



*Testimony of Mark A. Yarnell  
Senior Advocate and UN Liaison  
Refugees International  
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“Somalia’s Current Security and Stability Status”  
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I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Flake, Ranking Member Booker, and the members of this subcommittee for holding this timely hearing today.

Refugees International (RI) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people in parts of the world impacted by conflict, persecution, and forced displacement. Based in Washington, we conduct fact-finding missions to research and report on the circumstances of displaced populations in countries such as Somalia, Iraq, Nigeria, and Bangladesh. RI does not accept any government or United Nations funding, which helps ensure that our advocacy is impartial and independent.

I have traveled to Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa region every year for the past six years, and Refugees International has been reporting on the situation for displaced Somalis since 2008.

You are holding this hearing at a crucial moment for Somalia. Last year, famine was averted – but the crisis is far from over. In February 2017, after successive failed rainy seasons, the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET) – the early warning and analysis institution created by USAID in 1985 – rang the alarm bell. The deadly combination of drought, violent conflict, and restricted humanitarian access could have led to a catastrophe as severe as the 2011 Somali famine that killed 260,000.

Fortunately, unlike in 2011, the early warning system worked. Donor governments, especially the United States, responded promptly with robust humanitarian funding. Aid organizations were able to expand their operations and target populations in greatest need – thus avoiding a worst case scenario.

However, though famine was averted, the humanitarian needs in Somalia remain significant, and strong donor funding through 2018 is essential to save lives and prevent backsliding from the fragile gains that were made last year. Drought and conflict have continued into 2018, further eroding the coping capacity of Somali households and contributing to new displacement. At present, 5.4 million people are in need of emergency assistance throughout the country, including more than 300,000 children who are at risk of starvation.

More than two million Somalis are displaced internally, as well as hundreds of thousands living as refugees in neighboring countries. In addition to providing life-saving services like food and healthcare, the United States must support programs that protect the rights and well-being of displaced Somalis who suffer from pervasive gender-based violence (GBV) and face the regular threat of eviction their camps, especially in the Somali capital, Mogadishu.

Across the border in Kenya, where the government has at times threatened to close down the Dadaab refugee camp, currently housing more than 230,000 Somali refugees, news that the U.S. resettlement program has effectively been shuttered – by so-called extreme vetting and other administrative and bureaucratic hurdles – has been devastating to refugees who face exceptional vulnerabilities. Congress must press the Trump Administration to maintain the longstanding U.S. commitment to resettle refugees in need.

Ultimately, U.S. assistance to the region will need to go beyond near-term humanitarian concerns if we are to address the chronic nature of the crisis in Somalia. This includes expanding programs that support the resilience of Somalis to rebound from recurrent drought, as well as programs that are adapted to the rapid urbanization of the country.

My testimony today will detail last year's emergency response to prevent famine, the ongoing humanitarian needs, protection gaps in the response, and concerns for refugees in Kenya. I will provide both immediate and long-term policy recommendations to better address the needs of Somalis.

### *Famine Averted*

I traveled to Somalia in July of last year, during the height of the crisis. By then 800,000 people had been displaced because of the drought. Most fled from rural areas, often under the control of Al-Shabaab, to urban centers secured by the Somali government and African Union peacekeeping forces. In these areas accessible to aid agencies, there was at least the chance that people who had lost everything could receive life-saving assistance.

When I visited the town of Baidoa in south central Somalia, humanitarian agencies were struggling to keep up with the pace of new arrivals. At the time, the town had received nearly 170,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) from the surrounding rural areas – most arriving by foot after days of travel. I met a single mother named Halima who had recently arrived with her seven children. She was from a small village about 20 miles northwest of Baidoa, where she had a small farm as well as camels, cows, and goats. Tragically, as she described, “There was not enough water or (food) for the animals and many died. Then Al-Shabaab took some of them...to eat. I had only one donkey left. When he died, I came here.” Her story is all too common.

Halima and other displaced people were living in informal settlements in small, makeshift shelters built with cloth and sticks. At the sites I visited, the shelters were only a few feet apart

and most lacked adequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities. Shortly before we arrived, a cholera epidemic had swept through a number of IDP sites, killing hundreds.

My colleagues and I were extremely concerned. Throughout the country, malnutrition rates were rising, and among IDPs in Baidoa, the rate of severe acute malnutrition had tripled. The threat of famine was real.

