

## **Chairwoman Lee's Opening Statement**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has been raging globally for more than eighteen months. It has taken millions of lives and devastated even more livelihoods, setting back the hard-earned progress we've made against poverty and disease. Eighteen months into this global catastrophe, the end is still not in sight.

There is no way to end this pandemic except to combat it globally. Americans will continue to be threatened by new emerging strains of the virus the longer we allow it to circulate. We can't get complacent. The COVID virus itself is not slowing down, as it adapts to our efforts with new variants. Speed is of the essence. Until we control COVID everywhere, American lives are at risk.

That is why hearing from our witnesses today is so critical as we review United States leadership in confronting this pandemic globally. The United States has been noticeably more present and active in the global response in recent months, culminating in September's White

House Global COVID-19 Summit. I am glad to see us stepping up in this way, but we can and should be doing more to rally others and address ongoing failings in the international response. We need to understand in greater detail the actions taken to date and the future needs.

In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act which included \$10.8 billion dollars for USAID and the Department of State to address the global impacts of the pandemic. According to information from these agencies, as of September 30<sup>th</sup>, 57% of these funds have been obligated.

These resources have enabled critical support for the distribution of vaccines in low-resource settings, continued provision of supplies and expertise to countries suffering from new waves of COVID infections, and given humanitarian support to people made more vulnerable by the pandemic's impacts.

The landscape has changed significantly since Congress approved the American Rescue Plan resources. The devastating Delta variant has become the dominant strain of COVID. A barrage of new data shows the crippling impact COVID has had on food security, education, and diseases like tuberculosis. Meanwhile, the COVAX mechanism has been strained in its efforts to deliver vaccines, and there remains incredible inequity in vaccine distribution. It is deeply troubling that while countries like the United States approve booster shots, and many other wealthy countries make steady progress, most countries in Africa have vaccinated less than 10% of their eligible population.

I am hoping the witnesses today can help us understand several things:

First, how has the United States determined priorities for the resources provided for the global response? How do we balance the need to respond to still climbing infection rates, prevent new infections

through vaccination, and mitigate the equally harmful economic and social costs of the pandemic?

Second, given the increase in the Biden-Harris Administration commitments made throughout the summer to the global response—commitments I applaud—are there adequate resources to continue the fight against this ongoing pandemic?

And third, it seems urgent needs are frequently crowding out long-term needs, rather than tackling both at the same time. The IMF has warned that failure to end the pandemic globally could cost up to \$5.3 trillion in economic losses over five years. How are we working across the United States government to ensure we are not going to beat back one health crisis only to face crises of food security, poverty, and debt? How are the State Department and USAID looking at the longer-term impacts of this pandemic and addressing these destabilizing needs?

Recovery from the pandemic must mean more than just recovery from the COVID-19 disease. We need to think through how we can help countries build their resilience for the long-term and preserve our development and health gains. We also need to be talking to the American people about how our domestic economy and security are inextricably linked with the rest of the world and that addressing their interests positively impacts our interests.