



## "Ethiopia and the State of Democracy: Effects on Human Rights and Humanitarian Conditions in the Ogaden and Somalia"

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### As Prepared

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Payne, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to discuss with you the current situation in Ethiopia and more broadly in the Horn of Africa sub-region. Before examining specific questions you may have, I would like to provide some context for that discussion.

U.S. interests in the Horn of Africa are to promote and support regional stability and effective governance, eliminate any platform for al-Qaida or other terrorist operations, respond to humanitarian needs, strengthen democratic institutions, promote respect for human rights, and collaborate with governments to transform their countries by investing in people and creating the conditions for sustained economic growth. In Ethiopia, U.S. engagement seeks to: support the transition to multi-party democracy; sustain economic growth and reduce poverty; build domestic capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies; improve access to basic education and health services; and bolster regional stability. With the added complications of continued instability in Somalia to the south and the unresolved border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea to the north, meeting these objectives represents a considerable challenge.

Our relationship with Ethiopia reflects a history of more than 100 years of bilateral dialogue and exchange. As a major bilateral donor, we are working with the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) and civil society on the full range of development issues; through this experience, we have gained an appreciation of Ethiopia's political and socio-economic trajectory. Just as there are areas of progress, such as HIV/AIDS prevention, there are areas of concern. The United States continues to place a priority on the need for improved human rights and greater political and economic freedoms in our dialogue with the GOE.

### DEMOCRACY IN ETHIOPIA

The campaign period leading to the May 2005 elections in Ethiopia was the most open and promising in that country's 3,000 year history. Unfortunately, post-election violence and lengthy detention and trial of opposition members, journalists, and civil society activists cast a shadow over the outcomes of that election. As the immediate aftermath of the post-election turmoil fades, we see a cautious, yet motivated host of political actors who are determined to regain and build upon the advances of 2005 to further strengthen the role of democratic institutions, policies, and practices in the national fabric of Ethiopia.

The United States has persistently pressed all sides to remain engaged with legal and constitutional approaches to advance Ethiopia's democracy. With U.S. encouragement, the ruling and opposition parties engaged in a dialogue process that resulted in agreements to tackle some of the challenging dilemmas facing Ethiopia's democracy. These include reform of the National Electoral Board, joint government-opposition missions to investigate human rights concerns in Oromiya, revising the media law and parliamentary rules of procedure, and establishing a code of conduct for the press.

These steps are unprecedented in Ethiopia and represent a monumental advancement in the political environment. Ethiopia's political environment continues to have its vulnerabilities, but we continue to press all parties to remain committed to the process and seek to establish an environment conducive to addressing the broader development challenges facing the Ethiopian people. It is critical that we all - as stakeholders in Ethiopia's stability, democracy, and prosperity - encourage all parties to move forward to regain the advances that we saw in early 2005 and to build upon them for the people of Ethiopia.

The United States has developed a strong partnership with Ethiopia to foster progress in these areas and democracy and human rights issues remain a permanent element in our bilateral dialogue with Ethiopian leaders and civil society. U.S. officials continue to raise these issues at every possible opportunity. The Department of State recently hosted a group of opposition political leaders and Members of Parliament in Washington, which provided the opportunity for a positive exchange of views on the current state of democracy in Ethiopia. The opposition leaders reaffirmed their commitment to dialogue as the only viable path to deeper democracy in Ethiopia.

While significant work remains, the GOE has taken steps to improve respect for human rights and democratic practices following the setbacks in 2005. The government's recent pardon of 71 leaders of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and members of civil society was an important event which significantly enhanced dialogue and reconciliation in Ethiopia. The ruling party's decision to revise parliamentary rules of procedure to allow for an increased voice for the opposition was also a significant development.

These decisions helped create a positive environment in Ethiopia. U.S. diplomatic and development initiatives, including capacity building efforts in the legislature, judiciary, and executive, are contributing to these efforts, and we will continue to encourage important reforms. However, political restrictions, including any harassment of or impediments blocking elected officials' access to their constituencies, and restrictions on independent journalists and media outlets remain issues of concern.

