

**Press Briefing with the U.S. Delegation to the African Union Summit  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

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**MODERATOR:** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome and thank you for joining us for today's press conference with our U.S. Delegation to the African Union Summit. Today, here, we have at the front table USAID Administrator Gayle Smith and the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield. This afternoon, we will start with brief remarks from Administrator Smith.

**USAID ADMINISTRATOR SMITH:** Thank you and good afternoon everybody. I hope that none of you...well, I imagine all of you are as tired and harried as we are, running around this building for the last few days. I am delighted to have been asked to lead the U.S. Delegation to the African Union Summit. We've got quite a delegation, too, with my friend the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. Also in the delegation, we have our Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and the Senior Director for African Affairs from the National Security Council. Two of our envoys – the Envoy for South Sudan and our Envoy for the Great Lakes Region. And obviously, our very capable teams here in Addis Ababa, including Ambassador Susan Page.

We feel quite honored to be observers here at the AU Summit for a number of reasons. We have been able, over the last several years, to deepen our relationship with the African Union, and it is one that we consider extremely important in the role the Union is playing on the continent, and let me just mention a few areas.

One is in the area of peacekeeping, where the AU stood up at a summit hosted by President Obama last September to redouble what is already an extraordinary commitment to peacekeeping on this continent, and work with us and others to ensure that there is sustained support for peacekeeping missions, including those led by the African Union.

We have worked very closely with the African Union on the issue of food security, where it was the AU, itself, that took the lead for the continent to call on countries to increase their investments in agriculture design, food security plans, and make a commitment to make their agricultural sectors work. We have worked closely with them on this for seven years now. We are now seeing extraordinary results across the continent in increases of incomes for small-holder farmers, and reductions in malnutrition.

We are also working with them on an initiative called Power Africa, where our objective is to work with African partners to double access to electricity on the African continent.

I will mention one in particular that has been, I think, of extreme importance during the last twelve months, and that is the response to the Ebola epidemic. This was no greater priority for anyone than for the men and women of Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, where very, very heroic healthcare workers and volunteers stood up in the face of one of the scariest things that I think we have ever seen.

President Obama dispatched the full force and competence of our own government, USAID took the lead in the field, the biggest deployment ever by our Centers for Disease Control out of Atlanta, and a role for the U.S. military in providing support and logistics.

But one of the most moving responses in what was a wonderful example of international cooperation was that of the African Union, which deployed over nine hundred volunteer health workers to West Africa. The beauty of that story is, the entire world stepped up, political divisions made no difference, almost every country in the world did something, and collectively we defeated an epidemic. It was our privilege to work the AU on this. So we have had the opportunity during the Summit to work and engage with our AU partners on all of these issues.

The AU is also, obviously, a very important partner on peace and security. At this summit, we have in particular been focused on two issues about which we can say more. One is Burundi, where we are deeply concerned about the violence and the great risk to that country of increased violence. So that has been the focus of great attention, as has been South Sudan, and not just by our delegation, but obviously by the leaders gathered here who can speak to both of those.

This trip has also afforded us an opportunity to deal with the opportunity to prevent a tragedy. Earlier today, the Secretary General of the United Nations and the Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia convened a roundtable on El Niño. I assume most of you are aware that this is the worst El Niño in history, and it has affected the African continent, in fact the whole world, but the African continent in particular, no country more dramatically than Ethiopia, where 11 million people are in need of assistance because of the impact of what is a very severe drought.

The difference between this and some other natural disasters that we have seen in the past is that the government has stepped up, not only to put political weight from the top down to the local level in responding to this, but also resources. There is a foundation in this country of resilience safety nets, progress on agricultural development that will help, we believe, Ethiopia respond to emergency needs without losing the gains that have been made in development.

There is close alignment, as we heard this morning, between the United Nations, other donors, our Ethiopian partners, on a strategy moving forward. The challenge is that the funding for this is not where it needs to be, and we are up against a very tight timeline. If farmers are not able to plant according to season, then we all know what happens, they will not be able to produce sufficient food.

As the United States, we have responded early to this. Since October 2014, we have provided over \$400 million in assistance, and I am pleased to announce this afternoon that we are providing an additional almost \$100 million in assistance. For those of you who want the precise number, it is \$97 million. This is to expand the reach of food programs again that are designed to help people who are vulnerable get through what is going to be a very intense, but hopefully time limited, external shock.

So we have also, as I said, had the opportunity to focus on that emergency, and I hope successfully we have a number of countries represented in the room, a very forceful appeal from the Secretary General,

myself, the E.U., U.N. agencies, that we will see the world step up, again, not just to meet emergency needs, but to prevent a crisis that is within our reach to prevent.

