



## Briefing on U.S. Efforts in the Humanitarian Crisis in the Horn of Africa

### Special Briefing

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**MR. TONER:** Thank you, and thanks so much to all of you for joining us. Just a reminder at the outset that this call is on the record.

As you all know, on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011, some six months ago, famine was declared in parts of the Horn of Africa. So today, we have invited senior members from the State Department to provide an update on continued U.S. efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis in the region as well as some of the ongoing security challenges that exist.

So joining us today are Bruce Wharton, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Diplomacy for the Bureau of African Affairs; David Robinson, who is the Acting Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration; and Nancy Lindborg, who is the Assistant Administrator for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development. They'll each speak briefly at the top here and then we'll open it up to your questions.

So without further ado, I'll hand the mike, as it were, over to Bruce. Bruce, go ahead.

**MR. WHARTON:** Thanks very much, Mark, and thanks to everybody who has called in today who continues to view this as an important issue.

As Mark said, we're about six months down the road from when the UN declared parts of Somalia in famine, and we're about a year and a half down the road from when the United States and others began to see the scope of this emerging humanitarian crisis and actually began to move resources around the Horn of Africa to prepare for our ability to respond to the crisis.

In spite of the great work that the United States and the international community have done in that last 18 months, this does remain one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world today. There's still a little over 13 million people in the Horn who are in need of emergency assistance. And while I think there has been some significant improvement, especially in the last few months – and I think my colleague from USAID will talk about that in a few minutes – there has been progress, but continued humanitarian access is still needed to save lives in the Horn. This crisis is not over yet, and the need remains great.

The United States, I think, can be very proud of the fact that we are the largest humanitarian donor to the region. We're up to about \$870 million so far in the last year and a half, and about 205 million of that has gone specifically for Somalia. I think it's also important to acknowledge the generosity of the people and the Government of Kenya, who have received and sheltered somewhere around half a million refugees. And my colleague, David Robinson from PRM, can speak about that in a bit more detail.

So that's – we've got the emergency response underway right now. We also understand that it's very important to provide longer-term responses. The President's Feed the Future Initiative works with pastoralists and farmers in the Horn of Africa to implement long-term food security programs both in Kenya and Ethiopia. And I have to say that the fact that Kenya and Ethiopia offer a secure environment for those programs makes a real difference, and we have seen improvement in the ability of people to adjust to these cyclical droughts that are part of the weather cycle in that part of the world.

Ultimately, though, I think the answer to humanitarian crises in Somalia is going to be the establishment of secure and stable governance in that country, governance that respects human rights and the basic needs of the population. The

international response to the humanitarian emergency in Somalia was significantly complicated and slowed by the actions of al-Shabaab and other armed groups. So we will continue to work with regional governments, international partners, and humanitarian organizations to meet the short-term emergency needs. We'll also work with regional governments and others to establish longer-term food security assurance, and we'll continue to work on the fundamental need for stable, secure, and citizen-focused governance in Somalia as the longest-term solution to this crisis.

So that's sort of a quick overview of where we are now, and I'll turn it over, I believe, to David Robinson, the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

**MR. ROBINSON:** Thanks, Bruce. Let me just start by agreeing with Bruce that the generosity and the hospitality of neighboring countries has been critical to making sure that more people haven't died in this famine and due to conflict. Kenya already was host to hundreds of thousands of Somalis who had fled over the years. And in 2011 alone, an additional 300,000 Somalis fled into Ethiopia and Kenya, bringing the total of displaced Somalis in the Horn of Africa to somewhere around 955,000 people. That flow has begun to diminish somewhat for a variety of reasons, but it is still continuing. We're still seeing thousands of people trying to get out of the country, many of them in very bad condition by the time they arrive at refugee camps, due to malnutrition and other illnesses.

Our response to the flow in this past year was to increase our funding significantly into neighboring countries, principally into Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti so that we spent about \$105-or-6 million on that effort in this year. And likely, we'll do the same in the coming year.

Among the things that we focused on were opening up additional spaces inside the existing camps. We opened up two new camps in the Dadaab complex in Kenya and three camps in the Dolo Ado complex in Ethiopia. The work continues because of continuing security challenges, principally in Kenya, in terms of our refugee work. Many of our activities are on a lifesaving, life-sustaining basis. The activities that we normally pursue in protracted refugee situations – including livelihoods, education, other things – are on a very limited basis at this moment, as a number of our international partners have had to scale back their presence inside the camps in response to the security challenges.

