The Indo Pacific Transparency Initiative was announced by Vice President Pence in November 2018 at the APEC CEO Summit in Papua New Guinea. The Transparency Initiative encompasses more than $600 million in programs that have been funded since the beginning of the Trump Administration. These programs promote civil society, rule of law, and transparent and accountable governments across the region as part of the governance pillar of our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. U.S. support for good governance is integral to U.S. foreign policy and national security interests, and in line with U.S. values. Weak institutions, corruption, onerous and opaque business processes, and poor human rights conditions drive away private sector investment in too many societies and can lead to poor choices by governments. Indo-Pacific nations and regional institutions identify transparency as fundamental to the realization of our shared Indo-Pacific vision, including in ASEAN’s Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

The Transparency Initiative involves over 200 programs developed by a range of U.S. government agencies focused on anticorruption and fiscal transparency, democracy assistance, youth and emerging leader development, media and internet freedom, and protecting fundamental freedoms and human rights. At the November 2019 Indo-Pacific Business Forum and East Asia Summit, the United States is pleased to be announcing an additional $68 million for new programs, including regional governance programs for the Pacific Islands and South Asia, and support for democratic elections in Burma. We are also actively coordinating with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and Taiwan on opportunities for further cooperation.

We are also announcing the formation of the new Indo-Pacific Transparency Fund, which will be formally launched by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) in the U.S. Department of State. This new multi-stakeholder partnership initiative will support targeted, priority efforts across the Indo-Pacific region, including projects that promote the rule of law, civic space, and transparent and accountable governance in the advancement of a shared vision of an Indo-Pacific that is secure, open, inclusive, and rules-based. This public-private partnership will allow like-minded governments, private businesses, foundations, and other types of entities or associations to join together to support transparent and accountable governance across the Indo-Pacific region.

As we commemorate the one-year anniversary of the announcement of the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative, we would like to recognize some of the U.S. government’s efforts to support good governance across the Indo-Pacific.
Anticorruption and Fiscal Transparency:

- State Department anticorruption efforts include the work of the Global Anti-Corruption Consortium (GACC), a groundbreaking initiative that brings together investigative journalists and advocacy groups to expose corruption, drive reform, and facilitate action by governments and international organizations. The United States and Australia are founding members of the GACC and have contributed diplomatic and financial support to the multi-donor initiative since it launched in 2016.

- In September, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) hosted the first annual U.S.-Taiwan Consultations on Democratic Governance in the Indo-Pacific Region in Taipei, which was led by the Department of State’s DRL. Taiwan agreed to commit to advancing good governance, human rights, and anti-corruption efforts in the region.

- A first-ever event between the United States and the South East Asia Parties Against Corruption, an anti-corruption entity associated with ASEAN, brought together 50 practitioners and experts from anticorruption agencies in ASEAN Member States, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.K government, and the private sector in September to share best practices on combating bribery through enforcement and preventive measures.

- The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) partnered with the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices (CACJ) Working Group on Judicial Education and Training to finalize its first work plan in September, which will be adopted at the seventh CACJ in November. The five priority areas identified are: business and commercial law, cross border criminal law, civil procedural law, environmental law, and leadership and management. The United States’ continued commitment to fortify legal frameworks strengthens democratic systems and supports ASEAN aspirations to uphold a rules-based order in the region.

- USAID is launching new activities in the Philippines to strengthen fiscal transparency and accountability in budgeting, revenue collection, and public procurement. USAID will promote efforts related to the Open Government Partnership, including the expansion of public consultation and monitoring. USAID will also support the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, in partnership with local communities, indigenous peoples, local governments, and the private sector, to identify collaborative strategies to improve the economic and financial management of extractive operations in select resource-rich locations.

- USAID is expanding assistance to support Sri Lanka’s open government reforms, including Sri Lanka’s efforts to implement a national anti-corruption strategy.

- In the first year of the Transparency Initiative, USAID helped Nepal in its efforts to improve transparency and curb corruption by supporting development of an open budget web portal. The portal provides the public access to local government financial information, such as revenue, budget, projects, and expenditures. Information is now available to the public in order to help them understand how resources are spent and hold government accountable.
• In support of Indonesia, one of the largest democracies in the world, the Republic of Korea’s International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) is working with USAID in support of the Government of Indonesia’s National Integrated Complaint Handling system (LAPOR). Alongside USAID’s other complementary anti-corruption programs, KOICA’s $5 million contribution in April 2019 to LAPOR will help combat government corruption and support a more responsive and accountable government by providing a transparent way – via Facebook and Twitter – to process complaints from the federal level down to the municipal local level.

