

# Press Releases: Remarks at the International Advisory Council's Closing Luncheon

Remarks

John J. Sullivan

Deputy Secretary of State

United States Institute of Peace

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**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Good afternoon, and thank you, Nancy, for that kind introduction and for your leadership. Thank you to the United States Institute of Peace and to the International Advisory Council for inviting me here today. As Nancy mentioned, I'm honored to have been selected to serve on the board as the representative of the State Department.

Before I begin my remarks on humanitarian assistance, I wanted to just note that today is a bittersweet day for me because Secretary Tillerson is

actually returning to his home in Texas today. He'll remain as Secretary of State through the end of the month, but he's departing the building today, and we'll have a ceremony for him in the lobby as he departs. But I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you how much he's meant to the department and to me personally. His work for our country, leading the department, his voice for peace, for humanitarian assistance has been an inspiration for me. And I was honored – have been honored to work for him, to have been selected by him to serve as deputy secretary of state. And I think if it's all right with you, if we could offer him a round of applause in tribute to his service. (Applause.)

He is moving back to a more familiar climate in Texas, which I know suits him well.

But I'm delighted to be here at the U.S. Institute of Peace. For three decades, the institute has been a strong partner of the State Department and USAID as we work to promote greater prosperity and peace throughout the world. As a new member of the board, it's a particular honor for me to address the International Advisory Council.

Today, as Nancy mentioned, I want to provide a few thoughts on the U.S. – United States role as a global leader in providing humanitarian assistance. I know we don't hear a lot about that topic in the news today, the U.S. role in providing humanitarian assistance; but as we know, all of us in this room know, helping those in need is and always has been one of our country's core values and very much in our national interest. How we assist people in times of conflict, distress, and natural disasters reflects how we see the world and is integral to how we execute our foreign policy.

The United States is committed to its role as a global leader on humanitarian issues. We understand the importance and necessity of humanitarian assistance, even as we work to preclude the crises that spawn the need for assistance. By helping those who bear the brunt of war, natural disaster, or the failure of good governance and policy, we preserve that chance for a more prosperous and more peaceful world for generations to come.

Today, the United States remains the single largest donor of international humanitarian assistance. Last year, we delivered more than \$8 billion in life-saving aid around the world. This includes assistance for basic necessities – food, education, health, and protection against violence.

But it's no secret that humanitarian challenges are multiplying around the world, including in countries that once flourished. I'm sorry to say that we have a tragic example in the Southern Hemisphere, in Latin America, in the crisis in Venezuela, which is entirely man-made, created by a corrupt regime that denies its people not only ability to choose their leaders, but also the ability to meet their basic needs. UNHCR estimates that 1.7 million Venezuelans have fled their country since 2014 – increasingly in search of basic needs such as food and medicine. What's even more striking is that over 1.5 million Venezuelans are expected to flee that country in this calendar year.

To help the people of Venezuela and those refugees who are crossing borders into Colombia and Brazil, and all those others affected by the regime's malfeasance, we are supporting regional humanitarian operations that provide vulnerable people in impacted border areas with life-saving health and nutrition, shelter, livelihoods, and protection. Venezuelan President Maduro could help his people by opening his country to humanitarian aid, but instead chooses to tightly limit and control that flow of assistance. We will continue our diplomatic pressure on his regime, but until he decides to make the right choices, we will support the region through humanitarian assistance, including through our announcement on Tuesday that we are providing an additional \$2.5 million for aid to Venezuelans who have crossed into Colombia.

We also continue to support areas where conflict and terrorism have long uprooted families and taken lives. Just a few weeks ago, we announced over \$500 million in additional humanitarian assistance for affected populations in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Nigeria, as well as other countries in the Lake Chad region. This announcement, along with our programming in South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will continue to help millions of people in Africa who are facing life-threatening food insecurity and malnutrition as a result of ongoing conflicts and prolonged drought.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to visit Iraq for the fifth U.S.-Iraq Higher Coordinating Committee. Our military has made great progress at rooting out ISIS, and today 4.5 million Iraqis have been freed from that tyranny, but 3.5 million internally displaced persons – excuse me – 2.5 million internally displaced persons are still seeking to return to their homes. Effective reconstruction is critical to ensuring ISIS can never return, and we are committed to working with our partners in the region to help the government in Iraq rebuild. Since 2014, the United States has provided more than \$1.7 billion in humanitarian assistance for Iraq, and we continue to provide support to promote a safe, voluntary, and dignified return of Iraqis still displaced by the conflict. This assistance also supports the rehabilitation of schools, legal aid to restore housing and property rights, and help millions of Iraqis re-establish their livelihoods.