Fortunately, donors stepped up, and aid agencies rapidly expanded their programs. In FY 2017, the United States alone provided more than \$422 million in emergency funding through USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Office of Food for Peace, as well as the State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration. Importantly, the famine warning by FEWSNET – also funded by the United States – helped rally others to quickly respond. The system worked. By the end of last year, the UN's request for \$1.5 billion was more than 70 percent funded. Members of the Senate and House deserve particular credit for responding to the urgent needs by adding \$990 million in supplemental famine prevention and response in four countries, including Somalia, in May of last year.

The robust funding allowed aid workers to reach more people in need, with a particular focus on treating those who were on the edge of starvation. According to UNICEF, nearly one million Somalis accessed nutrition services in 2017, many of them young children suffering from severe malnutrition. Through the end of last year, the overall rate of Somalis suffering from hunger and malnutrition has slightly, though steadily declined. Specifically, the median rate of global acute malnutrition across the country dropped from 17.4 percent in July to 13.8 percent in December.

Additionally, UN agencies and NGOs significantly increased the implementation of cash assistance programs. Despite the crisis, market systems in Somalia have continued to function. Cash assistance has allowed IDPs to buy the food items they needed while helping to stabilize the markets. The United Nations cites the expansion of cash assistance as a key factor in preventing famine.

Finally, a coordination group led by the International Organization for Migration and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) conducted detailed IDP site assessments to determine which agency was providing which services and where, with the objective of ensuring that the funding provided to humanitarian agencies was implemented as effectively as possible. This has contributed to an improvement in the basic conditions in some IDP camps, in particular for shelter, as well as for water and sanitation services.

### *Drought and Conflict Persist*

Though the worst was avoided, this is no time to take the foot off the gas pedal. Unfortunately, the drought persists and insecurity continues. There are currently 2.1 million Somalis displaced internally – more than double the number from 2016 – and 5.4 million are in need of food assistance. The next long rains, from April to June, are forecast to be below average, which could

lead to a poor harvest for the fifth consecutive season. Even if favorable rains do come, crops and livestock have been depleted to such a degree that it will require multiple successive strong rainy seasons for pastoralist and agriculturalist communities to recover livelihood assets.

Additionally, while the Somali government, with the support of African Union peacekeepers, has expanded its area of territorial control over the past few years, the conflict with Al-Shabaab continues to force people from their homes on a regular basis. When I was in Mogadishu in July 2017, I met with a woman named Badra and her five children – one less than a year old – who had fled to an IDP camp only a few days prior. The lack of rain had already wiped out some of her livelihood assets when Al-Shabaab attacked her village in the district of Merka, just south of Mogadishu, in an attempt to reclaim it from government control. “First we had a terrible drought and a lot of our livestock died. Then fighting broke out, and these guys took what we had left. I used to have camels, cows, and goats. Now, nothing is left,” she said.

When she and her children arrived in Mogadishu, they settled on a small plot of land with other IDPs. After several days, they had not yet received any aid, so they were dependent on the generosity of others in the camp to share their food. Though the overall situation in Somalia has improved since I met Badra and her children last July, the combination of drought and conflict continues to force tens of thousands of Somalis from their homes on a monthly basis.

Through 2018, the United Nations estimates that \$1.5 billion will be needed for the humanitarian response in Somalia. Just before he departed for Africa last week, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson announced an additional \$110 million in humanitarian funding for Somalia from the United States. This is welcome and badly needed, but it is not enough to meet urgent needs this year. Aid organizations that expanded their operations during the worst of the crisis need assurances that they can maintain robust programming while the crisis continues. The gains from last year are fragile.

At present, more than half the people in need in Somalia are children, including more than 300,000 who face acute malnutrition. We know that targeted, well-resourced feeding programs can work. We cannot allow thousands of children to die simply because of a lack of funding.

Recently, a senior aid worker in Somalia told me that, last month, his organization had to close 15 mobile nutrition units, serving 84 communities, due to lack of funding. And they may end other health programs if they do not receive additional money soon.

