

August 30, 2011

Dear Supercommittee Members:

As you consider future budget cuts in your capacity as Supercommittee members, we write today to ask for your help to ensure the foreign assistance budget is not disproportionately affected by future reductions.

We support the very difficult task you are undertaking and appreciate that the foreign assistance budget, like all other areas of the budget, must be considered for reductions as part of the important goal of reducing America's deficit. However, as you may be aware, the foreign assistance budget was cut more than 11% from FY 2010 levels in the FY 2011 Continuing Resolution and the cuts already proposed for FY 2012 would decrease it by another 20%. These vast cuts to a portion of the budget that's traditionally quite small—just 1% of the overall United States budget—will have negative consequences on the ability and effectiveness of the United States to serve as a global leader. In an increasingly interconnected world, and at a time when the U.S. and its partners must increasingly rely on diplomatic tools to pursue international priorities, additional large cuts to foreign assistance will have a devastating effect on our country's foreign policy goals.

The funding for the international affairs account supports numerous goals and priorities of the United States. In addition to funding diplomatic staff and paying for embassies, including security, this money supports a range of activities from humanitarian assistance and health initiatives, to combatting the drug trade, to engaging at multilateral institutions, to supporting good governance and the protection of human rights. The cuts proposed in these budgets not only severely impact the effectiveness of these programs, but they cut significant amounts of personnel from USAID and the State Department, which will further negatively impact program implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and ultimately the effectiveness of all projects. Drastic cuts now to programs that, relatively speaking, cost the American taxpayer very little could lead to vastly more expensive efforts to respond to political and humanitarian crises that could otherwise have been averted through a healthy U.S. foreign assistance portfolio.

Finally, at a fraction of the size of budgets for the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security, foreign assistance programs provide much more than a handout to countries in need. The work supported by our global foreign assistance programs plays a crucial role in developing strong trade, economic, military, and diplomatic partners. Including the foreign assistance portfolio as a part of the national security budget makes sense because the work our civilian staff is doing overseas in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan is directly tied to the success of those campaigns.

In the decades since the Marshall Plan foreign assistance has played an instrumental role in building strong allies from Eastern Europe to Latin America to Asia—allies that not only are no longer dependent on the generosity of wealthy countries to function, but allies who have stood with the United States as it defends its values and interests against various threats and challenges around the world. The benefits of building strong partners are even more starkly apparent as the people of the Middle East and North

Africa engage in a fight for their universal rights against repressive leaders. Countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya will require support as they embark upon the transition to free, democratic societies. It is undoubtedly in America's own interest to help support their transitions.

For all these reasons, when reviewing foreign assistance, we urge you to consider funding that is reasonable, proportionate, and that will not hamper our ability to promote our priorities and values abroad.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Center for Victims of Torture

Freedom House

Human Friends Organization International

International Center for Religion & Diplomacy

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy

The Project on Middle East Democracy

Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union

Citizens for Global Solutions

Foreign Policy Initiative

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

International Coalition for Religious Freedom

Physicians for Human Rights

The Solidarity Center