

Statement

By

H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi

**Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
and Current Chairperson of the Assembly of IGAD Heads of
State and Government**

At

**The Pledging Conference for Countries of the Horn of Africa
affected by Drought and Famine**

25 August 2011

Addis Ababa

Your Excellency Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the
Republic of Equatorial Guinea and Current Chairperson of the African Union,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Your Excellency Dr. Jean Ping, Chairperson of the Commission of the African
Union,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to welcome you all to Ethiopia and I hope your
brief stay in Addis Ababa will be productive. I wish to seize this opportunity to
express my appreciation to the Commission of the African Union for taking the
initiative to organize this conference in response to the appalling humanitarian
situation in the Horn of Africa. I would also wish to thank all those who have
contributed in various ways in alleviating the challenges we face in combating
hunger and famine in our region.

The situation is indeed a matter of serious concern not only for countries
of the region but also for the continent as a whole. It is, therefore, fitting for
member States of the African Union to mobilize assistance to their brothers
and sisters in the Horn of Africa who are in dire need of urgent help. On behalf
of the member States of IGAD, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for your
solidarity and support to the drought affected population in our sub-region.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are well aware, for decades now, our region has been prone to recurring and severe drought resulting in widespread famine, ecological degradation and socio-economic difficulties. It is in cognizance of this fact that the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), the precursor of our current organization (the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development), was established in 1986 in order to mitigate the impact of drought and desertification bedeviling our sub-region.

In this context, we have strived to develop a regional disaster preparedness strategy to address the challenges posed by drought and build our disaster risk management capability. Accordingly, we have set up a Climate Predication and Application Centre (ICPAC) which, among others, is tasked with the responsibility of providing timely climate early warning information for mitigating the impact of climate variability. It is worthy of note that this Center had rightly predicted the current severe drought affecting our sub-region.

Mr. Chairperson,

Large areas of our region are facing the consequences of the worst drought for more than sixty years. Millions of people across the region are unable to feed themselves and require emergency assistance. While in most of the affected countries, including Ethiopia, a well developed system of responding to such emergencies exist and as a result food aid is being distributed adequately, that is not the case in Somalia. While many people across the region will need food aid, the most immediate challenge we face is in Somalia. That is where we have famine and that is where people are dying in their thousands and will continue to do so unless we act expeditiously and in a concerted manner.

Our response must, therefore, reflect the specifics of the challenges in each of the affected countries. In those countries that have so far avoided a famine and have effective mechanisms to distribute food aid, the response should focus on ensuring that there is enough food in the pipeline. We had indeed foreseen the current drought situation and it has been quite some time since we made an appeal for urgent humanitarian assistance. While waiting for outside help, we have been distributing food to those in need from our Emergency Food Security Reserve. In this regard, I wish to announce that the Ethiopian government has decided to buy and import 300,000 tons of wheat to replenish the strategic reserve of the country and to ensure that there is adequate food in the pipeline.

Although many of our people had lost their lives due to recurrent drought and famine in the past, this time around we have been able to save the lives of the drought affected population. I am, therefore, pleased to report that at the moment we have managed to contain the humanitarian emergency in our country. This undoubtedly demonstrates the effectiveness of the drought risk management capability that we have developed over the years. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those friends and partners who have generously contributed in food aid. I urge all friends and partners to provide food aid to all those countries in the region who need it.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While the drought covers large areas beyond Somalia, famine is staking not the region as a whole but large parts of Somalia, particularly those areas under the control of the Al-Shabab terrorists. This is so not only because there is inadequate food aid available to Somalia but also and primarily because there is no effective and efficient system for distributing the aid. The lack of peace and stability in many parts of the country and consequently the absence

of governmental institutions have impeded effective response to the drought. The callous disregard for lives of the Al-Shabab terrorists and their calculated sabotage of all efforts to help the needy has forced people to travel for weeks to get aid or die in their homes and on their way to refugee camps.

In addition to the 4.5 million of our people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, we are also hosting more than 136 thousand Somali refugees affected by drought whose numbers are increasing by the day. We are doing everything we can to assist our brothers and sisters from Somalia with the meager resources at our disposal. However, I wish to emphasize that the situation in the refugee camps in Dollo Ado is still dire. Similarly, Kenya is hosting more than 500 thousand Somali refugees. Because of the high number, the situation is much worse in the Dadab refugee camps.

While adequate aid should be provided to the refugees in these camps, this is not enough to save lives. We should be able to provide aid in Somalia, not only in Moqadishu but also other areas that are not under the control of the Al-Shabab terrorists. The IGAD region is ready to contribute to such cross border operation by assisting the TFG and other forces of peace to ensure the necessary environment for such an operation. We seek the support of our partners to provide the resources to launch such a humanitarian operation and expand the zone of stability so that food aid can be provided as close to the homes of the needy as possible. There is no question that the response of the international community to the tragedy has been slow and tardy. But there is still time to save countless lives. We need to act now. We need to act decisively to use all mechanisms to deliver aid to the needy.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is on Somalia that our joint effort should concentrate on. In this regard, our partners should make sure that the aid they have pledged is delivered quickly and that additional pledges are made. The IGAD region is ready to play its role by welcoming refugees as Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya are already doing.

While it is absolutely correct that we should now focus on addressing the current emergency situation, we cannot fail to address the root causes of the problem. In this regard, it is important to highlight the fact that the center of gravity of the food insecurity challenge of the region is shifting from the settled farmer communities to areas of pastoralism.

This is so because on the one hand, agricultural programmes among farmer communities are beginning to deliver results and, on the other hand, there has been limited success in the pastoralist areas. The impact of climate change on the pastoralist areas is more pronounced as can be seen from the exceptionally harsh drought this year. Clearly pastoralism as a way of life is fast becoming unviable and addressing the root causes of the problem has to start from such a realization.

We need to do a lot more in water storage, management and irrigation to provide alternative livelihoods to the pastoralist communities and to adapt to the inevitable impact of climate change. Many promising pilot projects have been implemented across the region including here in Ethiopia. We need to scale up these successful projects and do so very quickly. We ask our development partners to help us achieve our goal by providing the necessary financial and technical support. We also seek the support of everyone to help us overcome the challenge posed by irresponsible organizations in the west, who seek to preserve an unviable life style as part of their hobby and create a significant hurdle to addressing the root causes of the problem. In other words,

we ask our partners to join us in addressing the root causes of our problem or at the very least get out of our way.

I would like to end my remarks by wishing success to this conference.

I thank you