**This year, in addition to the new funding that Secretary Tillerson announced, the United States must at least match the nearly \$423 million that it provided in FY2017 with an additional contribution of at least \$313 million. In particular, support for nutrition and health programming, as well as cash assistance for food, is essential.**

### *Protecting the rights and safety of displaced Somalis*

In a troubling trend, as the numbers of drought-displaced Somalis increased, so did the incidents of rape and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV). In June of last year, as the IDP caseload ballooned, UNICEF and its partners responded to nearly a thousand cases of rape – a three-fold increase compared to previous months. When I visited Baidoa last year, GBV specialists told us that intimate partner violence among IDPs was a serious concern but also that perpetrators from the outside – including members of security forces – come and go from IDP sites with ease. As noted above, detailed site assessments have helped improve the overall conditions in camps, but to address sexual violence and other forms of GBV, efforts to reduce overcrowding in IDP camps as well as to install solar-panel lighting and sex-disaggregated latrines with locks must be expanded. There is also urgent need for more healthcare and psychosocial support for victims. This all requires donor support.

IDPs also face the regular threat of being forcibly evicted from camps. As the value of land has increased in urban areas—particularly in Mogadishu—landowners, including government officials, often seek to reclaim their land for private development. With advance notice, the identification of alternative site locations, in consultation with IDPs and the aid organizations that serve them, relocations can be carried out appropriately and in a way that does not cause additional harm. To that end, in 2014, the Somali government adopted a policy that set out guidelines for lawful evictions.

Unfortunately, however, the policy is rarely followed. The Norwegian Refugee Council reported that in 2017, more than 153,000 IDPs were forcibly evicted in Mogadishu alone. In one particularly devastating incident on December 29, some 29,000 IDPs residing at a cluster of sites on the outskirts of Mogadishu were sent fleeing when a bulldozer and armed men showed up and demolished shelters as well as emergency schools, water points, and a feeding center. In the immediate term, Somali authorities must hold the perpetrators accountable. Going forward, protection actors, such as the UN Refugee Agency, must develop deeper community linkages with IDPs and landowners to establish an early warning system for evictions. Upon notice of evictions, UN officials must directly engage Somali authorities to prevent unlawful actions from going forward.

Already marginalized groups in Somali society are particularly prone to this and other risks. We know that during the 2011 famine, most of those who died were from traditionally weaker clans and minority ethnic groups, including the Rahanweyn clan and Somali Bantus. Those from more dominant clans often controlled aid distribution flows into IDP camps, diverting portions of aid from those at the lower end of the social hierarchy – a practice that was pervasive. To address this during the current crisis, some relief agencies have trained staff to map the power dynamics within IDP sites and enhance post-distribution monitoring. This is currently happening on a relatively small scale and should be expanded to ensure that assistance is delivered to those for whom it is intended.

**Strong financial contributions from the United States must prioritize support for monitoring, preventing, and responding to protection challenges.**

*Refugees in Kenya*

In addition to those displaced internally within Somalia, many Somalis have sought refuge in neighboring countries, including more than 290,000 in Kenya, most of whom reside at the Dadaab refugee camp in the northeast region of the country. While Kenya has been a generous host to refugees from throughout the region for decades, the government has made calls for the closure of the camp and for all Somalis to return home. Most recently, they called for Dadaab to be shuttered by May 2017, but the policy was ruled unconstitutional by Kenya's High Court. Despite the ruling, the government is effectively achieving its plan to reduce the numbers in Dadaab by refusing to register new arrivals and by urging Somalis to sign-up for a facilitated returns program.

The lack of ongoing refugee registration is significant, especially while the conditions inside Somalia remain perilous. Without registration, asylum seekers who arrive in Kenya are not able to receive life-saving assistance such as food and shelter. Additionally, without legal status, they are subject to arrest and deportation. Through 2017, a Kenyan aid organization monitoring the border between the two countries counted about 24,000 Somalis crossing into Kenya, with most citing drought and insecurity as motivating factors. In addition, the United Nations has profiled around 7,000 unregistered Somalis in Dadaab. Though the numbers are relatively small, the policy is harmful. The Kenyan government is essentially sending a message north of the border that, even when Somalis are fleeing for their lives, they will not receive assistance and protection in Kenya.

Life in Dadaab is by no means easy. The sprawling camp complex is located in a remote, arid region of Kenya. And the World Food Program regularly cuts food rations due to a lack of funding, most recently in October 2017. Nonetheless, as described above, the conditions inside Somalia are in no way conducive to large-scale returns. Short of alternative options, the camp offers Somalis a place of refuge until conditions back home improve.

