

**Testimony by
Acting Assistant Administrator Earl Gast
Bureau for Africa
United States Agency for International Development**

**Before the
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate**

July 30, 2009

**“Responding to Humanitarian Needs, Supporting Peace, and Implementing Development
Priorities in Sudan”**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to update you on the humanitarian situation in Darfur and our support for comprehensive peace and stability in Sudan. I am pleased to join my colleague, Special Envoy Scott Gration, on this panel and would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent cooperation and coordination between USAID and the Special Envoy’s office.

The U.S. Government has provided more than \$6 billion in assistance to the people of Sudan since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. We have helped to stand up a new regional government tasked with rebuilding and governing the war-torn South. We have conducted wide-ranging civic education programs and immunized children. We have supported life-saving humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. We have worked to improve economic opportunities and public infrastructure. We have provided food aid, and we have supported Sudan’s farmers and entrepreneurs.

We have saved lives, and we have improved living conditions for millions of Sudanese.

But with the continuing challenges Darfur and with less than 24 months left to follow the CPA’s roadmap for consolidating peace, our most critical tasks lie ahead.

The situation for the 4.7 million people affected by the conflict in Darfur remains intolerable. While we have managed to fill many of the gaps left by the expulsion of 13 international NGOs in March, these measures are temporary and must be replaced by a more sustainable, long-term strategy that is finally accompanied by sustainable, long-term peace. Compounding the situation, carjackings, staff abductions and assaults, break-ins targeting NGO facilities, and ongoing military campaigns still impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Darfur and have resulted in both temporary and permanent suspensions of life-saving programs. Constant insecurity and violence continue to be the primary factors limiting the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Meanwhile, Sudanese expectations that they would benefit from the peace that came in 2005 remain high—and often unmet. The frustration of many Sudanese is summed up by what a Nuba

man from Southern Kordofan, told a USAID partner not long ago: “The peace is now three years, and there are supposed to be tangible things. The government should have expressed its presence; but for us here, there is no government.” The time for achieving substantive improvements in governance is running out, as the national elections and the referenda on unity draw near. The critical window during which we can contribute to genuine transformation via the CPA roadmap will soon close.

As the Special Envoy has noted, the U.S. Government approach to Sudan’s multiple challenges requires complex and creative solutions, implemented in cooperation with government officials, tribal leaders, and civil society representatives throughout Sudan. And it requires us to make a political commitment that matches the enormous financial and human commitment that we have dedicated to the Sudanese people over the years.

EXPULSIONS

Even before the Government of Sudan expelled 13 international aid organizations in March, there were significant assistance gaps across Darfur. The upsurge in fighting in South Darfur in early 2009, for example, displaced over 30,000 people, and in February, the UN World Food Program (WFP) was unable to reach over 500,000 people in need of food aid.

The NGO expulsion significantly increased the humanitarian challenges and drastically reduced USAID’s ability to deliver assistance to people in need both in Darfur and in the Three Areas.

Darfur

In Darfur, the expulsions jeopardized food aid to more than a million people and health services to more than 650,000 Sudanese, according to a March 24 assessment conducted jointly by the United Nations and the Sudanese Government. More than half of USAID-funded humanitarian programs in Darfur closed, and 40 percent of the delivery capacity of our main food aid partner, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) was lost. In just one day, much of Darfur’s humanitarian infrastructure, which took years to establish and thousands of people to staff, was wiped out.

From the moment the Sudanese Government announced the expulsions, we have worked with our partners to mitigate the impact. NGOs stocked health clinics and nutrition centers with months of supplies. WFP conducted a two-month food distribution through remaining NGOs and local food committees. To ensure that services continue, agencies have shifted existing operations, are providing supplemental assistance, and are relying on community members to provide food, safe drinking water, health care, and shelter to the most vulnerable people. Remaining NGOs have scaled up their services and expanded their areas of operation to address gaps in assistance, and Sudanese Government officials have staffed some health clinics.

We have, so far, averted a greater humanitarian crisis.

However, these measures are merely stopgaps. They rely on temporary staffing and strain already limited resources. They are not sustainable.