• The United States is supporting a judicial integrity network with ASEAN member states in support of the ASEAN 2025 Blueprint commitment to build and strengthen transparent and accountable institutions and in cooperation with global efforts to strengthen judicial integrity.

Democracy Assistance:

• The United States and the Pacific Islands share a strong commitment to democracy, rule of law, peaceful resolution of disputes, and transparency. Secretary of State Pompeo announced at the UN General Assembly on September 27, 2019 that the United States will provide $15 million to promote sound, just, and responsive governance within the region to empower citizens, help combat corruption, and strengthen nations’ autonomy. This is part of the United States’ Pacific Pledge of $100 million in new and previously announced U.S. assistance to the Pacific Islands under our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

• The United States and Australia are funding a multi-prong effort to support democratic elections in Burma. Activities include assisting the election commission in expanding its voter outreach efforts and enabling the commission to safeguard the integrity of the process. The program is equipping women and young candidates with an improved understanding of election regulations and enabling Burma’s emerging leaders, including women, young adult candidates, and future political leaders, to attend Leadership Training Schools in Burma’s states and regions. Activities will also support international election observers and post-election dispute resolution.

• USAID and the Department of State are working with Sri Lankan partners on projects supporting Sri Lanka’s presidential elections on November 16, as well as parliamentary elections in 2020. As part of this effort, USAID has worked to strengthen the role and capacity of the independent Elections Commission and will field over 6,000 short term domestic election observers and over 400 long-term observers throughout the country to encourage a free, fair, and non-violent election. State Department funding supports pre-and-post election assessments, activities analyzing and responding to disinformation and hate-speech, and additional long-term international election observers.

• In the Pacific Islands, USAID is assisting Papua New Guinea’s Bougainville Referendum Commission and local civil society organizations to enable a free, fair, credible and peaceful Bougainville referendum. USAID is also launching support to the Solomon Islands Election Commission as it takes on an expanded mandate to administer provincial, as well as national, elections.
Youth and Emerging Leader Development:

- The Department of State and Australia fund the Women’s Business Resource Center (WBRC) in Papua New Guinea, which is run by the Center for International Private Enterprise and is celebrating more than two years of ground-breaking work in a country where women face many daunting challenges. The WBRC has empowered more than one thousand local women and developed women’s business skills through education and networking on supply chains, financial literacy and other entrepreneurship, leadership and civic engagement topics. The WBRC will soon create a Women’s National Business Agenda (WNBA), which will provide public platforms for emerging Papua New Guinean women leaders and be used to advocate for regulatory, legislative, and institutional strengthening and reforms to support women’s economic empowerment.

- The Department of State and Japan are collaborating on a conference in Tokyo in December that will bring together U.S. and Japanese alumni from the TOMODACHI Initiative (as well as youth alumni from India, the Republic of Korea, Australia, and the Young Pacific Leaders Initiative) and Young Southeast Asian Leaders’ Initiative (YSEALI) alumni. It will build a cohort of international leaders equipped to engage with colleagues throughout the Indo-Pacific region on issues of mutual concern.

- USAID is launching a new Leadership Development Program in Bangladesh that will work with local partners to promote youth leaders as change-agents for democracy and development. By promoting a greater understanding of democratic practices and values and by providing opportunities for community leaders to engage in community development, the new program will promote a better-informed citizenry that will actively engaged in the democratic process.

- USAID is also launching new support for civil society advocacy in Timor Leste.

- In Cambodia, USAID is launching new activities to expand citizen participation in local governance issues. Assistance includes support for women and youth leaders through leadership training and youth empowerment, along with assistance to women-led organizations focused on non-violent communication, peace-building and conflict resolution.

- The Department of State is expanding the Young Pacific Leaders program, including leadership training and grants for emerging leaders to implement projects related to education, economic development, resource management, and good governance.

Media and Internet Freedom:

- The State Department’s Global Engagement Center (GEC) is working to strengthen local journalism in the Pacific Islands through training and reporting tours. GEC is also providing media outlets in the Pacific Islands the ability to publish Associated Press reporting free of charge thus ensuring access to credible and independent news.
• USAID partnered with the ASEAN Foundation, the ASEAN Secretariat’s Education, Youth, and Sports Division, and *The Scoop* (a media outlet based in Brunei) to organize an ASEAN Youth Social Journalism training in Brunei, which trained participants on social journalism.

• In September, the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy jointly held the second Global Cooperation Training Framework workshop on media literacy, bringing together civil society, media, and other private enterprises to discuss different ways misinformation influences elections, the implementation of media literacy education in curriculums, and how government and civil society initiatives can enhance their efforts to combat misinformation, among other challenges.

