

ADDRESS TO THE HAPDC COMMUNITY MEETING
ON JUNE 3, 2007 AT THE RADISSON HOTEL, DALLAS

By Kidane Alemayehu

1. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please let us rise for a one-minute silent prayer for the people in Southern Somalia and the Horn of Africa who are suffering from conflict, poverty, lack of democracy and human rights, and pandemic diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS.

On behalf of the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center, I wish to express our appreciation and thanks:

(1) To all of you for having taken time from your busy schedule to attend this community meeting;

(2) Our special appreciation goes to Ambassador Shinn and Dr. Ali Bahar for being with us today to address important issues in our region;

(3) It is also my personal pleasure to recognize members of our Center's leadership without whose strenuous effort this meeting would not have been possible. Mr. Yussuf Kalib, Vice President; Mr. Semere Habtemariam, Secretary; Mr. Betru Gebregziabher, Treasurer; Mr. Harun Musa, Information Officer, and Mr. Ali Dahir Had.

2. HORN OF AFRICA PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER
(HAPDC)

2.1 HAPDC is an outcome of the international conference on Prospects of a Horn of Africa Confederation which was held in Tampa, Florida during November 14 and 15, 2002. That conference's resolution can be seen by visiting our website: www.hafrica.com and clicking on "Tampa Declaration". The Tampa conference was attended by 300 participants and presenters from several renowned

universities such as Michigan State and UCLA; UN organizations such as the UNDP, WHO, and FAO; regional organizations such as COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa); national government entities such as the USA President's Advisory Council for HIV/AIDS as well as several Horn of Africa experts. The conference was also graced by renowned individuals including H.E. President Kenneth Kaunda former President of Zambia, Mr. Zachary Teich, Deputy Director, Office of Eastern African Affairs in the State Department, and the now late Poet Laureate Tsegaye Gabremedhin who contributed a poem entitled: "Yes, we betrayed our ancestors" and I quote a small part as it remains relevant to the current situation in the Horn of Africa:

"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!"

In summary, the conference concluded that a confederation among the Horn of African countries was a noble idea and listed the essential preconditions for its eventual achievement. It also recommended that an institutional capacity be established to continue with the struggle for peace and development.

2.2 The Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center was, therefore, first established in 2003 as per Florida laws and, last year, reestablished as per Texas laws with its headquarters in Dallas. The Center plans to establish branch offices in each of the Horn of African countries. As per its statutes, the Center "is a non-profit making civic organization dedicated to the vision of attaining a durable peace and stability along with an accelerated socio-economic development in the sub-region". Its "mission is to initiate and facilitate informed discussions, research and studies on all vital issues that have relevance to the organization's vision including economic, trade, social, political, environmental, etc. aspects of importance to the sub-region in order to generate effective and practical ideas as well as strategies

and action plans that can be implemented by the respective governments, concerned regional and international organizations, and civic bodies”.

2.3 Although the Center is, by all accounts, a youthful entity, I dare say that it has registered a commendable achievement as follows:

2.3.1 Formation of the group of individuals I introduced earlier, who hail from Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia dedicated to the vision and achievement of peace and development in the Horn of Africa;

2.3.2 A successful international conference on a development strategy for the Horn of Africa organized in collaboration with the Africa Program of the University of Texas at Arlington and the Amoud Foundation and held in Dallas during October 20-22, 2006. Here, I would like to express, on behalf of the Center, our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Jalloh, Director of the Africa Program at the University of Texas as well as to Mr. Mohamoud Egal, Chairman of the Board and co-founding President of the Amoud Foundation and to the many other organizations and individuals who supported that conference.

Keynote speakers and presenters at the conference came from several universities such as Princeton, Howard, and West Michigan; UN organizations i.e. FAO and UNICEF; The World Bank; USAID; the USA National Science Foundation; the Hurley Medical Center, and other institutions.

The conference focused on six major areas of socio-economic development:

- (a) Macro-economic development;
- (b) Agricultural and rural development;
- (c) Infrastructural and water development;
- (d) Education, science, and technology;
- (e) Health care;
- (f) Women and social development.

The conference’s main output, namely, the development strategy document is being edited by UTA’s Africa Program and will be made available to the public after its review by COMESA and the World Bank.

