

Chairman Donald M. Payne
Opening Remarks
Hearing of the Subcommittee on African and Global Health
“The Horn of Africa: Current Conditions and U.S. Policy”
June 17, 2010

Good morning and welcome.

I have convened this important hearing, “The Horn of Africa: Current Conditions and U.S. Policy”, to discuss the region of Africa that stays in the headlines perhaps more than any other region of the continent, yet is so misunderstood. This hearing comes on the heels of a similar one on the Great Lakes region. The point of this type of approach is to broaden the focus from particular countries, to a regional outlook. The Subcommittee will hold similar hearings for other regions in Africa.

Some of you may wonder why a discussion about the Horn of Africa would include the Secretary General of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement. Sudan abuts the Horn, and is both impacted and impacts what happens there.

We cannot and must not take a myopic view when approaching challenges in African countries and regions. With that view in mind, the inclusion of a witness from Sudan makes absolute sense.

As you will hear from our witnesses, the Horn of Africa – named for the shape the peninsula takes as it juts out into the Arabian Sea – has been marred by civil wars, internal political turmoil, inter-state wars, famine, and man-made humanitarian disasters. It is a focal point for U.S. foreign policy mainly for counter-terrorism -- as it is highly vulnerable to terrorist attacks and is considered a safe haven for international terrorist groups -- as well as for humanitarian concerns.

Ethiopia and Somalia fought three major wars over the past several decades, while Eritrea and Ethiopia fought a bloody war from 1998 to 2000, in which over 100,000 people were killed and many more displaced. The results of the Hague decision and the efforts of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission remain unimplemented and the two countries have yet to move forward on the issue of Badme, recognized as part of Eritrea.

Prime Minister Meles of Ethiopia rules with an iron fist, overseeing the violence of the 2005 elections after which nearly 200 innocent people were killed by Ethiopian sharpshooters and countless people were imprisoned. Last month, elections were held, and though they were relatively peaceful, they did not meet international standards, according to the U.S. and the EU. Harassment, detention, and killings of opposition members preceded the elections. Opposition leader Ms. Bertukan Mideksa remains in prison and according to Meles, will never be released.

Somalia, one of the world’s poorest nations, has been marred by factional fighting and humanitarian disasters since the collapse of the central government in 1991. Famine and

lawlessness ensued, and an estimated 300,000 Somalis died of starvation during the civil war in the early 1990s.

A peace agreement was reached in 2004 and the Transitional Federal Government was established following a long process in Nairobi. However, Ethiopia invaded in 2006, tacitly encouraged by the former U.S. Administration, and ousted the Union of Islamic Courts. The relative calm that followed the Islamic Courts rule ended abruptly; open conflict erupted in Mogadishu and beyond, and the humanitarian crisis exploded.

The TFG is now led by President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed [ah-MED] and he faces a major challenge by the terrorist group Al-Shabab. I commend the Administration for the support it has provided the TFG and urge it to increase that support to defeat Al-Shabab and restore peace.

On the humanitarian side, I am outraged by the continuing suffering of the Somali people. The World Food Program's suspension of activities in January in the south and central regions of Somalia has had a devastating effect on vulnerable populations. We must do more to protect and provide support to the Somali people.

In the North, the people of Somaliland will go to the polls on June 26. I hope the elections are free and fair. In a region that has suffered from wars and anarchy, Somaliland has consistently maintained relative peace and stability. This upcoming election provides a positive milestone for the future of the region and Somaliland.

One of the root causes of political instability in the Horn is the underlying impact of the unresolved Eritrea-Ethiopia stalemate. These two countries have not had diplomatic relations with each other for 11 years and the two have resorted to pursuing a proxy agenda in Somalia rather than resolve their differences.

Eritrea has become increasingly isolated. However, over the past several years, President Isaias has stated that his government is ready to constructively engage Washington on a wide range of issues, including cooperation on the war on terror. Some opportunities have been missed by the U.S., but President Isaias must also do more to show he is serious.

Djibouti serves as the host to the U.S. Combined Joint Taskforce-Horn of Africa, a staging area in the war on terror. Djibouti is a strong partner. However, U.S. assistance has been on the decline. I hope to see this change. I also hope recent developments in the border dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea bear fruit.

In Sudan, the U. S. is committed to seeing the referendum take place on January 9, 2011 and must respect the will of the Sudanese people. We must also do more to help prepare the South as the referendum approaches and for both possible outcomes.

Finally, a word on Kenya: on August 4th the people of Kenya will vote in a referendum to approve or reject a draft constitution. Outside forces have been waging a negative

campaign over the past several months. The new constitution includes sweeping and much needed reforms, as called for following the deadly post-election violence in 2008. The process must be allowed to move forward without outside interferences.

I now turn to the Ranking Member for his opening statement.