I will stop there, and I think both the Assistant Secretary and I are available for any questions you may have. And let me just say, thank you. It is really terrific to see such a full room.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you, Administrator Smith. We will start with our first question this afternoon. If you could state your name and your media outlets before your question, please?

**MEDIA:** Good afternoon, I am Fortune newspaper here in Addis Ababa. It is very good news to hear about the additional \$97 million that is now being supplied, but some \$300 million or \$200 million or so, is still left, that there is still that gap to meet. Has this morning's roundtable been fruitful in getting any more ideas on how that could possibly be met?

**USAID ADMINISTRATOR SMITH:** I think so, and you are absolutely right to point to the gap. And we are overwhelmingly in the lead with respect to our contribution, but we are also prepared to do more. A few things we talked about, one is getting the word out. You know, we are at a time in the world where people are focused on Syria, on Yemen, on South Sudan, and you've got a number of chronic emergencies around the world. And this one needs to break through, but importantly break through in such a way that we are telling a story about the potential to prevent a crisis, which is a different kind of story than one often sees in natural disasters of this case.

So we talked about a few things. One is, all of us reaching out to other countries that have not yet made sufficient contributions. The second is reaching out to the private sector. Over the last several years we have seen the private sector make contributions to humanitarian crises in new and different ways. The private sector has expanded its presence and interest in Africa as investments go up, so a number of us talked about increasing those investments and reaching out to partners on that front.

Another is to turn on its head the way we usually think about appeals. There is an appeal put out, we need this many dollars, and are we there yet? We talked about recasting that a bit as a goal to help us focus on a calendar, that if we can raise this additional money within the appropriate time frame, within the next couple of months, and very quickly, we can forestall a disaster that is preventable. So we want to message that, as well.

The Secretary General is traveling to the field. The fact that he convened the press conference is critically important. We will travel, our mission here will continue to draw attention to it, and if I may, I certainly hope the media will get the word out that there is an urgent crisis, but that with an appropriate level of resources, we can not only prevent a tragedy, but we can protect the gains that this country has made over the years.

**MODERATOR:** Next question?

**MEDIA:** Thank you. I am from Addis Standard. My question goes to the recent situation in Oromia [inaudible]. I think you already put out a statement about the situation with the Ethiopian government, and it is my understanding that you have met with high-level government officials. If so, would you tell

us if your discussion in that regard [inaudible], and given the gravity of the situation, what are your recommendations for hope with that?

**USAID ADMINISTRATOR SMITH:** Sure, I will say some things, and then ask the Assistant Secretary to join me. We met with people on our first day here on this issue with the government, and also some very thoughtful interlocutors from Oromia. And we registered our very clear concern about the events, themselves, but also the potential for these events to get much worse if things are not brought under control. Quickly, we will certainly remain very vigilant, but I will say that I think the response, and what we heard from everyone we talked to, was a collective recognition of the danger of this kind of situation going unattended, number one.

Number two, the need for a much greater ability to listen to the voices of people, and particularly young people, who clearly have some frustrations, to hear what those concerns are so that they might be addressed. To find out exactly what happened, so that that can be addressed appropriately. And again, this is serious enough that I am not going to say, nor would I think my colleague, the Assistant Secretary, say, everything is fine. And I do think that what we heard from people conveyed a serious intent to address this; a recognition that it was both dangerous, and that the way it unfolded was unacceptable. So we will keep on it, and I think our embassy will certainly continue to follow it. Linda, would you like to add?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** There is not much to add, other than the fact that I think there was general agreement that there needed to be better communications with this community, and particularly with the young people there, and a recognition of what the root causes are. It was more than just the Addis Plan, that it was much deeper than that. And to have those discussions so that this can be avoided in the future I think was a key recognition in all of the meetings that we had during our first day here.

And I would just indicate that in our delegation is the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and he has engaged on this issue with the government much more intensely, and will continue, as will our embassy and my office continue to engage.

**MODERATOR:** Next question?

**MEDIA:** William Davison from Bloomberg News. Just a very quick follow-up on that. When Ethiopia last had a serious political crisis, or at least that is the way people are portraying it, was in 2005. And at that time, the government used lethal force against unarmed protestors. And then eleven years later when there is another very fairly serious political crisis in Oromia, the government used lethal force against protestors. So what is your take on that, because you talk about a government that is willing to listen and take steps to address things, deal with it in a different way, but it seems that they have decided how to deal with this, this sort of problem.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** That was an issue that was discussed with the government, and there was a recognition that that wasn't stable. One issue we talked about was how to train policemen to respond with less than lethal force, in terms of riot training, so that they don't

make the situation worse. We also have discussed the large numbers of people who have been arrested, and that they be given quick access to justice, and make sure that we move the situation from the critical crisis point to a situation where we are looking at how to address the root causes. And again, we all agreed that communications was an important element of that. There was an acknowledgement that mistakes were made.

