

**MINISTERIAL PLEDGING CONFERENCE ON SOMALI REFUGEES –
BRUSSELS -- 10/21/2015**
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Excellencies, Colleagues, and other distinguished guests –

First, a word of sincere thanks to UNHCR and its tripartite partners, the Governments of Kenya and Somalia, for all of their work in outlining the current scope of the Somali refugee situation and pointing to new measures that the international community can take to continue seeking durable solutions. I would like to thank the hosts of this event, High Commissioner Antonio Guterres and EU High Representative Federica Mogherini. Thank you to everyone here today. Your participation is a show of dedication to achieving solutions for one of the most protracted refugee populations in the world and protecting some of the world's most vulnerable people. We cannot overestimate today's challenges as unprecedented numbers of children, women, and men globally continue to seek refuge from persecution and conflict.

The United States government is pleased to be here today. This is an exceptionally important gathering as we discuss the plight of so many refugees and the aspirations they hold for one day returning to their homelands in safety and dignity. The United States has been consistently engaged for over 25 years now with refugees from Somalia and will continue to be. This gathering focuses on a number of principles that have been, and will be, key in the U.S. diplomatic and operational approach to refugees – notably, multilateral partnerships and protection for the vulnerable.

I am personally pleased to be here because I have also been engaged for that long. Long enough to have been in Ethiopia visiting Somali refugees from the troubles of the 1980s when the Siad Barre regime began to collapse and still more refugees were flooding across the border before our very eyes. I have also been privileged to have seen over time the successful voluntary return of millions of refugees, including hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees -- when conditions are right. My colleagues and I in the U.S. government's refugee bureau do not lose hope, even if we sometimes lose patience. We have not forgotten the Somali refugees or their generous hosts. Hosting refugees can be challenging, but it is vital to our common efforts to save lives and we are in this together. We know that, in time, refugees will be able to go home. We know that we in the international community have an important role to play in helping make that happen.

We pledge today that the United States will continue to be robustly engaged, both in supporting protection and assistance for refugees across the greater Horn, and in supporting voluntary return and reintegration in a stable Somalia. We offer our record to date as evidence that we are as good as our word. In our fiscal year 2015, which just ended at the end of September, the U.S. government contributed more than \$430 million in humanitarian assistance for Somalia as well as to support refugee populations in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Yemen. This total includes a special contribution of \$1 million to the Kenya-UNHCR Security Partnership Program.

Three years ago, we sponsored a series of three colloquia on Somali refugees in the greater Horn that engaged the countries of the region and a number of external donors. One of the principal conclusions of the colloquia was that there should be a focus on education and livelihood activities for the refugees – education linked to

livelihoods linked to self-reliance and linked to eventual return to Somalia. A share of our assistance, in Kenya in particular, has been in those endeavors. And I was pleased to see that same emphasis reflected in the portfolio of projects presented here. Education is critical to ensuring that we have no lost generation – a phrase that you have heard used in the context of the Syria crisis.

The United States is often cited as the largest single international donor contributing to humanitarian response and assistance worldwide and we are proud of that. At the same time, we remind ourselves that the true leading donors are the communities hosting refugees, communities that share their land and natural resources such as water and even firewood with the refugees – as our distinguished colleague from Kenya mentioned earlier.

The action plan that we have before us takes fully into account the need to address some of the needs of those who are hosting refugees and those who make up the community to which refugees and IDPs return. The action plan also seeks to marry development and humanitarian assistance. We have to be honest and say that the international community has struggled to adequately link our humanitarian and development efforts, this has been true in my government and I suspect for many others here as well. It has been true in the international architecture that works rather well when it comes to emergencies, and much less well when it comes to protracted situations.

I am pleased to see a renewed push to bridge the relief and development gap in this region. We welcome, for example, the Solutions Alliance – mentioned by our Danish colleague -- as a forum to bring relevant stakeholders together, as well as the World Bank and UNHCR's joint effort to address protracted displacement in

the Horn of Africa using this model. Let us all see if we cannot get it right this time, turning the words from the Action Plan “to ensure alignment of the Action Plan with (i) the Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan, and (ii) the Peace Building and State Building Goals (PSGs) of the New Deal Compact” into a reality. The United States stands ready to assist.

Repatriation in safety and dignity is a goal we all share. **Voluntary** repatriation. Whenever we bring new staff into our bureau, we drum it into them that the word “repatriation” should never be uttered without the companion word “voluntary!” The pilot voluntary repatriation program from Kenya has been encouraging because the returns, if not huge, have been relatively steady over this past year. We welcome the upcoming voluntary return pilot from Ethiopia.

Recently I met with a number of Somali-American students from the University of Minnesota – many Somali refugees have resettled in Minnesota -- who have moved to Mogadishu, at least part time, to work with, and in some cases set up, non-governmental organizations that could help some of the most vulnerable in their ancestral country. They described a Mogadishu that is rarely covered in the news – a vibrant, “happening” place. Of course they did not diminish the challenges. But it is very heartening to see things through the eyes of enthusiastic young people.

The recent establishment of the U.S. Mission to Somalia– and I am joined here by our Charge, Ambassador Kaeuper -- is a mark of our confidence that a corner has indeed been turned in Somalia.

We know that all is not well yet in Somalia. The humanitarian situation remains of significant concern, including the places from which many refugee families have fled, or from which their families originally hail – given that several generations have now been born in exile – that are not yet safe or lack even the bare minimum of social services and infrastructure. The Somali government needs to step up its efforts. The AMISOM offensive to rout al-Shabaab has also displaced people inside Somalia as may have been expected. Many also worry that El Niño will cause both drought and floods in Somalia – and its neighbors. We believe that large-scale returns before conditions are appropriate could threaten Somalia’s fragile stability, precipitate a new humanitarian crisis, and even undermine regional security. But voluntary returns can and should continue.

In addition to voluntary repatriation, solutions include resettlement. Of the over 22,000 African refugees who were resettled in the United States this last fiscal year, 8,858 were Somali. As part of the U.S. effort to increase resettlement numbers globally, we will be bolstering resettlement programs in Africa. Over the last four years, we have doubled the number of African refugees we resettle. We plan to increase that number still further.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the security concerns that many equate with refugees. We do not ignore the possibility that some refugees, just like any other person, could be caught up in violent extremism. But let me be clear that we have seen no evidence whatsoever that refugees are any more susceptible to violent extremism than any other people. We all need to protect innocent people from harm caused by terrorists. We need to do all that we can to make sure that refugees are not caught up in violent extremism. And we need to ensure that refugee camps are not exploited by terrorists. We are glad to see that UNHCR has

included in the action plan a straightforward recognition of this need and has proposed security measures.

Finally, if the terrible Syria refugee crisis has anything positive about it, it is that many in the world are now much more aware than they once were about the numerous and varied refugee situations around the world. And more importantly, the challenges that UNHCR and others such as WFP face in marshaling sufficient resources to assist. We need to capitalize on that new awareness, to make our case to legislatures and taxpayers everywhere that we need still greater engagement and more resources to address this and similar refugee situations.

Thank you.