

Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum

“Post Conflict Unrest in Ethiopia/Eritrea”

June 13, 2006

The June CPRF examined the causes and potential solutions to the conflict that persists following the end of the border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Speakers were Mark Schneider, Vice President, International Crisis Group; Samuel Tesfaye, journalist and consultant for the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy and the Ethiopian Life Foundation; Dr. Asgede Hags, Professor at Delaware State University and President of the Organization of Eritrean Americans; and Dr. Terrence Lyons, Associate Professor at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University.

The speakers addressed the need for immediate action from all sides, including the international community, to resolve the situation, but none saw the conflict as too futile to resolve. While questions of accountability were raised throughout the session, the speakers agreed that steps must be taken by both Ethiopia and Eritrea to resolve the conflict. However, all of the speakers agreed that the resolution process would require intense international involvement and a greater level of understanding, flexibility, and compromise of the parties involved.

Mark Schneider moderated the forum, helping to frame the conflict through the 2000 Algiers Agreement. He emphasized the positive steps taken as a result of the agreement, such as the cease-fire, noting that the conflict is not intractable, as others have previously stated. He advocated for a process of de-escalation, demarcation, and dialogue to achieve a lasting and durable peace. Dr. Schneider specifically cited how Ethiopia must begin to fully accept and commit to the provisions of the 2000 Algiers Agreement while Eritrea must allow helicopter flights to recommence in remote areas for non-military purposes such as aid administering and boarder mapping.

Samuel Tesfaye focused on the lack of journalistic freedoms and on the persecution of members of the media in Ethiopia. Tesfaye noted that the limited freedom of the press in Ethiopia often results in imprisonment or exile of journalists. The strict control of the government over all mediums of expression has resulted in a severely biased and oppressive information system. He expressed the difficulty of the reconciliation process and that ultimately it is the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and the President of Eritrea specifically who must begin the peace process and remain committed.

Dr. Hagos commented on the lack of assistance from the international community in resolving the conflict. He noted that U.S. policies aimed at resolving the conflict are skewed more towards Ethiopia preventing the creation of durable or fair provisions. Hagos recommended an intense review and possible overhaul of current U.S. policies relating to Ethiopia/Eritrea. He further expressed that the International Community shouldn't tolerate Ethiopia's actions if it wished to prevent more bloodshed.

Dr. Terrence Lyons addressed how the Ethiopian/Eritrea border conflict is linked to domestic internal conflict within each country. He spoke of the extensive repression in Eritrea since 2001 and how the border demarcation stalemate is feeding internal conflict within the country. Dr. Lyons also warned that while a window of opportunity for peace existed in Ethiopia after the elections in 2005, violence has since ended that opportunity, creating a potentially dangerous situation. In terms of resolving the problem, Lyons feels it is vital that state interest of the problem be directed towards multi-lateral actions as opposed to U.S. ad-hoc committees, which are largely ineffective. Dr. Lyons emphasized that the stability of the Horn of Africa is of concern to everyone and that now is the time to finally demarcate the border and move towards peace. Simple resignation that “we cannot change things so lets move on” will not suffice.