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PRESS RELEASE

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Former Humanitarian Workers Sentenced to 142 Months In Prison For Defrauding USAID of \$1.9 Million - Money Was to Fund Community Reconstruction Projects in Liberia -

WASHINGTON – Two former humanitarian aid workers were each sentenced today to 142 months in prison for defrauding the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) of roughly \$1.9 million that was meant to assist impoverished people and towns in Liberia.

The sentencings, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, were announced by U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr., Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division Lanny A. Breuer, and Donald A. Gambatesa, Inspector General of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Joe O. Bondo, 39, and Morris B. Fahnbulleh, 41, both of Monrovia, Liberia, were each convicted by a jury in November 2010 of one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States, four counts of mail fraud, two counts of wire fraud and four false claims counts. Bondo was also convicted of two counts of witness tampering. Fahnbulleh was also convicted of one count of conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud. The two men have been in custody since their arrests in 2009.

The Honorable Reggie B. Walton, who sentenced both defendants, also ordered that they pay jointly and severally \$1.2 million in restitution. Bondo and Fahnbulleh also were sentenced to three years of supervised release following their prison terms.

“Through their tax dollars, the American people battle hunger and disease and poverty throughout the world,” said U.S. Attorney Machen. “Today’s sentence makes clear that we will punish opportunists who try to undermine the good work of USAID by diverting development assistance for personal profit.”

“Today’s sentences reflect the reprehensible nature of the defendants’ conduct,” said Assistant Attorney General Breuer. “Bondo and Fahnbulleh defrauded USAID of nearly \$2

million intended to provide food for the needy and build infrastructure in war-torn Liberia. Serious crimes deserve serious punishment. These defendants have learned first-hand that we are committed to pursuing aggressively those who steal from our government programs.”

“Our office will continue to pursue anyone who defrauds USAID,” said Inspector General Gambatesa. “As in this instance, we will use the necessary resources to investigate allegations of wrongdoing worldwide in order to serve the U.S. taxpayer.”

According to court documents and information presented at trial, after Liberia’s 14-year civil war, USAID awarded a grant in 2005, through Catholic Relief Services, to World Vision, an international non-profit Christian humanitarian foundation. The grant was a two-year humanitarian project in Liberia for community reconstruction projects.

Under the agreement, Bondo and Fahnbulleh were assigned to supervise World Vision employees as they assisted Liberian communities with infrastructure projects, including road, latrine and water well construction. In return for their labor, USAID, through World Vision, was supposed to then distribute food to the residents of these communities.

However, in 2008, an internal audit conducted by World Vision revealed that up to 91% of the food never reached its intended beneficiaries. According to the trial evidence, the defendants sold the food and pocketed the proceeds; they then instructed World Vision employees to falsify the documents used to track food distributions.

Bondo and Fahnbulleh also directed USAID-salaried employees to perform construction work on their personal compounds, instead of building clinics, schools, roads and other vital infrastructure projects which the federal government had funded. They further concealed these activities from World Vision headquarters, Catholic Relief Services, and USAID by intimidating the World Vision employees with threats of job loss and by paying some subordinates “hush money” to cement their silence and cooperation.

As a result of the defendants’ conduct, thousands of families never got the food or reconstruction assistance they were to receive. More than 250 towns in Liberia submitted statements to the Court that detailed the consequences of the fraud. In addition, World Vision has repaid about \$1.9 million to USAID through Catholic Relief Services. World Vision also expended extensive resources in investigating the fraud and working with authorities.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John Borchert of the District of Columbia and Trial Attorney Liam Brennan of the Criminal Division’s Fraud Section. The Criminal Division’s Office of International Affairs assisted in the case. The investigation was conducted by the USAID Office of the Inspector General.

In announcing the sentences, Assistant Attorney General Breuer and U.S. Attorney Machen commended the work of the Special Agents of the USAID Office of Inspector General, who performed much of the investigation. They also acknowledged the efforts of numerous law enforcement partners, including: Regional Security Officer Christopher Gillis at the U.S. Embassy in Liberia; the FBI forensic examiner on the case; Paralegal Specialist Tasha Harris; Fraud Section Law Clerk Diana Wang, and Legal Assistant Jamasee Lucas, as well as the Department of Justice's Office of International Affairs.

Finally, they expressed appreciation for the work of Assistant U.S. Attorney Borchert and Trial Attorney Brennan.

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