

MFAN Applauds Senator Kerry's Public Commitment to Elevating Development and Reforming Foreign Assistance

May 21, 2009 (Washington, D.C.) – *This statement is delivered on behalf of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN) by MFAN Co-Chairs David Beckmann and George Ingram:*

In an important speech today at the Brookings Institution, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry (D-MA) outlined a bold and comprehensive vision for a stronger, more effective U.S. foreign policy, saying: "If we are to rise to meet...new challenges, this much is clear: Development and diplomacy must retake their rightful place alongside defense at the heart of America's foreign policy."

MFAN shares Chairman Kerry's belief that U.S. non-military foreign assistance programs that alleviate poverty, fight disease, and create opportunities in the developing world are both investments in the U.S. national interest and critical expressions of American values. We also strongly support the Chairman's pledge to introduce legislation that will begin the process of modernizing the U.S. foreign assistance system in order to make sure these investments are more coordinated and transparent, as well as more effective at getting help to the people who need it most. MFAN thanks Senator Kerry for his leadership on elevating global development issues, and we look forward to offering him support as he takes on these crucial tasks.

Key quotes from the speech include (for full text, click [here](#)):

- What we need today is...a strategic vision for diplomacy and development that will carry us forward to meet a new generation of challenges: ethnic tensions, religious extremism, ideological excesses which present problems in many ways far more complex than those [faced during the Marshall Plan], but no less immediate and urgent.
- And yet today, for all our past successes, there is a growing realization that our diplomatic and development capacities are simply not prepared for the task ahead. And when you consider our meager investment, it's easy to understand why: We have voted repeatedly with our dollars to bolster our defense institutions while neglecting our civilian capacity. Ladies and gentlemen-- that must change.
- Our aid workers served on the frontlines of countless humanitarian responses, from earthquake relief to tsunami assistance. America's strong tradition of diplomacy and development is a point of pride – and it should be...These remarkably dedicated people are without question the unsung

heroes of American foreign policy, and folks, to live up to our responsibility we must give them the resources they need to deliver on their talent.

- All of which begs the question: How do we finally strengthen our civilian institutions to adequately address the challenges of the 21st century?
 - First, we need to clarify the policies and goals of our foreign assistance. There is no overarching policy for U.S. foreign aid and development today. By one count, the Foreign Assistance Act actually lists over 150 policy directives and goals! When you prioritize everything, then nothing is a priority. Dramatically paring down this list will go a long way toward strengthening the focus and impact of our programs.
 - Second, we must bring greater coordination to our aid efforts. We have over 20 agencies implementing a slew of aid programs, often with diffuse or even conflicting goals. Right now, while 60 percent of our foreign aid goes to 10 countries for political/military, counter-narcotics and HIV/AIDS—the other 40 percent is spread thin in 140-plus countries. We need a more balanced approach, and a comprehensive development strategy to determine which agency is in charge, what we hope to achieve, and how best to accomplish our goals.
 - Third, we must strengthen our professional expertise and capacity. The need has never been greater to train and cultivate a generation of highly skilled public servants. We need agricultural experts who can plant bug-resistant crops and foster a second green revolution in Africa. We need scientists who can develop new vaccines and public health workers who can train people to deliver them to places that have never seen an American before. We need engineers who can help the poorest countries in the world find clean development pathways and adapt to a changing climate. To attract top talent, we need to promote a results-based culture of accountability and transparency-- and we need to restore intellectual capacity, and policy and strategic planning to ensure that USAID is a place where innovative ideas can take shape.
 - Fourth, we need to streamline outdated laws and heavy bureaucracy to untie the hands of our aid workers. The last time the Senate authorized a Foreign Assistance Act was the year I arrived, 1985. That bill runs over 400 pages and is full of confusing directives, reporting requirements, and procedural roadblocks. We need to ease those burdens so that missions can do their jobs. And I intend to work with the Administration to revisit the Foreign Assistance Act in this year.
 - Fifth, we must rebalance the relationship between Washington and the field. Recent reforms have kept most funding and policy decisions in Washington and undermined the primacy of the field. While this helps with bureaucratic coordination, it cuts out the expertise of those living on the ground with specialized knowledge of cultures, problems, and possibilities. We need to empower country teams to shape programs, determine needs, and even take calculated risks when they see real strategic opportunities.
- That is why I will be asking Senator Lugar to join me in introducing two pieces of legislation: a Foreign Affairs Authorization Act that will authorize the State Department and related accounts, and an initial foreign aid reform bill. Neither piece of legislation will bring comprehensive reform all at once. But they will initiate a reform process to begin laying the groundwork, and providing a

blueprint, for the diplomacy and development institutions we need. I plan to work closely with my colleagues in the House of Representatives, particularly Chairman Berman, in moving this legislation forward.

- Passing a foreign aid reform bill will also be crucial to revitalizing our development agencies. One of the top priorities will be to reestablish policy, intellectual and strategic capacity in our foreign aid programs. For too long we have delegated development leadership and innovation to others. We need cutting edge programs that push the envelope on ending global poverty and other problems—and our development agencies should be leading the charge.
- Finally, we all share the notion that we should be in the business of funding development programs that actually work. To that end, we will support efforts in legislation to promote accountability, enhance transparency, track performance and distill lessons learned to build up institutional knowledge and avoid repeating mistakes. These legislative efforts can be a precursor to a larger, more comprehensive rewrite of the Foreign Assistance Act next year, of course taken with the cooperation of the Administration.
- Just as we did in Marshall's time and Kennedy's time, America today has a chance to return to a foreign policy that is not just seen by people everywhere, but felt and lived, one that translates our promises into real value and real progress on the ground—one that improves people's daily lives, inspires them, and earns their respect. The good news is that, as we rebuild our civilian institutions, there will so many chances to lead in the process. We are living in a moment of volatility, but also—emphatically—a moment of possibility.
- History teaches us that America is safest and strongest when we understand that our security will not be protected by military means alone. It must be protected as well by our generosity, by our example, by powerful outreach, and by instilling a palpable sense in the people of the world that we understand—and share their destiny. That has always inspired people, and it always will. It undercuts our enemies, it empowers our friends—and it keeps us safer.