

# EVEREST TREMBLED: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NEPAL EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

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## **EVEREST TREMBLED: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NEPAL EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2015**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Matt Salmon (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SALMON. As I mentioned during markup, Nepal was hit with a devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake on April 25, followed by another 7.3 magnitude earthquake on May 12, claiming the lives of over 8,000 people and leaving millions affected and at risk.

Some have argued that the disaster in Nepal was partially mitigated by advanced preparation of USAID and others through its 60-year presence in Nepal engaging in disaster risk reduction.

Today, we will discuss the U.S. Government efforts to alleviate the circumstances of disaster in Nepal. We expect our distinguished witnesses to highlight successful, effective preplanning efforts. But I also expect an honest assessment of the long-term implications and challenges for rebuilding and protecting vulnerable communities. I would also like to hear about what we can do to make our foreign aid efforts more efficient.

The United States has committed nearly \$47 million for response and recovery efforts in Nepal. We are working with a dozen other nations in cooperation with the United Nations, as well as thousands of foreign personnel on the ground in Nepal assisting with our relief projects. Our efforts have been particularly concentrated on search and rescue, shelter, water, and sanitation. But we have been involved in nearly every aspect of the response to some degree.

As far as USAID is concerned, they deployed a Disaster Assistance Response, or DART team the day of the event, sending over 120 people, search and rescue dogs to Nepal aboard military aircraft within hours. The team's urban search and rescue personnel, some based in nearby Fairfax, Virginia, as was referenced, spent weeks working miracles, pulling survivors out of the rubble in Kathmandu and elsewhere, while other DART personnel investigated the safety of damaged structures.

I look forward to hearing more about their heroic activities and how preparations such as the DART's readiness and prestaged supplies helped in Nepal.

The State Department helped to connect thousands of American citizens with their loved ones in Nepal during the earthquake. I have also heard that the U.S. bilateral connections are playing an important role in the crisis response. Our partner nations in the region are leveraging U.S. capabilities to help shoulder more of the burden.

I would like Assistant Secretary Biswal to inform the committee on whether this may be an indication that future disaster responses in the region might be less reliant on U.S. agencies.

The Department of Defense supported these efforts by providing airlift and other support at USAID's request. Though DOD does not take the lead in comprehensive disaster support such as this, without their support such efforts would be impossible.

Our military is also our country's most significant strategic presence in Asia, and we rely so heavily on their capabilities both to support our existing partners and to develop new ones through military cooperation. I look forward to hearing about the military's engagement during the crisis and how their support of operations in Nepal will inform their strategies in the future.

Enduring needs and increased risks for Nepal. Despite these incredible efforts for our country and many others, the crisis is far from over in Nepal. The coming months and years will be the true test of our response capabilities. Monsoon season is fast approaching. Large numbers of homeless people exposed to the elements during this time would be a dire enough problem in and of itself.

The earthquakes have also changed the water tables in Nepal, reducing water quality, creating large amounts of displaced earth, and increasing the risk of flooding. Nepal faces enormous water and sanitation dangers.

Food shortages are also a major concern. I understand the crisis hit just before the planting season and that there were efforts to help farmers get their crops in the ground. Additionally, I am concerned by reports that U.S. food assistance, including food that has been prepositioned in Sri Lanka in order to reduce delivery times, will take up to 45 days to arrive in Nepal. I would appreciate a report on this delay and any idea of Nepal's longer-term food outlook.

These and other challenges will disproportionately affect the vulnerable populations among Nepal's displaced peoples, including women and children. Given the history of trafficking-in-persons issues in Nepal, support of these vulnerable populations will be of the utmost importance, and I would like our administration witnesses to discuss how we are working to ensure their safety.

As we consider these horrific enduring challenges, however, we should not forget that the response to the Nepal crisis highlighted just how effective some of our disaster response mechanisms really are and reduced some of the earthquake's devastating impact. I have heard that safer building techniques meant that we suffered zero U.S. Embassy or local personnel fatalities and that prestaged supplies in Nepal are helping us get people shelter faster. It is also very exciting to hear that some of our partner nations are using U.S.-built capabilities to contribute to that response.

I am interested to hear our witnesses' insight on what this means regarding the efficacy of these investments in the region, whether U.S. capacity building in the region is increasing regional

disaster response effectiveness, and how these type of investments can reduce the cost of disaster response operations for the United States in the long term.

It is under extremely unfortunate circumstances that we discuss these efforts, but this is precisely what we have many of these organizations for. Discussing the challenges we face in the region is necessary to prepare for future potential disasters and working toward minimizing the loss of life, as well as depleting limited resources associated with relief efforts.

I give my sincere thanks to our colleagues and our witnesses for joining us in this conversation today. And I yield to the ranking member, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our panel.

The United States has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to assistance in disaster readiness in Nepal. For over 60 years we have had a presence in Nepal in the form of our bilateral aid program. And we have been focused, as you indicated, Mr. Chairman, on strengthening the country's disaster response capabilities for the last two decades.

U.S. efforts include the establishment of a disaster risk reduction office to coordinate government investments that make the country more resilient in the face of natural disasters, implementation of the program for the enhancement of emergency response to train Nepali first responders and medical personnel, and publication of a disaster risk reduction strategic framework for the country.

We obviously will be very interested in hearing how some things worked and some things didn't in the face of this natural disaster.

As part of the U.S. response to a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that occurred on April 25, the U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Disaster Assistance deployed, as it often does, a Disaster Assistance Response Team, or DART, that included elite urban search and rescue teams from my home county, Fairfax, Virginia, and Los Angeles, California. Physicians, K-9 handlers, structural engineers, technical search and rescue specialists, paramedics, and other personnel volunteer to serve on these teams and deploy abroad on a moment's notice, and we have done it all over the world for decades. And it makes one's heart feel better on television watching the backs saying LA team, Fairfax team, because you know Americans are putting themselves at risk to try to save fellow human beings they have never met in a faraway place.

Once in country, the team quickly begins to facilitate relief efforts. This time, that task was immense. The team found a dire situation in the region most heavily affected by the earthquake which killed more than 8,000 people and injured at least 16,000 more. The seismic impact left over 750,000 homes damaged or destroyed and 1.5 million people displaced, even without access to clean water.

Team members helped Nepali personnel assess whether structures were safe to inhabit and provided technical guidance on how to shore up buildings that needed to be reinforced. Miraculously, the U.S. search and rescue teams also helped to pull a 15-year-old boy from the rubble of a building 5 days after the earthquake had struck. Additionally, after experiencing a 7.3 magnitude aftershock,

the team quickly went back to work and rescued a 41-year-old woman who had been trapped in a four-story building.

U.S. assistance efforts are not cost-free endeavors, however, and they certainly are not without risk. Tragically, six of our marines were killed in a UH Huey helicopter crash while on a humanitarian mission in response to this earthquake.

The dangerous nature of these deployments on behalf of vulnerable populations abroad further demonstrates the resolve of U.S. foreign assistance operations. We should honor the men and women who stepped forward to put themselves in harm's way on behalf of this mission.

Disaster response tests the limits of domestic institutions, as well as international assistance and cooperation. I certainly look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the performance of the U.S. team in Nepal, lessons learned, and how we can further improve our coordination with Nepal, and prospectively other international partners, when the need for such disaster relief effort arises again, as we know inevitably it will.

I welcome recommendations on how we can promote the democratic transition in Nepal and put a decade of civil war firmly in the rear-view mirror. It is only through strengthened governance and civil society institutions that Nepal will be able to develop fully its own disaster response capabilities, resilient enough for this disaster-prone region in the world.

And with that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you.

Does anybody else wish to be recognized?

Mr. Chabot.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important hearing.

The devastating earthquake that hit Nepal on April 25 was heartbreaking. The incredible loss of life is tragic beyond words, and the loss of thousands of years of history places an enormous gap in the historical record of Nepal's people. Picking up will not be easy, and unfortunately, Nepal will never be able to get back all that it has lost.

The international response to the quake, however, has been considerable. And in particular, the U.S. Government's response efforts from the State Department, USAID, and the Department of Defense, its immediacy and rapid-fire response made a difference and saved many lives. You are to be commended and thanked for your considerable effort there.

The dedicated U.S. team that joined the response effort deserves our gratitude. As you already mentioned, Mr. Chairman, and the ranking member mentioned, six of our marines paid the ultimate price to help the Nepalese people, and they will forever be missed, and we should remember them.

Three years ago, I happened to visit Nepal, and as soon as I heard this, I remembered it like it was yesterday: The Ambassador voicing his concern to us as we drove about the stone buildings and the brick buildings and the vulnerability to the quake when the big one hit, which ultimately it would. The thing that is particularly frightening, is that this apparently wasn't the big one. There is probably one even bigger coming. Hopefully, that can be considered



in the efforts, not just the rescue efforts and the recovery effort, everything that has happened right now, but long-term preventing more people from losing their lives down the road and how we can assist in that effort.

So, again, thank all of you for everything you have done to help.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. Yield back.

Mr. SALMON. Ms. Meng, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sherman, and our witnesses for being here of course.

New York City is home to thousands of Nepalese Americans, and we have Nepalese community centers in our districts and throughout the borough of Queens. So this earthquake has affected my constituents in a very personal way.

I want to thank all of your departments for the immediate response to the crisis and your ongoing efforts. In a tragedy like this one, every minute and every hour is important and can mean the difference between a life saved and a life lost.

This has been a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions. As of May 13, the Government of Nepal estimates that more than 8,200 people have been killed and over 17,900 injured. From what I understand, an earthquake in Nepal was considered one of the worst-case scenarios as far as potential environmental disasters in Asia. I would like to hear from you on how your preparations helped facilitate appropriate aid in this crisis and what more needs to be done to prepare for future disasters.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you.

Mr. Brooks, did you have an opening statement?

Mr. BROOKS. No, sir.

Mr. SALMON. Well, thank you.

We are proud and very appreciative today to speak with a panel of some of the administration's most knowledgeable and senior figures handling this crisis. Appearing before the subcommittee once again is Nisha Biswal—great to see you again, I am glad to have you here—Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs. Assistant Secretary Biswal has just returned from Nepal. And we are very much looking forward to hearing about your findings there.

We are also very grateful to hear from Thomas Staal, USAID's Acting Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance. Also joining us, again from USAID, is Jonathan Stivers—great to have you here again, Jonathan—Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Asia. This is Mr. Stivers' third time before the subcommittee.

I am getting to see more of you than my family members. So it is great. And we are very glad that you keep coming back, that we haven't scared you away. That is good.

And finally we have Anne Witkowsky.

Did I say that right?

Ms. WITKOWSKY. Yes, you did.

Mr. SALMON. I hate it when people mispronounce my name, so I want to make sure I get it right. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs.

