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Opening Statement by Ambassador Ranneberger **January 17, 2007**

(Begin Transcript)

I want to have this opportunity to talk to you today about U.S. policy and actions in Somalia. Obviously this is a very important issue. As I have said before, the United States really has two fundamental goals in Somalia. We want to help bring about long-term stability in the country and at the same time we want to ensure the security of Somalia, and that includes the efforts to interdict and apprehend known international terrorists. We are moving vigorously on both the tracks. The two are closely related and in fact mutually reinforcing. You cannot have stability in Somalia if it is being used as a safe haven for terrorism and vice-versa. Obviously, if you can stop the safe haven for terrorism, it is going to enhance prospects for long-term stability. We are cooperating with Kenya, Ethiopia and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia in efforts to interdict terrorists. In terms of promoting stability, we are really making progress in three basic areas. First, we are encouraging dialogue among all Somalis, we are pointing out that this must be done in Somalia and between Somalis. The purpose of that is to promote an inclusive government. An inclusive government is the only way in which there will be long-term stability. We do think that there is a tremendous window of opportunity now; we think that the Somali people have an opportunity to consolidate a stable government. This is not going to be an easy process, but the prospects are there and we are optimistic that we can achieve that.

In addition to promoting dialogue, we are at the same time providing urgently needed assistance to the Somali people, and I might add that last year we provided about 86 million dollars in assistance to Somalia. We have already pledged 40 million dollars of assistance to the TFG and to the Somali people, including money that will go to support civil society. We are supporting efforts for an African stabilization force to go into Somalia in order to support the peace process there and to enable the rapid withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces. We fully recognize that efforts to consolidate stability in Somalia are going to require a consolidated international effort. That is why ten days ago we participated in an International Contact Group meeting here in Kenya with the Kenyan Government as well as with the European Union and others to discuss ways in which we could promote all the actions needed. We discussed assistance for the stabilization force, and we can say there was a strong resolve that came out of that meeting to continue to work together to achieve these objectives. Finally, we very much welcome and appreciate the forthright leadership that has been shown by Kenya in this effort to respond to the current situation in Somalia. Kenya is helping lead efforts to get the African stabilization force into Somalia to promote dialogue and to work with Somalis to bring about a stable outcome to the current

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situation.

Questions only on situation in Somalia:

Q. Adam Minot (BBC) The Kenyans have sent Tuju and other ministers to African countries to solicit troops for the stabilization force. What is your view of the process?

A. Yes, that's extremely urgent. You know that President Museveni of Uganda has committed about 1,500 forces. He has indicated that they will be available in the very near future, about a couple of weeks at the longest. I know they are going to do this as rapidly as possible. The Kenyans have dispatched Foreign Minister Tuju and I believe six other ministers to various countries in Africa to push for contributions to the African stabilization force. The African Union's Peace and Security Council just met this week to urge African countries to support and to endorse the idea of the stabilization force, and the African Union is active in this effort to try to get contributions for that force. So, it is a matter of urgency and that's one reason why within the 40 million dollars that we have pledged, we indicated that a sizeable part of that is to support the deployment of the Ugandan forces and other African stabilization forces. We are also obviously trying to encourage other countries, including European countries, the European Commission, and other potential contributors to come forward with funds to support the deployment as quickly as possible.

Q. Alisha Ryu (VOA) What is your view of the popularity of the TFG relative to the CIC?

A. My view is that the Islamic Courts didn't have broad popular support. What they had was a positive response to their efforts to promote law and order in Mogadishu and other areas, and I do make that distinction, because I don't think there was a popular support for the Islamic Courts in general. I think we saw that as the Islamic Courts started to impose tougher and tougher restrictions on the population, the popular support started to dwindle. I think the problem with the TFG was that it was isolated. The Somali population doesn't know about and is skeptical about the TFG. They don't know what the TFG can achieve. It doesn't have a track record and let's be frank, the TFG has been limited in its effectiveness. Now the TFG has an opportunity to come forward and show what it can do. There are multiple challenges. We have been in very close touch, almost daily contact with the TFG. I have spoken a number of times to Prime Minister Gedi, President Yusuf and other officials and they have indicated that they recognize the urgent need to take steps to demonstrate their credibility with the population and demonstrate that they can deliver.

