food Program (WFP) to deliver emergency food supplies to 143,000 people in remote parts of Jonglei State, at times using WFP's airlift capacity to parachute food supplies into otherwise inaccessible areas. Catholic Relief Services is also using our own private funding to implement an anti-cholera program in Lake State, reaching 16,000 individuals with hygiene promotion, borehole rehabilitation, and latrine construction. We are also using funding from Caritas Austria to provide emergency food assistance to 10,000 people in Upper Nile State.

Somalia

In 2011, Somalia experienced famine that claimed the lives of 260,000 people. Recent years have not been kind. The 2016 Deyr rainy season (October-December) was late and did not benefit most of the country, resulting in significant water availability deficits across the country. While the poor rains in 2016 were largely attributable to the effects of La Nina, many parts of Somalia have experienced drought conditions for two or more years. Prolonged drought conditions have adversely impacted pasture, water supply, livestock, and crops, leading to a large depletion of vegetation cover across the country. Approximately half the population of Somalia, 6.2 million people, need urgent humanitarian assistance. As many as 363,000 children under the age of five are acutely malnourished and 71,000 are at risk of dying. Nutrition support is urgently needed to keep them alive. The Somali government declared a

national disaster due to drought on February 28th, and without assistance, there is a strong likelihood of famine in some of the worst drought-affected areas of the country.

It is estimated that approximately 1.1 million people are internally displaced, with the majority being women and children living in camps in urban centers. High rates of malnutrition are being reported in children at these camps. Our assessments in Bay, Bakool, and Gedo States in the Southwest of Somalia indicate loss of livelihoods, limited access to food and drinking water, and limited access to basic services such as health, education, and sanitation, all of which is driving more people from their rural homes into IDP camps in city centers. The situation is worsened by some 250,000 Somali refugees returning from Yemen as they flee the violence and hunger in that country. The United Nations has appealed to the international community for \$864 million, but thus far only 31 percent of this funding has been secured.

Catholic Relief Services' current programming in Somalia is concentrated in the regions South and West of Somalia's capital Mogadishu, which has traditionally been the breadbasket of the country. Catholic Relief Services implements three USAID funded projects, and is permitted to operate in Somalia under the USAID's humanitarian license granted by the Office of Foreign Asset Control. The first project, Program for Enhanced Resilience in Somalia (PROGRESS), jointly funded by USAID/FFP, OFDA and the U.S. Mission in Somalia, is designed to increase household resilience to recurrent shocks. The project works to improve smallholder farmers' production and marketing skills like introducing new farming techniques that are more water conscious, provides vouchers to needy families to buy necessary food items in local markets, organizes saving and internal lending groups, builds water access points, and works with communities to develop participatory disaster risk assessments and corresponding plans to mitigate those risks. The OFDA funded Humanitarian Assistance for Conflict and Drought-Affected IDPs and Host Populations provides support to IDPs and host communities to provide basic nutrition, health and protection services, ultimately making it easier for host communities to care for IDPs. The third project is a small pilot project which is testing electronic cash transfer modalities. Catholic Relief Services Somalia programs in FY16 reached 289,000 direct beneficiaries and 646,000 indirect beneficiaries. These ongoing programs provide Catholic Relief Services the capacity to quickly scale up emergency response, and Catholic Relief Services recently dedicated use of \$300,000 in private funds in this way to provide additional assistance to 2100 households.

Nigeria

For the last seven years Boko Haram has staged attacks in northeast Nigeria killing more than 13,000 people. Boko Haram has planted bombs in public places, abducted women and girls, forcefully conscripted young men and boys, destroyed villages and farmland, seized livestock, and forced markets and farms to shut down amid the violence. In some areas, people have been unable to plant or harvest for three years. As a result, an estimated 7.1 million people are experiencing severe hunger and more than 515,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

At least 1.76 million people are internally-displaced in Nigeria by the violence, with the vast majority living with host families, and the remainder in camps, makeshift shelters and unfinished buildings. Because the crises in northeast Nigeria has spread to neighboring countries in the Lake Chad basin, including Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, there are also approximately 630,000 IDPs across these countries. Families who have fled lack essential supplies like soap, cooking sets and clothes, while sanitation and hygiene conditions are dire. The situation is compounded by overcrowding and limited access to health facilities. Recent reports indicate increased sexual and gender-based violence, particularly among young girls and women. The violence has also forced over 200,000 Nigerians to flee to neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and

Niger. On March 2, the governments of Cameroon and Nigeria signed a tripartite agreement with United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) requesting the voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees living in Cameroon.

