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Contents:

AFSA Member Survey  
Discussion  
.....pages 1-2

Your Survey Comments  
.....pages 3-5

Secretary Clinton Visits  
with USAID Staff  
.....page 5

Survey Results  
.....pages 6-9



# THE VANGUARD

## AFSA Member Survey Results

Included in this issue of the *Vanguard* are the results of the AFSA USAID 2008 Member Survey. This is our third survey and it has yielded very interesting results, especially when compared with the 2007 survey which covered a period of change in USAID Administrators. For the current survey, we received 344 responses, which is slightly higher than the previous survey and a valid representation of views held by our Foreign Service staff.

During our December 2, 2008 meeting with the transition team, AFSA presented to them the 2007 survey, which highlighted issues and problems needing particular attention. I hope that both surveys will influence the new administration to make sensible decisions regarding organizational and personnel matters at our agency. Therefore, I also intend to pass the results of this current survey to the new team in order to further help them understand what is currently going on at USAID.

In the 2008 survey, there was an increase in response from Washington-based officers (28%) compared to 2007 (21%). This may be because of the increase in number of incoming Junior Officers waiting for overseas assignments. The most responses came from FS-04 and below FSOs (28%). After that, there was a fairly even distribution of responses from all ranks (see question #2).

To no one's surprise, the top priority remains overseas comparability pay (67%). AFSA has come very close to success in Congress, only to be disappointed at the last moment. Efforts by AFSA to move the overseas pay gap bill through the post-election session of Congress were blocked by a senatorial "hold." Fortunately, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been unequivocal in her support on this issue and promised to work to get this problem solved. A close second priority is ensuring equal benefits for all foreign affairs agencies (65%). During a recent town hall meeting with former Administrator Fore, the HR Director, Gene George, mentioned that USAID is taking a close look at this and that in one area, the difficult-to-staff differential, the agency was planning to reinstate this benefit by this summer. We will follow this closely.

With respect to the Human Resources Office, I am sorry to report that their rating went down. Whereas 24% of the respondents graded their services poor in 2007, in the current survey this figure increase to 33%. (*cont'd on page 2*)

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## Survey Results (cont'd)

AFSA is very concerned about this and points out the need to improve HR training and increase the number of HR employees to serve our staff adequately. We will continue advocating for this.

The issue of morale is one of the most interesting results to follow since it directly affects everything we do. On the positive side, fewer people (22%) judged morale to be poor than in the 2007 survey (32%). In other words, morale seemed to improve a bit. However, the improvement is contradicted by the feeling that by more than half of the FSOs (59%) think that things were getting worse (see question #16). That is not a good situation for any organization. In both surveys, we also asked members to rate the job that USAID Administrator Fore had done. In 2007, most (48%) said that they were not sure yet since she had only been on the job a few months. In 2008, only a small number (6%) thought she had done poorly. This indicates that most of the staff (94%) supported the new Administrator and her efforts to improve the agency. The bottom line is that there is still a long way to go to increase staff confidence about the future.

Questions regarding service in the critical priority countries (CPC) of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan are a good measure of what the staff thinks about these assignments. Some 60% of FSOs oppose directed assignments compared to 65% the previous year, a figure which is still high. Currently, the main motivation to serve in CPCs is the extra pay and benefits (68%) while the greatest disincentive is separation from family (71%). HR should consider these two factors when deciding staffing issues in these severe hardship locations. It should be noted that close to half of all FSOs will have served in CPCs as of this summer.

A new question in the current survey is whether employees support designating USAID as an independent cabinet-level department, which would free it from increasing State Department control. Many studies have indicated that this is a main concern of USAID employees here and overseas. Close to three quarters (73%) of the respondents favor this proposal. This should be an important consideration for the next administration, because staff is in favor of more independence. The majority of the staff seems to reject the increasing trend to merge the agency with State and understands that the fragmentation of foreign assistance is detrimental to our mission (also see question #4).

Another new question relates to official recognition and benefits for same-sex partners (see question #8). Only 17% of the staff is opposed to such a measure. This issue has been presented to the new Secretary of State and she seems understanding and supportive towards increasing these benefits.

