

Written Testimony of  
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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. Your attention and concern is critical, as the situation continues to deteriorate daily, with millions of individuals affected.

In scale and severity, the current drought in the Horn of Africa is the worst in 60 years and, according to the UN Office of the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs, it is now affecting an estimated 12.4 million people in Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. It is both a humanitarian and a security crisis, as famine has been declared in the difficult to access areas of Somalia and refugees are pouring across the borders into already drought-stressed areas of Kenya and Ethiopia.

I will discuss today the current situation, our immediate response, the challenges we face, and our long term plans to address the chronic food insecurity in the Horn of Africa.

### **Current Situation**

The Horn of Africa is experiencing the lowest rains in 60 years, in a region long plagued by cyclical drought. However, what used to be a ten year drought cycle is now occurring every other year and is combined with rising food prices and a 20 year conflict in Somalia.

Twenty five years ago, USAID invested in the Famine Early Warning System, or FEWSNET, precisely because of the recurring droughts in the region. FEWSNET, along with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU), maintains a strong presence in the Horn and enables the humanitarian community to identify conditions based on an extensive analysis of historical and current rainfall, cropping patterns, livestock health, market prices and malnutrition rates. USAID is the largest supporter of these vital early warning systems, and the entire international humanitarian and donor community relies on their information to provide appropriate assistance to those who need it most and to target assistance that might be needed in the future.

In Ethiopia and Kenya, the situation is grave but we do not expect it to deteriorate into famine. Both countries have large areas of arid lands populated primarily by pastoralists. Ethiopia has declared 4.8 million in need of urgent assistance, and in Kenya, 3.7 million are at risk. USAID has worked extensively in both countries, in partnership with international donors and local governments; to increase the resilience and food security of communities in these drought affected areas. We have focused better on early warning systems, ongoing safety-net and community protection programs, and increased productivity in arid lands and pastoralist livelihoods.

For example, in partnership with the Ethiopian government, the World Bank and other donors, the United States supported the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net program, which has effectively removed approximately 7.6 million people from the emergency caseload. In the drought of 2002-3, the Government of Ethiopia stated that 13.2 million people in Ethiopia were drought-affected and in need of emergency assistance. By contrast, that number to date is 4.8 million. The needs in these countries are still serious and require sustained focus and attention, but the results of preparedness and development investments are having a positive impact.

In Somalia, however, the situation is stark. Consecutive seasons of failed or poor rainfall, coupled with two decades of conflict and lack of governance, have resulted in rising food prices, livestock mortality, crop failure, denial of reliable humanitarian access by al-Shabaab, and

consequent severe malnutrition and massive population displacement. The U.N. estimates that a total of 3.2 million people in Somalia now require immediate, life-saving humanitarian assistance. Of those in urgent need, 2.8 million people reside in southern Somalia. On July 20, the U.N. declared a famine in two regions of Somalia: Lower Shabelle Region and areas of Bakool Region in southern Somalia. A famine determination is never made lightly and reflects the truly dire circumstances facing the people of southern Somalia. Based on nutrition and mortality surveys verified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we estimate that more than 29,000 children under five – nearly four percent of children -- have died in the last 90 days in southern Somalia.

Somalis are leaving the south in great numbers, either for the more stable areas in the north or into neighboring countries – in all cases adding great strain to already drought-stressed environments. More specifically, 1.5 million internally displaced Somalis are concentrated in Mogadishu and the regions of Lower Shabelle and Galgaduud, with increasing numbers in Puntland and Somaliland. In May, I traveled to Hargeysa, in the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland, where I met with President Sulanyo, as well as UN and local and international nongovernmental organizations. They noted rising concerns about the numbers of internally displaced persons who are now arriving in their cities, ill-equipped to meet the needs of a rising population. Farmers and pastoralists, with no remaining assets, are swelling the outskirts of cities throughout northern Somalia, including many youth with no evident future.

The refugees who cross into Ethiopia and Kenya describe a grueling trip, often on foot for three to four or more weeks. My colleague, Deputy Assistant Secretary Reuben Brigety, will describe in more detail the deeply distressing stories of families arriving in refugee camps in near-death shape. Tragically, we also know that in these crisis situations, those who leave are the ones with the strength and resources to do so. The weakest and most vulnerable are often left behind.

### **Current U.S. Government Assistance to the Horn Drought and Famine**

FEWSNET warned us of the increased probabilities of drought in August 2010. Because of these early warnings, USAID began prepositioning additional emergency relief supplies and

food aid in the region last fall, stockpiling food aid supplies in Djibouti, South Africa and Kenya. As a result, the U.S. Government was able to help jump-start relief efforts and is now reaching more than 4.6 million in need throughout the Horn and providing approximately \$459 million in humanitarian assistance to date (in FY 2011). U.S. assistance provides critically needed food aid, treatment for severely malnourished children, health care, clean water, proper sanitation, and hygiene education and supplies. The United States is providing approximately \$217 million in Ethiopia, \$156 million in Kenya, \$80 million in Somalia, and \$6 million in Djibouti. Since the drought began, for example, USAID assisted the Government of Ethiopia to vaccinate nearly 300,000 livestock, critical for the survival of 25,000 households.