2.3.3 A community meeting was undertaken by the Center in August, 2006 with Ambassador Nagy as the keynote speaker.

2.3.4 The Center issued an international appeal regarding Somalia in December, 2006 and I will provide some details about its contents when I will present the Center's position regarding the conflict in Southern Somalia.

2.3.5 In collaboration with the Dallas Peace Center which has over 3000 members, a letter dated February 20, 2007 was sent to Senator Russ Feingold, chairman of the Foreign Relations Sub-committee on Africa calling on USA support for, among other things, democracy and development in the Horn of Africa. As regards Somalia, our joint letter recommended:

- (a) The immediate withdrawal of Ethiopian forces and replacement by a peace keeping force from neutral nations; (in compliance with the UN Security Council resolution No: 1725 of 2006 which forbade neighboring countries to Somalia from participating in peace keeping operations);
- (b) The immediate start of all-party talks for peace and reconciliation;
- (c) The immediate injection of adequate resources for the strengthening of peace and economic development;
- (d) The appointment of a US special envoy for the Horn of Africa to develop and implement a coherent US policy in the region.

2.3.6 Today's community meeting which required careful planning, publicity, and resources.

2.3.7 To my mind, the Center's most significant achievement so far is the fact that we have managed repeatedly to get people from all the countries in the Horn of Africa under one roof to conduct a civil and serious discussion about our region. This, above all, symbolizes our common history, culture, and destiny. For this fact alone, you deserve our sincere appreciation and congratulations!

3. CENTER'S FUTURE PROGRAM

The Center's program includes two additional community meetings: one to be held in December '07 on health issues, and a second one in April '08 on trade and investment in the Horn of Africa as well as an international conference to be held during October/November '08 on conflict resolution in the Horn of Africa. Community meetings and conferences will be held in future years on major issues of interest to the Horn of Africa. The Center will also disseminate information on the various findings and recommendations.

4. The Center's Position Regarding the Conflict in Southern Somalia.

The Center's position was made clear in the international appeal it issued on December 4, 2006 prior to Ethiopia's incursion into Somalia in support of the Transitional Federal Government. You will be able to see the details of the appeal on our website: www.hafrica.com. The appeal was directed to the UN, the European Union, the African Union, the Arab League, the USA government, the governments of the countries in the Horn of Africa, and IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority on African Development). The appeal called on the international community to, among other things, "respect and facilitate the basic human rights of the Somali people to express their will, in a fully democratic framework", to deploy a peace mission from neutral countries, and to tackle the real enemy in the Horn of Africa, namely, poverty. The appeal also called on the opposing Somali parties in the conflict to arrange a cease-fire and engage in meaningful negotiations.

Unfortunately, precipitate actions were taken which have resulted in the current untenable situation whereby Ethiopia is stuck in Somalia despite its declared intention to withdraw in a few weeks according to one of the earlier statements by the Prime Minister. Ironically, according to recent reports, both the African Union and the USA government are calling on Ethiopia not to withdraw from Somalia before the full deployment of the IGAD peace keeping force which, when seen in the context of what happened in the Darfur situation, does not seem likely to materialize soon.

Our Center is of the view that the international community should expedite the deployment of neutral forces under the AU and IGAD

auspices in order to bring about a speedy withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces as well as the urgently needed stability and peace in Southern Somalia leading to a democratic governance and a sustainable economic development. The Center is also cognizant of the fact that in the final analysis, the most important factor for the successful achievement of peace in Somalia is the ability of the Somalis themselves to conduct a serious negotiation that would end in a real reconciliation.

5. Prospects for Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa

Mainly due to poor leadership and lack of democracy, the Horn of Africa is notorious for its extreme poverty and instability. By all objective criteria such as the human development index, the countries in the Horn of Africa are virtually at the bottom of the list of countries throughout the world.

Nevertheless, the region does possess a tremendous potential for development including:

- (1) Its rich agricultural and water resources; (86% of the water that cascades to Egypt originates in Ethiopia.)
- (2) Its total population which will reach 100 million in a couple of years. Current population: Ethiopia 80 million; Somalia: 10 million (comprising 3 million each in Somalia's north-western and eastern parts: the so-called Somaliland and Puntland territories, and 4 million in Southern Somalia); Eritrea: 5 million; and Djibouti: nearly 1 million; Total: 96 million;
- (3) Its ports on the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean;
- (4) Its geo-political importance situated as it is in a sensitive area and being the headquarters of important regional and international organizations: the African Union, the Economic Commission for Africa, and IGAD;
- (5) Its rich eco-tourism potential with its unique environmental assets and historic landmarks.