The subcommittee gives sincere thanks to the panel for their insights this afternoon. And I am going to start with Ms. Biswal. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE NISHA DESAI BISWAL, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Ms. BISWAL. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for this important and timely hearing on Nepal. Ranking Member Connolly and members of the committee, it is tragic that the earthquake in Nepal is what brings us together here, but I want to thank you for your very comprehensive and very heartfelt statements and for the very strong support of the United States Congress in the relief efforts from the United States and really from around the world for the people of Nepal at this time.

I am particularly proud to be appearing at this hearing with my colleagues from USAID and the Department of Defense, which is a really true indication of the spirit of civil and military cooperation in the United States when it comes to issues of humanitarian response.

In the interest of time, and because we have such detailed expertise at the dais, I want to ask that my full statement be entered into the record, and I will just summarize a few key points here.

Mr. Chairman, the outpouring of concern from the U.S. Congress in the days and weeks following the earthquake, and the surge in contributions to relief organizations, is a real testament to the generosity of the American people and a true indicator of the common values that unite us during difficult times.

As you noted, the 7.8 magnitude earthquake in Nepal took over 8,600 lives and injured over 17,000 people. Last week, I traveled to Nepal and witnessed firsthand the devastating losses suffered by the Nepalese people, but also the triumph of the human spirit, the resiliency of the affected communities, and the courage and the commitment of the relief workers as they all came together to help Nepal recover from this devastating earthquake. I saw the grit and determination in the faces of those who had lost their homes and their family members, but who had not lost their hope.

It was heartbreaking news, as I arrived in Nepal, that the American UH-1 helicopter had crashed with no survivors. And that news reached our team in Kathmandu, as we had kept our search efforts and our hopes alive for 4 days in search of that helicopter. We salute those brave military professionals, Americans and Nepalese, who perished in their Nation's service while helping those in need.

I also want to take a moment to express our extreme gratitude to the strong support of the Indian and Nepalese forces who joined us in that extensive search for our missing helicopter. As General Wissler, the lieutenant general task force commander of Joint Task Force 505, noted to me, the Nepalese and Indian forces joined in that search as if it was one of their own that had gone missing.

The U.S. civilian responders, led by the AID DART team and the Embassy team, and our search and rescue teams from Fairfax and Los Angeles, all worked tirelessly to save lives and bring assistance. They are heroes that embody the best of American values.

Mr. Chairman, Nepal is a nation of tremendous strength and bravery. It was just on the verge of emerging from a 10-year civil war and moving toward strengthening its democracy and moving down a path of development. It is now a country that is recovering from a major tragedy and focusing on the most immediate needs of shelter, of food, and of health.

If we are to help Nepal not only recover from this earthquake, but also continue down that path of political transition and progress, it is going to require the considered effort of the United States and the international community, and most importantly, of Nepal itself.

Our immediate focus, Mr. Chairman, is on beating the clock, as the monsoon rains that are expected in about a month's time threaten to bring a new onset of disaster. We are racing against time to provide shelter, to help people get crops in the field, and to move toward a post-monsoon recovery phase.

When I was in Nepal, I had a chance to visit a town of Sankhu, about an hour outside of Kathmandu, where I saw devastation which was heartrending, with 50 to 60 to 70 percent of the buildings and structures destroyed or damaged beyond habitation. Yet at the same time, we saw perseverance in the faces of the Nepalese people who were already undertaking the task of trying to put their lives and their homes back together.

The U.S. Government has already committed nearly \$47 million in assistance. But, Mr. Chairman, I want to note that some of the most important lifesaving assistance that the United States provided happened before the earthquake struck, as you noted. And because of the strong support of the United States and the American people and the investments we have made over the years, the Nepalese Government and the Nepalese military, which had been training with our military, was in a much better capacity to respond to this earthquake.

Our Embassy staff, under the leadership of Ambassador Peter Bodde and our Deputy Chief of Mission, John Carwile, who is actually with us today at this hearing, the Embassy staff performed above and beyond the call of duty in the recent weeks. After undergoing that tragic earthquake, they were up and ready to assist within hours.

And that team, because of the investments that the American Congress has supported over the last 5 years, did not lose a single life on the Embassy staff. We had put everybody into earthquake-resilient housing and we had done drills in preparation that proved to be extremely lifesaving in this important moment, and they were able to go about the business of rendering assistance to others in need because their own needs and their own families had been taken care of.

We learned important lessons in that process, and we will be looking at the best practices of what we did in Nepal in terms of our Embassies and people in other seismically prone areas.

The Embassy has been open since the time of the earthquake, providing services to American citizens and others in need. Over 800 U.S. citizens and third-country nationals were sheltering at the Embassy for a number of days in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Over 50 U.S. and third-country nationals were rescued by the efforts of the Embassy team by chartering private aircraft before the U.S. military assets arrived on the ground. And they continue to work to provide assistance to American citizens in need across Nepal, as well as third-country nationals as necessary.

Mr. Chairman, I want to talk a little bit about the regional responses to this earthquake. We have seen a remarkable response by the neighboring countries. Certainly the Indian Government and the Indian military, but also assistance was mobilized by Bangladesh, by Sri Lanka, by China, by Japan, by Thailand. And it has been just a tremendous outpouring of effort from within the region and across Asia, and it has been a really important indicator of the increasing capabilities throughout Asia to respond to humanitarian disasters.

A lot of that is work that has been done by the United States working with our partners across Asia to build capacity. Both our Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and our military have invested a tremendous amount of effort over the past decades in building disaster response capabilities, and that was on full display during this recent tragedy.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, as I noted, that as we are still in the midst of relief we are already talking about and focusing on the longer-term recovery, and we are working together with the international community, with the World Bank, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, the European Union, and bilateral donors to come together around a common framework of needs. There will be a post-disaster needs assessment that will be led by the World Bank and the U.N., under which the Government of Nepal and all of the donor community are working together to have a common assessment of need. And based on that, we will work together to ascertain the assistance pledges from within Asia and around the international community.

We do expect that a lot of the recovery will be Asian led, but the United States will have a very important role to play if we are to help Nepal not only recover from this earthquake, but build back better. We will have more on that as we progress, but Mr. Chairman, I want to pledge to you and to the ranking member that we will work very closely with Congress as we determine those needs and as we move forward.

It is also a time of political delicacy as we continue to strengthen Nepal's efforts for political reconciliation, for constitutional drafting, and for strengthening its democracy moving forward. And we will seek to work through the relief and recovery phase in ways that build political consensus and unity and help strengthen the democratic process in Nepal.

Finally, there are particular vulnerable groups within Nepal that are more affected by this earthquake, and we are very mindful of the needs of women and children, particularly the vulnerability to trafficking at a time when so much of the law enforcement capabilities are focused on earthquake relief. This is an area that we are

already surging technical expertise and assistance to address, and we are working not only with the law enforcement authorities of Nepal, but also of neighboring countries, especially India, to ensure that we are addressing the needs of these most vulnerable victims of the earthquake so that they do not also become victims of trafficking.

We are also working to ensure that minority populations and refugee communities within Nepal, who have long found refuge by the Government of Nepal, are also addressed in terms of the impact of the earthquake on Tibetan, Bhutanese, and other communities.

Finally, as we are looking at the long term impacts, let us not forget the impact on Nepal's cultural heritage. The beautiful and ancient architecture of Nepal took a severe blow. I had a chance to walk through Durbar Square, and it was just a deeply moving sight to see some of these beautiful ancient buildings reduced to rubble. And it will take an effort from not just Nepal, but from the world to preserve this heritage, which is not just Nepal's heritage, but it is the world's heritage.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, let me just thank you again for the leadership of this committee and of this Congress and the support that you have provided to the people of Nepal and to the U.S. Government's response to this tragic earthquake. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Biswal follows:]

**“EVEREST TREMBLED: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NEPAL  
EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE”  
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC  
NISHA D. BISWAL  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL  
ASIAN AFFAIRS  
May 20, 2015**

**Introduction**

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for this important and timely hearing on Nepal in the aftermath of the terrible earthquake that struck on April 25th.

The outpouring of concern from the U.S. Congress in the days and weeks following the earthquake and the surge in contributions to relief organizations are a testament to the generosity of the American people. It is a true indicator of the common values that unite us during these difficult times.

Mr. Chairman, the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit Nepal took over 8,600 lives and injured over 16,800 people, destroyed or damaged over 760,000 homes – directly impacting over 3.8 million people – as well as many schools and government buildings.

Last week, I traveled to Nepal and witnessed first-hand the devastating losses suffered by the Nepalese people. But I also bore witness to the triumph of the human spirit and the resilience of the affected communities as relief workers from around the world joined hands with Nepalese organizations to provide humanitarian relief. I saw grit and determination in the faces of those who had lost their homes and their family members, but had not lost their hope.

The Nepalese military, ably led by the Army Chief of Staff General Rana, worked hand in hand with our own Marines and civilian responders, alongside military and civilian teams from across the region and around the world, to coordinate search and rescue efforts and bring relief to remote and difficult to reach areas. I was there when the heart-breaking news of the American UH-1 helicopter crash, with no survivors, reached our team in Kathmandu. We salute those brave military

professionals – Americans and Nepalese – who perished in their nations’ service while helping those in need. I also want to take a moment to express our gratitude for the strong support of Indian and Nepalese forces during the search for our missing helicopter. These soldiers worked tirelessly alongside our Marines to fly sorties and deploy infantry to comb through the vast and difficult terrain.

The U.S. civilian responders, led by USAID’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance through their Disaster Assistance Response Team, including urban search and rescue teams from Los Angeles and Fairfax Counties, have worked tirelessly to save lives and bring aid to affected populations. All of these people are heroes that embody the best of American values.

Mr. Chairman, Nepal is a nation of tremendous strength and bravery. This is a nation that emerged from a ten-year civil war with a renewed commitment to democracy and development, holding successful elections and reducing the rate of extreme poverty from over half the population down to a quarter in just seven years.

However, the earthquake that hit Nepal on April 25th, its aftershocks, and the follow-on impacts, threaten to unwind the incredible progress that the country has made in recent years. The earthquake struck amid delicate constitutional negotiations, and many Nepalis have suddenly found themselves without access to shelter, clean water, or medicine. The monsoon rains begin next month and last until August, threatening more landslides and destruction.

Mr. Chairman, while in Nepal I had a chance to visit Sankhu, a historic town on the outskirts of Kathmandu with centuries-old architecture. What I saw was a scene of utter destruction, with more than half of the buildings completely destroyed and others damaged beyond repair. Other remote villages, hit by landslides, had all but disappeared, swallowed by the mountains around them.

Many villages suffering similar fates can be found throughout the most-affected districts. The needs are incredible, but we are helping to meet them. The United States Government has already committed nearly \$47 million in assistance. My colleagues will go into more detail on where that assistance has gone and what it has accomplished, which will really make you proud of our people out there and the great work that they are doing. I also want to underscore how important our pre-disaster investments in Nepal were. While these were relatively small dollar figures, their impact was tremendous: they saved lives – American, Nepali, and others – both during the earthquake and after.

**Consular achievements**

Our embassy staff, under the leadership of Ambassador Peter Bodde, has performed above and beyond duty's call in recent weeks and I would like to take this moment to publicly commend them for their incredible and life-saving work.

