

Ambassador Eric Rubin
President
The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA)

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) is grateful that Congress voted to increase the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 International Affairs Budget, including supplemental funding to address global crises, and build upon increases for diplomacy and development funding during the past few years. In FY24, AFSA hopes to build on the momentum by increasing the amount of Foreign Service hiring. Specifically, this testimony will address AFSA's requests for the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

In the FY24 SFOPS appropriations bill, AFSA is seeking an increase in funds for the State Department's "Human Resources" account to hire and continue to fill Foreign Service positions. AFSA also requests an increase in funds for USAID's "Operating Expenses" account to hire and continue to fill Foreign Service positions. AFSA strongly opposes any proposed cuts to the operations accounts of the foreign affairs agencies, which enable the hiring of career members of the Foreign Service.

AFSA has made the case that maintaining a robust diplomatic capability is vital to preserving America's global leadership role. Our leadership was built on a foundation of military might, economic primacy, good governance, tremendous cultural appeal—and the diplomatic prowess to channel all that power, hard and soft, into global leadership that has kept us safe and prosperous at home. A 2019 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey found that seven in ten Americans support an active U.S. role in the world, a record high of the past five decades.

We would like to partner with our congressional supporters to ensure that today, and years from now, full teams of U.S. diplomats are in the field, deployed around the world to promote and protect U.S. interests. For a tiny percentage of the overall budget, the Foreign Service builds the relationships that enable Americans to conduct business all around the world and keep threats at bay, reducing the need for military action. If the United States retreats diplomatically, we leave a vacuum that *will* be filled by others. In the face of more aggressive competition from countries such as China, the opportunity costs of leaving American embassies short staffed is rapidly increasing. Doing so erodes our nation's diplomatic power at our own peril.

State Department

Additional hiring will accomplish three major things: help facilitate a training float so members of the Foreign Service are better prepared for their jobs, allow expanded intake from an increasingly diverse U.S. population, and enable the Department to meet expanding mission requirements.

1. Members of the Foreign Service receive quality training on the front end and on the basics; before they go to their first assignment—for language training, for certain leadership positions, etc. For example, a mid-level ranked Public Affairs officer may

never take training on core public diplomacy functions because there is never time. The officers are usually shuttled between language training and their next post, without the opportunity to simply study and learn how to do their jobs better. A significant training float will enable members of the Foreign Service to perform higher quality work and provide temporary duty officers to perform jobs while others attend training. This request will help ensure that enough personnel are in place to support a training float for the Foreign Service.

2. A significant increase in hiring also provides the opportunity to expand representation to traditionally underrepresented groups. General expansion of the Foreign Service, while targeting underrepresented groups, aids in both the recruitment and retention of a more diverse Foreign Service. While there has recently been greater intake from traditionally underrepresented groups, which should continue to expand, retention remains an ongoing concern. We also need to ensure members of the Foreign Service have enough available positions to bid on around the world.
3. Today, the U.S. is facing new threats and issues diplomats did not have to reckon with 10 years ago. Russia has resurged as a major national security threat, especially after its invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. China now has a larger diplomatic presence than the U.S., having more posts overseas and outnumbering American diplomats five to one in African countries. Additional hiring will enable the Foreign Service to meet its expanded mission requirements to counter the ever-growing threats to our global leadership and influence.

Our nation needs a full team of diplomats and development professionals in the field keeping threats at bay and protecting our prosperity—combating the conditions that enable terrorism to take root, protecting against pandemics, and promoting the rule of law and open systems that allow U.S. companies to compete and thrive. The documented deficit needs to be addressed as soon as possible if we are to avoid losing further commercial, economic, and even political ground to rising great power competitors. AFSA’s request for funding to support additional hiring will enable America to have a full team in the field and at home.

USAID

AFSA also greatly appreciates bipartisan support for foreign assistance as a critical component of America’s national security, including increases to USAID’s Operating Expenses (OE) account in support of hiring career personnel and filling positions. For too long, USAID has faced chronic shortages of career employees, particularly FSOs. In the field, USAID Missions struggle to find career FSOs to fill Contracting Officer, Controller, technical, and programmatic positions due to chronically low numbers. Instead, the Agency relies on temporary contractors and short-term fixes or simply making do without. The Agency is long past the point of being able to do more with less.

Decades of OE shortages, career hiring caps, fragmented internal budget processes, and an under-resourced and unempowered Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM) Office have warped both USAID's workforce composition and processes. For over 1.5 years, USAID has been without a named Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO). The result is an Agency where critical Washington units such as the Bureaus for Conflict Prevention & Stabilization (CPS), Humanitarian Affairs (HA) and Global Health (GH) are comprised of 90%+ short-term non-career staff, primarily Personal Service Contractors (PSCs) and Foreign Service Limited (FSL) appointees.

Comprehensive staffing data, including on diversity, remains opaque and difficult to obtain particularly for the 1500+ non-career staff who work within USAID. The Agency has some 1100 PSCs, of which approximately 500 are deployed worldwide—some filling Foreign Service gaps, others inappropriately serving as sole USAID representative in countries. Many go from one USAID contract into another for decades, contrary to the purpose of this specialized mechanism.

USAID also has some 400 non-career FSL colleagues, appointed under the Foreign Service Act. These FSL appointees no longer fill urgent needs in Kabul, Baghdad, or Islamabad. Instead, the bulk of these positions are in Washington—often filling what otherwise would be career positions but for OE and hiring limitations. Their five-year terms under the Foreign Service Act have been extended to nine years over several Congresses. To be clear, these individuals are professional and respected colleagues, many of whom would welcome the chance to compete for a career position with USAID if opportunities arose.

Supervisors both in Washington and the field spend inordinate time and energy on managing this patchwork of staff and related HR processes. Those hired under non-career mechanisms understandably have one eye on the end date of their current contract and the other eye on their next employment opportunity. This is no way to run the world's leading development institution, nor treat Americans dedicated to public service. The more USAID uses, and Congress funds and approves, these unsustainable workarounds, the more complex, convoluted, and inefficient the overall management of USAID's people and programs becomes.

The adverse impact on employee morale and engagement extends across the workforce. The large numbers of PSC and FSL staff mean fewer position and promotion opportunities for career employees. For the Foreign Service, modeled after the military, officers serve in a "rank-in-person" not "rank-in-position" capacity, most taking a pay and status cut to dedicate themselves to a Foreign Service career. Yet at USAID, career FSOs watch the Agency regularly hand out high-ranked FSL and PSC positions with commensurate higher salaries.

Again, AFSA requests an increase to OE funding that recognizes the urgent need for a larger, robustly resourced career Foreign Service at USAID. We hope this is the beginning of a concerted effort to rebuild and empower USAID's career cadre to better serve the interests of the American people.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Eric Rubin, AFSA President