Finally, we at AFSA are ultimately accountable to you and we value your opinion of our work. While you rated our efforts highly (76%) we are concerned some of you are displeased with our performance. Most were disappointed that we have not been successful in solving the overseas pay equity issue. On the mid-level hire question, the majority were supportive of our efforts to keep the number down while a minority were upset that we were blocking their entry. And while we have regular AFSANETs, *Vanguard* newsletter issues, and bi-monthly columns in the *Foreign Service Journal*, several wanted more frequent information to the field.

We are reviewing your comments and concerns and will try to do better. However, we ask your understanding that a significant amount of AFSA's time is spent on individual cases of assistance which are confidential in nature and are therefore difficult or inappropriate to publicize. These include possible separations, assignments, evaluations, tenure determinations, disciplinary actions, and financial problems.

Thank you for trusting in us.

*(Please see pages 3-5 for examples of member comments from the survey.)*

# Survey Results (cont'd)

Some of your comments:

-Inequitable treatment of gay men and lesbian women; inequitable treatment of singles; the FS personnel system is broken. Will someone please take the lead in fixing it?

-AFSA needs to ensure that our FSOs have the best medical care possible. State/Med has been dangerous in their attempts to not medevac people. They don't attempt to serve the best interest of the employee or the employee's family when medical issues arise. I believe USAID is disproportionately affected by this since we serve in the hardship countries where medical care is substandard based on international norms. There are some horrific stories related to State/Med's poor decisions and attitude. Honestly, at this stage I think someone will have to die before State/Med starts to take this issue seriously. I think a special survey on medical care overseas is warranted.

-Equity between FS Agencies, e.g. State receives Difficult to Staff Incentive Differential at many posts that USAID has a mission and does NOT receive the same benefit. Closer review of post differentials - many African countries have extremely poor living conditions while posts, such as Georgia have pleasant living conditions with ability to move about freely (aside from 2 conflict areas)with a greater PD, 30%.

-Abolish F, MCC, PEPFAR, MEPI, etc. and incorporate their functions into the new USAID (or better in the new Department of Int'l Development).

-Maternity leave!!! It is really unbelievable that in 2008 the US federal government does not grant maternity leave--this REALLY disadvantages female employees!

-The superficial training being provided to DLIRs (i.e., PO/PDO, other technical backstops) and sending them overseas to learn on the job by overworked Officers that barely have time to carry out their functions let alone train a new Officer with no reference materials or support to reinforce their orientation in Washington. It is a disservice to the Agency, more importantly it is a disservice to our foreign policy as well as our targeted beneficiaries that will not get the best designed programs that USAID is traditionally known for. Bring back handbook 3 as a virtual updated manual for Project Officers. Give these DLIRs a fighting chance. Unlike older officers they have options and can move on and are willing to move on if they get frustrated enough with the lack of support the Agency is providing. ...It is a bum deal for our new blood. PS. The EXOs and Contracting Officers are getting extensively more training. Why is that?

-The training and professional development of Agency employees must have greater emphasis. Very few training opportunities are realistically available, and USAID employees need consideration for training on a par with State employees. It also is noted that many more USAID positions need to be language-designated. AFSA should take a more active role in requiring that the Agency provide sufficient resources to Missions to assure well-funded and well-equipped USAID operations overseas. Finally, USAID Foreign Service employees require that Agency management maintain a professional and productive working environment overseas, and adequate support for our FSN colleagues is key to that effort; FSN staff need more support from HR/Washington, working with State to assure improved supervisory practices (performance evaluations, strengthened uniform HR practices), as well as improved compensation and benefits and protection from arbitrary personnel actions.

-We had a feeling of caring under Colin Powell in regards to training priorities, family support, and quality of life. We no longer feel that under the current administration and I am not optimistic we'll get that with the new. The current atmosphere in the Foreign Service seems to me to be like DoD -- where you're used, abused, then thrown out the door when they're done with you.

-Seek to privatize our dysfunctional Human Resources system.

