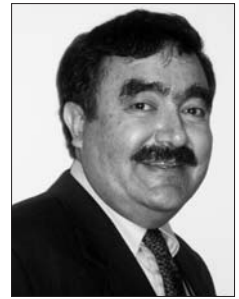


An Open Letter to Administrator Fore



Congratulations on your historic accomplishment in being confirmed as the first female USAID administrator. Your qualifications have been justly recognized and your performance during your first few months on the job has been impressive. AFSA acknowledges that you are stepping into a challenging environment in an agency experiencing enormous change: in the space of seven years, we have witnessed the departure of two administrators, participated in two major reorganizations, begun work in war zones and experienced a radical change in our relationship with the State Department. All USAID employees have felt the stress of these changes. With only one year left in your tenure to accomplish your goals, I take the liberty of offering some observations and recommendations that I hope can support your efforts to improve our agency.

As you will surely agree, the greatest strength of any organization is its people. Ensuring that the staff is well motivated and fairly treated should be a priority. For this reason, we believe that Foreign Service conditions of employment at USAID must be brought more into line with those of the State Department. As USAID moves closer operationally to the State Department structure, there can be no further justification for continuing the existing double standard. Unlike our State colleagues, USAID officers do not have access to benefits such as student loan reimbursement, language training for spouses, difficult-to-staff incentive differentials, USAA membership for new officers or adequate per diem rates for long-term training, among other things.

Affording preferential treatment to some groups is unjustified and amounts to conferring second-class citizen status on USAID FSOs. While lack of funding has always been the agency's response to our requests to redress inequities, we believe it has been more due to a lack of management will than an empty wallet. Priorities need to be revisited.

Foreign Service members also report to us their extreme concern over hardships created by the lack of overseas comparability pay. When they accept overseas assignments, officers ranked FS-1 and below must endure an almost 21-percent cut in the salary that they would otherwise receive in Washington. Senior Foreign Service officers working side-by-side with these lower-grade officers are not penalized in this way. The result is that service outside the U.S. is becoming less and less attractive economically, especially when officers are forced to live on just one salary per household due to lack of employment for spouses at most posts.

Both State and USAID officers have the same needs and endure the same risks (witness the tragic deaths of several USAID offi-

cers during the last few years). Regrettably, the overseas pay disparity extends even into death. The families of those employees assigned overseas who are killed in the line of duty are also being shortchanged by 21 percent due to the overseas pay gap. The calculation of the one-year death gratuity awarded under Section 413 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (as amended) excludes Washington locality pay. However, the surviving family of a Foreign Service employee based in the U.S. but detailed overseas on temporary duty who dies in the line of duty would receive the additional compensation derived from locality pay. Equally, since the introduction of a new pay structure for the Senior Foreign Service, the pay, and thus the death gratuity, is now the same in both situations for an SFS employee. It is therefore conceivable that if two or more officers die in the same incident overseas, their benefits would be radically different. Such inequities should not be tolerated.

And yet, despite these conditions, USAID members continue to answer the call to duty. Since our initial involvement in Iraq, USAID has filled all of its slots on a completely voluntary basis. The USAID staff has stepped up to the plate. They now wait to see if USAID management will respond in kind to their many concerns.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should add that most FSOs are very concerned about the creation of the "F Bureau" and "agency reforms." They are not convinced that the agency is moving in the right direction. Not surprisingly, a recent AFSA survey of USAID officers shows that only 16 percent rate morale as good; close to 80 percent believe things are getting worse. It is time to step back to see if all these "reforms" are truly benefiting the agency. We should have the courage to change course if they are not. AFSA is ready to help.

Our recent member survey also indicates that a large part of the staff supports your efforts (45 percent judged you positively), and about an equal number (48 percent) are giving you the opportunity and time to act before deciding. AFSA especially congratulates you on your outstanding commitment to diversity in the agency as evidenced by your funding increases for recruitment.

I hope that the issues raised in this letter will help inform you and initiate a dialog to improve the current situation. Many of these matters are within your authority, and your personal involvement in implementing the agenda above will be greatly appreciated. We stand by your side and look forward to our partnership. □