As I said, we will anticipate continuing at about this level of effort into the coming year, and we again are working to encourage neighboring countries to remain as hospitable as they have been. That's – the principle of first asylum is the best safeguard from the refugee perspective that these people in need have.

So Nancy, if you want to take it from the USAID perspective, I'll turn it over to you.

**MS. LINDBORG:** Great. Thanks, Dave. And thank you, everyone, for joining us today. We've really, as Bruce noted, taken a look back over the last 18 months, beginning when we first got the early warning from the Famine Early Warning System, or FEWS NET, which let us know that there was an impending drought on the horizon. And that point, we were able to pre-position food in the region. And since then, as you've heard a little bit from both Bruce and Dave, we actually had a three-part emergency, with the refugees, the drought-affected communities in Ethiopia, in Kenya, and then those communities so deeply affected by both drought and conflict and, ultimately, famine inside Somalia.

And as we look back, I think we're heartened at, in particular, some of the very significant improvements, particularly in Ethiopia and Kenya, which have been able to build on some of the resiliency programs we have been doing over the past several years, in particular the productive safety net programs in Ethiopia that we do in partnership with the Government of Ethiopia, the World Bank, and other donors that really enabled about 7.5 million people to not fall into a state of emergency, coupled with a lot of the livestock management and vaccination programs that have both helped those communities not fall into the depths of crisis, and then those that did, help them get through it.

In Somalia, we were – after the famine declaration six months ago, which is a very serious and specific designation of crisis, there was a huge mobilization of assistance. We are very happy that we were able to help lead that effort. And on November 19<sup>th</sup>, we were quite heartened to learn that three of the six areas that were previously declared as experiencing famine came out into one level less severe. And the 750,000 people in famine conditions had gone down to 250,000 people, specifically as the result of this huge mobilization of humanitarian assistance.

However, we also want to be very cautious to note that just because you've dropped out of a famine designation doesn't mean that those people aren't still in a very, very precarious situation. And you, of course, are aware that not long after that, 16 international and non-government organizations were banned from the areas under the Shabaab de facto control. So that already fragile situation became more so.

It's way too early to ease up on assistance in Somalia, or for that matter across the Horn, where what we've put in, which is about \$870 million of U.S. assistance, is continuing to provide food treatment, healthcare, clean water sanitation, and hygiene. We continue to be very focused both on the provision of lifesaving assistance in Somalia and, as importantly, the imperative of building resilience. We know that we can't prevent these droughts from happening. One of the reasons the drought was as severe as it was is that these communities are subject to ever faster cycles of drought, so that they are unable to recover in between. So it is critical that we work in partnership with local governments, local communities to create that greater resilience. It is the centerpiece of President Obama's Feed the Future Initiative. And based on the lessons that we've learned during this response, we're very optimistic that we can continue to make progress so that next time a drought hits the Horn, we won't have 13.3 million people going into crisis. Thanks.

**MR. TONER:** Well, thank you guys. And I guess now we're ready to open it up to your questions.

Operator.

**OPERATOR:** Thank you. If you would like to ask a question, please press \*1. If you have muted your phone line, please un-mute, and record your first and last name, as it is required to identify your line. To withdraw the request, press \*2. Once again, to ask a question, please press \*1. One moment for the first question.

The first question comes from Christile Haguma. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Yes. Thank you. Is the Obama Administration promoting Feed the Future policy by helping power countries to develop their own agricultural sector in spite of the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa?

**MS. LINDBORG:** I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question?

**QUESTION:** I said is the Obama Administration promoting Feed the Future policy by helping power countries to develop their own agricultural sector in spite of this humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa?

**MS. LINDBORG:** The Feed the Future Initiative is really that totality of continuing to do smarter, more targeted, more effective humanitarian assistance that connects more effectively to increased investments in both agricultural and nutrition. And the goal is to help those communities that are in chronic food deficits and always teetering on the edge of crisis to be able to move into a more productive future and a – and get on that pathway to development. It's not instead of.

**QUESTION:** Okay.

**MR. TONER:** Great. Next question.

**OPERATOR:** The next question comes from Andrew Quinn. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Hi. It's Andy Quinn from Reuters. I actually have two quick questions.

