An Open Letter to the President and Congressional Leaders on the Importance of Global Development and Foreign Assistance Reform

As the 111th Congress and a new Presidential Administration begin, we are writing to urge the need to modernize our foreign assistance programs to replace a system of separate agencies that have not been modernized in over 20 years. If global development programs are to take their place as prime tools in the U.S. foreign policy toolkit, they must be modernized so that all can better address today’s challenges and a strong development voice must be given a seat at the table when key foreign policy decisions are made.

We realize that during this time of economic turmoil and global conflict we face today, including instability and the need to reinforce the U.S. government’s power, the U.S. government’s foreign assistance has the financial resources and professional civilian capacity to achieve our foreign policy goals.

We urge you to act quickly and to take critical steps to make U.S. global development efforts more effective and appropriate to the global challenges we face today, including enabling a more modern and strategic Foreign Assistance Act; developing a national strategy for global development; consolidating our programs under a strong, empowered, and capable development organization that can deliver results; and reforming the U.S. government’s foreign assistance to improve its long-term effectiveness.

The American people overwhelmingly agree — a recent poll found that, even in the midst of the global financial crisis, nearly 90% of those surveyed agree that foreign assistance must be made more efficient in order to get more of our economic prosperity, for the stability of our allies, and for the well-being of those around the world who struggle to lift themselves out of poverty.

This time of political transition for our country provides us with an enormous opportunity to take a fresh and balanced approach to U.S. global engagement. This approach should emphasize programs that promote development as tools equal in importance to military might and diplomatic savvyness.

While there are standpoints that continue to deliver real value and impact, overall the current system for managing U.S. global development efforts is outdated and woefully too many agencies running too many programs that lack an overall strategy — and these programs are governed by a Foreign Assistance Act that has not been formally updated in over 40 years and has not been reauthorized in more than 20 years. If global development programs are to take their place as prime tools in the U.S. foreign policy toolkit, they must be modernized so that all can better address today’s challenges and a strong development voice must be given a seat at the table when key foreign policy decisions are made.

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