

**DEVELOPING A COORDINATED AND SUSTAINABLE U.S. STRATEGY
TOWARD SOMALIA**

**Testimony
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Subcommittee on African Affairs**

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Isakson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the humanitarian situation in Somalia and the importance of a coordinated and sustainable US strategy. Oxfam is extremely grateful for the work this committee has done, in particular you Senator Feingold, in drawing attention to the humanitarian situation affecting almost half of the country.

Oxfam America is an international development and relief agency committed to developing lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and social injustice. We are part of a confederation of 13 Oxfam organizations working together in more than 100 countries with over 3,000 local partners around the globe.

Oxfam's response in Somalia

We have been working in Somalia since the 1960s, providing humanitarian and capacity-building assistance. Since the start of 2008, we have spent more than \$7 million on emergency programs delivering aid to over 400,000 Somalis with a network of Somali partner organizations. In Mogadishu, we are part of a consortium working with a local partner to provide over 80,000 hot meals a day to the most vulnerable people. Together with the same partner, we have just finalized the design phase of a community therapeutic care program for severely malnourished children. In the Afgooye corridor, about 18.5 miles south-west of Mogadishu, we are providing water and sanitation services to over 200,000 people displaced from Mogadishu and the surrounding areas. In central and southern Somalia, we are assisting 70,000 people to rebuild the livelihoods they have lost as a result of the crisis in their country.

In my testimony today, I will be focusing on the humanitarian situation inside the country and in the region and making recommendations on steps the US government can take to address the situation as part of a coordinated US strategy.

Current humanitarian situation

Somalia remains the site of the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The combination of conflict and drought have led to more than three million Somalis dependent on aid within the country and the displacement of up to 1.8 million. Somalia is also one of the world's most challenging environments for aid workers and 40 of them, mostly Somalis, have been killed since the beginning of 2008. Half a million Somalis are finding refuge outside Somalia's borders in Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Yemen. Over 250,000 of these refugees now inhabit the overcrowded Dadaab camps in Northern Kenya. While the Northern regions of Puntland and Somaliland have both achieved relative degrees of stability and security, the South and Central regions in Somalia remain unstable and access for aid organizations extremely difficult.

Latest humanitarian development

The withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in January, 2009 initially improved civilian safety in some areas – evidenced by the tentative return of up to 65,000 people to Mogadishu between January and April of this year. This marginally improved the ability of humanitarian actors to access people in need with the removal of roadblocks on major axes. But, over the last few weeks, recent fighting between the Transitional Federal Unity Government (TFG) and opposition groups erupted in the Somali capital of Mogadishu claiming the lives of civilians, and sparking a new wave of displacement. Hospitals in central Mogadishu are overwhelmed and among the newly displaced are families that had recently returned home following a period of relative peace in Mogadishu. Many of the displaced are heading towards the Afgooye corridor. As of yesterday, it has been reported that there are close to 60,000 new displacements into the corridor.

Beyond the obvious humanitarian impact of the ongoing conflict, the country faces drought conditions unseen since the 1991 famine and meteorologists are warning of an 80% chance of drier than normal conditions in the Horn of Africa through 2009. Drought conditions continue to ravage livelihoods, particularly among pastoralist populations as livestock are dying and wasting at an alarming rate.

Despite the operational challenges, it remains possible to responsibly implement aid programs, and it is crucial that aid operations continue, and even expand where possible. Being able to operate within an insecure environment is largely based upon the perceptions of communities and warring parties as to whether we are operating neutrally and impartially. Oxfam works with proven and trusted local Somali NGOs which come from the beneficiary communities so they are accountable not only to us but to their communities. We also have a team of high qualified Somali engineers and other technical experts who visit and monitor the programs we are funding.

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations' Subcommittee on African Affairs
Developing a Coordinated and Sustainable U.S. Strategy toward Somalia
Statement for the Record by Oxfam America

Humanitarian obstacles

While our reach is limited due to security, aid is saving lives and livelihoods in Somalia. Aid agencies have access at the neighborhood, district and camp levels but this access must be protected. As the United States sets out a new strategy for Somalia, it is critical that the strategy does not undermine aid operations and preserves the limited operating space. In the past, U.S. airstrikes in Somalia have negatively impacted humanitarian access by casting suspicion on aid workers, followed by threats and retributions. Likewise, restrictive Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) licensing could slow down the delivery of urgently needed aid, and so it is important that a workable middle ground be found on the OFAC issue that enables exemptions for those aid agencies working in al-Shabaab controlled territory (similar to the OFAC exemption granted to organizations working in Hezbollah territory in Lebanon). It is important to note that no matter who is in control of areas where we work, Oxfam's partners work directly within local clan structures, which continue to exercise effective control over day-to-day administration of aid.

