

Keynote Speech
International Conference on a Development Strategy for the Horn of Africa

October 20th at 7:00pm

By Kidane Alemayehu
Founding President
Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center

Mr. Chairman
Ladies and Gentlemen

My address will focus on the background, reasons for having the conference, its expected outcome and future prospects.

But first, please allow me to welcome you, on behalf of the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center, to this historic, unprecedented conference and to acknowledge the important contributions of certain organizations and individuals without whom this conference would have not been possible.

1. The Africa Program of the University of Texas at Arlington led by Dr. Jalloh who exerted a huge effort as chairman of the organizing committee along with his excellent secretary, Ms. Lois Lettini.

2. Amoud Foundation represented by Mr. Yussuf Kalib whose dedication and extraordinary support made this conference possible.

3. My thanks are also due to the other members of the organizing committee:

Dr. Habte Woldu,
Dr. Dereje Agonafer,
Mrs. Safia Ismail
Mr. Betru Gebre-Egziabher
Mr. Semere Habtermariam
Ms. Martha Melaku
Mr. Solomon Haile

4. May I also express, on behalf of the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center, our gratitude to Dr. Mulu Ketsela, Alternate Executive Director and, through her, to the World Bank for her support to this civic initiative and hope that our mutual collaboration will continue.

5. I would like further to express my appreciation and thanks to all the speakers at this conference. As per the conference program, the six workshops will conduct concurrent sessions the whole day, and night if necessary, tomorrow (Saturday) to discuss the issues and to formulate the respective development strategies for the Horn of Africa. On Sunday, we are scheduled to have our second plenary session at which each chairperson will present his/her proposed development strategy for the Horn of Africa. This will be followed by a general discussion after which the chairpersons will have a joint meeting to formulate the final resolution which will be presented to the third and final plenary session.

BACKGROUND

The idea of organizing a conference on a development strategy for the HOA was initiated at the international conference on prospects of a confederation in the Horn of Africa held in Tampa, Florida in November 2002. The outcome of that conference is contained in a document entitled the Tampa Declaration and can be seen in the website: www.hafrica.com.

Shortly thereafter, the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center was established in Tampa, Florida. The Center's vision is to achieve a sub-region where genuine democracy, peace and stability will prevail and where the evils of poverty and deadly diseases will have been eliminated.

The Center's main mission is to initiate research and studies on HOA issues and to generate practical ideas and strategies and action plans for implementation by the concerned countries with the support of regional, international and civic organizations as well as bilateral assistance. For more information, please visit the Center's website: www.hafrica.com.

The members of the Center's Board include Mr. Yussuf Kalib, Mr. Semere Habtemariam, Mr Harun Musa and myself.

The Center's first major outcome is this conference which was organized, as stated earlier, in collaboration with UTA's Africa Program and the Amoud Foundation.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE HORN OF AFRICA

This historic and unprecedented conference is to focus on all the major socio-economic aspects needed for the formulation of a development strategy, namely, macro-economic development and globalization; agricultural and rural development; infrastructure and water; education, science and technology; public health; as well as women and social development. Scholars from 13 universities, 8 institutions, and 3 UN organizations including the World Bank are meeting here in Dallas for the purpose of formulating the development strategy which will be the first of its kind in the history of the Horn of Africa Region.

It should be noted that the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center will collaborate with interested partners such as COMESA and, hopefully the World Bank and the UN, in promoting the outcome of this conference as well as in conducting further detailed studies for the implementation of the Development Strategy.

REASONS FOR HAVING THE CONFERENCE

There was an international hue and cry when the Tsunamis hit Indonesia recently. However, not much is said and done about persistent disasters of Tsunami proportions that afflict the Horn of Africa resulting in the perennial death of hundreds of thousands including women and children. The main ones are the following:

Tsunami #1: Poverty

The HOA is among the very poorest regions in the world. The GNP per capita income is about \$100.00 per annum. The policy of land ownership by the state has relegated 85% of Ethiopia's population which depends on agriculture, to a status of serfs. According to the UN Development Index: out of 177 countries:

Djibouti	150 th
Eritrea	161 st
Ethiopia	170 th
Somalia	unknown

Tsunami #2: Problems of Health and Environmental Degradation

The people of the HOA suffer from the blight of diseases such as malaria, TB, and HIV/Aids from which hundreds of thousands die every year. The devastation of the environment is progressing at an alarming rate. Life expectancy in the Horn of Africa is 40 years.

Tsunami #3: Mutually Antagonistic Leadership

The current leadership in the HOA countries is incapable of initiating an integrated development strategy. They are not even on talking terms let alone initiating any regional development.

Governance in the HOA is characterized by lack of democracy and abuse of human rights. A heavy cloud is looming over the HOA with signs of impending conflagration: a Jihad proclaimed by Somali militants, and the worsening tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Tsunami #4: Disunity

Thanks to the British, French and Italian colonial legacy, the HOA is torn into four desperately poor countries.