Despite the trauma of surviving a massive earthquake and witnessing the horrific aftermath, they selflessly continued to serve their own country and help the people of Nepal. Our staff ran 24/7 operations to account for and help U.S. citizens and assist with disaster response. After the earthquake, the Embassy contracted private helicopters to search for U.S. citizens stranded in remote locations. Thanks to their efforts, 17 U.S. citizens and 38 third-country nationals were rescued. Sadly, four U.S. citizens were killed immediately by avalanches on or near Mt. Everest.

The Embassy has been open for emergency services for U.S. citizens since April 25th, and over 800 U.S. citizens and third-country nationals sheltered at the Embassy and its annex after the earthquake. Immediately after the earthquake, our staff began canvassing hospitals and hotels to locate U.S. citizens and provide support as needed, and worked closely with the Nepali Army to rescue missing citizens. Our staff also worked with other missions to get information on U.S. citizens in possible distress and to help evacuate U.S. citizens as needed.

Our Embassy was able to respond so quickly and thoroughly because of far-sighted investments in disaster preparedness. In the past five years – and in response to the terrible Haiti earthquake of 2010 – the Department of State, with strong support from Congress, has made substantial investments to upgrade Embassy housing to meet high-seismic standards. We have conducted regular drills on earthquake preparedness, including a drill on April 24th, just hours before the actual earthquake.

These investments in preparedness made the difference between life and death. I have to give credit to our previous Ambassador, Scott DeLisi, who was also instrumental in these preparations. And we are proud to report that none of our Embassy staff – American or Nepalese – were killed or seriously injured in the earthquake or any of the aftershocks. Mr. Chairman, I want to again thank Congress for the strong support in this investment on disaster preparedness, which saved lives and meant we could respond more effectively to U.S. citizens in need.



We will look to the Nepal earthquake for lessons learned and best practices we can deploy in other seismic-prone embassies.

### **Regional Cooperation**

This tragedy has given rise to a remarkable regional response in South Asia. India, which also lost lives in the earthquake, has demonstrated its ability to lead, deploying search and rescue teams, medical teams, and engineering teams, in addition to hundreds of tons of relief material, some of it airlifted on U.S.-supplied aircraft.

India has also been extremely helpful in assisting the relief efforts of others, especially the United States. They have granted our aircraft overflight clearances faster than ever before, allowed us to use their airfields, and eased visa restrictions for our people going in and out of Nepal, including a surge of American Citizens Services personnel from India.

Bangladesh, where some also died in the earthquake, has contributed two Army Medical Teams as well as rice, money, tents, medicine, blankets, and water.

Sri Lanka used a U.S.-made C-130 aircraft to deliver its own search and rescue teams, food, medicine, and helped repair an orphanage.

Pakistan has sent two C-130s carrying a medical team, a field hospital, tents, blankets, and more.

And one of the first countries to deliver assistance was Bhutan, whose Prime Minister joined a special flight that delivered medical and search and rescue teams, along with a pledge of \$1 million.

Some of these South Asian countries were devastated by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami and now, barely a decade later, they are delivering assistance to their neighbors, often with unique platforms that U.S. companies helped build. That is a strong demonstration of how effective our investments in regional capacity can be, and the potential of further increasing those capacities and bringing them together under a regional framework.

I should also take a moment to recognize China's extensive relief efforts, which included deploying over 950 military staff, 10 plane loads of tents, and emergency road repairs. We have had good coordination with China throughout and we're

very grateful for their efforts, and offer our condolences to the families of those killed in China by the earthquake.

**Next steps**

Mr. Chairman, the most urgent tasks in the coming weeks will be to get the millions of Nepalis who lost their homes and were directly impacted by the earthquake into emergency shelter before the onset of monsoon season. Our USAID team is also working to help farmers plant their crops before the monsoon, so that Nepal does not fall into long-term food insecurity. This will provide livelihood for the affected population and reduce dependency on food aid.

Now is also a critical time to focus on planning and coordination for the recovery and reconstruction phase, which will start after the monsoon ends. We are working closely with the Government of Nepal and others in the international community to coordinate a Post Disaster Damage and Needs Assessment, or PDNA. USAID will participate in the needs assessment along with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations, European Union, and Japan.

We are also encouraging Nepal's neighbors to join in the multilateral needs assessment process so that donor countries all have a common framework from which to work. Needs assessment will not be available for several more weeks, and one thing is clear: Nepal's recovery and reconstruction will cost billions and take years to complete. We expect a strong response from Nepal's neighbors, but the United States also has an important role to play.

I should add that another way we can help Nepal's recovery is through granting Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, to Nepali nationals who are currently in the United States. This temporary benefit would allow them to continue to work here and send back much-needed remittances, which their families and friends can use to purchase food, medicine, building materials, and other necessities. U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services estimates that 10,000-25,000 Nepali nationals in the United States could benefit from TPS. The Government of Nepal has requested TPS, and Secretary Kerry has sent his recommendation to the Department of Homeland Security, which is now considering a determination.

**Political Reconciliation and Inclusive Recovery**

The earthquake struck amid Nepal's delicate transition from a decade of conflict towards political reconciliation and constitutional democracy. That process is now more complicated and made more fragile.

Nepal faces massive challenges and its people – and leaders – must face them as one. Nepal must finish its constitution and hold long-delayed local elections to build the foundation for a stable, inclusive, and accountable government that will be critical to an effective reconstruction process. We raised these concerns with the Prime Minister, with members of political parties, and with civil society. Accountable leaders will ensure that earthquake relief is delivered to the people who need it, without disadvantage for caste, gender, legal status, or ethnicity. Doing so will lay a critical foundation for stability and renewal – one that values equality and the full participation of society. The U.S. commitment to equitable access to assistance will reinforce this approach.

Our assistance is needs-based and guided by the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. And we seek to ensure that our assistance is reaching vulnerable communities, and that those communities are protected. For example, USAID is running a five-year project on improving the health and nutrition of pregnant women, new mothers, and infants. The project pays special attention to groups that have historically suffered discrimination through the caste system, and uses Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to ensure that project services are delivered to those populations. After the earthquake, USAID was able to use that project's platform to provide aid equitably in six of the 14 most-affected districts.

Since the earthquake, we've also worked to make sure that local authorities and police are alert to gender-based violence and trafficking threats in displaced-person camps. Police were able to use U.S.-supplied equipment and training to identify and arrest three rape suspects. We're now working closely with Nepal's government, civil society, and the international community, to ensure that vulnerable populations, including women and girls, members of the Dalit caste, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons, are protected in the aftermath of the earthquake, and are included equally in recovery and reconstruction efforts. India has been especially proactive in increasing vigilance against trafficking-in-persons in the aftermath of the earthquake.

I should also mention that we are monitoring the impact of the earthquake on the large Tibetan, Bhutanese, and other refugee communities in Nepal, as part of our enduring commitment to those populations. We send our condolences to the families of the approximately 20 Tibetans that died in the earthquake, and we are working with Nepal's government and international donors to ensure that these communities receive the relief supplies they need.

Let me pause to note a virtuous circle: the U.S. Government has accepted more than 80,000 Bhutanese refugees who had previously been housed in camps in Nepal. I was heartened to learn that this community, many of them now U.S. citizens, took up a special collection to help Nepal as a sign of thanks for Nepal's hospitality during their own time of need. We will keep the Tibetan and Bhutanese refugee communities and other vulnerable populations in mind as we plan for a longer rebuilding effort.

And as the world looks to helping Nepal rebuild, a top priority should be restoring the damage to its world-famous cultural heritage. The devastation is deeper than the toll in bricks, mortar, and the economic costs of lost tourism: these sites represent the idea of Nepal as a wellspring for Asian religion and culture. The development and expansion of Buddhism and Hinduism over many centuries inspired a unique artistic and architectural heritage in Nepal that represented impressive achievements in not just artwork and buildings, but also in developing a tolerant and inclusive society that was a melting pot for diverse faiths and cultures. The earthquake completely destroyed some of the grand monuments to this important legacy, and strong and sustained international efforts will be required to restore them.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, as you have heard today, our investments go a long way when disaster strikes – they save lives, including American lives. And when these investments succeed it means that we have to spend much less afterwards – health and development impacts are smaller, and the countries are able to recover quicker. This is truly a case where an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. So we need to expand and accelerate our investments in helping Nepal, and the region's other countries, to prepare for natural calamities.

We, and, more importantly, the people of Nepal, appreciate the strong messages of support and commitment from Congress and from the American people – they mean a lot in times of tragedy. Now, we must turn our attention to recovery and

reconstruction. We are committed to helping construct more resilient housing, addressing the impact on health and education, expanding support for vulnerable communities, and strengthening disaster preparedness and response capabilities in Nepal's government and civil society.

Mr. Chairman, this will be a long-term effort that will require long-term attention, and I look forward to working closely with Congress to help rebuild a stronger and more resilient Nepal. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you.  
Mr. Staal.

**STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS H. STAAL, ACTING ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Mr. STAAL. Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Connolly, and members of the subcommittee, thank you very much for inviting us, for USAID especially, to testify regarding the humanitarian response to the Nepal earthquake. And of course thank you for your continuing support to our efforts.

And of course we would like to express our deepest condolences to all of those who lost their lives and to the loved ones in this tragedy, including the families of the six U.S. marines and the two Nepalese soldiers who died. We are very grateful to our military, urban search and rescue teams, partners, and staff who are taking risks every day to save lives in Nepal.

As you mentioned, the earthquake on April 25 and the aftershocks that followed caused huge, widespread damage across Nepal, and especially in the rural areas. But preparedness measures that USAID has supported over the years have helped save lives and mitigate damage.

Today, I want to provide quickly an overview of our humanitarian response, and then I also want to share how we have leveraged investments in disaster risk reduction over the years to ensure the most effective and efficient response. And then I will turn it over to my colleague, John Stivers, who just returned from Nepal, to provide an overview of the next steps and initial plans for recovery.

As you mentioned, to date the U.S. Government has provided nearly \$47 million in humanitarian assistance. The funding is being used to address priorities, including emergency shelter—we have got some plastic sheeting right here—safe drinking water, food, improved hygiene, protection of survivors, especially women and children, so quite a broad spectrum of assistance.

Within hours after the earthquake hit we deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team, as you mentioned. This included 20 USAID disaster experts, plus the search and rescue teams from Fairfax and from Los Angeles, and their famous now 12 rescue K-9s. I think we have a picture of that that we can show too. Here is a photo of two of the USAR members, Teresa MacPherson and her K-9 Port, from Fairfax. I think we have got it there somewhere. There you go.

We have learned from previous disaster responses the value of strong interagency coordination. Based on initial disaster assessments, we promptly requested assistance from our colleagues in the Department of Defense to provide airlift and logistical support. So that since May 4 we have now worked with the military to transport more than 109 tons of relief supplies to remote areas. The coordination has been exceptional.

