

**Statement of Ms. Gayle E. Smith**  
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**U.S. Department of State**  
**Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**May 12, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the Committee. It is my pleasure to appear before the committee today to discuss the Biden-Harris Administration's progress towards ending and building back from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we know all too well, more than 576,000 of our fellow Americans have died due to COVID-19, and many without their families having had the chance to say goodbye. We've seen communities devastated, economic and racial divides exacerbated. And we know that this virus doesn't play fair. Communities of color have borne a heavier burden of the pandemic's impact, and women's employment gains have fallen.

The devastating impact of the pandemic has been felt at home and all over the world, where the pandemic has triggered both a health crisis and an economic crisis. Globally, we are witnessing the first increase in extreme poverty in twenty years, the loss of decades of development progress, rising food insecurity, and increased unemployment, particularly among young people. Some countries face the collapse of entire sectors, such as tourism; supply chains and markets have been disrupted; and revenues are down. For a significant number of low-income countries, the risk of debt distress, a liquidity crisis, and even insolvency is real.

Globally, cases are still increasing, as is the incidence of new and more transmissible variants. There have been over 3.3 million deaths worldwide. We are seeing both a dramatic surge in cases in India and other countries and the evidence of what happens when health systems are stretched beyond capacity. The surge in India is not the only one, and will not be the last that we see outside our borders.

As the Secretary has said, this pandemic won't end at home until it ends worldwide. The United States must lead in this time of global peril to end the lifespan of the pandemic.

And America is leading.

Thanks to generous and bipartisan support in Congress, we are moving quickly to address the humanitarian and public health impacts of the pandemic, including through USAID, the agency I once had the honor to lead.

We have dramatically increased U.S. financial support for COVAX and the Global Fund, which will expand the reach of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. We have rejoined the WHO and joined the ACT-Accelerator, a coalition of agencies that was built last year to respond to this crisis.

At the same time, we are responding to the crisis in India with the recent delivery of approximately USD \$100 million in emergency assistance and by facilitating a powerful and impactful response from the American private sector and diaspora.

As you know, the demand from governments all over the world for vaccines is high, and urgent. We're moving on multiple fronts to respond. First, and thanks again to bipartisan support of Congress, the United States is now, with our recent USD \$2 billion contribution through USAID, the single largest donor to COVAX, the global vaccine platform built on the foundation of Gavi, an organization this body has strongly supported since its creation. We will contribute an additional USD \$2 billion through 2022 for a total of USD \$4 billion. Last month, the Secretary of State co-launched the One World Protected campaign to mobilize partners to join us in helping COVAX reach its sprint goal of an additional USD \$2 billion.

Second, President Biden has announced that we expect to have up to 60 million AstraZeneca doses to share globally in the coming months, contingent upon FDA review.

Third, our U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) is pursuing investments designed to expand vaccine production in critical markets, including through the Quad – the United States, Japan, Australia and India.

Fourth, and most recently, Ambassador Tai has announced that the United States supports a waiver of intellectual property protections for COVID-19 vaccines under the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property. While the Administration strongly believes in intellectual property protections, we are facing extraordinary times that demand extraordinary measures to end this pandemic.

We will do more. All countries and all people need access to safe and effective vaccines, and we're not there yet. We are committed to working with global partners to increase global production and manufacturing to expand access.

But this is only part of the story.

This pandemic has driven home the urgency of achieving global health security – the capacity of all countries to prepare for, prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks. Since 2015, the United States has provided more than \$1 billion in technical assistance to Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) partner countries to strengthen country-level capacity. We are now focused on what must be done to further strengthen key capabilities, establish new norms and practices, reform and modernize existing institutions, expand actionable multilateral cooperation, and secure means of sustainably financing what we all need – a world that is safe from the global health threats we know are coming.

We are also working closely with partners to strengthen and modernize the World Health Organization, including by improving its surveillance and alert systems. Ultimately, the WHO is only as strong as its members, so we are also engaged with WHO member states to increase their ability and commitment to quickly and effectively prevent, detect, transparently report, and

respond to potential contagion outbreaks, particularly through greater adherence to the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHRs).

And this Administration will act on these fronts from a strong foundation. For almost two decades, and with consistent bipartisan support from Congress, the United States has led the world in supporting global health. The extraordinary work of the President's Emergency Program on AIDS Relief, the Department of State, USAID, Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control, National Institutes of Health and others have saved lives, dramatically improved health outcomes, and strengthened the health systems we must build upon now.

I am honored that Secretary Blinken asked me to take on the position of Coordinator for Global COVID-19 Response and Health Security. In this capacity, I report directly to him and work closely with colleagues across the Department and U.S. government, and with global partners. My mandate in this role is to build out our global COVID-19 response, to coordinate our work on global health security, and to advise the Secretary on how we can maximize the impact of the Department in the global health security area over time.

My experience prepares me for the task today, including my previous roles as Administrator of USAID for President Obama, and my position on the National Security Council staff during the U.S. response to the Ebola crisis in 2014. I have worked throughout my career on the fight for global public health, development, equity and dignity.

In closing, let me say thank you. For decades, Congress has enabled an enduring U.S. leadership role on global health, and has demonstrated this commitment once again with the funding provided in the ARPA. I look forward to your questions, and to working with you in the days ahead.