

Opening Remarks of Chairman Donald M. Payne  
Hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health  
***Somalia: Prospects for Lasting Peace and a Unified Response to Extremism and  
Terrorism***

Thursday, June 25, 2009  
2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Let me first welcome you all to this important and timely hearing on Somalia. Let me also express my deep appreciation to the witnesses, many of whom came a long distance to be part of this hearing.

The title of today's hearing, **Somalia: Prospects for Lasting Peace and a Unified Response to Extremism and Terrorism**, says a great deal about the challenges and the difficulties the people of Somalia face today. The primary objective of this hearing is to hear from Somalis themselves about the fate of their country.

We also have witnesses who, though not Somali, have been engaged full time in efforts to bring a just peace in Somalia. Again, we thank all the distinguished witnesses for their participation today and for their dedication on these issues. We invited representatives from all three regions of Somalia -- the Transitional Federal Government, the Puntland Government, and the Somaliland Government.

Prior to the hearing, I spoke to the president and foreign minister of the TFG, the Puntland president, and the foreign minister of Somaliland. They all accepted and, in fact, the president of Puntland has been in Washington for the past five days. The foreign minister of the TFG was supposed to come but he had to go back to Mogadishu to deal with the ongoing crisis. Today the TFG is represented by the deputy ambassador to the United Nations.

The Somaliland foreign minister accepted our invitation but last week the government requested if the Subcommittee could have a separate panel for the Foreign Minister. The reason: the Somaliland representative did not want to be part of the panel with the President of Puntland and the TFG representative. We informed the Somaliland

government that their request was unacceptable and defeats the main purpose of this hearing. If Somalilanders cannot sit with fellow Somalis to explore ways to bring peace to Somalia at this critical juncture, I wonder what this says about their commitment to all Somalis.

As is now widely known, in April I traveled to Mogadishu to get a firsthand account of conditions in the country. What I saw in Mogadishu then was very encouraging, despite the enormous difficulties many Somalis face everyday. Somali women are still active in trying to help the vulnerable. Human rights advocates, journalists, and humanitarian workers are doing their best in the face of the impossible.

Some concerned friends said why take such a risk and go to places like Mogadishu. I respond with another question: Is my life more important than the children in the streets of Mogadishu? My trip, though marked by the press for the mortar attack, helped bring attention to the conditions on the ground. This so-called attack was an attempt to mar my otherwise very positive and encouraging trip.

It must be clear to all that the crisis we face in Somalia today has devastating implications for the rest of the region. The last defense against this cancer is the TFG and the African Union forces. What we are witnessing is not a liberation struggle or resistance against a brutal regime. The terrorists waging this war have one objective in mind -- to make Somalia the Swat Valley of Africa. With the foreign jihadists next to them, often leading them, these terrorists are brutalizing innocent civilians.

This is why we have called this hearing. Somalis from all three regions must come together to counter this challenge. The international community must also help. The Obama Administration has done a great deal to assist the TFG and also to contain the threat and I am encouraged by this.

The Government of Puntland has sent an estimated 1,000 troops to assist in the fight against the terrorists in south-central Somalia. This is commendable. I hope this hearing leads to greater cooperation between the three regions.

As we gather here today, many Somalis continue to be displaced, maimed, and killed. The dreams and aspiration of millions of Somalis are on hold or crushed. Over a year ago, I visited the Somali refugee camp in Kenya called Dadaab. I met thousands of refugees, some of whom were born in the camps.

When I asked a number of young Somalis what they want badly that they currently don't have, they responded: education. This is the same response I've received to the question when posed in Darfur refugee camps in Chad. Somalis, like people everywhere, want and deserve the opportunity to educate their children and have hope for a better life. We can do more to help towards this. I encourage President Obama and Secretary Clinton to engage further in a positive way in Somalia as we have seen so far.

I will now turn to our Ranking Member, Congressman Smith for his opening statement and will read the bios of the distinguished panelists following Members' opening remarks.