And our DART urban search and rescue, the USAR specialists, played a critical role in this response. In fact, I have got another photo here that many of you have seen, where they helped to iden-

tify and then pull a 15-year-old boy out of the rubble in Kathmandu 5 days after the earthquake hit. The yellow hats are the search and rescue folks in there. And then of course you have got Nepalis as well.

And then, as you mentioned, they also rescued a 41-year-old woman after the May 12 aftershock. And they worked with the U.S. military to set up triage centers at the airport and treated more than 50 people using medical supplies purchased and airlifted out there by USAID.

The USAR teams are home now, but our disaster experts remain to direct the U.S. response in coordination with the Government of Nepal and other donors. With the monsoon season fast approaching, as my colleague said, we are focusing on providing emergency shelter, improving water, sanitation and hygiene to hard-hit communities. We have airlifted so far 6,200 rolls of this heavy duty plastic sheeting. We have got a picture of that being distributed. This can help 310,000 people build temporary shelters, protect their homes from damage and rain. And the last cargo flight with sheeting just landed this morning.

And not only for homes, but you can use that plastic sheeting for other purposes. I think the next photo we have got showing that the Nepal Red Cross is using it as temporary classrooms and safe spaces for children to play. And that is another way of protecting women and children.

Before I turn it over to John, I want to just briefly identify some insights on response from previous investments. Over two decades, we have partnered with the Government of Nepal to bolster its disaster management and emergency response capability. For example, we supported the Nepal Red Cross Society to preposition water treatment plants and stock warehouses with emergency supplies out in the rural areas, and these were distributed to 3,000 families within hours of the earthquake happening.

We worked with the International Organization of Migration to identify, prepare, and preserve more than 80 open spaces throughout Kathmandu Valley, about half of which are now being used to shelter displaced. We retrofitted 50 schools to make them more earthquake resistant. And through our USAR teams, we checked these schools. Only six had damage, and very minor damage.

And also, thanks to support for hospital preparedness, the hospitals were able to stay open and quickly provide support to earthquake survivors. One hospital has treated 700 survivors and performed 300 surgeries.

So the impact of the quake could have been a lot worse without these preparedness efforts. And none of these investments of course would have been possible without your continued support. So thank you very much.

And now I would like to turn to John to lay out some of the plans for the recovery phase. Thank you.

Mr. SALMON. Mr. Stivers.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JONATHAN STIVERS, AS-  
SISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR ASIA, U.S. AGENCY  
FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Mr. STIVERS. Thank you. Chairman Salmon, members of the subcommittee, thank you for scheduling this important hearing. It is always an honor for me to testify before this subcommittee. Thank you for your continued support for USAID's humanitarian and development initiatives, which save lives and put people on a path toward democracy, resilience, and prosperity.

I join with this committee and my colleagues in expressing their deepest condolences to all who have lost their lives in this tragedy, including the six marines and two Nepalese soldiers who died.

I was in Nepal shortly after the earthquake, and I can attest to the expertise, determination, and bravery of our personnel who are saving lives and mitigating the damage of this terrible earthquake. I can also attest to the resilience of the people of Nepal, who are determined to put their lives back together and move forward stronger than before.

Building on the remarks of my colleagues, I will focus first on the context of the earthquake, including the U.S. role in Nepal's development in recent years, then second on our efforts to protect vulnerable people, especially women and girls, from trafficking and exploitation, and third some early thoughts on Nepal's long-term recovery.

So first, in regards to development, Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world and continues to cope with the effects of a decade-long insurgency that ended in 2006. Prior to the earthquake, Nepal had made significant development gains, including with support from President Obama's Feed the Future initiative and Global Health and Global Climate Change initiatives.

Three development accomplishments that we can be proud of. First, we have helped Nepal cut its extreme poverty rate in half, to 25 percent, in recent years. Second, we have helped significantly decrease maternal and infant mortality, putting Nepal on track to meet its Millennium Development Goals and giving mothers and children a better future. And third, since the conflict ended in 2006, we have supported Nepal in carrying out two free and fair elections, with high voter turnout, due to our voter registration efforts and support for their Election Commission.

Despite these achievements, Nepal has significant challenges ahead. The combination of weak democratic governance institutions and a natural disaster threaten the stability of this fragile democracy and the gains that have been made over the last decade.

In regards to gender-based violence, prior to the earthquake human trafficking was a prevalent problem, and the current disaster puts women and girls at great risk. USAID is leveraging its anti-human trafficking program to respond to these heightened protection needs. For example, our partner, the Asia Foundation, is identifying those in need and providing support to help vulnerable people cope with the trauma of loss and make decisions that do not put them at risk of trafficking, sexual abuse, and exploitation. USAID is expanding on those efforts to five more earthquake-affected districts, building on our ongoing legal counseling to



survivors of trafficking and training of justice sector officials to effectively investigate and prosecute trafficking cases.

Thank you to the members of this committee for really keeping this issue front and center for U.S. priorities in Asia and around the world.

In regards to the long-term recovery, time and again we have seen the value of initiating recovery efforts even as a disaster response is underway. In the coming weeks and months, we will work with the Government of Nepal and the international community and local civil society to advance the long-term recovery effort. USAID is working closely on a World Bank-led post-disaster needs assessment, PDNA, that should provide a framework for a donors conference to consider the long-term construction needs.

While that assessment will not be completed until mid-June, we anticipate that shelter and infrastructure will be the greatest need. We have learned from past disasters that recovery in other areas is contingent on people having a safe place to live.

Shortly after the earthquake, I had the opportunity to participate in an aerial survey and observe the distribution of relief supplies in Sinhupalchowk, one of the worst-hit districts in the mountains north of Kathmandu. In this district, it is estimated that 70 percent of the structures were destroyed, and 40 percent of the deaths occurred here.

The remoteness of these hardest-hit towns makes delivering relief supplies before monsoon season next month extremely difficult, and assessing the full scope of the reconstruction effort is a major challenge based on this terrain. But we know that the recovery will need to focus on livelihoods and food security, health and hygiene, water and sanitation, education, protection of vulnerable people, and disaster risk management.

Efforts to strengthen governance systems will also be critical to ensure that recovery investments are transparent, accountable, and responsive to local needs. We look forward to working with the U.S. Congress to determine the appropriate U.S. Role in Nepal's long-term recovery.

Nepal will not walk this road alone. The U.S. Was one of the first countries to enter Nepal in 1951 when the government opened its borders to the outside world. We are Nepal's longest-standing development partner, and we will work alongside the Nepalese people on the front lines of this response and recovery.

Thank you for the congressional support of our disaster response and development efforts in Nepal and around the world, and I look forward to answering any questions. Thank you.

[The joint statement of Mr. Staal and Mr. Stivers follows:]

**Testimony of U.S. Agency for International Development  
Assistant Administrator Jonathan N. Stivers and  
Acting Assistant Administrator Thomas H. Staal**

**House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific  
“Everest Trembled: Lessons Learned from the Nepal Earthquake Response”**

**May 20, 2015**

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for inviting USAID to testify on the U.S. humanitarian response to the Nepal earthquake. Thank you also for your continued support for USAID’s humanitarian and development programs, which save lives and put people on a path toward democracy, resilience, and prosperity.

We would like to express our deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones in the April 25 earthquake and May 12 aftershock. It is heartbreaking to see the devastation and loss of life caused by this disaster and the damage to sacred sites. We also extend our condolences to the families of the six U.S. Marines and two Nepalese soldiers who died while delivering relief supplies. We are grateful to our military, urban search-and-rescue teams, partners, and staff who are taking risks every day to save lives in Nepal.

Landlocked between India and China, Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world and continues to cope with the effects of a decade-long insurgency that ended in 2006. In line with USAID’s mission to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies, U.S. development efforts support progress toward a democratic, resilient, and prosperous Nepal.

For more than two decades, USAID has partnered with the Government of Nepal to strengthen its governance system, especially its disaster management and emergency response capabilities. While the April 25 earthquake and subsequent aftershocks caused significant damage to the country, preparedness measures put in place prior to the earthquake—such as the pre-positioning of supplies and training on earthquake-resistant construction—helped to save lives and mitigate damage. To date, the U.S. Government has provided nearly \$47 million in humanitarian assistance to earthquake-affected populations. We know that our investments before the crisis and after will be critical to ensuring that Nepal can overcome this latest tragedy and build a democratic, resilient future.

Prior to the earthquake, Nepal had made significant development gains, including with support from the Feed the Future program, and Global Health and Global Climate Change initiatives. Through these and other initiatives, USAID helped Nepal cut its extreme poverty rate in half to 25 percent. We supported Nepal in achieving a 50 percent increase in the number of children under two consuming a minimally acceptable diet in 20 targeted districts, and we helped achieve maternal and infant mortality decreases that put Nepal on track to meet its Millennium Development Goals in these areas.

USAID has been a committed partner in helping key institutions in Nepal—such as the Election Commission, political parties, and the new Constituent Assembly—become more democratic,

effective, and inclusive of all citizens. Since 2006, we have supported Nepal in carrying out two free and fair elections, with high voter turnout due to our voter registration support. Despite these achievements, Nepal has significant challenges ahead. The combination of weak institutions of democratic governance and a natural disaster threaten the stability of this fragile democracy and the economic development gains made over the last decade. We know that nation states with the capacity to manage risks and encourage inclusive growth are best able to withstand disasters. As Nepal underscores, addressing state fragility and promoting good governance is key to building resilience.

Today, we would like to provide an overview of the current humanitarian conditions as well as an update on our response efforts and critical next steps.

#### **Current Situation and U.S. Response**

On April 25, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck central Nepal—the worst to hit the country in over 80 years. It caused widespread damage across the country, nearly destroyed entire villages, and triggered several landslides and avalanches. The earthquake was followed by more than 100 aftershocks<sup>1</sup>, including a magnitude 7.3 tremor on May 12 that triggered additional landslides and collapsed buildings already damaged by the April 25 earthquake.

According to the Government of Nepal's latest statistics, the earthquake and its aftershocks have killed over 8,600 people, injured over 16,800, and damaged or destroyed more than 760,000 homes. Authorities expect these numbers to grow.

Hours after the first earthquake hit, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)—which has Presidential authority to coordinate the U.S. Government response to international disasters—deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to Nepal to assess the damage, airlift relief supplies, coordinate relief efforts with the Government of Nepal and other donors, and conduct search-and-rescue missions. The DART comprised more than 20 experienced USAID disaster experts; a 57-person urban search-and-rescue (USAR) team from Fairfax County, Virginia; a 57-person USAR team from Los Angeles County, California; and 12 rescue canines. USAID also stood up a Response Management Team in Washington for operational support and coordination with other U.S. Government agencies.