There were times when most of the HOA was a united entity whether known as Punt or Ethiopia. In the words of Donald Levine: “In the latter part of the 3rd century Mani wrote that Axum (Ethiopia) ranked among the great powers of the world.” For at least half of the First millennium, the powers that be in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa were Byzantium, Persia, and Ethiopia. For more details, please refer to my paper entitled: “Horn of Africa: From Glory to Misery, and Hope?”.

Let me quote a poem by the famous Poet-Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin entitled: “Yes, We betrayed our ancestors”:

“When our fathers gave us the cradle of the First World,
At the beginning there was KA, the first God of Earth and Sky,
On this birth land of our first ancestors.
They raised for us the sacred shrine
On the glowing head piece of the Horn of Africa,
Where the sun first touched the body of the Earth.
But, alas, now, look at us!
The generation who has forgotten how to unite.
The rotten link that has lost the scale of self-respect.
Look at us!”

Tsunami #5: An Indifferent International Community

The international community is pursuing a policy of containment in the HOA and does very little for the region's socio-economic development for mutual benefit.

There are three foreign armies located in the HOA: two belonging to USA and France are there to protect others from the HOA including the so-called "international terrorism". The UN force is simply an observer.

In his book entitled: "Arms for the Horn", Jeffrey A. Lefebvre states that the HOA has no strategic value to USA except "its location across the Red Sea from Saudi Arabia". According to him, USA interests in the HOA are for:

- (1) Protecting the sea lines of communication or oil lanes;
 - (2) "Supporting Egypt's efforts to protect its southern flank and the Nile waters";
- and
- (3) Blunting destabilization activities aimed at Saudi Arabia and other pro-western states.

In his book "The Horn of Africa – Conflict and Poverty", Mesfin Woldemariam states:

"For the US, none of the countries of the Horn have any significance outside its material interests on the Arabian Peninsula, and the prosperity and military strength of Israel."

WHY SHOULD THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY BE INTERESTED IN THE HOA?

The international community should be interested in the HOA for the following mutual benefits:

- (1) With its current population of nearly 100 million, increasing to 145 million by 2025, the HOA has a tremendous trade potential;
- (2) The HOA has substantial water, energy, agricultural, and mineral resources. 86% of the water flowing to Egypt originates in Ethiopia;

- (3) The HOA possesses a significant cultural, historic and environmental tourism potential;
- (4) The HOA is situated at a sensitive strategic location with ports on the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean;
- (5) The HOA plays a highly significant role in international affairs as it hosts three important organizations: the African Union headquarters (AU), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the Inter-Governmental Agency for African Development (IGAAD);
- (6) Countries surrounding the Red Sea could form a Cooperative Council which could bring together an area which has a population of 200 million, increasing to 400 million in 20 years. These countries have mutually complimentary resources: agricultural, labour and water resources on the Horn of Africa side and investment and oil on the side of the Arab Peninsula. Such a Council could contribute immensely to international peace and development.

FOCUS ON POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Before I conclude, let me address two points that are raised regarding this conference and the previous one held at Tampa:

1. Those whose perspective of history spans only a century or so give scant regard to earlier times when the Horn of Africa was a united entity. I obviously disagree. We ignore history at our own peril. As indicated already, the Horn of Africa was prosperous and strong when it was united and weak as well as poor when, as at present, it is divided.
2. With the exception of few far-sighted scholars such as Dr. Sisay Assefa of West Michigan University, current wisdom among Horn of Africa activists holds that politics should be the sole focus of attention. While the struggle for democracy and human rights should be supported, ignoring socio-economic development needs is, in my opinion, a folly of gigantic proportions. In Clinton's campaign words: "It is the economy, stupid!".

CONCLUSION

1. An integrated development strategy is essential for the Horn of Africa as no such instrument has ever been devised so far. Because of leadership problems in the region, such a strategy can only be formulated through civic initiatives such as ours.
2. An appropriately formulated development strategy would facilitate a meaningful response by the international community to the desperate plight of instability, poverty and disease afflicting the Horn of Africa region.
3. In order to promote an accelerated development in the region, it is essential for the international community to encourage the governments and people of the region to strive for unity, democracy and respect for human rights.
4. It is also essential for the international community to reassess its strategy and role in the Horn of Africa so that it will, for its own interests, contribute to the region's accelerated economic development.
5. For all the above reasons, the conference is extremely beneficial for the people of the Horn of Africa and humanity at large. The Center is confident that all the scholars gathered here today will contribute effectively to the formulation of an appropriate development strategy for the Horn of Africa. It is anticipated that the chair of each conference workshop will come up with a concise identification of the issues and strategies aimed at enabling the 90 million people of the Horn of Africa to finally defeat the grinding poverty and associated diseases from which they have been suffering for so long.

In the words of Senator Barak Obama, our effort is an expression of “An Audacity for Hope”.

THANK YOU.

