Thank you Ambassador Lynch. It is an honor to be here with you today. Members of the Press.

It is indeed good to be back in Guyana. However, I wish it were under better circumstances as communities face severe flooding across the country. Something I saw coming in on the flight. Our thoughts and prayers are very much with the people of Guyana during this time.

With President Ali’s recent declaration of a national disaster, the situation provides a somber backdrop, and underscores the importance of a concerted effort to tackle climate change right now. In response to the flooding, the United States Government, through USAID, is providing an immediate $30k in humanitarian assistance: $15 thousand to the Guyana Red Cross (GRC) for the local purchase and transportation of relief hampers, including cleaning and personal hygiene kits. And an additional $15 thousand to assist CDC in the transportation of relief items to priority regions. Our Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance continues to engage and monitor the situation with the CDC and other key organizations.

I also wanted to mention that we are hosting our USAID’s Climate Change Symposium series with CARICOM, which kicked off this morning here in Guyana. This is our opportunity to talk about this existential problem and to find solutions, together in the region.

The impact of Climate Change in this region is huge—personally, environmentally, and economically. Such costs affect a country's competitiveness in international tourism, agriculture, and other markets, thereby reducing employment and income in these sectors of the economy. We are most concerned due to the impact on a family's livelihood—including resource-dependent, low-income, and indigenous groups, and particularly vulnerable individuals such as children, the elderly, and women—who may be more affected financially by these effects of climate change than other segments of the population.

Climate change poses a serious threat to Guyana. With 90 percent of the population living in the low-lying coastal region, Guyana is at risk from sea level rise and coastal flooding impacts. It is a risk not only to the built environment and urban centers located along the coast, but also to agriculture and the natural environment.

The Biden Administration has made climate change a U.S. foreign policy priority and USAID/ESC will work with CARICOM, the eleven countries we cover, our donor partners in the region to put the world on a path to a sustainable future through ambitious action on climate change.

Here are some key steps in the right direction:
This morning, USAID, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology, and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, all of us signed an important Memorandum of Understanding to build the region’s awareness, preparedness, and develop action steps to counter the impacts of climate change.

In terms of the COVID-19 Pandemic, as the Ambassador mentioned, the United States has been a global leader in pandemic response worldwide. Over the past year, USAID/ESC funded over $3 million in new activities and in-kind donations to augment the region’s COVID-19 health response. This funding is helping health institutions and community-based organizations to prevent and control COVID-19 infections; provide critical hygiene and medical supplies, and; support public health information campaigns.

Furthermore, to augment this initial funding, USAID is providing $1.5 million to PAHO and UNICEF in support of COVAX-approved vaccine readiness and delivery in the region, including here in Guyana. Specifically, USAID will support expanding the cold chain, evidence-based comprehensive communication planning, training and evaluation intended to sustain confidence in immunization; performance monitoring; and community engagement. USAID is also supporting strong coordination and collaboration between all organizations working to increase immunization coverage.

A priority of my visit this week is to reaffirm USAID’s partnership with CARICOM and the government and people of Guyana, as neighbors, partners, and friends. I am pleased to let you know that we will soon release our new Regional Development Country Cooperation Strategy covering the period of 2020 to 2025. Key areas of support include Economic Growth, Citizen Security, Education, Energy and Climate Change. My colleagues and I are meeting with government officials, CARICOM representatives, leaders in the business community, youth representatives and members of civil society organizations, to hear about their achievements, priorities and areas for future collaboration.

Finally, I wanted to share that USAID is celebrating 60 years in 2021. Over the years, our work has exemplified the best of American values abroad. From disaster response to HIV/AIDS support to private sector competitiveness—we have contributed to a value system in which every man, woman, and child lives with dignity and reaches their full potential. USAID’s partnership with Guyana promotes a more peaceful, stable, and just world. Together our work benefits the people of Guyana, strengthens national security, and advances shared prosperity for all.