### THE SITUATION IN THE OGA DEN

In a reflection of the challenges encountered throughout Ethiopia, the conflict in the Ogaden region is complex. In early September, I had the opportunity to visit Gode, a bleak and desolate area of the Ogaden, to see first hand the problems and what more needs to be done to bring relief to this region.

The GOE is facing a genuine security concern in the Ogaden region and has an obligation to respond. An increasingly violent insurgency is operating from the Ogaden, where Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the United Western Somalia Liberation Front (UWSLF), extremists affiliated with the Ogaden faction of al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), and terrorists affiliated with the extremist al Shabaab militia and remnants of the Somali Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) are stepping up their attacks against government targets. While this is not a new conflict, in fact it dates back to before the Meles government took office, in the last year the ONLF has become more aggressive and violent. In April 2007, the ONLF conducted an attack that killed nine Chinese oil workers and 77 Ethiopians, many of whom were civilians.

Regrettably the actions of rebel groups, extremists, and government troops alike have all taken a damaging humanitarian toll on the local civilian population. The challenge for the GOE and international partners is to mitigate the civilian impacts of these events. The current situation in the Ogaden reflects the combined result of continued humanitarian crisis and years of conflict driven by a violent insurgency and fighting between government and rebel forces, as well as government restrictions on commercial trade and on mobility of civilians and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), recurrent drought and flooding, and general insecurity.

Ethiopia's Somali Region, which includes the Ogaden, has a population of approximately 4.5 million people, of which approximately 1.8 million live in five zones

(Degehabur, Fik, Gode, Korehe and Warder) with severe humanitarian needs. Unfortunately, three of these zones - Degehabur, Korahe and Warder - are also where the insurgent activities are the most prevalent.

In May 2007, in response to the increase in ONLF attacks, the Ethiopian military initiated a new counter-insurgency campaign. The Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) conducted military operations, restricted humanitarian food aid and commercial traffic to certain areas, and restricted movement of rural communities. The ONLF has also planted landmines throughout roads, impeding large scale movements and disrupting the commercial trade in food and humanitarian assistance. On July 29, three aid workers were killed when their vehicle struck a landmine, which was placed by the ONLF.

The United States has seen allegations of human rights abuses conducted by all parties, including reports of burned villages and population displacements. While we cannot confirm these incidents, it is clear that the local population is suffering from the insurgency and counter-insurgency campaigns. The United States has raised our strong concerns in this regard with the leaders of the GOE, including Prime Minister Meles. The GOE is working with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to investigate allegations of human rights abuses in the Ogaden. The United Nations has also recommended that an independent probe be undertaken into alleged human rights violations in the region.

To address the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations in the Ogaden region, the United States is working closely with the GOE to open commercial trade routes between the Ogaden and Somalia, which has historically provided approximately 80% of local food, and new routes through Dire Dawa, and to resume distributions of emergency food assistance in the region. The U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa leads efforts to clarify the scope of the humanitarian situation in the Somali Region, coordinates donor meetings with representatives of the international and NGO communities, and works closely with senior GOE officials to identify and respond to the areas of greatest need.

The United Nations recently conducted an assessment of the Somali region. According to the UN World Food Program (WFP), approximately 600,000 people will require food assistance for the next three months to alleviate current humanitarian needs, address food insecurity, and avoid a humanitarian crisis. The GOE has responded positively to the UN recommendations and has requested assistance from donor partners to respond to humanitarian needs in the region. Medical supplies are also in great demand and health care, and the international community is seeking to respond to the GOE's request for assistance.

The U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia announced on August 24 that the United States is providing \$18.7 million in humanitarian assistance for the Somali region. The U.S. government provided more than \$200 million to support humanitarian programs throughout Ethiopia in fiscal year 2007. U.S. food aid is currently available in Ethiopia and will be distributed over the coming months. Additionally, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) plans to provide \$25 million as an initial contribution in fiscal year 2008. This contribution will be made through WFP in anticipation of greater food needs in January and February, traditionally the most food insecure months in the region.

