



Congressman Donald Payne

Tenth District - New Jersey

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Subcommittee on Africa Chairman Donald Payne calls The Ogaden and Somalia “The Forgotten Tragedies”

Tenth District Representative Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs’ Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, issued the following statement today:

“Innocent civilians continue to suffer in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. No one knows for sure how many people have died in the Ogaden in the past two years. Many have fled their homes in search of help or had no choice but to flee in the face of major atrocities being committed by government forces.

Ethiopian security forces are deliberately targeting innocent civilians. The raping and hanging of civilians are being used routinely by Ethiopian security to intimidate and to psychologically torture innocent civilians. I met many of these victims in a refugee camp in Kenya.

The suffering and abuses of the people of the Ogaden are well documented. Since when does starving a child or hanging a young woman publicly qualify as a counter-insurgency operation? I have witnessed many tragedies around the world, but the one unfolding in the Ogaden is by far one of the worst. I met a mother who wondered aloud how she would survive after she had been raped by men younger than her own sons.

What the Ethiopian government is doing is planting the seeds of hatred that will last many generations. The people of the Ogaden may forgive, but I doubt they will forget what happened to them under this regime. The Ashanti of Ghana say “There is no medicine to cure hatred.”

Meanwhile, next door in Somalia, another man-made tragedy is killing, maiming, and displacing millions of Somalis. In the past year alone, an estimated 10,000 people have been killed by Somali and Ethiopian security forces, and insurgent groups. Many of these victims are innocent civilians. In October, two United Nations representatives were killed.

More than half of the Somali population, an estimated 3.4 million people, is in need of humanitarian assistance. Hundreds of people have died while trying to flee the suffering in Somalia. An estimated 1 million people are internally displaced and many have fled to Kenya, Yemen, and Djibouti.

In January 2008, I met many of these refugees in Daddab refugee camp in Kenya. Many of them were born in the refugee camp. United Nations officials are concerned that they cannot help many new comers since the camp is full. In January, I asked a number of young Somalis in the camp what is it they want badly that they do not have in the camps. They all replied that it was education they wanted most.

The people of Somalia have suffered for far too long. There is a famous African proverb: No matter how long the night, the day will come for sure. I am sure the suffering of the helpless will one day end. The question remains, when?"