We must focus not simply on the quantitative aspects of filling assistance gaps, but the qualitative aspects that make programs effective and allow them to continue. This means ensuring that programs meet technical quality standards, that they are adequately managed and staffed, and that assistance meets international norms and standards for humanitarian action. Although immediate gaps have been addressed through the extraordinary efforts of the United Nations, NGOs still operating in Sudan, and parts of the government, the expulsion severely impacted the quality of programming and the ability to accurately monitor the distribution and impact of assistance. Despite our best efforts, many basic humanitarian needs remain unmet. Even before the expulsions, NGO access to affected populations in Darfur was limited and inconsistent. Simply restoring assistance to pre-expulsion levels would still leave many people in need.

In the immediate aftermath of the expulsions, the United States sent a clear message that the ultimate responsibility for the well-being of the Sudanese people solely rests on the shoulders of the Sudanese Government. In coordination with USAID, Special Envoy Gration successfully negotiated with the Sudanese Government to allow new NGOs to fill gaps in assistance, which is enabling USAID and its partners to begin the process of rebuilding humanitarian operations. Some new projects are already underway. These efforts will reintroduce lost capacity and program quality to Darfur.

However, bureaucratic obstacles and insecurity continue to hamper our efforts to rebuild the humanitarian infrastructure. The registration of new NGOs has been time-consuming, and many Sudanese Government commitments remain unmet or only partially implemented. For example, the Government of Sudan has yet to return USAID-funded assets that were confiscated from our partner NGOs when they were expelled.

Three Areas

There has also been a marked lack of progress in enhancing the NGO operating environment in the Three Areas, where the NGO expulsions significantly altered the humanitarian, recovery, and development landscape. The expulsion of leading USAID partners and subsequent seizure of their program assets and equipment severely undermined the operating environment and has threatened the stability of these war-torn areas. Due to the unique nature of the Three Areas' governance systems, humanitarian programs in the parts of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) went largely uninterrupted. However, many assistance programs in northern-controlled areas were halted. This dynamic has created an imbalanced distribution of assistance, which only reinforces conflict lines rather than fostering integration. Although two new organizations have recently started work in the Three Areas, the current lack of capacity and loss of confidence among remaining NGOs, coupled with the likely delays to re-establishing programs now that the rainy season has begun, will further exacerbate the risk for conflict. The Government of Sudan and the United Nations have yet to finalize joint communiqués that will formalize operating procedures for programs in the Three Areas—and which are vital to safeguarding the conduct of programs in this critical region.

The U.S. Government has worked closely with the Government of Sudan, the United Nations, other donors, and humanitarian agencies to increase their access and capacity to address the gaps created by the expulsions. We must continue to coordinate and engage with these entities to

ensure that humanitarian, recovery, and development programming proceed without impediment, and that aid agencies are able to operate freely.

Darfur IDP Returns

We have recently received reports that some of Darfur's displaced people have returned home. While we believe that some of these returns are seasonal in nature, we look forward to the day when the 2.7 million people who were driven from their homes by this conflict can return safely and securely to their villages. While not all of them will choose to return home, we are prepared to shift our assistance to support voluntary returns, and as elsewhere around the world, the international community will look to ensure that those returns are certified as voluntary by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or the International Organization for Migration. We call upon the Government of Sudan to support the operations of these organizations in Darfur so that they can undertake this vital task. USAID will not deviate from its responsibility to safeguard the rights and protection of displaced people.

CPA IMPLEMENTATION

At the same time, we must leverage our coordination and engagement to prepare for the upcoming historic milestones of holding national elections and referenda on self-determination for Abyei and Southern Sudan, which could result in the creation of a new independent country.

The Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) did not exist before 2005. Every government structure and system has had to be crafted from scratch. The committed men and women who serve in the government are not career politicians, nor have they benefited from the lessons of a life lived in a democratic, transparent state. That's why building the capacity of the GOSS is a cornerstone of USAID's strategy in Sudan, and central to the successful implementation of the CPA.

Initially, the GOSS had no offices, no pens, no paper, and no staff to undertake the most basic tasks needed for a government to function. But with our assistance, the key GOSS ministries have established systems for hiring people, for formulating budgets, and for establishing office systems. This has required tremendous dedication on the part of GOSS officials, who have been willing to roll up their sleeves and persevere through each one of these processes.

