

**CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

## CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

## MONMOUTH

112 Village Center Drive  
Freehold, NJ 07728-2510  
(732) 780-3035

## OCEAN

405 Route 539  
Plumsted, NJ 08514-2303  
(609) 286-2571; (732) 350-2300

## MERCER

4573 South Broad Street  
Hamilton, NJ 08620-2215  
(609) 585-78782373 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-3004  
(202) 225-3765<http://chrissmith.house.gov>**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**SENIOR MEMBER, FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEECHAIRMAN, AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,  
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEEWESTERN HEMISPHERE  
SUBCOMMITTEECO-CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY  
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPECO-CHAIRMAN, CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE  
COMMISSION ON CHINA

DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

## Africa's Current and Potential Famines

*Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,  
Global Human Rights and International  
June 14, 2017*

The Bible, in the Book of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3, Verse 2, tells us that: “There is a time to plant and a time to harvest.” That ancient prescription has allowed multitudes to be fed over the millennia, but now ruthless men seeking power have disrupted this cycle, causing man-made famine where none should exist in African countries from South Sudan to Nigeria to Somalia.

Famine in Africa and Yemen has been called the worst since World War II, even worse than the catastrophic 2011 famine in East Africa. What makes this round of famine even more tragic is how preventable it is. For example, South Sudan contains the most arable land in what was once a united Sudan. Aside from oil reserves, agriculture was seen as the key to South Sudan's future success. Now, areas such as the Equatoria provinces, South Sudan's breadbasket, are engulfed in conflict with citizens fleeing the country in the thousands daily.

There are more than 4.8 million displaced South Sudanese—1.8 million refugees in neighboring countries and at least 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). South Sudan is experiencing heightened levels of food insecurity with as high as 27 percent of the population in some areas facing famine. Despite the government's contention that people are merely being frightened by rumors of conflict, South Sudan has quickly surpassed Eritrea to become the world's fastest emptying country.

Another country seeing a major exodus due to conflict is Somalia. There are an estimated 881,000 Somali refugees, and the anticipated scale of population displacement from Somalia due to pervasive conflict and the threat of starvation will increase refugee flows throughout the region and into Europe. In Somalia, nearly 6.2 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 2.9 million people are facing crisis or emergency levels of acute food insecurity, including nearly a million children under the age of five.

Nigeria is yet another country experiencing famine due to conflict. There are 14 million people in northeast Nigeria who are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 8 million children, and almost 6 million people are also facing severe food insecurity. Almost 9 million Nigerians are projected to suffer from food insecurity by August 2017, including more than 3 million people living in the northeast state of Borno.

We focus on the part Boko Haram has played in creating chaos and famine in Nigeria, and quite rightly so. More than 30,000 lives have been lost in violence related to Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency, but there is a developing threat that could widen the likelihood of food insecurity there. Attacks by Fulani extremists on farmers in Nigeria's Middle Belt are increasing in intensity and could further exacerbate hunger in the region.

The El Niño-El Niña weather cycles have caused drought as well as flooding in parts of Africa in recent years. The possibility of drought currently threatens famine in countries ranging from Angola to Sudan to Mozambique to Madagascar. Nevertheless, it is conflict that poses an even greater threat of famine in countries such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali and could cause or exacerbate famine should fighting disrupt planting-harvesting cycles and markets where locally produced food can be purchased.

Ranking Member Bass and I just returned from a mission to South Sudan and Uganda. Humanitarian aid officials repeatedly told us that no matter how much aid is provided, it will not be enough to meet the ever-expanding need. Although we need to do more, no amount of assistance will do the job unless the conflict in South Sudan is definitively ended. Currently, there is not enough food to keep pace with the growing flow of refugees from South Sudan, and rations have been cut at times by half.

There has been a cease-fire declared in South Sudan, but many observers believe that is due more to the rainy season preventing large movements of troops and heavy equipment than a genuine determination to end the conflict. This week, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development has convened a conference aimed at bringing the South Sudan conflict to an end. After numerous efforts to reach a lasting cease-fire, one can only hope the realization of the immensity of this crisis will lead the warring parties to actually seek a lasting peace.

Our hearing today is intended to make the appeal both for continued humanitarian aid from our government and others in the international community, but also for a more robust international effort to end conflict in the countries where people are scattered in the millions and desperate levels of hunger are rampant. We must contend with the vagaries of weather, but we shouldn't have to see people suffer for the ambitions of those without mercy seeking power at any cost.