Catholic Relief Services is implementing a USAID/FFP program in Borno and Yobe Provinces that provides over 10,000 households with monthly e-vouchers to purchase food and non-food items, and another OFDA program in Borno province provides shelter, water infrastructure rehabilitation and hygiene promotion activities for over 14,000 households. Under an existing USAID food security project, Catholic Relief Services is expanding agriculture and livelihood programming to southern Borno and Adamawa states. In addition to USAID resources, Catholic Relief Services has also received funding from Latter Day Saints Charities and Caritas Germany for water and sanitation work.

Other Challenges of Note

While the focus of this hearing is rightfully on the ongoing food emergencies in South Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria, we must bear in mind other current and likely situations that require a U.S. and international response. For instance, close to 2.7 million refugees have fled to countries neighboring these conflict zones. As noted earlier, Uganda alone is hosting 813,000 South Sudanese refugees, with 2,000 new arrivals daily. Uganda has recently surpassed Ethiopia as the country hosting the most refugees in Africa (note, Ethiopia is hosting around 811,000 refugees, with about 350,000 from South Sudan and 250,000 from Somalia). Governments like that of Uganda are providing what services they can, but they do not have the resources themselves to provide needed food, water and other supplies to maintain these refugee populations. They rely on United Nations bodies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and aid implementers like Catholic Relief Services to meet the basic needs of the refugee populations.

The challenge to serve refugee populations is also great for countries like Kenya, which is suffering from the same drought affecting Somalia. There, approximately 3 million people need emergency food assistance. While the Government of Kenya has pledged \$99 million of its own resources to respond, this is less than half of the projected \$208 million required and has led the Kenyan government to issue an appeal to the international community to cover the balance. These domestic challenges come on the heels of last year's announced closure of the Dadaab refugee camp that has accommodated around 300,000 Somali refugees for several years. Recent reports indicate Somali refugees are beginning to move into Kenya again, underscoring the need to support Kenya in both its drought response and the assistance being provided Somali refugees in the country.

Another concern we must keep in mind is the possibility of another El Nino event. Last year, El Nino caused what was described as the worst drought in a generation in Ethiopia and across many Southern African in countries like Madagascar, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. In Ethiopia alone, over 10 million people required emergency food assistance, and Catholic Relief Services played a significant role in drought response there and in other impacted countries thanks to foresight of USAID programs (see below for additional discussion of this). Some forecast models indicate an increasing chance of another El Nino developing by the end of the year. Food and monetary reserves in many of these El Nino impacted countries have been exhausted, and if another El Nino occurs later this year the strain on resources would likely be unprecedented.

Humanitarian Response Must Cover Multiple Needs

While it is the picture of starving children that draws media attention to the unfolding emergencies, as aid implementers we know hunger is only one of the challenges facing people in these crises. Our assistance must provide more than just food to the people we are aiding. For instance, people who have fled their homes in search of food, or security, left most of the of their limited possessions behind. In their desperation, they have made long treks across inhospitable land, usually by foot. When they arrive to displacement camps, or urban centers, they have little more than the clothes on their backs. For these people, meeting basic needs in addition to food and water includes shelter, clothing, basic hygiene products, cooking and kitchen wares, water storage canisters, and host of other supplies.

Most often the lack of food is accompanied by a lack of clean drinking water. Driven by extreme thirst, people will drink water they know is contaminated. This leads to a host of water-borne diseases, including cholera, diarrhea, and parasites, all of which require immediate responses. Additionally, efforts supporting and improving sanitation practices – latrine construction and handwashing – are essential to preventing the spread of infectious diseases.

Refugees and IDPs are also easy targets for violence and exploitation. Rape and other gender-based violence are common in displacement camps. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation – put in the horrific position of trading sex for food and water, or being targeted for human trafficking. Providing protection for vulnerable people and safe spaces for children are necessary to deter exploitation of this kind.

In many of these cases as well, we know that people will not be able to return to their homes for a long time. For these conflict-affected families, we must look at more mid-term solutions with alternative livelihoods and a means to provide for themselves.

U.S. Humanitarian Resources Must be Robust and Reliable

The United States leads the international community in responding to crises, likes the ones threatening famine in Africa, as it has historically been the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance. This moral leadership motivates and guides other countries to contribute their fair share. United States funds humanitarian assistance primarily through three main accounts – 1) International Disaster Assistance, 2) P.L. 480, Food for Peace, and 3) Migration and Refugee Assistance.

