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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

National AIDS Resource Center and Hotline Handover
Remarks by USAID Ethiopia Mission Director Dennis Weller
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(as prepared for delivery)

Indemin aderachu!

It is an honor to be here with His Excellency State Minister Kebede, other Government of Ethiopia officials, and invited guests.

For more than 12 years, the U.S. Government, through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, has provided support to the Government of Ethiopia in areas such as prevention, care and treatment, and support to people affected by HIV and AIDS. That support includes numerous HIV interventions.

Three such interventions are the National Wegen AIDS Hotline, the AIDS Resource Center, and HIV-related radio programming, all very important components. For the last two years, USAID has supported these components through the Health Communication Capacity Collaborative project, implemented by Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication.

And today, we are extremely happy to join in celebration as we transition these components to the Ministry of Health.

The first component—the AIDS hotline—began in 2004. Since its inception, the hotline has provided free counseling and psychosocial support to more than three million callers affected by HIV/AIDS, many of whom are young people. With this transition, the ministry is not just continuing what we started, but is expanding upon the success.

I am happy to announce that the hotline will extend counseling services beyond HIV/AIDS to include other health areas and will be managed solely by the ministry.

The resource center is the second major component. The center has provided accurate and up-to-date HIV information to non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, researchers, religious leaders, government officials, journalists, HIV positive people, students and members of the public. With its transition to the ministry, the resource center will continue to provide these services in its new home at the Ethiopian National Archives Library.

The third successful component was the creation of popular HIV related radio programs for broadcast throughout Ethiopia.

One of those radio programs, *Betayña*, addressed issues of the stigma and discrimination faced by those with HIV/AIDS. Each week the Ethiopian public heard the voices of people living with HIV/AIDS. The show was aired on five radio stations in Amharic, Afaan Oromo and Tigriña.

Another program, *Dagu*, focused on youth with messages about HIV/AIDS and building life skills. The radio program played an instrumental role in reaching school-age youth in Addis Ababa.

The ministry has built upon the experience of *Dagu* and *Betayña* and is currently developing a similar radio program that will discuss HIV and other health areas.

The spirit of collaboration, partnership and ownership of these services is critical to the successful transition of these project components. On that note, I would like to thank Johns Hopkins for facilitating the successful transition of the resource center, hotline services, and radio programming to the Government of Ethiopia.

More importantly, I would also like to thank the Ministry of Health and all stakeholders involved in the implementation and transition. The Government of Ethiopia's ownership and leadership of the transition process made this handover possible and serves as a model for other projects.

But my thanks are nothing compared to those whose lives have been positively impacted by these project components.

One woman wrote to us saying, "Thanks to the Wegen AIDS talk line, you saved me from suicide. I am able to build a better relationship with my doctor. I know how to take my A.R.T. medication and I am now back to my normal health condition."

Another couple wrote that they were devastated after learning about a positive HIV status. They abandoned their village and were living in a remote rural village. But because of the knowledge that they gained from the radio programs, they are back with their friends and community and taking care of themselves.

These are but a few of the many testimonies that demonstrate the lasting impact this project has had.

In closing, let me leave you with something President Obama said during a 2015 speech to the General Assembly at the United Nations in New York. He said, "Let the skeptics and cynics know development works. Investing in public health works. We can break the cycle of poverty. People and nations can rise into prosperity. Despite the cruelties of our world and the ravages of disease, millions of lives can be saved if we are focused, and if we work together."

We are committed to continue supporting and partnering with the Ministry of Health. Working together, we can improve health for all Ethiopians.

Amasagenalehu and thank you very much!