

**Written Statement of Tyler Beckelman, Deputy Assistant Administrator,
Bureau for Africa, United States Agency for International Development
Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa
Ethiopia: Promise or Perils, The State of U.S. Policy
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Good afternoon Chairman James, Ranking Member Jacobs, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for your support for USAID and for the people of Ethiopia.

USAID's long-standing development partnership with Ethiopia has helped propel historic improvements in living conditions for millions of Ethiopians. From 2000 to 2020, Ethiopia's poverty rate dropped from almost half the population to less than a quarter. During this period, life expectancy rose by 16 years while maternal and child mortality fell by over half and nearly two-thirds, respectively. Enrollment in primary school rose by almost 60 percent and access to safe water more than doubled in the last 30 years. These gains were severely compromised by the devastating two-year war in northern Ethiopia that killed hundreds of thousands and forced millions to flee their homes.

The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) brought much-needed reprieve to the people of Tigray. However, many elements of the agreement—including the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration provisions as well as the parties' commitment to a credible transitional justice process—have yet to be fully realized. Ethiopia also continues to wrestle with the devastating effects of violence—including widespread sexual violence-- and other human rights abuses in other parts of the country, including Amhara and Oromia. It is imperative for Ethiopia to reckon with its violent past, and to commit to peaceful dialogue to prevent future conflicts. These are not processes that can be imposed from the outside, but require the government and the people of Ethiopia to chart their own path forward. As the largest bilateral donor of assistance to the Ethiopian people, USAID is a committed partner in these efforts, and will continue to stand on the side of all Ethiopians wishing to live in peace, dignity, and prosperity.

USAID Support for COHA Implementation

The signing of the COHA brought visible advances towards sustained peace in northern Ethiopia. Armed hostilities ended, and basic services like power, cellular, and banking networks were restored. The Ethiopian parliament de-listed the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

as a terrorist organization and an Interim Regional Administration was established in April to take on the formidable task of steering the region in the aftermath of the war.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

Work towards disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) began shortly after the COHA went into effect. As we see across the world, DDR is a lengthy, politically challenging process that requires sustained political will and commitment from the warring parties, as well as sustained international commitment and financing. Recognizing these challenges, USAID is preparing to support reintegration, resilience, and early recovery efforts for conflict-affected communities. Examples of this support include psychosocial support, inter-communal dialogue activities, small scale infrastructure projects, and revitalizing local livelihoods that give demobilized soldiers productive opportunities in civilian life. USAID will also support reconciliation, peacebuilding and conflict mitigation processes, national dialogue, and other political and consensus-building efforts that will help communities heal from the trauma of this two-year conflict.

Transitional Justice

In the COHA the Government of Ethiopia committed to develop and implement a comprehensive national transitional justice policy. To date, the government has issued public commitments to pursue a credible transitional justice process and has undertaken broad public consultations to develop its transitional justice policy framework. We expect the framework to provide specific timelines, decision points, and procedures that will help us assess the credibility of the process going forward. We continue to urge the Government of Ethiopia to demonstrate its commitment to accountability in both word and deed, and to implement a transparent, victim-centered process that contributes to truth, justice, reconciliation, and non-recurrence.

Civil Society and Human Rights

It is critical that Ethiopians lead the fight for rights, justice, and accountability. That is why USAID supports local civil society organizations that monitor and advocate for human rights and justice throughout the country. We partner with these organizations to strengthen civilian oversight of justice and accountability efforts, including support to organizations that promote access to justice and healing for survivors and those who have experienced conflict-related sexual violence, and have provided assistance to the national human rights institution, which plays a critical role in monitoring and documenting abuses. Currently, USAID is working with international human rights monitors in northern Ethiopia who are contributing to the national monitoring efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). USAID plans to further its assistance to local human rights actors and

organizations to both respond to crisis-related human rights violations and to address non-conflict related human rights issues.

