

BACKGROUND PAPER

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE HORN OF AFRICA (HOA)

1. INTRODUCTION

An international conference is scheduled to take place at The University of Texas at Arlington, October 20-22, 2006 on the development of the Horn of Africa with the participation of civic, national and international institutions such as the World Bank, the United Nations, universities, and non-governmental organizations.

The conference is organized by The Africa Program at The University of Texas at Arlington in partnership with the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Centre, and Amoud Foundation.

2. PURPOSE

The long-term objective of the conference is to explore and promote practical possibilities for achieving an enduring peace, stability, and an accelerated development in the Horn of Africa (HOA). The immediate purpose is to focus attention and action on the development needs of the HOA by bringing together representatives of public, civic and academic institutions from the HOA and other countries as well as the concerned international and regional organizations, and independent experts in order to identify and analyze the major development challenges being encountered and to chart out a practical strategy and development plan for the region. It is the fervent hope of the organizing committee that the conference will also provide a unique opportunity to all concerned organizations to review and coordinate their plans and efforts in an environment that facilitates an objective and free discussion.

3. BACKGROUND

The countries commonly known as the Horn of Africa comprise Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. They have a total population of close to 100 million. According to the UNFPA, the population in the HOA is expected to increase to 185 million by 2025.

An International Conference on the Horn of Africa was held in Tampa, Florida November 13-14, 2002 to discuss the prospects for a confederation among the four countries, namely, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. The conference was attended by over 300 participants. Keynote speakers included renowned individuals such as the former president of Zambia, HE. Mr. Kenneth Kaunda, and Poet-Laureate Tsegaye Gabremedhin. Participants included representatives of major national and international institutions such as the US Administration (health issues), the US State Department, renowned universities (UCLA, Michigan State, Howard, Princeton, etc.), UNDP, UNFAO, WHO, and civic organizations concerned with gender and social issues. The main conclusions and recommendations of the conference were declared in its final document entitled: "Tampa Initiative for the Horn of Africa".

The four countries are known to be among the least developed nations in the world with recurring bouts of famine caused by drought coupled with inefficient agricultural practices and underutilization of the available water resources. They also suffer from poor infrastructure, low levels of education, high rates of unemployment and prevalence of devastating health pandemics such as malaria and HIV/AIDS from which millions of inhabitants continue to suffer and perish perennially. The vast majority of the population in both the urban and rural areas lives under

conditions of a grinding, abject poverty. Food insecurity is a persistent challenge facing the people in the four countries. It should be emphasized that food insecurities occur not only because of drought but also because of cultural and institutional inflexibilities which damage people's coping mechanisms, which emerge from unworkable assets (including land) ownership systems and obstacles to geographic mobility.

In addition to severe economic hardship, people and governments in the region are dealing with problems related to governance and democratization.

The desperate circumstances being faced by the people of the Horn of Africa call, as a matter of great urgency, for a development strategy and plan of action that would effectively respond to their basic human needs.

4. HORN OF AFRICA'S POTENTIAL

It is ironic that the people in the HOA suffer extreme levels of poverty, while they live in a sub-region which is rich in natural resources. With more efficient management, these resources could dramatically transform the economic conditions of the population and alleviate their suffering. The irony is much more pronounced when considering the fact that while Ethiopia suffers from recurring droughts, its waters (Blue Nile) cascade to Egypt providing it with 85% of its needs.

It is well known that the HOA has vast agricultural, water, mineral and energy resources, which continue to await appropriate policy (including a more practical system of land tenure), planning, investment and development. There is no doubt that a more efficient exploitation of the available natural resources through strategic measures such as the improvement of the backward agricultural system as well as the poor infrastructure throughout the sub-region and the introduction of irrigation systems could effectively bolster the economic performance of the sub-region. An effective change from the current anachronistic system of access to land in parts of the region to one based on private land ownership could bring about a substantial improvement in the performance of the agricultural sector.

It is also worth noting that the youthful population of 85 million in the HOA could provide not only an abundant reservoir of human resources but also generate a substantial demand for goods and services that would benefit the international community in the long run.

Situated as it is along the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, the HOA and its ports could become major entrepôts of international commerce and trade. Additionally, as part of the international collaboration in dealing with global terrorism, USA and France have established military facilities in the Horn of Africa. The United Nations is maintaining a military force to keep the peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Therefore, the importance of the Horn of Africa to international stability and peace has already been recognized.

The existence, in Ethiopia, of important regional organizations such the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa would enhance the role of the Horn of Africa in international cooperation and global partnership. Improved stability and development in the HOA would facilitate a practical collaboration with other regions including the Arab peninsula as both sub-regions have complementary resources: agriculture, water, mineral and human resources in the HOA, and oil and investment resources on the Arab side.

5. CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS

The main conference document entitled: Proposed Strategy for the Development of the Horn of Africa shall be prepared and reviewed by carefully selected professionals from the Horn of Africa. Other renowned organizations and individuals shall also review the draft. In addition, keynote speeches will be made by renowned individuals with interest in the development of the Horn of Africa and representatives of various organizations with in-depth knowledge and experience about the sub-region.

6. CONFERENCE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Dr. Alusine Jalloh, The University of Texas at Arlington, Chair

Dr. Dereje Agonafer, The University of Texas at Arlington, Co-Chair

Kidane Alemayehu, President, HOA Peace and Development Center, Member

Dr. Habte Wolduh, The University of Texas at Dallas, Member

Prof. Dennis Cordell, Southern Methodist University, member

Yussuf Kalib, Regional Director, Texas Health and Human Services, Member

Betru Gebregziabher, Mortgage Banker, & Board Member, DFW-International, member

Safia Ismail, Coordinator, Hilton World-wide Reservations, and President, Awdal

Charity Services

Temesgen Asmerom, Member

Martha Melaku, Esq., Attorney at Law, Member

Semere Habtemariam, member

Solomon Haile, member

7. CONFERENCE OUTCOMES AND SUBSEQUENT ACTION

The main outcome of the conference will be a resolution presenting a HOA Development strategy and plan. The conference's outcome will be presented by The Africa Program at the University of Texas at Arlington and the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center to the following national and international stakeholders:

The international community, including the UN, EU, U.S. , and Japan.

Donor agencies including the World Bank, UNDP, USAID, CIDA, and SIDA.

c. The UN Secretary General with a request that he appoint a HOA Development Coordinator to mobilize international support and resources for a speedy implementation of the development strategy and plan.

The relevant civic, religious and governmental institutions , as well as the private sector in the four HOA countries.

e. Regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Inter-Governmental Agency for African Development (IGAAD), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the African Development Bank (ADB).

The media.

Renowned individuals and other appropriate institutions.

Periodic monitoring and progress reports will be undertaken by the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center in collaboration with the above organizations and civic bodies. The Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center will also arrange future conferences on the Horn of Africa in collaboration with interested academic and other institutions to discuss issues of major concern to the region as well as the international community.