The United States is the largest single country humanitarian donor for the Syrian response as well, providing nearly \$7.7 billion since the start of the crisis in that country. Each month, this assistance helps Syrians in every governorate, in addition to the over five and a half million Syrians in neighboring countries.

And in Yemen, the U.S. has provided nearly \$768 million in humanitarian over the – humanitarian assistance over the past two years. That includes food, water, emergency medical care, hygiene kits, treatment for malnourished children, and other aid. At the same time, we have repeatedly called on all parties to ensure rapid, safe, and unhindered access for humanitarian and commercial goods, including food, fuel, and medicine, as well as aid workers, into and throughout Yemen.

Turning to Asia – the United States has provided more than \$177 million to

help those affected by conflict in Burma, including as many as one million refugees displaced to Bangladesh. This assistance provides protection, emergency shelter, food, and nutritional assistance, as well as medical care and psychosocial support for so many who have suffered from ethnic cleansing.

Well, that's a long list, and I wish that list was shorter. But it's really just a fraction of the humanitarian needs that exist across the globe. And despite our best efforts, most of these crises, conflicts, and natural disasters are not going to stop anytime soon. Most will ultimately require a diplomatic solution – results that we are working toward each and every day. But until those solutions arrive, you can count on the United States to help everyone where we can to alleviate suffering and save lives.

But one government or one entity can't tackle these issues alone.

We all know that the urgency of the crises we face demands a global response. And as we continue this humanitarian leadership, we will also continue to emphasize the importance of coordinated, effective, and efficient international responses, as well as the need for other governments and other actors in the private sector to step in to contribute to humanitarian efforts.

This multifaceted advocacy – including through our engagement with the United Nations and directly with partner nations around the world – focuses on expanding the number of donors, increasing the global contributions to humanitarian appeals and responses, as well as advocating for humanitarian access wherever necessary.

We need other governments, NGOs, and the private sector to work together to respond to humanitarian crises at every phase.

The United States is working with international partners to provide funding, technical assistance, and other forms of support that help leverage humanitarian and development investments.

And most importantly for this audience, we need USIP to highlight these issues wherever they arise and promote preventative diplomacy and peaceful resolutions.

We also believe the private sector has great potential to provide meaningful support and engagement in humanitarian responses. We hope that organizations like USIP can help us partner with the private sector to help the vast number of people around the world who are affected by crises and to address long-term sustainability challenges.

A global response, with increasing financial support of multiple nations and groups, is essential to effectively moving more help to the many who are in need and to ensure a greater regional stability across the globe.

Those are some preliminary thoughts from me. I know I've thrown out a lot of numbers and countries, but it's important for me to come here and emphasize the importance to the Department of State of our humanitarian mission through our colleagues with USAID and working through our own bureaus.

So I think there's an opportunity now for questions. I'd like to turn it back over to Nancy. If there are topics you'd like to talk about, I'd like to continue our discussion. (Applause.)

**MS LINDBORG:** Thank you, Deputy Secretary Sullivan. And we especially appreciate your taking the time to come over during such a busy day and such an important day, and I know this will greatly increase your responsibilities. Thank you also for a rather sobering tour globally and for the leadership that the United States continues to provide on humanitarian assistance.

So you just described an overwhelming number of crises with increased flows, increased needs. How does this make you at the – and colleagues at State and the administration think about what the U.S. should be doing to think about tackling the causes of these crises and of these outflows of refugees? How do we begin to get more upstream on these issues?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Well, as I suggested in my remarks, just looking at humanitarian assistance, which is – once the crisis has already developed and people are in danger or hungry, just meeting those immediate needs is something that the U.S. Government and certainly not just the Department of State can do. Getting at the deeper root of the problem requires an even greater, broader support.