-ICASS is a failure. Let's undo consolidation and allow USAID to control its own assets. Not only is ICASS more expensive but its not meeting the customer service standards required. Perhaps if the Management officers overseeing ICASS has more managerial experience it may work....but having a new GSO who has been with State for 5 years (1 in training and 4 as a Consular Office) is not really a recipe for success. It gets worse when the management officer has only had 1 tour as a GSO before being the decision maker for ICASS. It's a failure and AID should no longer participate!!!!

## Survey Results (cont'd)

-12 year rule is not advantageous to the Agency - our strength is overseas

-Whereas worldwide availability is a condition of FS employment, USAID was NOT in WAR ZONES when I made that commitment. The dynamics of USAID have changed outrageously since the US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan began. We are civilians and should not be FORCED to serve as an arm of war.

-If the field, USAID is now considered a section within the Embassy rather than a separate, independent Agency. Ambassadors and other State staff are attempting to micro-manage the USAID program under the guise of providing "policy direction." Foreign assistance has become less about development assistance and more about short term politics and power. The Administrator listens to field concerns, but doesn't "hear" them. The increased workload under the F framework, along with the increased involvement of State in USAID work has undermined the Agency's work, status, and development leadership overseas. While the Administrator has been successful in getting more money and more staff, she hasn't been successful in reducing paperwork (in fact, she's increased it) or in addressing the FUNDAMENTAL changes needed in foreign assistance.

-Since the Powell days we have lost focus and there is no direction provided for our mission. We are developing all of these new and better applications to do our jobs but it is requiring more care and feeding which means less time dedicated to the work. We are wasting resources at consulates that have no relevance any more.

-We have too many contractors managing our critical positions and no one is managing the human capital assets of the Department.

-The creation of the "F" bureau has blurred the lines between State and AID. State has no money and so FSNs are not getting adequate compensation adjustments. The FSNs at my post are almost ready to mutiny full scale. Many of our top FSNs have left for better paying jobs. This creates work stress on the staff remaining.

-Hiring Mid-Level staff has undermined my service and sacrifices including pay cuts and assuming very junior support roles in order to transition from a high level USPSC role to an entry level position as a USDH.

-There are less positions overseas, it's demoralizing to take huge pay cut to come work for USAID as a NEP then USAID starts taking in mid level officers and the whole assignment process is messed up - the list came out so late this year, if you're a tandem couple with another agency it makes it impossible to bid/coordinate bids.

-The pay cut when going out to post is very tough on families, especially considering that spouses often have a hard time finding work for a second income. In addition, many people have houses here that must be maintained while at post. Also, although I am married, I feel very strongly that domestic partners should be afforded the same rights as spouses (be on travel orders, insurance, etc.). This is an issue that AFSA should lobby heavily for during the Obama administration.

-The recent HR initiatives such as a transparent, merit-based SMG assignment process and new hiring are terrific improvements. The one drag on the system is the forced merger of administrative services. We had to merge at my post and the customer service is absolutely terrible. We were much better off when USAID provided its own EXO services. I suggest this be halted and possibly reversed at posts where it has already been done.

-Agency Leadership is out of touch with reality on what is going on in the field in terms of resource support, our ability to influence and make a difference, and agreeing for USAID to do many things that we don't have staff, resources, or time. Stretched in all directions. Did you know that Foreign Service Officers are not required to take negotiation course, cross cultural communication course, to take refresher language training classes? Are we really trained and equipped to deal with 21st Century development challenges? What about information technology?

## Survey Results (cont'd)

-The stealth merge with State is a disaster for USAID's morale, productivity and achieving development goals. The mandate and culture of the two organizations are and must remain different. The result has degraded the professionalism and capacity of the development agency to respond to countries' urgent as well as long-term needs. The creation of MCC, PEPFAR, SCRS as "separate" or "new" entities that largely duplicate USAID, and, increasingly, rely on USAID expertise and funds to achieve their objectives. This has undermined USAID morale and capacity and contributed to further fragmentation of US government foreign assistance. The result, ironically, is both great duplication AND immense gaps in programming -- for instance, the unconscionable reduction in funds to support economic growth and poverty reduction -- basic drivers of conflict. I don't think USAID needs necessarily to be a separate agency -- I'd settle if we could just go back the way we were -- largely autonomous, with broad responsibility and accountability for achieving development outcomes and progress, with strong and respected intellectual leadership. Development is not an overnight process; we need to consider country development issues strategically, over the medium and long term (as opposed to 2-3 years). The Green Revolution, the major breakthroughs in health care such as Oral Rehydration therapy, innovations in social marketing -- these are not possible today -- to everyone's loss.