Again, I think that we will keep pressing on this issue, and we have spoken to the community, or as Gayle indicated, individuals who were very thoughtful on this issue, and they have some ideas on ways to move forward, as well. There was also a request that an investigation be done, and that that investigation be transparent and shared.

**MEDIA:** I am Matthew Kaye, Radio France International. I had a question to the Assistant Secretary of State. How disappointed are you with the situation in Burundi, in particular that the regime there continues to resist the idea of a peacekeeping force?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** I don't know that disappointment describes my feelings for what is happening in Burundi. There is a strong sense of frustration that I and others...we have a special envoy for the Great Lakes, and he has been actively engaged in the region. We know that this has been a subject of intense discussion here at the AU on how to respond to the situation in Burundi. We understand that they came to some decisions today, and a high-level delegation will be going to Burundi to engage with the government and push for additional observers, as well as human rights observers. And we were hopeful, hearing that today, because it is a very frustrating situation.

Our position, two years ago, was that if the president made the decision to run again, it could be destabilizing. Unfortunately, we were right. And we have been engaged to ensure that the situation doesn't spiral more out of control, and more people than what we have seen killed already become victims of the violence that is taking place in that country.

**MEDIA:** Thank you, Omer for The Spanish News Agency. My question is to the Assistant Secretary of State: There are reports...there are statements that the U.S. government has made its strongest statement against the Ethiopian government when it comes to issues of human rights in the latest incidents. What is your reaction to that? I mean, people used to say that the U.S. government has been complacent about the Ethiopian government's human rights records, and at this time it has gotten stronger. What is your reaction to that?

The second question is: has the government made any commitment...one of your requests is to release those in prison following the protests in Oromia, essentially, and has the government made any commitments to agree to that? Thanks.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** First, I think our statements speak for themselves, and we have never been complacent when it comes to human rights. Dealing with human rights in every country across the globe is a core value for the United States, and I think if you look back on the record you will see statements in every single case, and they are always strong statements. And

again, these statements came out very quickly. In fact, I heard when I got here that there was the feeling that we had not issued statements on the current situation. So we have, and we will continue to watch the situation very, very closely.

We have not asked the government to release protestors. What we have asked is that they be given access to justice. And that is an important element, that they be given a transparent and open process, and those who have committed crimes, of course, can be held accountable. And those who, where it cannot be proven that they committed any crimes, they should be released. But we have an Assistant Secretary for Human Rights here; Tom, you might want to add something?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE MALINOWSKI:** I would just reinforce what Assistant Secretary Thomas-Greenfield said. I think we have been quite consistent. The President of the United States was here, as you may recall, not too long ago, and made a series of very strong statements about this situation. I was here a couple of months ago, delivered a speech, had very constructive discussions with members of the government, including the Prime Minister, on a whole range of these issues. And of course you saw our statements on Oromia.

I think we were all quite impressed in our meetings with the government by the very strong acknowledgement on its part that there were legitimate grievances, including with respect to governance in Oromia and a legitimate interest in moving towards greater political openness. And I think that recognition is an important first step, and what we will be hoping for and looking for are concrete steps that are consistent with that recognition.

As you said, in terms of the people who were detained, including opposition leaders, what we would hope is that, of course, if there is any evidence that someone was involved in violence, that they be given due process swiftly. And if anyone is held for the peaceful exercise of their views, engaging in a peaceful demonstration, that those people be released swiftly.

**MODERATOR:** Aaron?

**MEDIA:** I am Aaron Maasho from Reuters asking about Burundi. There are differences among member states about the deployment of peacekeeping forces without the consent of the government. What is your view of this? How concerned are you that this time will not [inaudible]?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE THOMAS-GREENFIELD:** I think I will refer that question to the AU, but our understanding is that this is still under discussion, and that the decisions that were discussed today was to send a high level delegation to engage with the government on the deployment of peacekeepers. So I do not think it is off the table, and that is a very good thing. We think it is in the interest of the Burundi government to have peacekeepers that will provide eyewitnesses to what is going on. They have said that they have not been involved in some of the activities that they have been accused of. If they allow observers on the ground, and allow peacekeepers, it is in their interest, and it is in the broader interest of the Burundi people.