As a result of this combination of factors, morale among the refugee population in Dadaab is very low. Many feel pressure to leave Kenya while they fear for their ability to survive if they return to Somalia too soon. The decision by the Trump Administration to effectively scuttle the option of resettlement to the United States has dealt another blow. In 2016, the United States resettled nearly 10,000 refugees from Somalia. In contrast, over the past five months, with new U.S. vetting and bureaucratic measures in place, only 177 Somalis have been resettled to the United States, with no expectation that numbers will increase substantially. This is deeply disturbing, as resettlement is an essential form of protection for refugees who face particular threats and vulnerabilities.

**It is imperative for Congress to urge the Trump Administration to maintain the longstanding U.S. commitment to resettle refugees. Additionally, the United States must sustain financial support for refugee assistance operations in Dadaab, while calling on the Kenyan government to resume refugee registration for arrivals from Somalia and to ensure that any returns to Somalia are safe, dignified, and voluntary.**

*Strategy for displacement over the long-term*

Short-term, emergency response efforts, whether for those internally displaced in Somalia or for refugees in neighboring countries like Kenya, can only go so far. A key component for a longer-term strategy for Somalia is dual-pronged: Address the conditions of need that cause displacement in the first place, but also adapt programming for urbanized IDPs who have already lost their livelihood assets and are unlikely to return to rural areas.

To its credit, U.S. government support to Somalia over the past several years has included support for programs to build the resilience of vulnerable households to climate stress and other shocks. Innovative resilience programs, supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development, have proven effective in improving food security and allowing communities to better weather poor harvests. The United States has proven to be a thought leader in resilience efforts and must sustain investment in its program. **Specifically, the United States must continue to support resilience programs that bridge the gap between short-term responses and long-term needs, including those aimed at restoring and improving productive capacities through improved agricultural inputs and rehabilitation of agricultural productive infrastructure.**

Unfortunately, for those who are not able to weather recurrent shocks, the ongoing crisis has resulted in massive displacement to urban areas, while climate change and other structural economic causes have contributed to urbanization in general. Mogadishu is now one of the fastest growing cities in the world. Many of the IDPs in Mogadishu and other cities with whom I have met over the past five years have said they expect that they will never to return to their pastoralist or agriculturalist livelihoods because all of their assets have been completely wiped out. Others told me that they had lost so many family members during periods of insecurity that they had nothing to return to.

**Given this reality, the U.S. assistance to Somalia will increasingly need to focus on urban development and promoting the local inclusion of IDPs in cities.** We urge the United States to support initiatives to engage local governments to extend access to urban services and to integrate IDPs who are unlikely to return their home areas. This support should also include assistance for education and new skills development among IDPs as Somalia transforms into an urbanized society.

Fortunately, the United States and other donors appear to have a willing partner in the Somali government in achieving these development objectives. Somalia's current National Development

Plan prioritizes climate adaptation strategies, and political leaders, at both the national and local level, have made positive statements regarding the integration of IDPs in urban areas.

### Conclusion

Now is not the time to scale back on our commitment to Somalia. Though famine was averted last year, serious needs remain and the risk of backsliding is real. In addition, humanitarian assistance must be matched by sustained engagement with the Somali government in support of peace and stability. Indeed, when Secretary Tillerson announced new humanitarian funding for Somalia, he noted that money will not solve Somalia's challenges, "but only buy us time – time to pursue diplomatic solutions." **To that end, Congress must urge the President to nominate a U.S. ambassador to Somalia.** This would demonstrate not only an intention to promote a coherent U.S. approach toward Somalia, but it would also demonstrate U.S. commitment to the Somali people.

### Key Recommendations for Congress

- Provide at least an additional \$313 million in humanitarian funding in FY2018 to respond to emergency needs in Somalia and to protect the rights and safety of displaced populations.
  - Funding priorities should include nutrition, health, and cash assistance, as well programs that seek to both prevent and respond to gender-based violence.
  - Programs aimed at monitoring, preventing, and responding to regular forced evictions of internally displaced people (IDPs) from their camps should also be supported.
- Sustain financial support for the refugee assistance operations in Dadaab, currently housing more than 230,000 Somali refugees. Additionally, call on the Kenyan government to resume refugee registration for arrivals from Somalia and to ensure that any returns to Somalia are safe, dignified, and voluntary.
- Urge the Trump Administration to maintain the longstanding U.S. commitment to resettle refugees in need, including Somalis.
- Support a long-term assistance strategy in Somalia that includes:
  - Continued programming aimed at building household and community resilience to drought;
  - Urban development and planning that extends access to affordable housing, land, services, and jobs for IDPs who may never return to their rural home areas.
- Call on President Trump to nominate an ambassador to Somalia