

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 23, 2017

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

Yesterday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee convened a hearing regarding the heartbreaking humanitarian crises in northeastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. The testimony of the witnesses underscored the urgent need for a “diplomatic surge” in the next couple weeks to prevent millions of people from dying unnecessarily from starvation. Consistent with the national security interests of the United States and the compassion of the American people, we write to ask that the Department of State implement an urgent and comprehensive diplomatic effort to address political obstacles in each of these regions that are preventing humanitarian aid from being delivered to people who desperately need it.

As you know, 20 million people are at risk of starving to death in these four countries. Mr. Yves Daccord, the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, yesterday called the crisis “one of the most critical humanitarian issues to face mankind since the end of the Second World War”. He warned that “we are at the brink of a humanitarian mega-crisis unprecedented in recent history.”

To make matters worse, the need for food in each of these regions is especially urgent. In northeast Nigeria, more than 5 million people are in urgent need of food. In South Sudan, one-third of households are estimated to be in urgent need of food. In Somalia, an estimated 6.2 million people—over half the country’s population—are in a dire need of food. In Yemen, the World Food Program estimates that 80% of the population is in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. In short, millions of innocent people will starve to death without concerted and urgent action in the coming weeks.

State and/or non-state actors in each of these regions have blocked or hindered humanitarian access—depriving the world’s most hungry people of the food they need. Such egregious acts are deeply deplorable, but the good news is that there are steps the Department of State can take to potentially address some of these man-made obstacles.

For example, in South Sudan, as one witness testified today, “the government has consistently blocked access to humanitarian assistance, including a recent decision to charge aid workers \$10,000 for a visa.” Working with allies and partners, we urge the Department of State to employ every appropriate strategy to persuade the government of South Sudan to stop blocking aid for its people who desperately need it. Please do not hesitate to let the government of South Sudan know that a failure on their part to cooperate without delay will result in increased calls in the United States Congress for the imposition of further bilateral sanctions against key government decision makers.

In Nigeria, we understand that the famine ends when there is improved security in the northeast. We urge the State Department to continue to press the Government of Nigeria to take

a holistic approach that includes accountability for human rights abuses by the security forces, and full cooperation with international aid efforts.

In Somalia, we urge you or a high level representative to attend the upcoming United Kingdom's Ministerial on Somalia and publicly announce a contribution to the humanitarian assistance efforts which will help us leverage other international donors.

In Yemen, we ask that the Department of State work urgently with stakeholders to persuade combatants to permit humanitarian groups increased access to Red Sea ports like Hodeida to deliver much-needed assistance to vulnerable communities.

Furthermore, the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is appealing for \$5.6 billion in 2017 to address famines in Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria and Somalia, \$4.4 billion of which is required urgently. We urge the Department of State, in conjunction with the U.S. Agency for International Development, to identify countries that can join the United States in meeting these financial needs. We ask that you issue a directive requiring that ambassadors in all relevant countries demarche their host government about making contributions without delay. We also ask that you notify Congress without delay if any additional authorities or appropriations are required to address the urgent humanitarian needs in each of these regions.

The scale and complexity of these crises might lead some to say the situation is hopeless. We reject such a response as U.S. leadership can make an enormous difference, and we believe the Department of State can and should lead a diplomatic effort now to reduce the political barriers that are hindering the delivery of food to millions of starving people. The U.S. government has a strategic and moral imperative to do nothing less.

Thank you for your leadership of the Department of State and your willingness to work with us to address these urgent humanitarian crises.

Sincerely,



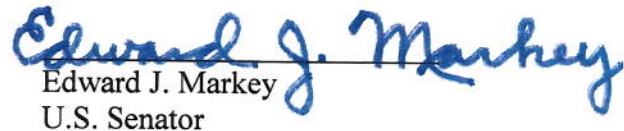
Todd Young  
U.S. Senator



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator

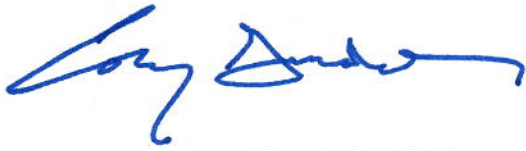


Benjamin L. Cardin  
U.S. Senator



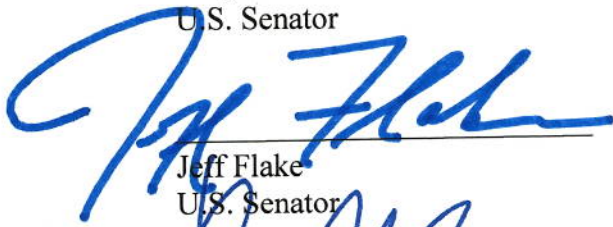
Edward J. Markey  
U.S. Senator





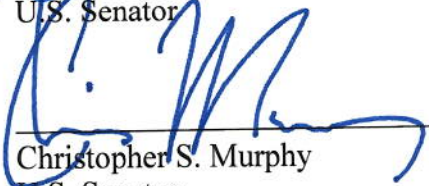
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Cory Gardner  
U.S. Senator




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Jeff Flake  
U.S. Senator



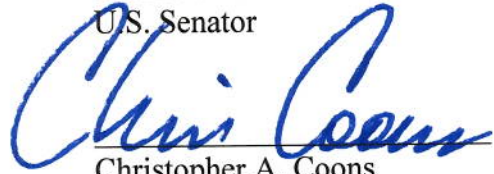
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Christopher S. Murphy  
U.S. Senator




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U.S. Senator



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Christopher A. Coons  
U.S. Senator



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Cory A. Booker  
U.S. Senator