

Written Testimony of
Reuben E. Brigety, II
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State

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Drought and Famine in the Horn of Africa

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Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Isakson, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa. We appreciate the support and attention Congress has given to this crisis in the midst of so many other issues you have been grappling with this summer.

I will discuss today the current situation facing refugees, our immediate response, the challenges we face in meeting their needs as more famine survivors reach the borders of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, and our plans to work with the world community to meet those challenges and save as many lives as we possibly can in the coming months ahead.

Refugee Overview

I travelled to Ethiopia and Kenya in July to evaluate the emerging refugee crisis in the region where hundreds of thousands of Somalis have fled drought and famine in Somalia. During my trip, I visited refugee camps in each country along with representatives from donor countries, met with senior government officials, talked with officials from UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, and spoke with refugees. It was clear that this is developing into the worst humanitarian emergency that the region has seen in a generation, at least since the great famine of 1991-1992. We now must confront a refugee emergency within a protracted

refugee situation. Years of hard work by the host governments and their international partners to address just the basic needs within established camps quickly are being overshadowed by the need to add new border-crossing facilities, new camps, and emergency services.

Both Ethiopia and Kenya are receiving record inflows of refugees from Somalia, and in both countries refugees are arriving in appalling physical health. Every refugee family with whom I spoke in both Ethiopia and Kenya said that they had walked for days from Somalia with virtually no food and water. Brief visits to the health clinics in the refugee camps revealed dozens of malnourished children, so emaciated and weak that they appeared to the untrained eye to be close to death. Among new arrivals in the refugee camps in Ethiopia, we are seeing up to 50% global acute malnutrition— reflecting the even more grim state of affairs for children inside Somalia. Camps in Ethiopia and Kenya are strained far beyond capacity in every way – with regard to space, staff, food, and essential services – trying to cope with the record influx of refugees, which continues unabated.

Somalis represent the largest refugee population in Africa. According to UNHCR, Somalia's neighbors in the eastern Horn of Africa now host more than 620,000 Somali refugees. Some 159,000 Somalis have sought refuge in Ethiopia; over 75,000 have arrived just since January 2011. Kenya hosts more than 448,000 Somali refugees with nearly 100,000 since the beginning of the year. Even Djibouti has seen an almost twenty percent increase in the number of refugees since the beginning of the year. We commend the governments of Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia for their generous support for refugee populations in the region, even as they themselves are currently struggling with a drought that may be the worst in 60 years.

While the current crisis is taxing an already stressed system, I am confident governments of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and their international partners, including the U.S., have the ability to confront this crisis head on and will be able to find new solutions to address the needs not only within the camps but also for those within Somalia. Let me give you just two examples of what I saw during my trip and how we are responding to those in need.

The Long Journey of the Survivors

First, the U.S. and our regional and international partners have helped ramp up emergency assistance. I traveled to the refugee camp complex at Dolo Ado on the Ethiopian-Somali border accompanied by US Ambassador to Ethiopia Donald Booth, USAID Deputy Administrator Don Steinberg, Ethiopian government officials, UNHCR's Ethiopia Country Representative, and senior representatives from several embassies, including Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, and the European Union. As we wandered through the refugee camp, talking with people who had been there for several days or who had just crossed the border a few hours earlier, we heard versions of the same story over and over again.

One man I met had come all the way from Mogadishu, traveling for nine days with his wife and six children with very little to eat along the way. I talked with him as he sat on the hospital cot of his youngest child -- a three-year-old girl I'll call Aisha. As we spoke, Aisha never stopped moaning. She could not get comfortable amidst the heat and flies as her tiny bones threatened to pierce her paper-thin skin. We saw many families in the same desperate situation during a separate visit to Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. In Dadaab, I spoke to one mother who had carried her polio-stricken seven-year-old daughter on her back for nine days with little food and water as her other six children trailed behind.

It was clear that a number of recent interventions – such as the provision of hot meals at the transit center or the establishment of blanket feeding programs – are vital steps needed beyond just basic camp services to assist those making this heartbreaking journey. I commend Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, for finding ways to add these additional programs around Dolo Ado after he himself visited the area and found ways to move resources and personnel into place more quickly. Still more is needed and we in the international community cannot slacken our efforts.

Current U.S. Government Assistance to Refugees

Second, the U.S. has increased overall refugee assistance throughout the region. The U.S. has long been a partner to the governments and people of the Horn of Africa as they host hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees, providing approximately \$459 million in humanitarian assistance this fiscal year to help those in need. This funding supports refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other drought affected populations, and helps build resiliency and food security beyond the immediate crisis. Out of this overall funding, the U.S. is providing approximately \$69 million, specifically for refugee assistance in the region through the Department of State's Population, Refugees, and Migration bureau.

Maintaining access to safe asylum for Somalis in neighboring countries is critical to saving lives. The U.S. has previously supported the expansion of the Dadaab camps and UNHCR is now moving refugees into the new space following the government of Kenya's agreement to allow the opening of the new site. We are also urging Kenya to quickly open more reception center capacity so that incoming refugees can be properly screened and registered. We will continue to support the Horn countries' efforts to provide asylum to vulnerable Somalis, including through our support for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Program, and other international organizations and NGOs working in the region.

Representatives from other donor countries who accompanied me were moved by the gravity of the situation and said they would work with their governments to support the efforts of aid groups. Rigorous and sustained diplomacy will be required both in the region and with other donor capitals to ensure that the international community and host countries take necessary measures to save lives in the coming months. We need to ensure that insecurity from Somalia does not spill over into the neighboring countries.

We are also committed to addressing the humanitarian needs inside Somalia so that lives are saved and fewer people need to flee to the neighboring countries. There is an immediate need to reach vulnerable populations inside Somalia who may be unable to travel long distances to seek life-saving assistance. Ideally drought victims would not have to leave their homes in

order to receive life-saving assistance, but in conflicted Somalia, that is not currently possible in all instances.

That brings us to the security situation. Al-Shabaab's activities have clearly made the current situation much worse. We expect the situation in Somalia to continue to decline, especially in southern Somalia where the UN has declared famine in two regions to date and where conditions continue to worsen. The international community is calling on al-Shabaab to allow unimpeded assistance in these areas of Somalia, including allowing aid groups access to the direst areas to directly assist those in greatest need.

There is not a single solution – to this regional crisis. We are working to tackle it through a variety of mechanisms and responses, including addressing the underlying causes, as noted by my colleague, Assistant Administrator Lindborg.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.