-DSID was eliminated for USAID but State still has it. Enforcing the 12-year rule for returning to WDC is demoralizing. The assignment process is taking far too long and the SMG process is not transparent.

-USAID's Washington-based HR is absolutely horrible. It is truly a drag on the entire agency. I have heard cases where employees will spend up to 20 hours pursuing a request (through e-mails, follow-up, phone calls, etc.) that should only take about 20 minutes to complete if the will was there. A performance audit or something similar needs to be done!!

-I feel like AFSA's USAID office has not adequately responded to the intake of mid-level foreign services officers in certain backstops, despite the fact that this is a key concern of many people who came into the agency at FS4 as NEPs, after having accepted a pay cut to join.

-Overseas locality pay issue should have been resolved successfully by now.

-I'm not so sure what AFSA is doing that is of great use. I strongly object to the amount of AFSA resources devoted to individual employee grievances and to its position on mid-level hires.

-I do not agree with AFSA's opposition to mid-level hires and its unfair characterization of FSLs as 'outsiders' when most of them have been with the agency for years.

-We applaud all your efforts...keep at it!

## Secretary of State Clinton Visits USAID

On January 23, her second day on the job, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited USAID to meet staff and lay out her vision for the role of development in U.S. foreign policy. AFSA Vice President for USAID Francisco Zamora was on hand to introduce Acting Administrator Kent Hill and Secretary Clinton. We at AFSA appreciate the early visit, as well as President Obama's visit to the State Department that same week. We hope this is a true indicator of their appreciation for the great work being performed every day by Foreign Service Officers around the world, as well as their counterparts in the civil service. We are eagerly anticipating the naming of a new Administrator for USAID, and hope that the President will soon announce his choice for this important position.

Pictures and video of Secretary Clinton's visit and remarks at USAID may be found at:

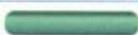
<http://www.usaid.gov/press/speeches/2009/sp090123.html>

# Survey Results - Graphs

## 1. Are you currently serving overseas or in a domestic assignment?

Overseas		246	72%
Domestic		98	28%
Total		344	100%

## 2. What is your Foreign Service rank?

FS-4 or below		96	28%
FS-3		72	21%
FS-2		65	19%
FS-1		72	21%
SFS		39	11%
Total		344	100%

## 3. What would you like to see as AFSA's top priorities? Please rate the following in terms of importance to you.

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Highest priority	Medium priority	Low priority	Should not pursue
Lobbying for overseas comparability pay.	220 67%	71 22%	31 9%	6 2%
Fighting for fairness in assignment/promotions.	164 50%	131 40%	29 9%	3 1%
Assisting members with individual labor-management problems, concerns, inequities, disciplinary issues, grievances, retirement, etc.	120 37%	169 52%	31 10%	5 2%
Providing services (awards, scholarships, insurance, etc.)	9 3%	104 32%	175 54%	34 11%
Defending the reputation of USAID and its role in development.	134 41%	95 29%	71 22%	23 7%
Opposing directed assignments to war zones.	96 29%	91 28%	88 27%	53 16%
Ensuring equal benefits for all foreign affairs agencies.	209 65%	80 25%	27 8%	7 2%

## Summer Fiction Contest

We invite members to enter our annual summer fiction contest, which has just a few simple rules. Please submit just one entry per author, no more than 3,000 words long. (A Foreign Service theme is not required but is recommended.) The story should be e-mailed in Word format to FSJ Business Manager Alicia Campi at [campi@afsa.org](mailto:campi@afsa.org) and include contact information and a brief bio. Most important: The deadline is March 1, 2009. The winning entry will be published in the July-August FSJ; other top stories will appear in later issues.

