

Opening Session

9:15 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Sarah Charles is the Assistant to the Administrator of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), the U.S. Government lead for international disaster response. With a mandate to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and reduce the impact of disasters, BHA monitors, mitigates, and responds to global hazards and humanitarian needs. The Bureau also promotes resilience by preparing communities for disasters before they strike, and by helping people recover and move beyond crises.

Prior to BHA, Ms. Charles was the Senior Director for Policy and Advocacy for the International Rescue Committee, where she led efforts to reform the humanitarian aid system and promote policies to improve the lives of refugees and other conflict-affected people. She also staffed the National Security Council (NSC) at the White House, first as the Director for Humanitarian Affairs and then as the Director and Acting Senior Director for Strategic Planning. In the first role, Ms. Charles was responsible for humanitarian policy and coordinating worldwide assistance including emergencies in Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic, the Philippines, and South Sudan. Ms. Charles played a particularly central role in coordinating the international Ebola response, an operation that used novel approaches and involved actors across the government, private sector, and international community. As the Director for Strategic Planning, Ms. Charles coordinated the White House response to the global refugee and migration crisis including the 2016 Leaders Summit on Refugees.

Before the NSC, Ms. Charles covered the Middle East for USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, the United States government's primary political transition and post-conflict assistance instrument. She led USAID's post-Arab Spring efforts to strengthen democracy, promote space for democratic dialogue, support stabilization, and encourage civic participation in the Middle East. Ms. Charles also helped start the International Rescue Committee's emergency response in Darfur and led multi-country refugee repatriation efforts following the signing of the Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement.



Abby Maxman is President and CEO of Oxfam America. In her position, Abby mobilizes people and resources worldwide for positive social change and to provide lifesaving support to people in crisis. Since joining Oxfam in 2017, she has elevated its focus on gender, climate justice and fighting inequality. She has been at the forefront of Oxfam's response to safeguarding, the COVID pandemic and vaccine equity, global governance reform, and its ambitious 2030 strategy.

Abby is a thought and practice leader, playing an important role sharing efforts and expertise with NGOs and other actors. This includes as Vice Chair of InterAction, Chair of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, Representative on the U.N. Inter Agency Standing Committee, and serving on the boards of Frontline AIDS, Global Executive Leadership Initiative, and the Classy Leadership Council. Abby's approach is informed by her experience living and working through challenging periods of rapid social change, development and disaster in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Lesotho, Haiti, Georgia, and Geneva, serving with CARE, several U.S. Government agencies, the German development agency, and the U.N. World Food Programme.