The first one, can you tell us what the U.S. Government is doing to restore the viability of the remittance system for Somalia? I'm sure you're aware that banks have stopped transferring money due to concerns over OFAC restrictions, and this has really dried up an important sense of – a source of revenue for Somalia. What can you do to get that back up and running?

And the second question is: With the current state of aid within the borders of Somalia, how much is going to areas controlled by the TFG, and how much is going to areas controlled by al-Shabaab? What's the proportion? Thank you.

**MR. WHARTON:** Hi. Bruce Wharton here. I think – let me take a shot at the remittance question. Yeah, it is a serious concern. My understanding right now, frankly, though, is that there are some institutions in the United States that are able to move money into Somalia. So the remittance flow is actually still – it continues right now, but I know that we are – the State Department is in discussions with Treasury and others to try to make sure that that flow from the Somali diaspora back home is safe, that the money does not go to people who wish to harm the United States, but that it can be a contribution to the people of Somalia overcoming the crisis that they face right now.

**QUESTION:** Are you in any way anticipating issuing the same kind of open directive to banks to say, "Look, we'll let you do this. Don't worry about OFAC restrictions on this, get the money there," that you did for the aid groups?

**MR. WHARTON:** I'm afraid that the issue is actually more complicated than that, and part of the response may be a legislative response. I don't think it's something that the executive can do unilaterally.

**QUESTION:** Okay. And on the proportion of aid to TFG versus al-Shabaab areas?

**MS. LINDBORG:** We have a little over \$200 million of assistance going into Somalia, and that is not so cleanly broken into the two categories, because some of the programs are countrywide, and we are – we enable partners to receive the funding and work in multiple locations. I can tell you that there is considerable focus on ensuring that we reach those who are most in need, and that includes the six areas that were famine designated. And of the three that are still in famine conditions, one is in Shabaab territory, and two are under TFG control.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MR. TONER:** Thanks. We'll take the next question.

**OPERATOR:** One moment for the next question. The question comes from Oren Dorell. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Hi. It's a little bit – this question is a little bit along the same lines. I wanted you to – I was wondering if you could talk about the relationship between the fighting that's been going on in the region between the African Union forces and al-Shabaab, and how that – what's the relationship between that and the improvement that we're seeing in the famine or even the continuation of the famine in some areas?

**MS. LINDBORG:** I don't think at this point there is a relationship. The lifting of the famine designation happened in November and then, of course, we've been still in the rainy season until just recently. So a lot of the fighting has not been

that active. In the – clearly, any time you have open conflict and there is decreased access in the ability of assistance to reach families and communities, there is the possibility that their conditions would worsen.

**QUESTION:** So is there – I was typing in my name and giving my name when you were talking about the – how much aid was getting to areas that are controlled by al-Shabaab and how much is controlled by the transitional government. Can you kind of go over that again so that I can get that too?

**MS. LINDBORG:** Sure. What I said is that we've put a little more than \$200 million of assistance to partners who are working inside Somalia. And much of that is for programs that are – or organizations that are countrywide. So it's not broken down quite that cleanly geographically, but we have focused on the areas that have the greatest need. And the six areas that were declared famine include two that are under TFG control, the internally displaced in Mogadishu, and the internally displaced in Afgooye corridor. And the remaining four areas are all in the al-Shabaab-held territories.

The complicating factor of course is the expulsion of the sixteen groups who were expelled in late November from areas under Shabaab's de facto control, which is a potentially grave concern.

**QUESTION:** Okay, thanks.

**MR. TONER:** Ready for next question.

**OPERATOR:** Once again, if you would like to ask a question, please press \*1. One moment please. At this time, there are no further questions.

**MR. TONER:** Okay. Well, we'll give you one more shot at this. If you have any additional questions, please go ahead and

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**OPERATOR:** One moment for the next question. The next question comes from Andrew Quinn, your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Hi. I couldn't let you get away that easily. (Laughter.) Do you guys have any projections about how long the famine is likely to persist? I mean, you have this – some improvement in some of the areas. What about the big picture? Are we rounding the corner on the famine designation?

**MS. LINDBORG:** There's only famine in Somalia. I would say that as we look across the Horn, we are watching very carefully what the harvest is from this rainy season that we've been in, and we expect a report from FEWS NET later this week that will give us greater projections of how well this harvest did. We expect food – serious food insecurity to persist probably for another six months because it will take at least another harvest season to get people in better shape. And all of this is potentially complicated in the Somalia areas by what happens with conflict and access to communities in need.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Thank you.