The International Disaster Assistance account funds USAID/OFDA, which provides funding for non-food items and services to people in emergency need, including IDPs and refugees. These non-food items include things like shelter, water, hygiene kits, protection, livelihood opportunities, livestock support, and the like. OFDA also supports agricultural recovery by funding emergency seed distributions, which is commonly provided to small farmers who would normally save their own seed for replanting, but lose everything when rains and their harvests fail.

Using a combination of resources from International Disaster Assistance and P.L. 480, emergency food assistance is managed by USAID/FFP. Under the auspices of the Emergency Food Security Program, recently authorized in the Global Food Security Act, FFP utilizes International Disaster Assistance funding to finance cooperative agreements for cash and voucher based emergency food assistance, while also drawing on P.L. 480 to finance cooperative agreements to purchase, ship, and distribute U.S. commodities in emergency programs. Implementing partners like Catholic Relief Services work with FFP to determine

the optimal form of food assistance in a given situation, and FFP then uses resources from the corresponding account. In some cases, like in South Sudan, the import of U.S. commodities is the right choice because there is very little food available due to violence induced interruptions in production. In countries like Somalia and Nigeria, voucher and cash based food assistance is a better option because food is still available in functioning markets.

The Migration and Refugee Assistance account funds the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, which provides emergency aid to refugees and IDPs to return home, re-integrate into their communities, or resettle in third countries. Significant amounts from this account are being channeled through international bodies like UNHCR and UNICEF, to provide assistance to the 1.8 million displaced from Nigeria, 1.7 million from South Sudan, and 1.2 million from Somalia.

We appreciate that Congress has been responsive to the great needs being met by these accounts. Many millions of people are alive today because of this generosity. In the FY2017 Continuing Resolution, overall funding for the International Disaster Assistance and Migration and Refugee Assistance accounts saw increases that put funding at \$3.41 billion and \$3.35 billion, respectively. Note, while these accounts are important contributors to the famine response in Africa, they are also heavily relied on to assist Syrian war refugees. Also, in the FY2016 Omnibus the P.L 480 account was funded at \$1.716 billion, which included a one-time \$250 million increase to respond to emergency conditions seen at the time. Given the critical roles that the International Disaster Assistance, P.L. 480, and Migration and Refugee Assistance accounts play, we urge Congress to oppose any reductions in funding to these accounts in FY17 or FY18. In fact, we believe the magnitude of these emergencies require funding way beyond these levels. As such, we ask Congress to consider providing immediate and significant supplemental funding in FY17 to address these famines and famine-like conditions. We know what works and what will save lives, and we know we must act now if we want to avert the worst that these food security crises can bring.

Mechanisms to Quickly Scale Up Response

To its credit, USAID has explored various ways to build capacity to scale up response during food security emergencies. In our own experience, the clearest example of this is the Joint Emergency Operation Program (JEOP) in Ethiopia. The JEOP is a multiyear emergency food aid program funded through P.L. 480. In a typical year, Catholic Relief Services and its partners provide emergency food rations to about 700,000 people. In addition, the program is designed specifically to quickly scale up because it has an established pipeline of food coming into the country, partnerships have been created port authorities that help move food quickly into the country, warehouses to store food are reserved, and a network of on-the-ground relationships with local leaders that facilitate food disbursement activities was created. In 2016, this capacity to scale up was tapped when Ethiopia was struck by a major drought caused by El Nino, resulting in over 10 million people in need of food assistance. Catholic Relief Services' food distributions were quickly ramped up to cover more than 2.9 million people, helping to avert famine even in the depth of Ethiopia's food security crises.

We have also seen USAID use the footprint of Development Food Aid Programs (DFAPs) to provide emergency response, which have had invaluable results. DFAPs are five-year multisectoral development programs funded by P.L. 480, which target highly vulnerable communities. In South Sudan, Catholic Relief Services operated the Jonglei Food Security Program as a DFAP before violence broke out there. When the conflict spread to Jonglei State, we were given flexibility to shift to emergency response as conditions in target communities no longer allowed for development activities. Today, the program is now called the Resilience Food Security Program and is a hybrid of emergency and development programming. In

both capacities, the program injects much needed food into the region and has been a factor in keeping conditions in Jonglei from deteriorating. More recently USAID has begun integrating “crises modifiers” into DFAP awards that anticipate emergencies and allow implementers to shift development resources if the need arises. Utilizing this model, Catholic Relief Services moved resources from its DFAPs in Madagascar and Malawi to scale up food-for-asset programming and unconditional food transfers, when they too saw El Nino droughts last year. Congress should continue to encourage USAID to experiment and develop other innovative ways of scaling up emergency response, while maintaining investments in long-term economic development.

