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**National Blood Service Center Groundbreaking
Remarks by USAID Mission Director Dennis Weller
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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(as prepared for delivery)**

Good morning and welcome everyone. Your excellencies Minister Kesetebirhan, state ministers Amir and Kebede, Dr. Habtemariam, assembled guests...it is a pleasure to join you today to break ground for the construction of the Ethiopian National Blood Transfusion Service Center.

Though just a plot of grass and a parking lot now, this area behind me will soon serve as the nucleus for the recently-established National Blood Transfusion Service. I know it is hard to imagine now, but a 5,300 square meter building, funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief—will rise from this spot.

The new center will provide the Ministry of Health with the capacity to receive donations, screen and process blood products, and distribute life-saving products, which will serve approximately 26 million Ethiopians.

The capacity of this facility will enable the ministry to meet more than 25 percent of the overall World Health Organization recommended blood collection goals for Ethiopia each year.

This facility will also serve as the administrative headquarters of the National Blood Transfusion Service. It will provide a permanent home for offices, training, meetings, document storage, and more.

But beyond just meeting the requirements of today—this building has been designed so that it can also meet the needs of tomorrow. The design and layout of this facility will provide the flexibility and space for the National Blood Transfusion Service to address future needs which arise.

One of the primary reasons for strengthening and expanding blood transfusion services in Ethiopia is to reduce the prevalence of HIV in the blood supply—so that patients do not need to worry at all about the blood they are receiving. The center will be able to provide that peace of mind—as it will be able to ensure that all blood collected is properly screened for HIV and other infections.

Another key reason for improving blood transfusion services in Ethiopia is to reduce the number of maternal deaths. Hemorrhaging continues to be one of the leading causes of maternal mortality in Ethiopia, and many of these deaths can be prevented through blood transfusions.

The increased capacity of the center will help to address this problem as well. Increased blood supply capacity will expand access to blood transfusion services throughout rural and urban areas of Ethiopia, decreasing maternal hemorrhagic deaths.

While the National Blood Transfusion Service and this new facility are critically important to blood transfusion services in Ethiopia, without donors—there is no blood for transfusions. Just a couple of months ago, the U.S. Embassy held a blood donation drive and our staff members, both American and Ethiopian, donated 64 units of blood. Each of these units provided Ethiopian healthcare workers with the blood needed to save up to three lives.

I want to take this opportunity to urge everyone here and anyone watching or reading about this event—to consider the importance of voluntary blood donation, and to please contact the NBTS if you are willing to donate. Your donation will help save lives!

Finally, on behalf of the United States Government, and USAID's Health Infrastructure Program, I would like to thank the Government of Ethiopia, in particular—the Ministry of Health, and the National Blood Transfusion Service for your patience and contributions to the many months of planning, design, and—as of today—the CONSTRUCTION of the new National Blood Transfusion Service Center here in Addis Ababa.

USAID looks forward to completing this project and seeing National Blood Transfusion Service in its new home. We will continue to assist you, our Ethiopian partners, as you work to bring better healthcare services for all Ethiopians.

Thank you.