**MEDIA:** Elias Gebreselassie from Initiative Africa. My first question relates to the drought situation. We hear competing reports about how many people are affected by drought. Many nations saying up to 15 million people are affected; some are saying it could be 18 or even 20 million people. What is USAID's prediction of the drought situation in Ethiopia? Will it get worse before it gets better, or do you see [inaudible]?

My second question relates to Power Africa. As you know there are I think five African countries that were supported under the Power Africa scheme? [inaudible] But, we haven't heard much about Corbetti Geothermal recently or at least over the past six months, and not much has been heard about it. So how is it moving?

**USAID ADMINISTRATOR SMITH:** Those are good questions, sure. Your question on the numbers on the drought is a good one. Part of what we have done as USAID, but also with partners, is try to map out the impact, real, and projected, looking at weather patterns, markets, and what we anticipate. The baseline right now that I think we are in general agreement on is in the range of 11 million people, that we know, okay?

The problem is that as things get worse, and they get worse if they are unattended and the drought expands, is that those numbers could increase. So part of the response is constantly reassessing the numbers and looking at where the impact may be more severe or less severe than we thought, as a function of the actual weather, but also the response. So I think it is safe to say that roughly 11 [million] is a good figure for now, but the U.N. is also accurate in saying that those numbers could go up, which gets to your second question, because you very cleverly got three in there, which is, is it going to get worse before it gets better?

And I think the focus of our roundtable this morning, and the message that we want to deliver very clearly, and is foremost in the minds of our agency, is that if the world responds quickly and sufficiently in two ways, it doesn't have to get worse before it gets better. Those two ways are the emergency assistance that is needed now to shore up what are the most vulnerable, poorest people in this country who don't have anything to fall back on, but also to make sure that they are able to have in hand the seeds they need to plant so that they are not dependent again next season.

So we are in a race against time. I think that we have the ability to mobilize the world to do this, and that there is an interest in both meeting the emergency needs and protecting the gains. But it is one of the reasons that this round table, our visit, our focus on this is so urgent, and again, if I can appeal...and I can say to my colleagues in the press, I used to be one of you...to get the word out, not just of the emergency, but of the possibility that we have to prevent a crisis.

On Power Africa, which by the way, when we first envisioned what Power Africa would be, I don't think we envisioned how successful it would be with respect to the interest. You are right; you are referring to Corbetti here, which has been the focus of a great deal of attention, in part because it is geothermal, but also because it is so big. I think what you are observing in not having heard much of late, is negotiations over a deal and a transaction of this size are complex. Ethiopia is still in the process of

working through large private sector investments, and I think this is something that we are going to see grow in this and other African countries.

So it is a very detailed process of working through all the specifics so that it can move forward as quickly as possible. But we are confident that things will conclude successfully, that this will be a successful project, certainly a game changer in this country in and of itself, but also our hope is that this will be a model, an evidence, of what is possible, and itself attract other investments.

**MEDIA:** Thank you very much. My name is Eskinder from VOA Amharic service. We know, back to the, let me take you back to the drought issue, we know 1.4 billion USD is needed to meet the requirements of 18 million people, but what is the funding gap - before we see the detailed figures with regard to the funding gap?

**USAID ADMINISTRATOR SMITH:** That is, and I am not sure I can tell you exactly what the funding gap is right now because we haven't done the calculations with the \$97 million we are announcing right here. What we knew as of this morning is, of the appeal, that it was met at approximately forty-six percent. Now on the one hand, the appeal has not been out there that long, so that is not a bad response to a short-term appeal, but again, as I have said earlier, the time on this is very limited, so we have got to get that well ahead.

We did hear some other donors saying that they were in the process of making some internal decisions. The E.U. referred to that, Canada referred to that; we will follow up with them. So our hope, and I want to lean in a little bit [inaudible] of hope and not too far, is that we will see some announcements in the coming couple of weeks that will move us further. The challenge here, though, is that seventy-five percent isn't good enough. Because if we are only at seventy-five percent of what we ultimately need, then there are still going to be a lot of people who are left in need, a lot of kids who are going to be malnourished, and a lot of farmers who aren't going to be able to do enough planting.

So we are going to be tracking that gap as we move forward, and as the country that I believe is meeting well over fifty percent of the appeal at this time, we are constantly looking at what more we can do, as well.

**MODERATOR:** Any last questions? With that, I thank you all for coming this afternoon. Have a good day.

**USAID ADMINISTRATOR SMITH:** Thanks, everybody.