Our strategy is focused on providing emergency assistance for those most at-risk, while also continuing to build greater food security and resilience in the drought-affected communities of Kenya, Ethiopia and northern parts of Somalia so they can better withstand future droughts and shocks.

We have been responding since last fall with repositioning of supplies and increasing programs. Last spring, we created a Horn of Africa Drought Task Force in Nairobi, and on July 6, USAID activated a regional Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) in Nairobi, Kenya, and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to monitor regional drought conditions, identify anticipated response needs, and coordinate response activities with other donors. USAID also stood up a Response Management Team in Washington, D.C., to support the DART and coordinate U.S. Government humanitarian efforts. The DART continues to conduct assessments in the field to evaluate ongoing humanitarian needs and coordinates daily with other major donors to ensure a multilateral response.

In FY 2011 to date, USAID has provided more than 360,200 metric tons (MT) of Title II food relief and emergency food assistance through the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) and nongovernmental organizations for drought- and conflict-affected populations in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia—supporting approximately 10.7 million people.

Given the urgency of reaching the people in southern Somalia, we have a special focus on aggressively working to abate the potential for mass starvation. We have learned from the Somalia drought of 1992 that disease was a leading cause of death for children under five, so we are stressing a multi-sector response with a focus on three key areas: availability of food, access to food, and integrated public health interventions—including therapeutic feeding focused on the children under five, vaccinations, and access to clean water and sanitation.

Based on FEWSNET data, we do not expect a significant harvest in the south for another six months. The next potential rains are in September or October in the south, and even if there are good rains, we could experience another wave of mortality due to water-borne disease and livestock death.

We are working closely with other donors and U.N. and NGO partners to mount an effective response to save lives. We have three key challenges: time, access and scale. As noted earlier, time is not on our side. Unfortunately, the situation is going to worsen before it gets better. However, we know we have a small window over the next six weeks in which to provide life-saving assistance to prevent additional and potential significant deaths from occurring. The fear is that without immediate and significant assistance, famine conditions will spread from the two regions in southern Somalia to encompass the entire eight regions of the south with several hundred thousand additional deaths.

Access remains difficult in the worst affected areas of southern Somalia. The World Food Program and most international NGOs had suspended operations in the south due to deteriorating security and bans imposed by al-Shabaab. Since 2008, WFP has lost 14 staff members in attacks. However, we are in lockstep with other donors and the humanitarian community in our determination to test aggressively all options for delivering assistance in previously inaccessible areas to the people in southern Somalia.

Finally, the scale of this emergency outstrips the resources currently offered by the international community to meet the needs. We are working to encourage the broader

international community to step forward with additional assistance as we seek to address this sobering challenge.

### **Looking Ahead: Feed the Future**

We can't stop drought from happening, but we can strengthen communities and their ability to prepare for and withstand these kinds of natural calamities. President Obama's Feed the Future initiative (FTF) is focused precisely on addressing these root causes of hunger and under nutrition. It seeks to increase longer term resilience among vulnerable populations by increasing the commercial availability and accessibility of staple foods, reducing trade and transport barriers that impede the movement and sale of livestock and staple foods, harnessing science and technology to assist populations in increasing crop yields, and supporting national and regional efforts to reduce years of marginalization of certain populations. USAID is focusing its investments, both geographically and programmatically, to have the greatest sustainable impacts on reducing hunger and poverty. By linking vulnerable populations to market opportunities in more productive areas, our efforts are helping increase labor opportunities and strengthen value chains.

In the Somali, Oromiya and Afar National regional States of Ethiopia for example, FTF investments are helping vulnerable pastoralists and ex-pastoralists and Afar to improve their incomes and increase their ability to survive climate and economic shocks. USAID is helping these pastoralists to improve the health of their animals through strengthening community veterinary services and accessing affordable vaccinations and other medicine. In addition, we are working to help pastoralists earn more money from their animals by linking them to markets where they can sell their animals for a significant profit. We help producers organize into marketing cooperatives and access much needed credit, improve their business skills and provide them access to market information. Stronger linkages between traders, feed lot operator, processors and exporters also help to expand livestock trade and provide better access to lucrative markets in the region.

We are seeing with this drought the critical and positive impact of investing in the future. When countries have the governance structures, the policies and productive capacity to withstand drought and when communities have the resilience to withstand the inevitable shocks of droughts and crisis, the need for large-scale international emergency assistance is diminished. Even as we focus on the heart-breaking tragedy of Somalia, we are also committed to helping to build sustainable futures where communities feed themselves.

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