**OPERATOR:** The next question comes from Sam Loewenberg, your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Yes, hi. I wanted to ask about the situation in Kenya and Ethiopia, so not with the – in the conflict zones in Somalia. What are you doing this – FEWS NET has said that, I think last month, that the situation in Kenya and Ethiopia has predicted to be quite bad again come around May. What is it that you're doing this time that's different than you did last time? Specifically, are you doing anything to maintain people's livestock and supplementary nutrition to make sure kids don't get into acute malnutrition and anything with water like emergency boreholes or water pans, other things like that? Thanks.

**MS. LINDBORG:** Yes. We increased significantly programs that really look at the totality of how to help communities survive. So exactly as you just noted Sam, it's well beyond just provision of food. It's to help increase their ability to have access to food through improved livelihoods. We've done a lot of programming on culling and improving livestock, enabling access to better health care, better nutrition, investment in small water infrastructure so that they can better gather rainwater, so that they can ensure that they have better access to irrigation for their crops.

So we are both continuing the emergency assistance and the pipelines, we continue to push food through the pipelines in both countries. But we're also looking very carefully at what are those strategies for success that increase the resilience, exactly because we know there'll continue to be these cycles of drought, and continuing to look at programs and put additional programs in that have something that we call a crisis modifier, so that even as you move forward with development programs, you have that flexible ability to switch back to humanitarian assistance if and when the crisis returns.

**QUESTION:** Can you talk about specific numbers, how much you're putting toward those things and how does it compare with last year?

**MS. LINDBORG:** Well, at this point, a lot of the funding that we put in at the end of last fiscal year is still fully pumping, and we've put about 80 million in so far this fiscal year. And what we're doing is looking to connect that, plus additional humanitarian investments up even more closely with our development portfolios so that one is able to help move those communities that are in constant crisis into greater food security, so that they can withstand these cycles of drought.

**QUESTION:** And that's 80 million for both Kenya and Ethiopia combined?

**MS. LINDBORG:** Yeah. And that's just those early investments from our emergency accounts for this fiscal year. And we're looking at the rest of the year. We expect it will probably be close to on par to last – as of last year's.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Thank you.

**MR. TONER:** Operator, I think we have time for just one more question.

**OPERATOR:** The next question comes from Lauren Sutherland. Your line is open.

**QUESTION:** Hi. First of all, really quickly, I just wonder how many people are estimated to have died in Somalia. Secondly, while your point about the generosity of the Kenyan Government is certainly well taken, there have been some reports emerging from local outlets, both in Kenya and Somalia, that certain Kenyan military officials have discussed repatriating Somalis to this buffer region along the border, possibly as a means of reestablishing security at the Dadaab camp. I wonder if you're able to provide any information about that.

**MR. ROBINSON:** This is Dave Robinson. I can take a shot at the second question, if Nancy wants to come in on the first one. Concerning forcible repatriation, the first thing to say is that there has always been a certain amount of tension about the presence of Somalis, large scale numbers of Somalis, in a protracted situation inside Kenya. And clearly the goal of the international community is that at some point Somalis can voluntarily and safely return home.

We haven't seen – we've heard rumors. We have not seen evidence of certainly large-scale or significant forced repatriation. We continue to rely on and advocate strongly for the protection of Somalis inside Kenya, that they should not be sent back into Somalia in order to create some sort of a buffer zone. Clearly, people who have fled the violence in Somalia, fled the famine, need to have the principle of first asylum, their protection assured inside neighboring countries until they can go home in safety. That's been our line, that's our principle point of departure, and so far the neighboring governments have cooperated with that.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MS. LINDBORG:** Yeah. On the death rates, or on the total number of deaths, this gets into a science that makes it very difficult to say exactly how many people have died. The information that we use, especially to determine levels of crisis and when you enter a famine, are actually the mortality rates. And if that is what it gets reported in the FEWS NET data, which is an open source, and if helpful, we can make sure you get plugged into that.

**MR. TONER:** Great. Well, thanks to all of our participants today and to all of you who joined us on this call. We really appreciate it. That's all we have time for today. So thanks again, and hope to hear from you all soon.

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