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Fire and Emergency Prevention and Rescue Agency

MOU Signing Remarks

Mission Director Dennis Weller

November 13, 2013

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

It is a pleasure to be here today on behalf of USAID to sign this partnership agreement with the Mayor of Addis Ababa that will help strengthen the city's emergency preparedness and response capabilities.

In 2010, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Government of Ethiopia conducted an assessment of the Ethiopia's capacity for disaster management. Based on the results of that assessment, the U.S. Forest Service program was implemented with the long-term goal to strengthen capacity for disaster risk management within the Government of Ethiopia. This was done by integrating relevant components of the U.S. National Incident Management System (NIMS) into the Ethiopian disaster management system.

The NIMS objectives include reducing costs, avoiding redundancies, enabling a more rapid response, providing an all-hazards platform, and providing a common terminology and training to emergency responders. Since its implementation, NIMS has built local capacity and strengthened the ability of the Government of Ethiopia and its partners to respond to disasters in numerous ways.

The NIMS program helped the Government of Ethiopia implement the Incident Command System, which is globally recognized as a best practice for emergency response. It provides

organizational structure and processes at the field level to help regional and local governments more rapidly and effectively respond to disasters.

This year, the Government of Ethiopia established five field incident command posts, staffed by GOE employees and NGO and UN representatives, to respond to drought, flooding and conflict-related displacement.

The NIMS program has also made successful outreach efforts this year, conducting consultations with international UN Agencies and NGOs to see how to better integrate them into the government's NIMS, and establishing linkages with the World Bank and Bahr Dar University to increase learning opportunities for students and government officials.

Also this year, emergency coordination centers were established in Addis Ababa and in Oromia Region to facilitate coordination and communication. The Oromia center has already been used to coordinate multi-sector assessments among government and non-governmental responders during a flooding incident.

Despite these accomplishments, the outlook for natural disasters does not give us any reason to be optimistic. Over the past 30 years, the cost of weather-related disasters has increased due primarily to the rising cost and density of infrastructure and development in the path of such disasters.

Disasters, like the typhoon that just occurred in the Philippines, are unpredictable, with an estimated 2,500 people dead in one city alone and more than 600,000 people displaced.

Nobody in this room wishes that kind of emergency for Addis Ababa, or for any city. That is why it is critical that cities have adequate plans in place in the unlikely event that such an emergency strikes.

It is for this reason that we are signing this partnership agreement today to expand our cooperation with the Government of Ethiopia by establishing the Urban Emergency Preparedness and Response program in partnership with the City of Addis Ababa's Fire and Emergency Prevention and Rescue Agency, or FEPR.

Through this partnership, we want to build the capacity to enhance the disaster management systems of Addis Ababa by integrating relevant components of the NIMS into the city disaster management system.

In addition to providing training on NIMS, we will work with the City of Addis Ababa to develop city-wide emergency operation plans, establish disaster management teams, develop standard operating procedures for resource management, develop a more integrated communication system, and conduct simulation exercises.

It is the duty of all of us in the humanitarian arena to ensure there is effective and efficient coordination of humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of disasters, as well as in the preparedness field. Things are not perfect, and there are always examples which can help us assess the mistakes and improve our service delivery.

Much more can be done, and we must continue building the institutional framework within which coordination takes place, and developing the necessary legal base for action. But our focus remains on two main issues: building local capacity and helping the victims of disasters, who are entitled to receive adequate and immediate support and assistance, and be assisted in building their disaster resilience.

For disaster response coordination to work, we must start looking at helping the victims in a more structured way and improve a range of elements of emergency response. We must also, as a matter of the greatest priority, look for ways to prepare more effectively for disasters.

We will continue working on helping the Government of Ethiopia to improve their country disaster strategies and coordination mechanisms, and we hope that together with all the stakeholders we can achieve a reduction in fatalities and better prepared communities. It is my hope that we will all be prepared for the next emergency.

Thank you.