#### **REGIONAL INSTABILITY - ERITREA AND SOMALIA**

The situation in the Ogaden is also impacted by conflicts outside of Ethiopia's borders. Continued instability in Somalia has reduced the level of commercial trade with the Ogaden, exacerbating the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia. The ONLF also receives support and assistance from the Eritrean government, and ONLF fighters cross the border into Somalia. The Eritrean government also provides support and assistance to extremist elements in Somalia, including some with links to al-Qaida's transnational terror network who are alleged to be supporting the ONLF.

The past war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and unresolved border dispute is negatively affecting Ethiopia, the Ogaden, and the entire Horn region. The unresolved border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea remains an ongoing threat to regional stability. Unfortunately, the demarcation process outlined in the Algiers Agreement of December 2000 has come to a standstill. The result has been President Isaias attempting to overthrow the Meles government by supporting Ethiopian insurgents. The border remains a fault line.

The United States, the other Witnesses to the Algiers Agreement, and other interested actors recently encouraged both parties to agree to resume cooperation with the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC). We are disappointed that no progress was made at the September 6-7 meeting of the EEBC; however, we continue to urge the parties to accept the offer of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to engage with them to help lessen tensions along the border and move toward normalized relations.

The United States also has grave concerns about human rights issues in Eritrea, including democracy, rule of law, freedom of the press, and religious freedoms. Fourteen years after independence, national elections have yet to be held, and the constitution has never been implemented. Several thousand prisoners of conscience are being detained without charge indefinitely and without the ability to communicate with friends and relatives. The government has severely restricted civil liberties, and arbitrary arrest, detention (including two Eritrean employees of the U.S. Embassy detained since 2001), and torture are serious problems. Security forces detain and arrest parents and spouses of individuals who have evaded national service or fled the country, despite the lack of a legal basis for such action.

The situation in Somalia also poses a threat to regional stability. Extremist remnants of the Council of Islamic Courts and the radical *al-Shabaab* militia are seeking to reestablish their influence and capacity both inside Somalia and allegedly attempting to link with the Ogaden faction of AIAI and the ONLF inside Ethiopia. Despite these concerns, we have seen some positive developments over recent months, including the deployment of 1,630 Ugandan forces as the lead element of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the positive discussions of the National Reconciliation Congress.

The continued violence in Somalia has taken a terrible toll on the civilian population as all parties to the conflict have failed to safeguard civilians and have targeted institutions such as the press. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported that some 400,000 Somalis are internally displaced and living in extremely difficult circumstances with only limited access to shelter, food, and medical care. The United States has provided more than \$89 million in fiscal year 2007 to respond to these and other humanitarian needs driven by the ongoing complex humanitarian emergency in Somalia.

The United States continues to work closely with the African Union and potential troop-contributing countries to support the full and timely deployment of AMISOM, which will help facilitate Ethiopian withdrawal from Somalia. The United States supports a process of inclusive dialogue, however long it may last, while responding to the humanitarian needs of the Somali people and encouraging Somali stakeholders to move towards national elections at the end of the transitional period in 2009.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The Administration has made Africa a foreign policy priority, and that includes the promotion of conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, strengthening governance capacity, cooperation with international organizations, and counterterrorism efforts. All of these elements are part of the picture when we consider the Horn of Africa sub-region and Ethiopia in particular.

These and other issues facing us in Ethiopia and throughout the Horn of Africa are complex and not easily resolved. Bottom line: A political solution is needed in the Ogaden that will both end the region's historic marginalization and restore the commercial trade with Somalia to prevent a humanitarian crisis. The United States will continue to promote respect for human rights and democratic principles in our dialogue with Ethiopia, while serving as a partner in addressing the humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations and in seeking to resolve longstanding regional conflicts, and prevent terrorists from establishing a foothold in the Horn and East Africa.

Thank you, and now I would be happy to take your questions.

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