

An Open Letter to the President and Congressional Leaders on the Importance of Global Development and Foreign Assistance Reform

As the 111th Congress and a new Presidential Administration begin, we are writing to urge you to make modernization of our foreign assistance programs a priority, and pledge our cooperation with and support for efforts to make global development a co-equal pillar of U.S. foreign policy alongside defense and diplomacy.

We face a complex set of global challenges today. Rampant disease, lack of education, and poverty hinder economic growth and crush the hopes for a better life for nearly half the world's population. Incompetent and corrupt governments block opportunity and breed instability in many countries, creating fertile environments for extremism and terrorism. In other countries, governments are striving to fight poverty and establish democracies, but face daunting challenges. America's global leadership in tackling these challenges is more important than ever — for our own national security, for our economic prosperity, for the stability of our allies, and for the well-being of those around the world who struggle to lift themselves up out of poverty.

This time of political transition for our country provides us with an enormous opportunity to take a fresh and balanced approach to U.S. global engagement. This approach should emphasize programs that promote development as tools equal in importance to military might and diplomatic savvy.

While there are standout programs that continue to deliver real value and impact, overall the current system for managing U.S. global development efforts is outdated and messy, with too many agencies running too many programs that lack an overall strategy — and these programs are governed by a Foreign Assistance Act that was written 47 years ago and has not been reauthorized in more than 20 years. If global development programs are to take their place as primary tools in the U.S. foreign policy toolkit, they must be modernized so that they all can better address today's challenges and a strong development voice must be given a seat at the table when key foreign policy decisions are made.

That is why we urge you to act quickly to take critical steps to make U.S. global development efforts more effective and appropriate to the global challenges we face today, including by enacting a modern and strategic Foreign Assistance Act; developing a national strategy for global development; consolidating our programs under a strong, empowered, and capable development institution; and ensuring that the U.S. government has the financial resources and professional civilian capacity to achieve our foreign policy goals.

We realize that during this time of economic turmoil and global conflict there are many pressing issues that require attention. We believe, however, that because of these challenges, elevating development as a core instrument of U.S. foreign policy — and using our precious development resources as strategically and effectively as possible — is nothing short of essential. The American people overwhelmingly agree — a recent poll found that, even in the midst of the global financial crisis, nearly 90% of those surveyed agree that foreign assistance must be made more efficient in order to get more of our aid to the people who really need it.

We urge you to act quickly, and we look forward to supporting and assisting you in this effort.

Signatories of this "Open Letter" endorse only its contents.

MFAN MODERNIZING FOREIGN ASSISTANCE NETWORK *The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN) is a reform coalition dedicated to strengthening the United States' ability to alleviate poverty, fight disease, create opportunity, and foster sustainable security in developing countries. For more information, or to support MFAN's campaign, visit www.modernizingforeignassistance.net.*

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Stop Hunger Now, Rev. Ray Buchanan, DD, President
Taxpayers for Common Sense, Ryan Alexander, President
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