Thomas Cunnington

June 24, 2008

The Honorable Joseph Knollenberg, MI-09
United States House of Representatives
2349 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Knollenberg,

As your constituents, and members of the Board of Directors of Joint Aid Management USA (JAMUSA), a South African-founded international relief and development organization that implements food aid, clean water and sanitation, agricultural development, and HIV/AIDS prevention programs in Africa, we would like to express our deep appreciation for your strong demonstrated leadership on development issues. As you have so strongly shown a focus in the past on clean water and sanitation programs around the world, we respectfully urge your support for increased funding for development assistance programs that focus on alleviating extreme hunger and poverty around the world.

As you are aware, the media have reported recently on the effects of rapidly rising food costs both in our country and around the world. With the cost of basic food staples, such as wheat and corn, rising over 40 percent in the past six months, people living in already dire situations are being forced to spend up to 80 percent of their income on food. This crisis has the potential to push nearly 100 million people around the world into even greater poverty. People living on $2 a day cannot spend more money on food. When prices rise 40 percent, they eat 40 percent less. It is critical that the U.S. support programming to help the worlds poorest people not only find coping mechanisms during this time, but develop the means to overcome and thrive in the future. Increased funding for agricultural development, basic education, food assistance, access to clean water, and other aid programs, can contribute to long-term solutions to this and other development challenges.

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As we have visited the schools and clinics JAM works in, we've seen firsthand the positive impact that education, clean water, and proper nutrition has on children, their families and their communities. As you have seen yourself, we have also had the heartbreaking experience of meeting mothers and children at malnutrition clinics, and seen the devastating effects that a lack of food security has on their lives.

While we were in Angola, we had the chance to visit one of JAM's food-processing factories. We met the people from the surrounding community who work in and run that factory - and who have a great sense of pride in knowing that they have a hand in feeding their neighbors, families and friends through the food they produce and distribute to schools.

As the House Appropriations Subcommittee for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs considers funding for Fiscal Year 2009 programs, we would like to express our wholehearted support for increased funding for programs that target global poverty alleviation, including agricultural development, clean water, basic education, and access to basic healthcare. Specifically, we would ask you to support your colleague, Representative Betty McCollum's, request for increased funding for agriculture development as a longer-term solution to the global hunger crisis.

As the country faces a growing deficit, we understand the need for fiscal responsibility. We urge you to work toward shifting funds within the international affairs account into targeted programs that will have the maximum impact on the lives of those in greatest need.

Sincerely,

Tom Cunnington

Laurie Cunnington