

Statement of
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U.S. Department of State
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa Hearing
“Ethiopia: Promise or Perils, The State of U.S. Policy”
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Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, it is a pleasure to see you both again. I welcome the opportunity to discuss U.S. policy and interests in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa with you and the distinguished members of this subcommittee.

Ethiopia is a strategically important country. The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to working to promote peace, democracy, and economic development for the benefit of all Ethiopians, the broader region, as well as the American people. Our long-term goal is to support policies and reforms that will enable greater partnership between our two countries.

During my tenure as the United States Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, the Administration has focused on bringing an end to conflicts in Ethiopia and reducing tensions around the filling and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) by engaging to advance an agreement that serves the interests of all parties. Following the November 2022 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) regarding the northern conflict, we are focused on the agreement’s implementation while impressing upon the Government of Ethiopia the importance of dialogue and negotiation as a path to resolving ongoing conflicts in Oromia and Amhara. And we regularly engage with the Ethiopian diaspora to explain U.S. policy, encourage civil discourse, and foster reconciliation among all ethnicities and regions. As we pursue these policies with our colleagues at USAID and the interagency, we prioritize our responsibility to U.S. taxpayers.

In Pretoria last year, the United States participated as an active observer at the African Union-facilitated talks that led to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The COHA immediately silenced the guns and ended a horrific two-year war that killed hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians, forced millions to flee their homes, and caused untold suffering, including from horrific mass sexual and gender-

based violence. Since its signing, the United States has supported efforts to implement all aspects of the COHA, among them transitional justice, accountability, protection of civilians, and respect for human rights, including funding for international human rights monitors. As Secretary Blinken said during his visit to Addis in March 2023, to avoid future conflicts arising from past grievances it is important to account for the war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other human rights abuses and violations committed in the context of Ethiopia's conflicts. Shortly after his visit, the Secretary announced his determination that all sides had committed horrific atrocities in the northern conflict and that ensuring accountability will be a key element of our policy towards Ethiopia. As part of our commitment to accountability, the State Department has supported the work of the Transitional Justice Working Group of Experts, an independent body set up by the government with a nationwide mandate. This working group held 60 consultations throughout Ethiopia to gather views from victims and affected communities on their desire for justice, truth, reparations, and institutional reform. We look forward to the final report and recommendations from the Working Group, and will work with the government of Ethiopia, civil society and the victims — including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, on implementation of the recommendations. We are also working with our international partners, including many other countries that we know are closely watching this process, to establish regular information sharing and communications and speak with one voice.

Over the last year, we have seen significant progress. According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner and other independent observers, there was a dramatic decrease in human rights violations and abuses in Tigray after the height of the northern conflict. At the same time, the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) reported that serious problems remain in western Tigray and abuses by Eritrean forces continue, illustrating that much more needs to be done. Eritrean forces have not fully withdrawn from Ethiopia; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of Tigrayan forces is lagging; and the status of contested areas remains unresolved. Implementation of the COHA remains a work in progress.

While we support efforts to consolidate peace in northern Ethiopia, we are deeply concerned about the ongoing violence in Amhara and Oromia. There have been

credible reports of gross violations and other abuses of human rights, including widespread and severe conflict-related sexual violence, significant loss of life, and severe economic disruption. Recently in Amhara, we are concerned about reports of civilian deaths, arbitrary detentions, and extrajudicial killings under the State of Emergency. We have urged all actors to refrain from violence and hate speech that incites violence and to protect civilians. We have highlighted these concerns with all parties and offered to support or participate in mediation efforts. On Oromia, I just returned from Dar es Salaam, where together with Ambassador Massinga, we participated in talks between the Ethiopian Government and the Oromo Liberation Army. We reiterated to all involved that there are no military solutions to the complex challenges posed by these situations. Human rights abuses most often occur in the context of conflict, and it is therefore imperative that we support efforts to achieve peace through dialogue.

In order to promote a common vision for a new Ethiopia not riven by ethnic divisions, but united by a sense of nationhood and a shared future, we are prepared to support an inclusive and credible National Dialogue process. Both the National Dialogue and ongoing transitional justice process offer Ethiopia an opportunity to break enduring cycles of violence and impunity and secure a sustainable peace for all Ethiopians.

Compounding these challenges, Ethiopia is also confronting macroeconomic stresses and massive post-conflict reconstruction costs. We are looking, along with other international donors, to provide support to Ethiopia's DDR efforts, which will contribute to the expected "peace dividend" and further U.S. policy objectives for Ethiopia. Ongoing fighting in Amhara, Oromia, and elsewhere will only add to the post-conflict bill. Foreign exchange reserves are at the lowest levels in two decades, preventing Ethiopia from importing fuel or servicing its debts. Inflation has averaged around 30 percent for the last two years. In Tigray, the Interim Regional Administration faces steep challenges rebuilding government institutions, restarting public services, and paying public servant salaries. The IMF is in discussions with the Government of Ethiopia over concerns about the state of the economy. The United States also conducts annual reviews of Ethiopia's eligibility for benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), including assessing the government's human rights record and deciding whether

it is engaged in gross violations of human rights. Despite these challenges, Ethiopia has significant potential in the long-term as an engine of economic growth on the African continent, with opportunities for mutually beneficial trade and investment with the United States.

Regarding the GERD, we have supported efforts by Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan to arrive at a durable agreement. We are encouraged that there are diplomatic negotiations underway between the parties, as agreed to by the President of Egypt and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia in a joint July declaration. The United States remains actively engaged and committed to supporting the parties' efforts to achieve an agreement that benefits the parties and the region writ large.

In closing, let me reiterate my appreciation to this Committee for your commitment and counsel. Rest assured that we are clear-eyed about the challenges in Ethiopia, and we aspire to an Ethiopia that can put a history of violence behind it and move into a more prosperous, inclusive, and peaceful future – one in which the United States and Ethiopia can benefit from a strong partnership.

Thank you, I look forward to hearing your insights, recommendations and answering your questions.