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August 2, 2011

The Honorable Secretary Clinton
U.S. Department of State
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We are writing to urge the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to deliver humanitarian aid safely and without penalty to the southern region of Somalia. While the entire Horn of Africa is suffering from the worst drought and famine in decades, the southern region of Somalia is being hit hardest with over two million lives at risk. As a country that holds humanitarian efforts vital to our foreign aid policy, the United States should do what it can to ensure humanitarian aid relief can be delivered.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs declares a country is stricken by famine when “acute malnutrition rates among children exceed 30 percent, more than two people per every 10,000 die per day and people are not able to access food and other basic necessities.” Today, Somalia has the highest malnutrition rate in the world with certain regions in the country’s south experiencing rates near 50 percent. Children under the age of 5 are exceeding 6 per 10,000 deaths per day. In the last few months, tens of thousands of Somalis have died as a direct cause of malnutrition, with the majority being children.

Faced with malnutrition, health risks, food and water scarcities, global rises in food prices and death, hundreds of thousands of Somalis from the southern Somalia region have fled to central and northern Somalia and to the Capitol, Mogadishu, where aid is more readily available. We commend the efforts taken by the Transitional Federal Government to address the needs of its people. Still, thousands more have fled to neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya. Djibouti is also receiving Somali refugees who are suffering from life-threatening malnutrition and are in grave need of medical attention. As mentioned before, the entire Horn of Africa is at risk and many of these countries receiving Somali refugees have limited resources and are struggling to meet their own humanitarian needs. Somali refugees are expected to continue flooding neighboring regions and countries in overwhelming numbers.

The international response to the crisis in Somalia has been horrendously slow, as famine has already been declared and thousands have already died. At the crux of discussions surrounding our ability to send humanitarian aid to southern Somalia is the presence of al-Shabaab, the de facto leader in the region. While al-Shabaab is not an organization the United States supports, the millions of Somalis, many of whom are women and children, should not suffer due to a rogue regime. When President Obama signed Executive Order 13536 in April 2010, there were no clear signs that, just over a year later, his desire to fight terrorist financiers would have the unintended consequence of preventing the delivery of critical supplies to innocents that are simply trying to stay alive.

With the humanitarian crisis in Somalia deepening to new unprecedented levels, now is the time to move forward with sending aid to southern Somalia. The United States should be prepared to act at the moment U.S. humanitarian aid is fully welcomed in the southern region with conditions that will ensure all aid will be used for the sole purpose of addressing famine, access to water and medical assistance. We must be a leader in the international community and reject a repeat of the tragedy that befell Ethiopia in the 1980s. The money promised is clearly meant for humanitarian purposes and therefore it is critical to act now before red tape leads to the starvation of millions of people.

Sincerely,

Steve Cohen

Harriet L. Bean

Donald M. Payne

George Miller

Barbara Lee

E. Parnas

Bob Fisk

Gene Blackman

Alfred Hastings

Charles Rangel

Sheila Jackson Lee

Jim Moran

Don Stoebe

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Dana Perich

Michael Mottola

Phil Hall

Harold Sheer

Jim W. Brown

John Lewis

Pete Stark

Keith E. Chi

Raul M. Grijalva

Joe Schetz

Cc: The Honorable Secretary Tim Geithner
U.S. Department of the Treasury