Building on lessons learned from previous disaster responses, we know that strong coordination is critical for a timely and effective response. Given our need to reach remote areas, we requested assistance from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to provide its unique capabilities, including airlift and logistical support to the USAID-led effort. DoD activated a Joint Task Force out of U.S. Pacific Command and deployed four MV-22 Ospreys and three UH-1Y Hueys to support USAID's efforts to transport critical commodities to, and conduct aerial assessments of, earthquake-affected areas. On May 4, USAID's DART Leader and the Commanding General of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade conducted the first U.S. aerial assessment to the severely-impacted Dolakha and Ramechhap districts and neighboring areas. Since May 4, we have

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.usgs.gov/blogs/features/usgs\\_top\\_story/magnitude-7-8-earthquake-in-nepal/](http://www.usgs.gov/blogs/features/usgs_top_story/magnitude-7-8-earthquake-in-nepal/)

worked with the U.S. military to transport about 109 tons of relief supplies to hard-hit districts identified by Nepalese officials.

Together with the military, we addressed major logistical obstacles to ensure that humanitarian assistance could flow more quickly to the people and places most in need. Collaboration and coordination between USAID and the U.S. military—which has strengthened over the years—has been exemplary for the Nepal earthquake.

USAID also partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to get timely information on the April 25 earthquake and its aftershocks that helped to shape our response activities. USAID funds the USGS Prompt Assessment of Global Earthquakes for Response (PAGER) system. The system—developed in consultation with USAID—provides rapid estimates of likely fatalities and economic losses following an earthquake. In addition, USGS provided forecasts that gave our DART and the affected population a sense of the frequency, magnitude, and duration of aftershocks.

On April 30, USAR members of the USAID DART helped pull a 15-year-old boy out of the rubble in Kathmandu, five days after the earthquake hit. The teen was quickly transported to an Israeli field hospital where he was treated and later released. USAR teams also surveyed more than 130 buildings and bridges in Kathmandu for earthquake damage, including an ancient Hindu temple complex recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The continued presence of our USAR specialists in Nepal allowed them to rapidly resume operations following the May 12 aftershock. Within hours, our USAR teams rescued a 41-year-old woman from a collapsed building in Singati, and provided medical care to her and 11 other injured people. USAID had another USAR team in the nearby village of Charikot, where medics treated additional people for injuries. At Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport, our USAR medics worked with U.S. military personnel to set up a triage center—using medical supplies purchased and airlifted by USAID—and treated more than 50 people who had been evacuated to safety. We began to demobilize our USAR specialists on May 14 as the Government of Nepal signaled efforts should pivot toward assessing needs and coordinating relief and recovery programs. However, USAID disaster experts remain in Nepal to assist with managing the U.S. Government response.

#### **Immediate Needs**

Despite progress made over the past few weeks, substantial humanitarian needs remain in Nepal. Our current funding will continue to support improved logistics and humanitarian coordination and provide emergency shelter, safe drinking water, food, improved sanitation, hygiene promotion, and protection for the vulnerable, including women and children.

With the monsoon season fast approaching in June, our humanitarian partners are concerned that heavy rains will impede the delivery of assistance to remote areas. Monsoon rains will increase the risk of landslides in regions already destabilized by recent seismic activity, further affecting families who have lost homes, livelihoods, and loved ones. We and our partners are prioritizing

communities in these areas and delivering as many critical commodities as possible to ensure they have a three-month supply to get through the full monsoon season.

#### **Logistics**

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the response effort was hampered by damaged infrastructure and blocked roads. While Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport quickly reopened, a shortage of landing slots and limited cargo-handling capacity created bottlenecks for relief supplies arriving in Nepal. Debris and landslides blocked access to mountainous areas, creating challenges for distribution beyond Kathmandu.

Since May 4, the USAID DART has been working with the U.S. military to transport emergency relief supplies to remote earthquake-affected areas. USAID is also coordinating with the U.S. Air Force 36<sup>th</sup> Contingency Response Group and the Nepal Civil Aviation Authority to streamline airfield operations at the airport, maintain runway integrity, and expedite cargo flow so that relief supplies can be delivered more quickly to places in need.

#### **Shelter**

In Kathmandu, while some structures sustained damage, a majority remain standing. However in affected rural areas, the earthquake destroyed as many as 80 to 95 percent of structures. In addition to using pre-positioned supplies, USAID immediately transported emergency shelter materials from its global emergency stockpiles. The first airlift of USAID heavy-duty plastic sheeting arrived in Kathmandu on April 30 and was rapidly distributed by partners to help up to 35,000 affected people in the Kathmandu Valley and Sinhapalchowk and Gorkha districts. As aftershocks continued, it became apparent that shelter needs would increase.

We are prioritizing the provision of plastic sheeting, a cost-effective, durable, and lightweight material that can be easily transported to families in hard-hit rural areas choosing to stay near their damaged homes and farms. Plastic sheeting provides a water-resistant barrier for building temporary shelters and protecting damaged homes against rain. Moreover, plastic sheeting is a multi-purpose material that has been used to create child friendly spaces, latrines, rainwater catchment ponds, and even quarantine fencing during USAID's Ebola response.

In total, USAID is airlifting 6,200 rolls of heavy-duty plastic sheeting to help up to 310,000 people. Our partners are distributing emergency shelter kits with plastic sheeting, tools, and rope to families in hard-hit districts and conducting trainings on how to construct temporary shelters.

In the long-term, we are exploring how we might support the repair and reconstruction of homes and vital infrastructure, such as schools and health clinics.

#### **Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene**

USAID and the humanitarian community are prioritizing access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. According to the Government of Nepal, affected communities generally have access to water sources. However, the earthquake has severely impacted water quality. Landslides contaminated drinking water sources, requiring residents to boil or chlorinate their water to make it safe for consumption. Latrines were destroyed, forcing communities to practice

open defecation. As a consequence, more people are at risk of contracting waterborne diseases such as cholera, which is endemic to Nepal. With the heavy rains come heightened risks.

Between 660,000 and 1.7 million people will require water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance, according to the United Nations (UN) and other partners. USAID partners are distributing hygiene kits containing soap, toothbrushes, and sanitary supplies. We have temporarily shifted our gold-standard nutrition program, which before the earthquake was helping over 625,000 households in 41 districts, to support Save the Children's efforts to distribute hygiene and baby kits to earthquake survivors and provide emergency nutrition services to pregnant women and children. Our partners are educating communities on good hygiene practices. We plan to support a disease surveillance system to quickly identify and respond to potential disease outbreaks.

#### **Food**

While emergency food needs are not acute at this time, we are concerned about the long-term impact of the earthquake on food security, especially since 75 percent of the population lives off of farming. Many farmers had their grain storage sheds destroyed, and lost livestock, seeds, and tools. Seismic movements caused farms to shift or be wiped out by landslides. At the time of the earthquake, winter wheat was about to be harvested and spring corn was mostly planted; however, the country's main rice crop—a vital grain in local diets—had not yet been planted. With monsoon rains on the horizon, the window to meet the planting cycle is closing.

An estimated 1.4 million people are expected to need immediate food assistance in the next three months. According to the UN, as of May 13, food aid has reached more than one million people in 11 districts. On April 29, USAID provided the UN World Food Program with \$2.5 million to buy 1,390 metric tons of regionally grown rice for 120,000 people for one month. The time required to ship U.S. food to Nepal, a landlocked country, would have taken weeks. By buying rice locally, we ensured emergency food was available in the crucial early relief stages. In the coming weeks, USAID intends to draw down on pre-positioned food stocks from our warehouse in Sri Lanka to help meet ongoing food security needs. Through an ongoing development program, USAID will distribute vegetable seed packets for homestead vegetable gardening in hard-hit areas, as these crops will be critical to improve food security and nutrition in the coming months.

Markets in Nepal's worst-affected districts are showing signs of early recovery, although markets remain closed in some of the country's mountainous regions. Remittance flows are accelerating the recovery, and we expect that markets will respond once transportation access is restored. Meanwhile, USAID is looking to support market-based activities to improve access to food items and agricultural supplies. Our partners are exploring cash-for-work projects to help people buy food in revived local markets. We are also working with farmers to overcome key obstacles to growing and getting their crops to market. USAID is well positioned to be effective in these efforts. Through Feed the Future, we have been working in Nepal for four years to address the challenges of low agricultural productivity and lack of market access. In 2014, USAID helped 90,000 households increase their agricultural productivity and incomes.

### **Protection**

We know that women, children, the elderly, and those with special needs often fare worst during disasters, which is why we emphasize protection from the start of any emergency response. This is especially the case in Nepal, where a recent gender analysis by CARE showed that more than one-third of households in hard-hit Gorkha are female-headed, with approximately one in five headed by women ages 60 and older. Prior to the earthquake, human trafficking was a prevalent problem in Nepal; the current disaster puts women and girls at greater risk of exploitation, including in Sindhupalchowk, Kavre, and Dhading, which already had high labor migration.

To mitigate the risk of earthquake survivors falling prey to trafficking, sexual abuse, and gender-based violence, the UN stood up a protection cluster, which coordinates between UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and others to address protection concerns. The protection cluster plans to identify a coordinator. We also require partners to mainstream protection in their relief efforts to ensure maximum safety and dignity for women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and others. For example, distribution lines are organized in consultation with the affected community, taking into account location and ease of access, so that beneficiaries—especially women and girls—don't need to travel too far or at night to receive aid.

USAID is also leveraging its anti-human trafficking program in Nepal to respond to heightened protection needs. Our partner, the Asia Foundation, mobilized mobile psychological support services for earthquake-affected communities in Sindhupalchowk. They are also coordinating with the Sindhupalchowk District Health Office to identify areas in need and set up a camp that will provide psychosocial first aid and counseling support to women, girls, children, and men to help them cope with the trauma of loss, and help them make decisions that do not put them at risk of trafficking, sexual abuse, and exploitation. USAID will expand these efforts to five more districts, targeting the most vulnerable people to provide psychosocial care, shelter, livelihoods support, and awareness-raising regarding protection services. These efforts build on USAID's ongoing legal counseling to survivors of trafficking and sensitization of hundreds of justice sector officials on rights-based approaches for effectively investigating, prosecuting, and adjudicating trafficking cases.

### **Long-Term Recovery**

Time and again we have seen the value of initiating recovery efforts even as disaster response is underway, and we know this approach will be critical to ensure Nepal stays on a path of progress. While our robust humanitarian activities continue to save lives, we are already beginning to look at ways to restart economic activity and get people back on their feet.

In the coming weeks and months, we will work with the Government of Nepal, the international community, and local civil society to assess what will be required so that the long-term recovery advances in a way that bolsters future resilience and sustainable development. While those assessments are ongoing, we anticipate the recovery will focus on shelter and infrastructure, livelihoods and food security, health and hygiene, water and sanitation, education, protection of vulnerable people, and disaster risk management. Efforts to strengthen governance systems will also be critical to ensure that our recovery investments are transparent, accountable, and responsive to local needs. We know that shelter will be the greatest need and have learned from

past disasters that recovery in other areas is contingent on people having a safe place to live. With more than 90 percent of schools and health facilities damaged or destroyed in some districts, rebuilding public infrastructure will be critical.

We will be updating Congress as we proceed.