Therefore, with the advent of democracy and good governance, the region could, within a reasonable time, be self-reliant as well as be of benefit to the international community . With a less divisive leadership, the four

countries could form a confederation leading, eventually, to an integration into a single state. It is also possible to consider the formation of a Red Sea Cooperative Council which could bring together the countries around the Sea, an area having a population of 200 million now (400 million in about 20 years) to work for the common good using their complementary resources: human, agricultural, and water resources from the African side and oil and investment resources on the Arab side.

6. Role of the International Community

The grinding poverty and the endemic diseases from which the people in the Horn of Africa continue to suffer gives a clear indication as to the extent to which the international community gives scant regard to the needs of the region. On the other hand, there are three foreign armies in the region costing hundreds of millions of US dollars annually.

One army belongs to the UN to prevent a repeat of the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998 in which 100,000 people perished.

The other two armies based in Djibouti and eastern Ethiopia belong to France and USA. The question arises as to who or what these two armies are there to protect. In his book entitled: “Arms for the Horn” (p. 270) Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, states that USA interests in the Horn of Africa are:

- a. To protect the sea lines of communication or oil lanes;
- b. To support “Egypt’s efforts to protect its southern flank and the Nile waters; and
- c. To blunt destabilization activities aimed at Saudi Arabia and other pro-western states”.

In his book entitled: “The Horn of Africa – Conflict and Poverty”, (p. 84) Mesfin Woldemariam states: “For the United States, none of the countries in the Horn have any significance outside its material interests on the Arabian Peninsula, and the prosperity and military strength of Israel.” If Lefebvre and Mesfin were to write today, I imagine that they would add USA interests in the fight against “international terrorism”.

It would be interesting to know as to whether USA policy towards the Horn of Africa is predicated on supporting the region’s struggle for democracy and rule of law as well as the achievement of a sustainable development.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 It is essential that as a matter of urgency, the international community, especially USA, provide the necessary resources to enable the AU/IGAD to deploy the required peace force from neutral countries so that the Ethiopian army will withdraw from Somalia promptly and so that stability and peace will prevail in southern Somalia.
- 7.2 Peace and development in the Horn of Africa would be a realistic possibility only if the people in the region would be able to bring to the fore leaders who are capable of fostering democracy, stability and an integrated economic development. To paraphrase one of Dr. Ali Bahar's statements: what people in the Horn of Africa need is to save themselves from themselves. It is interesting to note here that, although not recognized by any country because of the importance of maintaining Somalia's sovereignty, Somalia's north-western part, calling itself Somaliland has shown an exemplary performance in democracy as its leader graciously accepted the loss of his parliamentary majority unlike most African leaders who normally rig elections to hang on to power by any means possible.
- 7.3 It is high time for the international community to shift its focus from its own short-term interests to long-term mutual benefits that could accrue from a more vigorous support for democracy and an integrated development in the Horn of Africa.
- 7.4 I do realize that the situations in Iraq and Somalia are different. Nevertheless, if there were any aspect of note from the tragic Iraqi experience, it is that the so-called insurgency has killed over 600,000 Iraqis and about 3,400 Americans so far as well as displaced over a million Iraqis and perpetuated the presence of foreign forces.
- 7.5 Ethiopia and Somalia and, for that matter, Ethiopia and Eritrea are neighbours and their people are brothers and sisters who share a common history, culture, and destiny. They gain nothing from any conflict which would only worsen their desperate poverty and instability. Conflicts in the Horn of Africa only benefit the internal and external enemies of the

region for their latent motives including corruption, the unfettered flow of water, and the promotion of their extremist religious and divisive ethnic/clan based ideologies.

7.6 The situation in southern Somalia would be resolved only if Somalis apply their fullest capacity and wisdom to achieve the much needed reconciliation and peace among themselves as well as with their neighbours.

MAY THE ALMIGHTY BRING PEACE, UNITY, AND DEVELOPMENT TO SOMALIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA.

THANK YOU.