• Department of State public diplomacy programs over the past year supported good governance and promoted freedom of the press and strong civil society organizations. These included a TechCamp for journalists and educators in Burma and Speaker Programs across the region on media literacy, journalism, and media ethics.

• USAID supported the Sri Lanka Parliament in establishing a media center to increase public awareness of and participation in the work of the Parliament. The refurbished Center can now host 110 journalists and includes a state-of-the-art television studio for professional interviews and media conferences, 70 modern workspaces for lobby correspondents, and an editing suite for video and audio editing.

• In Burma, independent journalists participating in a USAID training program have produced more than 50 stories in the last year. The stories covered a range of issues including the impact of armed conflicts, Internally Displaced Persons, land and farmers rights, inter-communal harmony, gender based violence, and drugs.

• USAID supported the Cambodian Women’s Media Center to air the first live radio show promoting the new fact-checking website, www.crosscheckwmc.com. This is the first publicly available resource in Cambodia that promotes independent media through helping citizens verify news sources.

• USAID is launching a new activity in Sri Lanka to strengthen the media sector and improve citizens’ access to balanced, reliable, and objective news. The activity will work to improve media governance and the enabling environment; strengthen media’s capacity to provide balanced, informed, impartial and ethical reporting; and help media serve as a forum for important national dialogues around good governance and reconciliation.

• In the Philippines, USAID is launching a new activity to strengthen civil society coalitions in support of a free press, and support game-changing interventions to improve media protections. The activity will train a nationwide community of media organizations to expand their reach in countering misinformation and facilitate collaboration with academic institutions and technology firms. It will work to advance media self-regulation and address issues on compliance with professional and ethical standards and content quality.
Fundamental Freedoms and Human Rights:

- The General Election Network for Disability Access (AGENDA), a creative partnership of disabled people’s organizations and election-focused civil society organizations in Southeast Asia, is engaging policymakers to implement the ASEAN Community’s new disability rights action platform. Building on the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by all ten ASEAN member states, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights launched a plan in December 2018 to ensure disability rights in the region. The AGENDA network, which has promoted equal access to rights since 2011, is playing a significant role advocating for implementation and enforcement of this plan with national governments with the support of Australia and the United States.

- The Global Equality Fund (GEF), a Department of State-led public-private partnership that supports innovative civil society programs, protects the human rights of LGBTI persons in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world. The GEF’s global reach is significant, empowering groups and activists in more than 90 countries. Australia has contributed since 2016, including crucial funding in the Asia-Pacific region.

- Australia and Mongolia contribute diplomatic and financial support to the Department of State-led, multi-donor Lifeline Embattled Civil Society Organizations Assistance Fund which launched in 2011. Lifeline provides emergency assistance to civil society organizations facing threats due to their human rights work and advocacy and resiliency support to address broader threats to civic space and freedom of association and assembly. Lifeline has supported over 1,900 civil society organizations in 112 countries, including countries in the Indo-Pacific.

- USAID partnered with the ASEAN Human Rights Working Group and ASEAN Civil Society to launch a policy dialogue on strengthening implementation of the ASEAN Consensus on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

- USAID collaborated with the Government of Thailand and the private sector to support the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights 6th Annual Youth Debate program, held in September. The initiative provides an opportunity for ASEAN university students to engage on the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration and Phnom Penh Statement to address the most pressing human rights issues facing the region.

- In September, the United States announced a new contribution of more than $127 million to help address the Rohingya crisis, more than $89 million of which went to programs in Bangladesh assisting both Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi host communities. The new funding brought the total U.S. contribution to more than $669 million since the outbreak of violence in 2017.

- USAID is launching a new Labor Rights in Cambodia project with to enlarge civic space by promoting labor rights. The program will work to improve labor rights protections; improve representation of worker interests in targeted sectors and industries; strengthen linkages
among labor, business and civil society; and increase the effectiveness of labor relations systems.

- In Laos, USAID is launching support to improve access to justice and strengthen safeguards for judicial fairness.
- In Bangladesh, USAID is launching a new activity that will engage worker-led organizations, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, international and local NGOs, clothing brands, the Government of Bangladesh, academia, and development partners to encourage best practices and foster good working conditions.
- USAID is launching new support to increase human rights awareness and public intolerance towards rights violations in the Philippines. The project will work with a broad and diverse community of local organizations to implement communication strategies designed to inspire public support for human rights.

The United States is committed to continuing to promote civil society, the rule of law, and transparent and accountable governments across the Indo-Pacific region – these are the building blocks of progress and the bulwarks of peace, security, and independence.

For additional information, contact EAP-Press@state.gov

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