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***Statement by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. Permanent Representative, on peace and security in Africa: Djibouti and Eritrea, in the Security Council, October 23, 2008***

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Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Mr. President, the United States would like to thank President Ismail Omar Guelleh for traveling all the way to New York to brief the Council on the continuing crisis between Djibouti and Eritrea.

We appreciate, Mr. President, the importance of the president's participation in this meeting and the content of his message. We take his message seriously, we hope the same is the case with all members of the Council and that we take appropriate note and respond to the challenge that he has presented to the Council.

Mr. President, the United States also welcomes the presence of the Foreign Minister of Djibouti and the Permanent Representative of Djibouti.

The United States remains extremely concerned about Eritrea's unprovoked attack on Djiboutian forces and its subsequent refusal to withdraw its troops or engage in peaceful dialogue to defuse the situation.

We commend the Djiboutian government for its efforts to find a peaceful solution to this crisis. The UN Fact Finding Mission to Djibouti has clearly documented the extent to which the Djiboutian government has worked to resolve the crisis peacefully.

The government of Eritrea, however, has defied the international community by attacking its neighbor in a violent confrontation that left 44 Djiboutian soldiers dead and many more missing. The Eritrean government then refused to cooperate or even to issue visas to the Fact Finding Mission dispatched by the United Nations to investigate the situation. The Government of Eritrea's failure even to acknowledge the existence of the problem, let alone the seriousness of the situation, is unacceptable.

The Security Council should take appropriate action to find a resolution to this crisis. The UN's Fact Finding Mission has recommended that the UN dispatch a high-level envoy to the area to engage with Eritrea to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.

The Fact Finding Mission further noted that, "in the event that the offer by the UN is again rebuffed by Eritrea, the matter should be referred to the Security Council for appropriate action." The report's finding that "a sovereign country is being drawn into a crippling and unaffordable military mobilization, to deal with a situation that may ultimately threaten national, regional, and international peace" reinforces the seriousness of these recommendations.

Mr. President, in line with the report's recommendations, the United States calls on the Secretary-General to dispatch a high-level envoy immediately. Eritrea should be given a clear time frame in which to accept the assistance of the United Nations, the African Union, or any other state, organization, or body that is acceptable to both parties to find a peaceful solution to the crisis. However, if Eritrea rebuffs any such efforts at resolution, the Council must react appropriately. If we fail to do so, not only do we risk yet another costly and tragic war in an area that has already suffered tremendously, we risk the credibility of the Security Council.

Thank you, Mr. President.