Peacebuilding, Diplomatic Response, and Development

Recurring conflict has been the main driver of the food insecurity we are witnessing in South Sudan and Nigeria. The international community has a responsibility to meet the humanitarian needs of the victims of violence in these conflicts, but it must also work to address the underlying reasons for conflict, and thus must respond with efforts to promote a lasting, just, and durable peace between conflicted parties. Building such a peace requires long-term political and diplomatic engagement, as well as commitments from the affected parties at grassroots levels.

South Sudan serves to illustrate the enormous challenge of peace building. In that war-torn country, Catholic Relief Services partners with the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), to implement a \$6 million grant from USAID designed to launch a National Action Plan for Peace predicated on three pillars: advocacy, neutral forums and reconciliation. In its advocacy work, SSCC aims to change the narrative of South Sudan’s culture of violence by sending Bishops to meet with leaders in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya seeking advice, buy-in and support for concrete steps towards peace. They also have reached out to the influential South Sudanese Diaspora. Under its neutral forums pillar, the SSCC creates for militia leaders, women, chiefs/elders and youth to share their experiences, grievances, regrets, and hopes with one another without fear of retribution. And finally, under the reconciliation pillar, the SSCC is guided by the Committee for National Reconciliation, Peace and Healing to training peace mobilizers to work at the grassroots level to help war-torn communities to reconcile.

Similarly, in norther Nigeria, Catholic Relief Services strengthens social cohesion in deeply divided communities using a methodology we call “the 3Bs – Binding, Bonding, and Bridging.” Binding activities provide space for internal reflection and personal transformation, including trauma healing. Bonding activities strengthen relations within respective identity groups through dialogue and collaboration with other members of the group. Bridging activities bring together oppositional and adversarial groups to interact purposefully in a safe space to promote mutual understanding and trust so that they can overcome their differences, engage in mutually beneficial activities, and jointly construct a shared vision of a peaceful future for their communities and society.

We strongly recommend that the United States continue to invest in efforts like these to make and build peace. The path to peace is fraught with setbacks and challenges, but it is the only path that will bring an end to the humanitarian catastrophes we are witnessing. Further, to support these community-driven efforts, the United States must have a robust diplomatic engagement with leaders in these countries, with their neighbors and with the international community to convince them to support peaceful resolutions to these conflicts. To ensure the United States is diplomatically engaged in this way, we urge the Administration to nominate qualified individuals for key diplomatic posts in these countries and in the region.

Once peace is established, good governance and development investments will be needed to avoid these kinds of life-threatening insecurities. The United States must work with other actors in the international community to help build effective systems of governance characterized by inclusive politics, effective delivery of services, uncorrupt judicial systems, and accountability to all populations. Disputes over fair treatment, resource allocation, and unmet grievances all have played roles in the conflicts we are focusing on. Building good, responsive governments, and providing these governments the support they need to rebuild and provide for the needs of their people, which development programming can support, is the path to a more stable situation for each of these countries.

Conclusion

Pope Francis, in response to the ongoing food insecurity crises in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, and Yemen, recently said, "Now more than ever there should be a commitment by everyone to not just talk but contribute food aid and allow it to reach suffering populations." He voiced his concerns that millions of people were being "condemned to death by hunger."

Catholic Relief Services and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops greatly appreciate Congress' past support and global leadership in providing resources for disaster assistance, food aid, migration and refugee assistance, and peacebuilding. As an implementer of U.S. humanitarian and development assistance, we know these programs have saved countless lives and are essential to the continued survival of the people of these war-torn countries. We also note that U.S. funding has helped us leverage the private resources made available to us to respond to these challenges, which has allowed us to extend lifesaving aid to even more.

We urge Congress to continue its moral leadership by robustly supporting those accounts that deliver this aid to the millions of people in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Yemen, and in the surrounding countries. If these people are to survive, not only must we continue to provide the food, shelter, water, and basic supplies made available through these accounts, a rapid and immediate scale up of this assistance is necessary. In the face of the unprecedented number of people suffering violence and hunger, anything short would surely lead to famine. We commend USAID's efforts to find innovative ways of rapid scale up, and hope to see further examples in the future. Furthermore, a refocusing on peacebuilding and governance is necessary to attack root causes of famine and insecurity in the region. Until we double our efforts to alleviate conflict and promote peace, the current 'quiet' crises we face will only repeat themselves and grow louder.