**4.** Please indicate your level of concern over the following additional issues that AFSA has addressed during the past year.

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Slightly concerned	Unconcerned	N/A
Promotion numbers.	95 30%	118 37%	68 21%	32 10%	8 2%
Utility and fairness of the AEF form.	85 26%	91 28%	78 24%	42 13%	26 8%
Fairness in the assignment system.	118 37%	124 39%	58 18%	18 6%	4 1%
Family-friendliness within the Foreign Service.	120 37%	102 32%	60 19%	39 12%	2 1%
Freedom to express dissent.	89 28%	99 31%	83 26%	46 14%	6 2%
Excessive number of mid-level hires.	118 37%	61 19%	69 21%	69 21%	6 2%
The increasing fragmentation of foreign assistance to other agencies.	188 59%	64 20%	34 11%	27 8%	5 2%

**6.** How would you rate the services provided by USAID's Human Resources (HR) office?

Excellent		11	4%
Good		88	29%
Fair		101	34%
Poor		99	33%
Total		299	100%

**7.** How would you judge current Agency morale?

Excellent		3	1%
Good		103	32%
Fair		144	45%
Poor		69	22%
Total		319	100%

**8.** Should AFSA advocate for official recognition and benefits for same-sex domestic partners of Foreign Service members?

Yes		211	66%
Don't know		56	17%
No		55	17%
Total		322	100%

**9.** How would you rate the job that USAID Administrator Henrietta Holsman Fore has done?

Excellent		51	17%
Good		138	46%
Fair		96	32%
Poor		18	6%
Total		303	100%

**10.** How would you rate the efforts of Administrator Fore when it comes to securing resources for the Agency and its people?

Excellent		66	21%
Good		139	45%
Fair		84	27%
Poor		20	6%
Total		309	100%

**11.** The Agency is now requiring bidders to include a Critical Priority Country (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan) on their bid list. How do you react to the decision to begin identifying employees for "directed" assignments?

Strongly support		32	10%
Support		91	29%
Oppose		111	36%
Strongly oppose		77	25%
Total		311	100%

**12.** What were/are the motivating factors for serving in one of the Critical Priority Countries? (Check all that apply.)

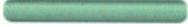
Patriotism		97	33%
Career enhancement		181	61%
Adventure/challenge		127	43%
Extra pay and benefits		200	68%
Living up to worldwide availability		114	39%
Other, please specify		56	19%

## Please Support AFSA's Legal Defense Fund

AFSA's Legal Defense Fund was created in 2007 as a last resort for members involved in legal cases with far-reaching importance to the rest of the Foreign Service - cases AFSA's in-house attorneys do not have the specialized expertise or hundreds of hours of additional time to pursue. The Legal Defense Fund will help members retain a private attorney to challenge egregious procedural violations committed by an agency, and protect them from lawsuits arising from service abroad and enforce Grievance Board decisions. If you are interested in donating to the Legal Defense Fund, please email [member@afsa.org](mailto:member@afsa.org) for additional instructions.

AFSA is grateful for your support.

**13.** What factors were/are most important in choosing not to serve in a Critical Priority Country? (Check all that apply.)

Security concerns		130	45%
Separation from family		205	71%
Obstacles to performing assigned duties		86	30%
Disagreement with policy		106	37%
Other, please specify		57	20%

**14.** Would you resign or retire rather than accept a directed assignment to Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Sudan?

Yes		98	32%
No		210	68%
Total		308	100%

**15.** Do you favor making USAID into an independent cabinet-level department?

Yes		230	73%
No		59	19%
No Opinion		26	8%

**16.** At the present time, do you believe that the overall conditions of work for the professional Foreign Service are improving, worsening, or remaining the same?

Improving		34	11%
Worsening		179	58%
Remaining the same		94	31%
Total		307	100%

**18.** Are you satisfied with AFSA's general efforts on behalf of its members?

Yes		246	80%
No		60	20%
Total		306	100%

**19.** Are you satisfied with the efforts of AFSA's USAID office staff on behalf of members?

Yes		214	75%
No		70	25%
Total		284	100%