

May 31, 2012

The Honorable Hillary R. Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520  
***Via Facsimile: 202-647-8947***

**Re: Securing and ensuring a successful Sahel Crisis Conference**

Dear Madame Secretary:

Thank you for your deep concern about the humanitarian emergency in the Sahel region of Africa, where around 18.4 million people currently need assistance and over 1 million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. The US government has demonstrated strong leadership in responding to the emergency - attending the Rome donor's conference back in February and committing \$270 million in fiscal years 2011 and 2012 to promote food security and nutrition. Unfortunately, the crisis is expected to peak between June and August if insecurity and weather patterns persist. Meanwhile, donors have responded unevenly. After revision of various appeals, \$1.46 billion is now required to tackle the crisis, yet only \$563 million or 39% has been committed to date.

The African Union has proposed a conference to mobilize funds, resources, and political will, to address the immediate needs and chronic challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition in the Sahel. **We urge the US government to support this initiative and to press both the African Union and ECOWAS to hold the conference as soon as possible, for the date has been repeatedly postponed.** In addition, due to the severity of the crisis and the number of people affected, **we hope the US will send a high-level delegation, including you Madame Secretary, as well as Administrator Shah, to send a strong signal that the US is addressing the situation at the highest levels and to leverage high-level European representation.**

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network has warned about pockets of famine in northern Mali if more action is not taken. Millions of families have already exhausted their stocks of food and need urgent assistance. They also need support to prepare for next harvest. The conference is needed to mobilize more funding, and to get real solutions put on the table to break the cycle of chronic food crises in this part of the world.

For the conference to have immediate and lasting impact for communities affected by the food crisis, it should:

- **Be held as rapidly as possible:** With the Horn of Africa crisis, funding was only mobilized at large-scale when a famine had been declared. This should have taught the international community that when large-scale response is late, fewer people are reached, at a much greater human and financial cost.
- **Be high-level and inclusive, inviting potential new donors:** Active ministerial level (or equivalent) engagement from all relevant actors, including governments in the Sahel, donor governments, UN agencies, multilateral agencies, and civil society, is needed. Specific efforts should be made to include potential new donors whose engagement could strengthen efforts in the Sahel, including Gulf States.

- **Deliver specific emergency funding commitments:** Bilateral and multilateral donors should use the conference to announce additional funding that reflects the humanitarian needs and full range of humanitarian responders. This includes using national and international appeals that are continuously revised and based on national plans to mobilize greater engagement in order to fill the funding gap.
- **Promote specific resilience-building measures:** The current humanitarian situation is an acute phase of chronic food insecurity and malnutrition, and requires longer-term investment to break the hunger cycle. Governments in the region, donors, and humanitarian and development agencies should specify how they aim to address these ongoing challenges, prioritizing greater investment in social protection measures, food reserves, and small-scale agriculture.
- **Tackle non-funding issues hampering the emergency response:** The conference should look at coordination issues amongst humanitarian responders critical to effectively responding to the Sahel crisis. It should also look at those affected by the Malian conflict to ensure they can access humanitarian assistance based on humanitarian need and recognized good donor principles. Finally, it should look at overcoming barriers to the effective functioning of the regional food market.

The Sahel conference should be the beginning of a discussion on the importance of the international community's long-term strategy to address chronic food insecurity in the Sahel, based on robust national country plans and regional leadership.

Sincerely yours,



Raymond C. Offenheiser  
President, Oxfam America



Carolyn S. Miles  
President and CEO, Save the Children



Richard Stearns  
President, World Vision U.S.

CC: *Rajiv Shah, Administrator, USAID*  
*Ambassador Johnnie Carson, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs*  
*Ambassador Eunice Reddick, Director, Office of West African Affairs, State Department*  
*Nancy Lindborg, Assistant Administrator for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, USAID*  
*Mark Bartolini, Director, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, USAID*