Looking at what we do in the U.S. Government, I'd focus, for example, in – on Africa, particularly in countries like Nigeria, the countries in the Sahel and Northern Africa, the tragic scenes that we have seen of refugees and migrants leaving Libya, Tunisia, Algeria for southern Europe. And those people are coming from countries farther south in Africa, where there is conflict, poverty, et cetera. So we've got to have – from the U.S. Government's perspective, it requires an integrated strategy with our colleagues at the Department of Defense to partner with host governments. For example, the countries in the Sahel, the so-called G5 – working with them to address the terrorism problems that are presented in the region, to establish a baseline of security so that humanitarian assistance, development assistance can flow into the region, and remove the causes of people who are fleeing those countries, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean to get to hope for a better future in Europe.

So it's a whole-of-government effort. It sounds trite to say, but it's certainly true. We work closely with our colleagues at the Department of Defense, USAID, the State Department. I was in Abuja, Nigeria a few months ago, and the challenges are enormous. The threat from Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa, particularly in northwestern Nigeria, is very serious, as we've seen just in the last few weeks with the kidnapping of another 110 schoolgirls, most of whom have been released, but only on the condition that they not be allowed to go back to school, which is astounding on its face. But we're thankful that at least most of those young girls have been released, but we've got to address the security situation.

But there are deeper problems, economic and social, that require not just U.S. Government assistance but assistance from a wide array of private

organizations, other countries, the United Nations. So that's what we're looking to mobilize to address the causes of the refugee flows out of that area and prevent these crises from developing.

**MS LINDBORG:** So just building on that a little bit, you mentioned in your remarks the entirely man-made causes of what's going on in Venezuela. Sadly, you could say that about any number of places around the world. And I'm very taken by the statistic that notes a decade ago, 80 percent of our humanitarian assistance went to victims of natural disaster. A decade later, that's flipped. You alluded to it in some of your previous answer, but if we could just go a little further in terms of: How does that, therefore, change how we think about the response? It's not only humanitarian assistance, but necessarily thinking differently about how some of our other assistance and activities work together, not just to meet the suffering but to resolve the sources of the conflict.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Sure. I think one of the sources of – one of the reasons why those numbers flipped was the persistence of the security – not just security threat, but the actual manifestation of the carnage inflicted by organizations like ISIS and al-Qaida in Syria, Iraq, Libya, you name it. This conflict with these terror organizations actually started before September 11th, but for most of us in our consciousness was really crystallized on September 11th. But that conflict has continued for the last 17 years, and I don't know that we see an end in sight.

We may have defeated the so-called caliphate, removed almost all of their territorial ambitions in Iraq and in Syria, but they've dispersed. They've moved to other countries. There are still pockets of ISIS left in Syria, particularly in eastern Syria, that are – remain a threat. Our mission in Syria, in northern Syria, remains the complete eradication of ISIS. But as we move down – just using Syria as an example, as the U.S. military moves down the Euphrates River Valley, supporting – providing support to our partner forces in the SDF – when we liberate – when we remove ISIS from those areas, there's an enormous need for assistance for just stabilization, demining, removing all of the booby traps, mines, and so forth that ISIS has left behind in places like Raqqa and elsewhere in Syria and Mosul in Iraq.

Beginning the resumption of basic services like water and electricity – we're not really talking about nation-building here. We're talking about the resumption of basic stabilization operations so that people can return to their homes, be safe – removing rubble from streets; for buildings that have been damaged and are dangerous to return to, knocking them down and clearing away dangerous obstacles; demining as I mentioned – that type of – those types of assistance and stability operations is something that's very necessary for us to provide. As soon as our military moves out, we're looking to move in USAID, State Department, other U.S. Government entities to provide that type of stabilization assistance so that refugees can return to their homes as soon as possible, not before they're ready to but when they're ready to. We don't want to force people back into situations that are still dangerous. Refugees should return home when it's safe for them to do so. And it's incumbent upon us and partner countries and nations and organizations to do all we can to repair that damage that's been done, once our military and

partner forces have eliminated the security threat.

So it's a huge challenge for us, just in Iraq and Syria – enormous challenge. Number of internally displaced persons is in the millions in Iraq and in Syria. So just in that region alone, we have a huge challenge.