Sustainable Peacebuilding

The continuing work of the COHA now must be carried out in the context of elevated regional tensions, particularly in Amhara. Encouraging and supporting COHA implementation has important implications for other peace processes, such as the ongoing conflict in Oromia. USAID has supported 35 locally-led initiatives that contributed to de-escalating tensions between ethnic and religious communities in conflict affected hotspots of Amhara and Oromia through targeted and rapid response programming that improved inter-communal trust and restored relationships. Although conflicts in Ethiopia are rooted in differing and complex grievances, it is critical to demonstrate that peaceful settlement through negotiation and dialogue pays off – and certainly preferable to repeated cycles of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Further, USAID is committed to applying our commitment to Women, Peace, and Security by promoting the meaningful participation of women leaders and women-led civil society organizations as part of the solution to a lasting peace.

National Dialogue

To that end, we will be closely tracking the National Dialogue process, which Ethiopia is preparing to embark on to address deep-rooted political and societal divisions. An inclusive, transparent, and broadly accepted National Dialogue process has the potential to play a critical role in long-term peace and stability. It is important for Ethiopia to use the National Dialogue to address various tension points at the regional and federal levels. Local stakeholders have repeatedly told us that while the National Dialogue process may be imperfect, it is sorely needed. USAID continues to support civil society, including women-led organizations, and other stakeholders so that they are prepared for, and can meaningfully engage in, the dialogue process, and we intend to support the National Dialogue Commission as it facilitates community consultations throughout Ethiopia. USAID programming has already helped build the knowledge, skills, and networks of over 34,000 citizens so that they can fully participate in the dialogue process, particularly in Oromia and Amhara. In my recent trips to Ethiopia, I have met with civil society organizations that recognize both the importance and the challenges of working in the current context. Not so long ago many of these same organizations were unable to register let alone operate. Now they will be taking on some of the most complex and unresolved issues in the country as key stakeholders in national level processes like the National Dialogue.

Humanitarian Assistance

In the months after the COHA was signed, troubling issues emerged around humanitarian access and assistance. While humanitarian access to northern Ethiopia had initially improved, in the spring of 2023, USAID identified a coordinated food aid diversion scheme and took action, making the difficult decision to pause all food assistance to Ethiopia.

This pause was a measure of last resort due to the extreme scale and scope of the food aid diversion. We could not responsibly resume food aid in Ethiopia until reforms and additional safeguards were in place to ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable people, including women and girls.

Earlier this month, after the Government of Ethiopia agreed to major changes in the food aid distribution process, USAID made the decision to resume food assistance to all vulnerable groups. Specifically, the Government of Ethiopia has handed over its management of warehouses and the distribution of aid to implementing partners and is providing full access to mills and other locations for monitoring and oversight. It has also agreed to the internationally accepted practice of Vulnerability Based Targeting, including joint identification of beneficiaries and joint approval of final beneficiary lists.

USAID and the Government of Ethiopia will implement a one-year trial period of this new beneficiary selection process, with formal reviews scheduled, which will allow us to continuously monitor and evaluate the efficacy of the reforms and additional due diligence measures put in place. We are confident that these efforts will help reinforce the integrity of the food aid system in Ethiopia, and help ensure that critical assistance reaches only the most vulnerable.

As this committee knows, USAID places the highest priority on taking every possible measure so that U.S. humanitarian assistance is used for its intended purpose. Our monitoring visits in areas where these reforms have been implemented - such as distributions for refugees in Gambella - have already demonstrated that reforms are working as intended. But we have made it very clear to the Government of Ethiopia and our implementing partners that USAID will not hesitate to pause activities again if we see evidence of waste, fraud, or a buse in the food aid system.

Conclusion

The November 2022 COHA marked an important turning point, bringing to a stop a brutal conflict that - in addition to its terrible human consequences - set back Ethiopia's development progress. While we are clear-eyed about the challenges ahead, USAID will remain a committed partner in helping all Ethiopians live in peace, dignity, and prosperity.

Thank you for your continued support of USAID's work in Ethiopia, and for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.