

World Vision/IRCE Interfaith Roundtable
Remarks by U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Patricia Haslach
March 19, 2015
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
(As delivered)

Indemen aderachu and good morning! I want to thank State Minister Dr. Kebede for being here today. Also my friend and colleague Mark Brinkmoeller from USAID's office of community and faith-based initiatives, and of course, the members of the IRCE, Pastor Zerihun and the other members, also the distinguished guests. I was happy to come around the room and meet a number of you.

The thing I like best about this event is you know, sometimes when you are sitting around and having a discussion with someone, people approach you with good ideas. And Margaret and I were traveling together about two months ago with the minister of labor in the southern part of Ethiopia, and we were looking at programs that were trying to prevent the trafficking of young children. And Margaret just happened to mention to me the initiative, the book, the launch of the book, and then of course, the plans to follow it up with a roundtable. So of course, we were enthusiastic about the whole proposal. We think it's a fantastic concept. I was very happy to be able to participate in the book launch and to meet all of the faith-based leaders that were really making a difference on the ground, in their communities, working with the health workers there.

So it's really a distinct honor to be here with you and with many of Ethiopia's key religious leaders this morning for what we're going to be calling, the Interfaith Roundtable for Action on Maternal/Child Health and Nutrition. This is an important follow-up to World Vision's book launch last month.

Again, I want to thank Margaret Schuler, the country director for World Vision in Ethiopia, and the Interreligious Council of Ethiopia, for inviting me to participate and to speak on behalf of the U.S. Government.

Let me begin by assuring this esteemed audience that ending preventable child and maternal death by 2035 is one of the U.S. Government's top priorities.

To this end, we continue to support a collaborative relationship with our Government of Ethiopia partners, as well as engagement with Ethiopian faith leaders and faith communities.

With our Government of Ethiopia colleagues, I applaud the success in developing a roadmap for accelerating improvement of maternal and newborn health that started back in 2011. This roadmap is accelerating the reduction of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality toward the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals related to maternal and newborn health in Ethiopia.

And the Government of Ethiopia will be hosting, actually in July, a conference that will look at the post-2015 MDG goals and financing of those goals. So as you can see, the government is very very involved here in trying to achieve these goals related to newborn health, maternal health, and nutrition.

USAID's Integrated Family Health Program, implemented by Pathfinder International Ethiopia, has involved religious leaders in providing an integrated package of family planning and reproductive health, maternal newborn and child health interventions, particularly in rural and underserved populations of Ethiopia. This excellent work included partnership with the Ethiopia Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, and Evangelical denominations such as Mekane Yesus and Kale Hiwot.

Real progress has been made and Ethiopia deserves praise for meeting its MDG 4 target, and that is reducing child deaths from 204 per 1000 in 1990 to 68 per 1000 in 2012 and recent data shows a 2/3 reduction in maternal mortality. This is still a goal that we're working toward, but still, a 2/3 reduction in maternal mortality is an impressive achievement.

I would also like to briefly highlight what the U.S. Government is doing to end preventable child and maternal death:

- USAID's support to end preventable child and maternal death are fully aligned with the government program from the federal level down through the regional health bureaus. Since 2012, the bulk of resources have focused at the community and health center level with the remaining funds supporting health systems strengthening activities aimed at reducing child and maternal mortality.
- Since this time, USAID's mission in Ethiopia received an increase of nearly 16 million U.S. dollars to improve child health system strengthening at the community level, and for the prevention of neonatal sepsis. This helps ensure that Ethiopian mothers and children have access to and receive quality health care they need, when they need it and where they need it. And it's most important at the community level.
- The nutrition project, ENGINE, focuses 100 percent of its nutrition funds on the first 1,000 days—from pregnancy to the child reaching two years of age.
- We continue to seek new and innovative opportunities to use U.S. Government resources as well as other donor funds to further capitalize on our joint successes.

Friends, much progress has been made to date, but there is more work to be done. We are gathered here today because we recognize that this work will require our collective efforts including continued action from Ethiopian faith leaders.

As we learned from the faith-based book launch in February, linking faith leaders with local level development interventions is a powerful means for positive behavior change in communities and yet, is not a fully used opportunity.

Today is an occasion to take the step toward strategic engagement of faith leaders and their respective communities in this important effort to have a sustainable impact on maternal and child health and nutrition in this country.

Governments can't do this by themselves. Businesses can't do this alone. Faith communities and charitable efforts alone are not enough.

But together, we can make great progress—thanks to the leadership of so many of you in this room.

Improving maternal and child health and nutrition not only saves mothers, but entire communities. I wish you all a very productive day of discussing and deciding how best to catalyze your collective leadership to move this agenda forward for the betterment of Ethiopia.

Thank you.