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United States Ambassador to the United Nations
Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing
“Global Food Security Crisis and U.S. Response”

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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished committee members:

Thank you, so much, for the opportunity to testify here today.

My mother was a cook -- the best I've ever known. She shared her gift widely, and not just with our family. She'd cook for the whole town at once. Even though we didn't have much, we made regular mass meals for anyone who was hungry.

My mother did this for a simple reason. She believed no one should ever have to go hungry.

Over the course of my career, I have seen what happens to people and communities who have hunger thrust upon them. I have looked in the gaunt eyes of children who are, as the doctors say, wasting: their rib bones poking out, their parents helpless to save them. I have seen a child die, right in front of me, from malnutrition.

Once you see something like that, you never forget it. And you keep it close to your heart.

That was one reason why, when I first arrived at the UN and assumed the Presidency of the UN Security Council a few days later in March 2021, I made our signature event that month focused on conflict-induced hunger.

Because we knew that the vast majority of widespread hunger -- in places like Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Mali, or South Sudan -- is man-made. Hunger is caused, often intentionally, by conflict.

Then, this year, came Russia's brutal, illegal, and unprovoked further invasion into Ukraine. Combine that with a cocktail of COVID-19, climate change, high energy prices, and pre-existing conflicts, and the world's food crisis has become colossal.

After all, Ukraine was the breadbasket for the developing world. According to the World Bank, some countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia typically got up to 75 percent of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

Russia has captured some of Ukraine's most productive farmland. They planted explosives throughout those fields. They stole and destroyed vital agricultural equipment and infrastructure. They bombed grain silos and are selling grain that we believe was stolen from Ukrainian stockpiles.

And Russia's naval blockade in the Black Sea, and the threat of further naval attacks, are currently preventing Ukraine's crops from being exported to their destinations. We hope that the

Ukraine-Russia talks, which re-started in Istanbul on July 13 with Turkey and the UN, will yield results.

In the meantime, we estimate that more than 20 million tons of grain are trapped in silos and ships, at risk of rotting away.

In essence, Russia is dumping out that breadbasket -- and leaving only breadcrumbs for a hungry world.

As long as Putin continues his war in Ukraine, millions and millions of people -- most of whom live well beyond Ukraine's borders -- won't know when or where they'll get their next meal. Countries in the Middle East and Africa will feel those effects most acutely. For example, the impact of Putin's war is worsening the effects of the historic drought in the Horn of Africa where nearly 19 million people are in need of emergency food assistance. But all of us will suffer.

To make matters worse, our food supplies are on the front lines of climate change. Severe heat and other extreme weather events are ruining crops around the world and are causing spikes in staple foods and fertilizer prices.

This is a five-alarm emergency. I have never seen a food security crisis like this in my career.

This is the kind of problem that no one nation can solve alone -- the kind of problem that requires serious, sustained multilateral cooperation.

That's why this past May, during the United States Presidency of the Security Council, Secretary Blinken joined me in New York. Together, we rallied countries, regional organizations, NGOs, philanthropy, and the private sector to take serious, concrete steps to bolster global food supplies and resilience.

We hosted a series of Days of Action on Food Security, which featured a one two-punch: a Security Council meeting that put pressure on Russia, and a ministerial-level event -- the "Global Food Security Call to Action."

At that ministerial, we brought together our closest partners to craft a *Roadmap for Global Food Security*. Thirty-six attendees of the ministerial signed on the spot. Sixty-three other countries have joined since. That means we've now rallied 100 countries - - a majority of UN member states -- to a common picture of this crisis and a common agenda for addressing it.

The Roadmap affirms our collective commitment to act with urgency, at scale, and in concert to respond to this crisis. It commits us all to providing immediate humanitarian assistance, building resilience for those in vulnerable situations, supporting social protection and safety nets, and strengthening our food systems. But this is just the first step.

Since the ministerial, we have been working closely at the UN, with the G7, the G20, the EU and the AU, APEC, and other partners and donors around the world. As we work through these multilateral channels, we have also been rebutting Russian disinformation at every turn.

Russia claims, falsely, that sanctions posed by the United States and our Allies are to blame for the global increase in food prices. But Russia knows full well that food and fertilizer are specifically excluded from U.S. sanctions. The Department of the Treasury has even issued two General Licenses to authorize agricultural and medical trade, as well as humanitarian activities.

Russia is trying to spread this disinformation because they know just how easy it is to see the ripple effects of their horrific war. And sadly, our fear is that there could be more ripple effects to come.

According to the World Food Program, this kind of global food shortage could cause mass migration unlike anything we've seen since World War II. And food insecurity is both a threat and a multiplier for violent conflict. It is not only caused by conflict -- it can also spark new ones in the countries and communities where food is scarce. A vicious cycle.

Fortunately, we have the tools and technology to combat hunger. Online platforms can connect farmers and equip them with the latest information about supply chains. Satellite imagery can improve our understanding of weather patterns and crop yields. High-quality seeds and agricultural inputs ensure farmers can produce enough food for everyone. The list goes on and on.

We have the tools to stop hunger and alleviate suffering. We just have to use them -- and rally the world to do the same. So we are doing exactly that.

After all, the world takes its cues from the United States on humanitarian issues -- which means your support, and the support of the entire Congress, sends an important signal to other donors to step up and pitch in. It helps reinforce our humanitarian values at places like the UN -- and it gives us a leadership platform.

I know Administrator Power will speak in more depth about our efforts on the ground. But I want you to know that together, we will continue to rally the world to take on the global food security crisis -- through the Roadmap, through the UN, U.S. food assistance, and through every multilateral channel we have.

Because, as my mother believed to her bones, no one should have to go hungry.

Thank you. I am honored to be here and look forward to your questions.