You mentioned Venezuela, a different situation but one that's been persistent over a number of years with first the current Maduro administration, but its predecessor administration really governing in ways that have driven what was once a vibrant economy over the brink into an economic disaster, at this point a country so rich in natural resources, but now its people are suffering. They're fleeing by the – fleeing in enormous numbers across the borders of Brazil and Colombia, creating – straining the resources of those countries. Also the outbreak of disease in Venezuela now – you may have seen that the incidence of tuberculosis in Venezuela has spiked. It's really a very tragic situation, and we're not able to get humanitarian assistance in because the Maduro government won't allow it.

**MS LINDBORG:** You mentioned the number of Venezuelans who are fleeing across the border into Colombia. And Colombia, of course, is itself in a precarious place struggling to implement a peace accord that ended 50 years of its own very bloody civil war. And we have other examples of that. You talked about Syria, and of course the number of Syrian refugees who have fled to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon far outweighs the numbers that are hosted by anywhere else in the world.

What are the obligations and the opportunities for the U.S. and our international partners to help ensure that those neighbors aren't pushed into their own new cycles of crises because of the burden of the refugees? And of course, we're seeing that this has even affected our allies in Europe, these outflows.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Well, we see in our media stories about the refugee crises in Europe, for example, and in the Mediterranean, but there are any number of examples I could cite. For example, Pakistan, which hosts an enormous number of Afghans who have fled violence in Afghanistan, and it's a strain for the Pakistani Government. It's something they cite to us as a burden on them in what they are doing in trying to support reconciliation in Afghanistan. There are any number of examples in this hemisphere and around the world of refugees crossing borders, straining the resources both of partner countries and NGOs, and the numbers are staggering – millions of people displaced.

And this administration is focused on – the President has made it a point of – the media's focused on defense spending, but we're also pushing at the State Department for other countries and organizations to do more to support humanitarian relief and assistance. We'll remain the leader in humanitarian assistance – we the United States – but we want to see other countries stepping up and addressing that problem which is global in scope and staggering in the numbers of people affected.

**MS LINDBORG:** And you mentioned several times the importance of working with

partners, and I think we've seen U.S. leadership has always been important in mobilizing that kind of joint effort to address needs. Are you seeing that there's a willingness to join together not just on the provision of humanitarian assistance but on really tackling those root causes as well?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Yes, in certain areas. We had a very good conference a few weeks ago in Brussels to address the situation in the Sahel. The G5 conference in Brussels attracted, I think it was 70 governments, many heads of state. It was sponsored by the EU.

But as an example of the United States working with partners, including the French have been great leaders in this, to address that crisis in the Sahel and surrounding areas – the Lake Chad Basin – is an example of work by a large number of countries from around the world, not just the region, not just European countries, but countries from around the world to address the security situation, supporting the G5 nations as they try to build their security services to protect themselves, but also providing humanitarian assistance, stabilization assistance, and development assistance for that region. And I just like that as an example of where the world community has come together to address a serious problem.

**MS LINDBORG:** And I want to go back to Iraq. You noted some of the efforts that are underway. I actually just was there recently with our board chair Steve Hadley and we were struck by what a pivotal moment this is for Iraq. And there have been three million internally displaced who have already returned home, and of course, as you noted, two million more, especially from some of the hardest-hit areas like Mosul. We have elections coming up in May. There are a lot of challenges left in Iraq.

What do you see as the critical, most important issues alongside humanitarian assistance that have to be addressed and the most important role that the U.S. can play in helping those two million displaced Iraqis still go home, and also to keep Iraq from falling into yet another cycle of conflict?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Certainly. Well, we have – we've worked very closely with the government in Baghdad, with the Abadi government and their military and security forces in defeating ISIS, moving through Anbar province up to Mosul and the liberation of Mosul. But that was really just the – it was just the start of what is a much larger undertaking which is now going to require long-term efforts for, first, stabilization, as I've mentioned; demining large swaths of urban areas; making places habitable again for internally displaced persons to return. And we – the Emir of Kuwait hosted a reconstruction conference at the end of January seeking support from other countries for development in Iraq. We were pleased that there were commitments of over \$30 billion, but that's probably a third of what's needed to rebuild by what has been destroyed by war and terror in Iraq.

Our most immediate focus in Iraq is seeking a peaceful election in May, as you mentioned. We have been working with Prime Minister Abadi and the government in Erbil to reconcile the government of the KRG with the national government in Baghdad. I was actually in Baghdad and Erbil about a month ago – six weeks ago now – to encourage a rapprochement between the Kurds and the



national government.