#### **Building Resilience**

We cannot stop shocks like earthquakes from happening, but USAID is committed to helping people mitigate risks and build the capacity to withstand them. In fiscal year 2014 alone, we have spent more than \$58 million to reduce disaster risk and strengthen response capabilities throughout Asia. Early warning is key to early action, which is why we have helped establish 17 global, regional, or national early warning systems for disasters such as volcanoes, cyclones, and floods. For example, we partner with the USGS on the Volcano Disaster Assistance Program, which worked with the Government of Indonesia to create an early warning system that helped evacuate more than 10,000 people when Mount Merapi erupted in 2010.

A massive cyclone slammed into the eastern coast of India in 1999, killing at least 10,000 people; due to disaster preparedness measures we helped the Indian government put in place over the past 15 years—including the training of thousands of emergency personnel—a similar storm in 2013 resulted in less than 50 fatalities.

In Nepal, our disaster risk reduction investments have focused on support to key institutions and communities to prepare for and respond to disasters. Before the earthquake, we partnered with the Nepal Red Cross Society to pre-position hygiene kits and latrine construction materials and install two water treatment units in two districts that have been severely affected by the earthquake. We helped the Nepal Red Cross Society stock 12 warehouses with emergency relief items, which were distributed to 3,000 families days after the earthquake. We funded the International Organization for Migration to work with the Government of Nepal to identify, prepare, and preserve more than 80 open spaces, so that in the event of a disaster there would be sites available for displacement camps, emergency warehouses, and other humanitarian activities. About half of these sites are now being used to shelter displaced people.

Since 1998, USAID has supported the Program for the Enhancement of Emergency Response (PEER) in Nepal and nine other countries. PEER assists local, regional, and national disaster management agencies in organizing and conducting trainings on medical first response, collapsed structure search-and-rescue, and hospital preparedness for mass casualties following a disaster. Dr. Pradeep Vaidya, a PEER graduate, implemented lessons learned and helped his hospital develop a disaster plan. As a result, Kathmandu's Tribhuvan Teaching Hospital fastened furniture to the walls, laminated windows, prepositioned supplies, and installed a seismic-resistant blood bank. These efforts allowed the hospital to stay open right after the earthquake, and its doctors treated 700 patients and performed more than 300 surgeries.

For more than 15 years, USAID has partnered with the Kathmandu-based National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) to increase earthquake awareness and preparedness. The organization educates homeowners, masons, and government authorities on the benefits of seismic-resistant construction and retrofitting best practices. The program also works with



schools, hospitals, and airport and transportation authorities to conduct seismic risk assessments and develop earthquake-preparedness plans. After the earthquake, NSET mobilized quickly to conduct structural assessments to determine which surviving structures were safe. In addition, later this month, USAID plans to fund the deployment of a USGS team that will provide technical assistance to Nepalese seismologists and geologists on hazard and damage assessments.

We have not only invested in emergency preparedness in Nepal, but also in recognizing and addressing the comprehensive set of risk factors and vulnerabilities that set Nepal's poorest communities back in the wake of recurring disasters. As part of USAID's new policy on resilience, we launched a \$70 million Community Resilience Program that integrates disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation into our food and nutrition security efforts. In addition, USAID's climate change activities aggressively address awareness and preparedness for extreme weather events and climate-induced disasters. We continue to identify opportunities to design joint humanitarian and development programs that invest in a range of areas—from livelihoods to nutrition to disaster risk reduction—to help communities adapt to and mitigate risks and stay on a path to development.

As this earthquake underscored, rural communities, which farm along steep hillsides, are especially vulnerable to mudslides. For example, along the steep banks of the Trishuli River, poor farmers had cleared the forest cover in order to grow food to support their families. Consequently, the land began to erode. In partnership with the government and farmers, USAID helped stabilize the eroding banks by planting a combination of native "broom grass," a highly marketable cash crop, and trees that will eventually produce cinnamon, lemons, and timber, further enhancing incomes. These simple but effective investments will continue to help the people of Nepal reduce their vulnerability to inevitable shocks and stresses.

#### **Conclusion**

USAID's goal is to build upon preexisting capacities to help Nepal and its people become more resilient to future disasters. Our disaster experts continue to assess needs and monitor conditions on the ground to determine what additional assistance will be needed.

Nepal will not walk the road alone. The United States was one of the first countries to enter Nepal in 1951 when the government opened its borders to outside support. We are Nepal's longest-standing development partner, and we will work alongside the Nepalese people on the front lines of this response and recovery.

Thank you for your time today and for congressional support of our disaster response and development efforts in Nepal and around the world. We look forward to your questions.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you.  
Ms. Witkowsky.

**STATEMENT OF MS. ANNE A. WITKOWSKY, DEPUTY ASSISTANT  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, STABILITY AND HUMANITARIAN  
AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Ms. WITKOWSKY. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sherman and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Mr. CONNOLLY. For the record, I am not Ranking Member Sherman.

Ms. WITKOWSKY. I am sorry. Ranking Member Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Ms. WITKOWSKY. I apologize.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Apparently we look a lot alike. Just teasing.

Ms. WITKOWSKY. May I try again?

Ranking Member Connolly and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Department of Defense role in the U.S. Response to the April 25 Nepal earthquake and May 12 aftershock.

First, I would like to express my deep sadness and offer my condolences to the families of the six marines and their Nepalese counterparts lost in a helicopter accident supporting the relief effort. This tragedy is a reminder of the vital role that U.S. Servicemembers play in delivering humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, but one that is not without risk.

The Department has a long history of military-to-military engagement in Nepal and the Pacific region. This engagement has focused on several areas most relevant to today's hearing, increasing Nepal's humanitarian assistance and disaster response capabilities.

In recent years, through U.S. Pacific Command, DOD has worked with the Nepalese Government on initiatives designed specifically to mitigate the impact of a disaster such as this one. These efforts include construction of Deep Tube Wells to provide water in the event of an earthquake or landslide, establishment of an earthquake-resistant central blood bank, construction of earthquake-resistant emergency facilities at Nepal's main airport, training on rapid repair of runways, establishment of emergency operation centers, and the construction of multiple disaster material warehouses.

In addition, we have engaged in disaster-reduction exercises and exchanges, including an earthquake scenario field training exercise in 2013 and a regional disaster preparedness summit hosted in Bangladesh in 2014. Another round of exchange training is scheduled for later this year.

Such efforts, along with other steady-state DOD humanitarian assistance projects, help to deepen our cooperation with our Nepalese partners and appear to have mitigated some of the impacts of the earthquake and facilitate its subsequent response efforts. For example, the DOD-funded Deep Tube Well Project is currently being used to provide water and power to more than 5,500 internally displaced persons, as well as local villagers and Nepalese police in the Kathmandu Valley.

On April 25, just hours after the quake, Secretary Carter directed that the Department provide support to the Government of

Nepal-led relief effort, responding to USAID's request for assistance. The Commander of U.S. Pacific Command ordered two special forces teams already in Nepal for training to assist the Embassy team with immediate lifesaving relief and medical support.

Additionally, U.S. Transportation Command provided two C-17 aircraft to airlift the previously mentioned USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team, the DART, as well as the two urban search and rescue teams from Fairfax County, Virginia, and Los Angeles County, California. These teams launched in the hours after the initial earthquake and arrived in Kathmandu on April 28.

U.S. Pacific Command also deployed a 20-person Joint Humanitarian Assessment Support team, commanded by Marine Brigadier General Paul Kennedy, to provide subject matter expertise to the DART leader and better frame military requirements.

As the Disaster Assistance Response Team and the Joint Humanitarian Assessment Support Team came to understand the scale of the disaster, it became clear that more military support would be required. Rotary wing airlift and airfield management specialists in particular were needed to help increase throughput of the increasingly backlogged international airport.

The U.S. Military response, named Operation Sahayogi Haat, Nepali for Helping Hand, is under the control of Joint Task Force 505, commanded by Marine Lieutenant John Wissler. The JTF has had more than 900 total personnel in Nepal, Thailand, and Japan. Up to 300 of those personnel have been forward staged to Nepal with Brigadier General Kennedy.

To date, Joint Task Force 505 has provided airlift, airfield services, search and rescue support, and other support to the USAID-led response.

As of May 19, the joint task force has flown 290 relief flights, airlifted 1488 passengers, and airlifted more than 728 tons of material, including relief supplies.

In conclusion, the Department of Defense, in support of our USAID and Department of State partners, has responded swiftly to assist the Government of Nepal. The relief efforts to date highlight the unique capabilities the Department can bring to bear in the U.S. Government response to natural disasters and humanitarian crises.

Thank you again for this opportunity to highlight the great work that the men and women of the Department of Defense are doing alongside our partners in USAID and the State Department, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Witkowsky follows:]

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
MS. ANNE A. WITKOWSKY  
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
STABILITY AND HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS

BEFORE THE 114<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MAY 20, 2015

**Introduction**

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Department of Defense role in the U.S. response to the April 25 Nepal earthquake and aftershock of May 12. These earthquakes have caused a disaster of staggering proportions, requiring a significant humanitarian response from the entire international community. The United States is responding alongside our international partners in support of the Government of Nepal to bring lifesaving relief to the Nepalese people.

Before addressing the details of the Department of Defense efforts, I would like to express my deep sadness and offer my condolences to the families of our six Marines who perished when their helicopter went down in the mountains of Nepal last week, while providing aid to earthquake victims. I would also like to convey our sympathies to our Nepalese partners, in mourning for the loss of their two service members who were on board the helicopter. At the same time, I wish to express our gratitude to the Nepalese and Indian governments for their dedicated support in the search and recovery operations. This tragedy is a reminder of the vital role that U.S. service members play in delivering humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, but one that is not without risk. Our mission continues in Nepal and we remain committed to answering the call when disaster strikes, in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world.

The Department of Defense has a long history of military to military engagement in Nepal and across the region. This engagement has focused on four primary areas, to include supporting the professionalization and modernization of the Nepal military and the Ministry of Defense; enhancing Nepal's peacekeeping capabilities and contributions; building Nepal's

ground force capacity; and - most relevant to today's hearing - increasing Nepal's humanitarian assistance and disaster response capabilities.

In recent years, the Department of Defense, through the U.S. Pacific Command, has worked with the Nepalese government on initiatives designed specifically to mitigate the impact of an earthquake-related disaster. These efforts include the construction of Deep Tube Wells, the establishment of a central blood bank, repairs to critical airport infrastructure, the development of an airport disaster recovery plan, the establishment of emergency operations centers, and the construction of multiple disaster material warehouses throughout the country. The Department has also engaged in several Disaster Response Exercises and Engagements with Nepalese personnel; in September 2013 the Department of Defense held a Field Training Exercise focused on an earthquake impacting the Kathmandu Valley. Foreign humanitarian assistance, civil-military coordination, and interagency communication were the primary themes. More recently, Nepalese personnel participated in the Pacific Regional Disaster Reduction Exercise and Engagement in Bangladesh in August 2014, and another similar exchange is scheduled for later this year. Such efforts, along with other steady-state military humanitarian assistance projects, help to deepen our cooperation with our Nepalese partners, and appear to have mitigated some of the impacts of the earthquake and facilitated subsequent response efforts. For example, the Department of Defense funded Deep Tube Well project is currently being used to provide water and power to more than 5,500 internally displaced persons as well as local villagers and Nepalese police in the Kathmandu Valley.