Considerable progress has been made in establishing functioning institutions where there previously were none. Ministries are functional, revenue is coming in, payments are being made, and a legal framework is being built. But development gains have been slow, and a recent fiscal crisis has highlighted that many fundamentals of good governance need to be improved. International NGOs are still the primary providers of basic services. Few roads have been paved and other infrastructure remains equally underdeveloped. Government at every level still needs to forge stronger, more consistent linkages between policy priorities and development, legislation, and budget capacity. High expectations for tangible benefits of peace remain unmet, especially in communities most affected by the war, where tensions and instability continue to threaten progress. Episodes of clan violence, as well as violence committed by the Lord's

Resistance Army along the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, have increased, taking scores of lives in recent weeks alone.

To bolster investments in strengthening the Government of Southern Sudan, USAID has launched a program that enhances the ability of local governments to provide peace dividends, defuse conflict, and promote stabilization in the Three Areas and key Southern states. USAID also played a key role in a joint donor–GOSS compact to strengthen the government’s fiscal responsibility and financial management, representing a renewed commitment and redoubled cooperation to deliver the peace dividends promised by the CPA. We all are seeking to help support the establishment of a just, accountable, democratic government able to deliver basic services, whether the people of Southern Sudan and Abyei choose unity with the North or independence in the 2011 referendum.

And we cannot speak of the CPA without noting the precarious footing of elections. Elections were designed to be a central component of the broader strategy to transform Sudan democratically under the CPA, and our support to the national election process remains firm. But the hurdles are daunting.

As you likely know, the date for elections has been pushed back several times from the CPA-mandate of July 2009. While the postponements were intended to allow for adequate preparation, ongoing delays pose increasing risks. Just nine months remain until the designated polling date, yet there is no public budget for the elections. The electoral law—which establishes an electoral system that would be highly complicated, even in countries with a long democratic tradition—was passed more than two years after the deadline specified in the CPA. The National Election Commission (NEC) still hasn’t fully established its 26 subsidiary commissions throughout the country, nor has it received its full operating budget. In addition, the failure to resolve technical questions related to northern census data spurred key Southern political leaders to reject the census results, making the use of those results to delimit electoral constituencies highly sensitive. Finally, the logistical and political challenges of implementing credible elections in Darfur cannot be understated. Massive civic and voter education will be required to engage Darfur’s displaced people and the vast populations in the South that have low levels of literacy and little or no experience with past elections.

So, given the current status of election preparations, are our expectations too high? Do we believe it is too late to have credible elections in Sudan? No. It is too early to predict whether or not these elections will be credible, when so many administrative decisions are outstanding. Until key decisions are made, the ability of our central election administration program to move forward as intended will be severely limited. However, our programs to increase civic participation and observe the entire electoral process will continue, in coordination with the National Election Commission. We are coordinating with the United Nations and other international partners to bolster a credible outcome to this daunting but historic election for Sudan.

Before concluding, on behalf of USAID, I want to express our appreciation to Senator Kaufman,

a member of this Committee, who recently in a statement on the Senate floor, paid tribute to John Granville, one of 91 Agency employees who have lost their lives in the performance of their duties overseas.

In honor of John Granville and Abdelrahman Abbas Rahama, USAID is establishing the Granville-Rahama Staff Care Award, which will recognize USAID employees who make significant contributions to the morale and well-being of Agency staff. Our staff work in some of the most difficult, dangerous environments in the world, and the tragedy of John and Abdelrahman's deaths reminded us of how important it is to promote a caring work environment and to help our staff cope with stress in the workplace.

In addition, the John Granville Secondary School is currently under construction and due to open this fall in Sudan's Blue Nile State. John had a special attachment to Blue Nile, and the fact that a school is being built in his name with the support and cooperation of the U.S. Government, the Sudanese Government, and the Government of Southern Sudan is a fitting memorial to a man who dedicated his life to helping Sudan's people.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of USAID. We certainly appreciate your continued dedication to the Sudanese people and your commitment to peace and stability throughout the continent.

I welcome any questions you might have for me at this time.