We've seen some progress recently. Steps have been made to reopen the international airports in Iraqi Kurdistan. It was very sad to go back to Iraq. I had traveled there a number of times when I served in the Bush administration to Erbil. And to the – when I was last there in 2008, which was the – to travel there, I arrived at the new international airport, which had just, just opened. But because of the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil, the airport had shut down. So when I flew in in late January, my plane was the only plane on the tarmac, with all of these gates emptied, no international flights in.

We've worked hard to get the government in Baghdad to work with the government in Erbil. The airport's being reopened. The government in Baghdad is going to be paying salaries for KRG employees, which is important. Many of – many hospital workers, teachers, et cetera, haven't been paid in months, so trying to develop – improve that relationship and assist the Iraqis in conducting a free, fair, and credible election in May to continue the development of democracy in Iraq.

**MS LINDBORG:** Yeah, we were struck by the shared understanding that without a more inclusive, more accountable government, then Iraq will surely not be able to stay on a positive pathway. So I know that all eyes are on this election, with hopes that they'll be able to forge that kind of a government.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** It's going to be difficult for Prime Minister Abadi to form a new government, if he were to get enough votes to be in a position to form a new government, if there isn't more inclusivity, particularly with the Kurds and others. So it's absolutely necessary for the democracy in Iraq to develop. We've seen very hopeful signs, and we've been working closely on a daily basis with the prime minister and his staff. They've come for – I had meetings last week with his deputy chief of staff on this issue, and we have worked very closely with them on it. So we're – we're hopeful that the election will proceed in a free and peaceful way in May and lead to a secure government that will lead to greater prosperity for Iraq.

**MS LINDBORG:** And of course, we're seeing in all the countries that you've mentioned corruption is one of the most corrosive aspects of contributing to the kind of conflict that leads to humanitarian needs. Do you see this as an area where we have effective tools for beginning to address that?

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Well it's certainly a pervasive subject. We can shift geographically to – to Ukraine. I was in Kyiv last month. Corruption is an enormous problem in Ukraine, and the Poroshenko government is trying to address it. It's very difficult; it's a difficult challenge for the government there, with the security problems that Russia and Russian-supported organizations pose, occupying territory in the Donbas, and of course, Russia's annexation of Crimea.

But for Ukraine to survive and to prosper, corruption has to be rooted out. And it's really a legacy of the transition from the Soviet Union to a – to an independent Ukraine. Corruption was allowed to flourish. It's a very

difficult system to purge of that – of that scourge. But it's something that's absolutely essential for that democracy – also focused on upcoming elections for its parliament and president. But corruption diminishes popular support and confidence in government, and that ultimately undermines democracy. So it's a priority for us around the world promoting free and fair elections and eliminating corruption.

**MS LINDBORG:** So I know we don't have a lot more of your time. What keeps you up at night more than anything else? (Laughter.)

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** I could channel my inner Marine four-star general and quote Secretary Mattis and say nothing keeps me up at night; I keep other people up at night. (Laughter.) But I don't have the wherewithal to back up that boast.

What keeps me up at night is – and I've said this at town halls when I've visited embassies, our embassies around the world – it's not any of these crises that we've discussed. It's managing the Department of State and our personnel issues, personnel and people of our department. It's the heart of our department. We don't have tanks. We don't have carrier strike groups. We have people, men and women in the Civil Service and Foreign Service, and making sure that they are supported, treated fairly, inspired – that's what keeps me up at night, making sure that they are supported and given the respect they deserve, they've earned – women and men who have served for decades in – many of them in very, very difficult places, and acknowledging their service, supporting them, and keeping the department on a solid footing.

That's my greatest – it's not a worry. It's my priority. So that's what – in answer to your question, that's my highest priority.

**MS LINDBORG:** Again, I want to thank you for joining us during such a very, very busy time. I know we asked you long before some of the recent changes, so we very much appreciate your coming over. Thank you for your leadership during this critical moment. We look forward to having you on our board. We're quite appreciative of your agreeing to do that. And please join me in thanking Deputy Secretary Sullivan for being with us today.

**DEPUTY SECRETARY SULLIVAN:** Thank you, Nancy. (Applause.)

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