**The Department of Defense Role in U.S. Government Nepal Earthquake Response Efforts**

Department of Defense personnel are deployed to Nepal in support of our USAID partners, providing unique military capabilities to the U.S. Government response effort. On April 25, just hours after the earthquake, Secretary Carter directed that the Department provide support to the Government of Nepal-led efforts, in direct response to USAID's request for assistance. U.S. Pacific Command ordered two Special Forces teams already in Nepal for training to assist the Embassy team with immediate lifesaving and medical support. Team members accompanied State Department consular personnel on chartered helicopters to rescue seven climbers stranded in Everest basecamps as well as repatriate the remains of a U.S. citizen killed in the avalanche. These teams remain engaged today, coordinating with Nepalese Army personnel on rescue operations in the Gorkha region.

The U.S. Transportation Command provided two C-17 transport aircraft to airlift the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) as well as Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams from Fairfax County, Virginia and Los Angeles County, California. The teams arrived in Kathmandu on April 28. The rapid movement of the teams paid off when both were involved in the rescue of a 15-year-old boy from the rubble on April 30 after being buried for more than 120 hours. The USAR team's efforts were called upon repeatedly, as they provided vital medical care to many injured people, often working closely with U.S. military medics and personnel.

The U.S. Pacific Command deployed a 20-person Joint Humanitarian Assessment Support Team, which arrived in Nepal on April 29, to coordinate with the DART. This team, led by Marine Brigadier General Paul Kennedy, consisted of military experts in multiple specialties, focused on determining possible military staging locations as well as specific military support requirements. As the DART and Joint Humanitarian Assessment Support Team came to

understand the scale of the disaster, it became clear that more military support would be required, particularly rotary wing airlift and airfield management specialists to increase the throughput at the increasingly backlogged international airport in Kathmandu.

The U.S. military response effort, named Operation SAHAYOGI HAAT (Nepalese for “Helping Hand”) is under the control of Joint Task Force 505, commanded by Marine Lieutenant General John Wissler. The Joint Task Force comprises more than 900 total personnel in Nepal, Thailand, and Japan. More than 300 personnel are forward staged in Nepal with Brigadier General Kennedy, an additional 260 personnel are staged in Thailand, and the remaining 340 are based in Okinawa, Japan. Additionally, four C-17 transport aircraft, two KC-130J transport aircraft, four V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft, and three UH-1 helicopters were deployed to support the effort.

To date, Joint Task Force 505 has provided airlift, airfield services, search and rescue support, and other support to the USAID-led effort in eastern Nepal. As of May 18, the Joint Task Force has flown 290 sorties, and a total of 938 flight hours. The Joint Task Force has airlifted 1,488 passengers and more than 724 tons of material, including 109 tons of relief supplies.

### **Conclusion**

The Department of Defense, in support of our USAID and Department of State partners, has responded swiftly to assist the Government of Nepal. The relief efforts to date highlight the unique capabilities the Department can bring to bear in the U.S. Government response to natural disasters and humanitarian crises.



Mr. SALMON. Thank you.

I understand Mr. Connolly has another function or another scheduling issue, so I am going to let you ask the first question.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Chairman, thank you. You are most gracious. I really appreciate it.

And, again, welcome to our panel.

I am particularly interested as a long-time supporter of and participant in USAID programs lessons learned. What worked? What didn't? We have been in Nepal since 1951. We have done a lot of training and spent a lot of money on emergency preparedness, knowing this is a high-risk area to begin with. You are between two tectonic plates that created the Himalayas, so I mean, this is real stuff.

What worked? What worked well, Mr. Staal, in your opinion, and what disappointed us that we have to beef up and improve?

Mr. STAAL. Thank you, Congressman Connolly. It is a very important question and something that we take very seriously. In fact, every time we do a humanitarian response like this, we do an after-action. So that will be coming out as well.

But even early on, I think we can already see that a number of things worked well. Certainly, our coordination with the military. And not just that it worked well now, but the fact that we had already developed good relationships, good working relationships. In fact, Paul Kennedy that Ms. Witkowsky mentioned, also helped us on the Haiyan response.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You are talking about our military?

Mr. STAAL. Our military, exactly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yeah.

Mr. STAAL. So we lashed up really well, and that is an important thing, that we continue to build that.

And also our relationship on the ground, training of search and rescue teams within Nepal, first responders there, both in the government and even volunteers. I mean, that made a huge difference. Prepositioning supplies around the country, both from us and from the military side, made a huge difference. It is hard to measure the negative, but I think that made a huge difference.

Coordination is still an ongoing challenge, and certainly in any disaster this big, especially in a disaster in a country that has governance challenges. So certainly the government is leading the effort, but we have had to provide quite a bit of support to that in a number of ways. The U.N. System quickly set up what they call a cluster system where you have sectoral groups, health cluster, a logistics cluster, a protection cluster, and so on, so that all different agency who are providing humanitarian assistance can work together, and that helped the government in terms of their leadership.

And even one of the issues we noticed was that at the airport the ability of the Nepalese Government to manage all the supplies that were coming in was inadequate. So, again, we called on our friends from DOD to come in, and they helped to provide a very important part of that kind of commodity management at the airport.

There is still weakness in a rural area where you have got the majority of the problem way out in the countryside in a very difficult terrain. They have building codes that they have developed,

again with our support, and we have done a lot of training for the government on implementing those building codes, but it still needs a lot of work, and especially as you get out of Kathmandu.

In Kathmandu, 90 percent of the buildings were basically undamaged. And it was any kind of new buildings are pretty untouched. It is really the older buildings, some of the ones with a heritage, unfortunately, where—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Temples.

Mr. STAAL. Temples and things like that.

And then when you get out into the small villages on the hill-sides, frankly, they don't know about building codes, and that is a bigger challenge that we still, I think, have to figure out how we are going to address that in a very rural setting like that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Just real briefly, anyone else want to take a crack at sort of lessons learned, things we thought worked well, things we have got work to do still?

Ms. Biswal.

Ms. BISWAL. Congressman Connolly, after the devastating Gujarat earthquake of 2000—I think it was 2001—Congress appropriated and USAID implemented over a number of years a partnership between the Government of India and the United States on creating a national disaster management agency. We provided some of the technical expertise.

That capability in India today is quite sophisticated, quite advanced. The recent super-cyclone that hit Orrisa was a tremendous reflection of India's capabilities, because the loss of life was minimal in a category 5 super-cyclone. That capability was on display in Nepal as part of India's response to the earthquake, and the United States can feel proud for the role that it has played around the region in investing in disaster response capabilities.

There is more to be done in trying to foster more regional coordination and advanced planning of regional responses, but the fact that there is so much capability in the region today, and the experiences of many of these countries in their own earthquakes, is something that we have a direct hand.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Very heartening to here.

Thank you all so much.

And, Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for your graciousness. I really appreciate it.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you very much.

I just want to start out with, it is a little bit of a statement, and I wanted to direct it to you, Ms. Witkowsky, regarding a conversation I had with the Hug family, whose son Jake died in that tragic crash.

They were, obviously, upset by his passing, but they were further upset because in some dialogue that they had with the bereavement folks that they are working with within the Department of Navy, they were told off the record that, well, if their son had been killed in combat that they would be afforded the opportunity and the full support of our country to go to the Dover ceremony and the funding that goes along with that, so that his parents could go to that extremely important vigil. But they were told that there is kind of a double standard. If you are killed in a mission like this,

a search-and-rescue mission, it is not considered combat, and that they wouldn't be covered to go.

Now, I first reached out to Mac Thornberry, the chairman of Armed Services. He was pretty upset by that. I don't think the American people would understand that at all, much less the family of the hero. But I know that we have reached out to the Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, and I believe in my heart he will do the right thing.

So would you please pass that on, that we are expecting good things?

Ms. WITKOWSKY. I will absolutely do that, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you very much.

A question I have is regarding getting the actual food and different emergency provisions to the people of Nepal. I understand there are some complications, and I am told that it is regarding the rules of cargo preferences and that 50 percent of the U.S. Government cargo has got to be transported on U.S. flagged vessels. Is that the reason that the estimates in taking this prepositioned food ship from Colombo to Calcutta and then overland to Nepal, that it could take 45 to 60 days, is that why this is happening? And if so, are there some concessions we can make to speed that up?

Mr. Staal.

Mr. STAAL. Thank you, Chairman Salmon. That is an important question.

Let me clarify. First of all, what we were able to do, there was food prepositioned already in Nepal.

Mr. SALMON. Right.

Mr. STAAL. So that got things out. That was obviously quick. And then also we were able to use IDA funds with the flexibility provided us by Congress to allow WFP to buy food locally, like within northern India and nearby, to get some food going very quickly.

So the food that is coming in from Sri Lanka, it doesn't need to be there within days. It is okay that the timing will then sort of refill the pipeline and provide for needs over the next few months. So it didn't delay any of our food aid. I want to clarify that to begin with.

And secondly, regarding the cargo preference, I mean, that is a more complicated question. But in the case of a really dire emergency like that, the cargo preference rule is a little more generic. We do have the 50 percent, but it is not just on every individual shipment. It can be generalized. So that doesn't really hold us up on this particular issue.

Mr. SALMON. Okay. So we can look for every effort to expedite this?

Mr. STAAL. Absolutely. Yes, for sure.

Mr. SALMON. Great.

Another question I have is regarding the local government, the Nepalese Government, and their reaction. Obviously, they have got to take a leading role in the response efforts.

Could you please discuss the role of the Government of Nepal in leading the response to this disaster and describe the structure of its disaster response mechanism, and how would you assess the strengths and their weaknesses of the response? And with some of

the fears regarding government corruption, what, if any, measures are in place to address corruption with the relief effort underway?

Ms. Biswal.

Ms. BISWAL. Thank you. Let me provide some initial comments and then invite my colleague, John Stivers, as well if he wants to weigh in.

Clearly, there is an issue in terms of the capacity of the Government of Nepal on the bigger challenge of long-term relief and recovery. In the initial relief phase, the Nepalese military has played a critical role in deploying their forces across all of the affected districts and in coordinating and assisting in the delivery of relief. And I think that they have performed admirably. They have interfaced extremely well with our military and our civilian forces, and we have had little complaint in terms of the efficacy of this effort in light of the magnitude of the disaster that we were facing.

There is an issue in terms of how the longer-term effort will be coordinated. Nepal has a National Planning Commission, and we are working with the Planning Commission, we are working with the Home Ministry, and with the Finance Ministry.

It is a time when the picture is still evolving in terms of what is going to be the most effective way for Nepal to coordinate the longer-term efforts, and they are thinking through that. There is a team that is in Kathmandu from India's National Disaster Management Agency to provide technical assistance.

