

USAID's Last Day Marked by Unity and Heartbreak

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WASHINGTON – In a rare moment of unity and emotion, former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush, along with singer Bono, paid tribute Monday to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as it shut down as an independent agency after 63 years.

Founded by President John F. Kennedy, USAID became a symbol of America's efforts to fight poverty and promote peace overseas. From providing food in war zones to fighting disease and supporting democracy, the agency reached millions around the world.

President Donald Trump made cutting USAID a priority, calling it wasteful and “radical.” Many staff were locked out of offices with little warning and laid off by mass email.

In recorded messages shared with staff, Obama and Bush strongly criticized the decision.

“Gutting USAID is a travesty and a tragedy,” Obama said. “It’s some of the most important work happening anywhere in the world.” He called the closure a “colossal mistake” that would damage America’s leadership and credibility.

Bush focused on PEPFAR, the AIDS relief program he started as president. The initiative has saved about 25 million lives.

“You’ve shown the great strength of America through your work and that is your good heart,” Bush said. “Is it in our national interests that 25 million people who would have died now live? I think it is.”

Bono, a longtime advocate for humanitarian causes, appeared as a surprise guest. Wearing sunglasses, he called USAID workers “secret agents of international development.” Fighting back tears, he read a poem he wrote about the agency’s closure.

“They called you crooks. When you were the best of us,” he said, speaking of children who will suffer without U.S. aid.

Former leaders from Liberia and Colombia also thanked USAID for helping their countries recover from conflict and poverty. A World Food Programme official cried as she promised that someday America’s mission of helping people would return.

Starting Tuesday, USAID’s work will move into a new State Department office called “America First.” Officials say this will ensure U.S. tax dollars support national interests.

Obama closed with a message to the thousands who served the agency:

“Your work has mattered, and it will matter for generations to come.”