It is also important to point out that there are a range of actors – al Shabaab, foreign fighters, militias and criminal groups - impacting our work on the ground. In Oxfam's case, it is our community-based approach that allows our partners to deliver aid because they involve the communities in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs and as a result, the communities protect the program from parties vying for control of territory.

Refugee flows to neighboring countries

The humanitarian challenges are not limited to Somalia. Kenya's Northeastern province, Dadaab, is host to three refugee camps established in 1991. Originally designed to accommodate 90,000 refugees, Dadaab now constitutes the largest refugee site in the world with 250,000 mostly Somali residents. In January 2007, the Kenyan government closed its border with Somalia but more than 100,000 have nonetheless arrived in Dadaab over the past two years, mostly from the conflict-affected areas of Mogadishu and Lower Juba. The high number of refugees in recent months has stretched resources and infrastructure beyond capacity and there is a lack of space on which to build a new camp unless the Kenyan government authorizes new land to build an additional camp. In March, an Oxfam assessment report showed a lack of basic services, severe overcrowding leading to more than 20 cases of cholera, and a lack of funding. Half of the people in the camps do not have access to enough water and women and children – who make up over half Dadaab's population – rarely have access to adequate latrines.

The need for accountability

Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 there have been widespread abuses against civilians. The lack of accountability for past and current crimes, reinforce a sense of impunity and further fuels conflict.

Since early 2007, there have been reports of widespread and systematic attacks on civilians, journalists, aid workers and human rights activists by all of the warring parties. The failure of the international community to hold these parties accountable for serious breaches of international humanitarian and human rights laws has contributed to a climate of impunity in Somalia.

Somalia is at a pivotal transitional moment and there is an opportunity for the new Transitional Federal Unity Government to draw a line with the past, demonstrate genuine willingness to end the prevailing climate of impunity, and gain the confidence of the Somali people.

Security sector reform and peacekeeping

At the donors' conference last month in Brussels, the United States and others pledged increased resources for the TFG and more than \$250 million for security efforts to bring order to the country. While efforts to bolster security are necessary, there needs to be recognition that recent international interventions in Somalia's security sector have exacerbated problems rather than eased them. For example, the United Nations Development Program gave direct financial support for police salaries and some of these police were implicated in serious human rights abuses.

A key component of the international community's engagement in Somalia is the African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). AMISOM's mandate is to protect key TFG officials and infrastructure, support the training of Somali security forces, and create security conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The force has never been adequately staffed or resourced but in January 2009, the United Nations Security Council authorized the use of UN assessed peacekeeping contributions to fund a UN support package, including medical and communications support, and the creation of a trust fund to marshal voluntary contributions to the force. Discussion has been underway of deploying a multidimensional peacekeeping operation.

Regional stability

The situation in Somalia acts as a destabilizing force within the greater Horn region. Until there is some level of peace in Somalia, more Somalis will cross over the Somalia-Kenya border into Dadaab and piracy will continue. The major supply ports in Mogadishu, Kismayu, and Merka are major supply ports for the rest of the Horn of Africa. As these ports are disrupted, so is the distribution of aid and commercial traffic all up and down the roads that criss-cross from these ports. Somali-Ethiopian tensions continue to simmer as ethnic Somali rebels battle the Ethiopian government in the Ogaden and Somalia serves a proxy battlefield for ongoing tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea. All of these problems are symptoms of the same underlying cause – the perpetual challenge of weak governance in Somalia.

Recommendations

Following are steps Congress and the Obama administration should take to address the humanitarian situation in a new comprehensive and sustainable strategy toward Somalia:

1. **Preserve the limited humanitarian operating space** - humanitarian needs remain paramount and of such scale that anything that jeopardizes the humanitarian relief operations will by extension threaten regional stability.
2. **Take urgent steps to deal with the serious public health crisis unfolding in Dadaab** – press the Kenyan government to authorize UNHCR to start work on a new refugee camp at Dadaab and ensure that its border remains open to those fleeing the conflict.
3. **Hold parties accountable for abuses** – the international community should use their diplomatic, financial, and political leverage with all parties to demonstrate that violations of international humanitarian and human rights law will not be tolerated, and that perpetrators will be held accountable.
4. **Prevent security sector reform and peacekeeping from becoming part of the problem** - any support to security forces must be transparent and accountable and any UN peacekeeping force should have wide acceptance by Somalis and a peace to keep. Otherwise they risk being drawn into the conflict.
5. **Foster a credible, Somali-led political and governance process** – this includes consensus-building, power-sharing, and moderation, but not supporting specific individuals or factions.
6. **Ensure any strategy for Somalia has a regional approach** – Somalia shouldn't be dealt with in isolation as peace in Somalia means engaging and resolving issues with neighboring countries.