We have also worked with our Pakistani colleagues, because General Nadeem, who oversaw the Pakistan earthquake response and reconstruction, and who has been very lauded globally for the transparency and the efficacy of the response that he oversaw, has also been brought in under USAID's leadership to come in and help provide some assessment and some assistance in terms of how Nepal can think about managing its relief going forward.

This is a country that is still coalescing in terms of its democratic institutions and institutions of government. So it is going to require the persistence and the partnership of the international community in supporting them in their efforts to manage a recovery effort. We want them to succeed. We don't want to take it over from them, but we want them to succeed, and there will be an element of partnership over the coming months in helping them get this right.

Mr. SALMON. Mr. Stivers.

Mr. STIVERS. Thank you.

There is no question that government is a major challenge in Nepal. Institutionally, it is difficult for the government to deliver basic services, enforce building codes, et cetera. The parties haven't come together in terms of a constitution. They haven't had local elections yet, which is a major challenge when it comes to the relief and long-term recovery effort.

We continue to help them try to work together on all of these issues, and we need to make sure, the international community needs to make sure that the long-term recovery takes into account how we can build Nepal's capacity not only to better withstand natural disasters, but also to move forward and come out of their fragile democratic stage to consolidate their democracy.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you very much.

Ms. Meng.

Ms. MENG. Thank you.

I wanted to follow up on Assistant Secretary Biswal's comments about helping vulnerable populations in light of potential human trafficking increase, specifically, with women and girls that often have unique needs that may be overlooked during crises. After food, water, and shelter are in place, there is rarely a budget left for basic health and hygiene needs for girls and women, like prenatal care and safe childbirth delivery services for expectant women and sanitary provisions for women during menstruation.

How is the U.S. Supporting providing support for these specific needs? Oftentimes women are too ashamed to ask for help.

Ms. BISWAL. Let me give you some initial comments, and then I will also, again, turn to Mr. Stivers on some of the work that AID is already doing in Nepal with respect to women and girls, and particularly focusing on health and hygiene.

But you are correct to say that this is a time of extreme vulnerability. And over the years, we have learned that it is in times of crisis and times of disaster response that particular attention has to be paid to issues of protection and issues of addressing the particular needs of vulnerable groups and vulnerable populations.

And so I think, not only in terms of the U.S. Government's response, but really, what I am hearing in terms of the awareness of the civil society in Nepal. When I was in India 2 days after the earthquake, the civil society organizations in India were themselves coming up to me and raising with me the need to focus on these groups. So there is an extreme attention to the issue.

I was in New York just a couple of days before heading to Nepal, meeting with the United Nations, with the OCHA and UNDP teams who are also looking at their earthquake response, and, again, the issue of particularly addressing the needs of women and girls, addressing the needs of children, and addressing particularly the health needs were something that the U.N. System was putting an integrated team in place so that UNICEF, the World Health Organization, OCHA, UNDP were all coordinated, and the World Food Programme, on making sure that there was an integrated and comprehensive response.

Mr. STIVERS. Well, in terms of before the earthquake, we have had, in terms of the successes in decreasing child and maternal mortality, is something we are very proud of having a role in. We know that saving the life of the mother not only transforms the health of her family, but the strength of a country and the profound impact that has.

We have scaled up the use Chlorhexidine, which is a gel applied to the umbilical cord, which aids in reducing newborn mortality, that we have scaled up in Nepal, which has been very successful at that.

In terms of the earthquake, the numbers are staggering. I think 2.8 million children have been affected, and 40,000 women are at immediate risk of gender-based violence. So the situation, the problem is so significant, and thank you to this committee and to Members of Congress for really putting that forward in terms of the resolution that I saw from the committee.

USAID, in the short term, we are expanding our Combating Trafficking in Persons project that works with NGOs and the gov-

ernment to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute those responsible. That program has strengthened the justice sector on human trafficking, leading to a 63 convictions recently. And in the long term, protection of vulnerable populations has got to be a key point in the longer-term recovery. It is a high priority certainly now in the relief effort, and in the longer-term recovery we have to keep our eye on the ball. So thank you for your leadership and for that question.

Ms. MENG. I know I am running out of time, but I, again, want to thank the administration for contributing to these urgent relief efforts.

Another significant way I believe that we can help limit the strain on that country's resources is by designating Nepal for TPS, temporary protected status. In a very similar circumstance, after Haiti's massive earthquake, the Secretary of Homeland Security acted very quickly to designate Haiti for TPS.

I know that the new Ambassador met with Secretary Kerry last week, and my understanding is that the Government of Nepal has requested TPS. While it is ultimately a DHS determination, I know that DHS heavily relies on the State Department's recommendation. I just want to ask what the status of the State Department's recommendation and this request is.

Ms. BISWAL. Thank you for that question, Congresswoman. I know that this is an issue of great importance and prioritization not only in the U.S. Congress with the Nepali Government, but also within the State Department. We do think that the provision of temporary protected status is an important way to provide some relief to Nepalese citizens who are in the United States and who need to stay here for some time until the situation in Nepal becomes more stabilized.

The Secretary has sent his recommendation to the Department of Homeland Security, and the decision is now with the Department of Homeland Security. So we will be awaiting their determination.

Ms. MENG. Okay. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. SALMON. Thank you.

This concludes the questions. I would like just to make another brief comment, that we are second to none, I think, in the world when it comes to disaster relief. I think that that is one of the things that the United States does exceptionally well. And I want to commend all of you for the amazing job that you do in balancing our priorities overseas.

I have been all over the world in my capacity, both in the private sector as well as in my capacity of my ninth year on Foreign Affairs, and I am always so very proud when I go to the Embassy. I meet with the USAID people, I see our defense folks. They are the brightest and the best in the world, and I am so proud of the job that you all do, so very proud. And you have done your country proud today in your testimony, and we appreciate you for coming here and doing that.

Without objection, member statements will be allowed to be inserted for the record.

And there is no further business, this committee is now adjourned.

Mr. STIVERS. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:40 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]





# A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific  
Matt Salmon (R-AZ), Chairman**

May 15, 2015

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

**DATE:** Wednesday, May 20, 2015

**TIME:** 2:15 p.m.

**SUBJECT:** Everest Trembled: Lessons Learned from the Nepal Earthquake Response

**WITNESSES:** The Honorable Nisha Desai Biswal  
Assistant Secretary  
Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs  
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Jonathan Stivers  
Assistant Administrator  
Bureau for Asia  
U.S. Agency for International Development

Mr. Thomas H. Staal  
Acting Assistant Administrator  
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance  
U.S. Agency for International Development

Ms. Anne A. Witkowsky  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
Stability and Humanitarian Affairs  
U.S. Department of Defense

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Asia and the Pacific HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 5/20/15 Room 2172

Starting Time 2:29pm Ending Time 3:40pm

Recesses  ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to )

Presiding Member(s)

*Matt Salmon*

Check all of the following that apply:

- Open Session
- Executive (closed) Session
- Televised
- Electronically Recorded (taped)
- Stenographic Record

TITLE OF HEARING:

*Everest Trembled: Lessons Learned from the Nepal Earthquake Response*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*Steve Chabot, Jeff Duncan, Mo Brooks  
Gerald Connolly, Grace Meng*

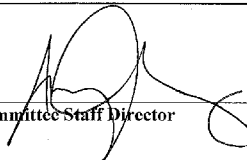
NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No   
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*Statement of Gerald Connolly*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_  
or  
TIME ADJOURNED 3:40pm

  
Subcommittee Staff Director

**Statement for the Record**  
*Submitted by Mr. Connolly of Virginia*

The U.S. has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to assistance and disaster resilience in Nepal. The U.S. has had a presence in Nepal for 60 years and has been strengthening the country's disaster response capabilities for the last two decades. U.S. efforts include the establishment of a Disaster Risk Reduction Office to coordinate government investments that make the country more resistant to natural disasters, implementation of the Program for Enhancement of Emergency Response to train Nepali first responders and medical personnel, and publication of a Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Framework for Nepal.

The unpredictable nature of natural disasters often means that what we have prepared for is not necessarily the challenge we face. However, a major earthquake in Nepal is often cited as the most predicted natural disaster on the planet, and this tragedy offers a unique insight into the international community's capacity and willingness to prepare for and respond to catastrophic events.

As part of the U.S. response to the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that occurred on April 25, 2015, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Disaster Assistance (OFDA) deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) that included elite urban search and rescue teams from Fairfax County, Virginia and Los Angeles, California. Physicians, canine handlers, structural engineers, technical search and rescue specialists, paramedics, and other personnel volunteer to serve on these teams and deploy abroad on a moment's notice.

The team from Fairfax, Virginia Task Force 1, was established in 1986, and is sponsored by the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. As Chairman of both the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the Emergency Preparedness Council for the metropolitan region, I worked closely with the Department to help leverage local and federal funding into strengthened disaster response operations.

In addition to Nepal, recent deployments by these brave men and women include post-earthquake Haiti in 2010 and tsunami relief efforts in Japan in 2011. The team trains often to meet the high standards required to be one of only two local search and rescue teams that USAID sends abroad for disaster response. In fact, the team was conducting a training exercise at a facility in Lorton, Virginia when they received the notice that they were being activated for the response in Nepal.

Once in country, the team quickly began to facilitate relief efforts. Their task was immense. The team found a dire situation in the region most heavily impacted by the earthquake, which killed more than 8,000 people and injured 16,000 more. The seismic activity left over 750,000 homes damaged or destroyed and over 1.5 million people are still without access to clean water. Team members helped Nepali personnel assess whether structures were safe to inhabit and provided technical guidance on how to shore up buildings that needed to be reinforced. Miraculously, the U.S. search and rescue teams helped pull a 15-year-old boy from the rubble of a building five days after the earthquake. Additionally, after experiencing a 7.3 magnitude aftershock, the team quickly went back to work and rescued a 41-year-old woman who was trapped in a four-story building.

Thankfully, the entire team from Fairfax made it home safe. Waiting for them when they returned were relieved family and friends and thankful representatives of the Nepali-American community.

However, U.S. assistance efforts are not cost-free endeavors, and they are certainly not without risk. Sadly, six Marines were killed in a UH-1Y Huey helicopter crash while on a humanitarian mission in Nepal. The dangerous nature of these deployments on behalf of vulnerable populations abroad further demonstrates the resolve of U.S. foreign assistance operations. We should honor the men and women who step forward to put themselves in harm's way on behalf of this noble mission.

Disaster response tests the limits of domestic institutions as well as international assistance and cooperation. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the performance of the U.S. response in Nepal and how we can further improve our coordination with Nepal and other international partners when the need for disaster relief efforts arises once again. I would welcome recommendations on how we can promote the democratic transition in Nepal and put a decade of civil war firmly in the rear view mirror. It is only through strengthened government and civil society institutions that Nepal will develop its own disaster response capabilities resilient enough for this disaster prone region of the world.