Clearly we are in a situation that's very difficult. The security situation is fluid; we don't have a stable situation throughout the country. What the TFG is looking at is providing essential services, putting things like education back on track as quickly as possible. They are deploying the limited number of trained police that they have and they have done some of that in Mogadishu already. District and regional governing administrations, the ones planned and approved by the TFG Parliament in April,

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2006, will be selected. I have been told by the senior TFG leadership that they intend to follow that process as soon as practicable. The process calls for local reconciliation conferences and then for the local leaders to be chosen out of that, building up to the district levels. This is quite a detailed plan which I have seen. One obvious issue is that with respect to all of these the TFG must be trusted to move forward. They are going to need support from the international community and none of these steps will be free. The UNDP has already been engaged in projects in terms of assisting with the police and that sort of thing. We have got our 40 million dollars, but that money does take time to be disbursed. We have working groups urgently looking at how best we can spend those funds and how best we can provide this assistance quickly. So, I think the sense of urgency is appreciated by the TFG and by the international community. I am hopeful that in the coming weeks we are going to see increasing signs that some of those steps have been taken.

Q. Isabel Coello (Spanish News Agency) According to the information we have now on the air strike, in military terms was it a botched operation?

A. Well, it did achieve its goals. Let's be clear about this. A U.S goal, one part of what we are doing in Somalia, is to apprehend or kill foreign terrorists who have perpetrated acts of terror against Americans and other people around the world, including here in Kenya. That's the goal we share with Kenya, with Ethiopia, with the Transitional Federal Government and everyone else in the world who is against terrorism. Now on the air strike: there was one air strike. The U.S. has only done one air strike, which was directed against known international terrorists and eight of those terrorists were killed. So it would be wrong to say that it was a failure. In terms of the Somali people's reaction to this, I do think there is a real public diplomacy challenge. There is a real challenge in terms of getting out our message to the Somali people in terms of what's going on. You look at the situation in Somalia - means of communication are limited and some of those have been disrupted by fighting and that sort of thing. So what we are trying to do, and one reason for my briefing you today, quite honestly, is to get our message out about what our intentions are and about what we have actually done in Somalia. What you are seeing in Somalia is a combination at this point of inaccurate information and deliberate disinformation, and all of that has created a situation that allows for a lot of speculation. As I have said, there have been reports about the United States pursuing different targets and bombings, and all that, but in reality there has been only one air strike and no civilians were injured in it. I think that the challenge we have is to get out our message to the Somali people. I think that's happening and we are moving to do that aggressively. And it is also important to get that message out to the broader community as well, exactly what is the nature of U.S. policy and actions in Somalia.

Q. KBC. Please confirm now the role of the African force? Is it to kill terrorists?

A. No it is not. The African forces that have been called upon to go into Somalia will be different. Their purpose will be to support peace and stabilization inside Somalia. That will be a quite specific mission as developed by the African Union and the East African Inter-Governmental Authority on Development.

Q. Desmond Thompson (Media 24) Are there any preconditions for the AU to be involved in Somalia (for example: no US strikes)?

A. I have seen the communications out of African Union Peace and Security Council, and certainly there are no pre-conditions. I wouldn't expect there to be any. I think that the questions that the African Union's Peace and Security Council are what will be the mandate of this African force and what will be the duration of the mission. Those are the questions which are standard for any operation involving deployment of African forces in any situation in Africa, but I don't think it will be related to the actions that we may or may not have underway in Somalia.

Q. Reuters (Bryson Hull). How many people were killed in the air strike and what is your view of the Speaker being impeached.

A. Eight terrorists were killed in the air strike, but I cannot give you the details of who they were. As I said these are all ongoing operations and we are not prepared at this point to talk about precisely who may have been killed in that strike. They were Al Qaida affiliated and known terrorists. As to the speaker, I have only seen the press report on that at this point, so I don't want to comment too much. What I would say is that the questions that arise in my mind are: was there a proper quorum of the Parliament; were the proper procedures of the Parliament followed; were the procedures of the Transitional Federal Charter followed? Those are kind of questions I would have. It may well be that they were all met. I don't know that because I don't know the details of what happened. We have in fact encouraged discussions between the Speaker and the other senior authorities of the TFG. The Speaker, as far as I am aware, is a respected figure in Somalia and is the kind of person in our view who could help pull people together. As we have made clear, we believe that everyone, and I do mean everyone in Somalia who does not support terrorism, extremism and violence should have a role to play in the future of that country. That is why dialogue is so important and that is why we are doing so much to encourage dialogue.

Q. Ed Sanders (LA Times) Who was killed in the air strike and what was the role of Al Qaida in the courts ...?

A. I don't want to talk about specifically who might have been killed in that attack. What I would say is that there was a lot speculation before the current Ethiopian operation about the links between Al Qaida and the Islamic Courts. What has become clear with the demise of the Islamic Courts is that in fact it is now clear that Al Qaida influence within the Islamic Courts had increased in recent months. Some of that was seen in the increasing militant nature of the Courts, particularly the Shabaab. Al Qaida affiliated foreigners were coming into Somalia in increasing numbers. We were seeing increasingly radical statements coming out of the Islamic Courts. The information available to us indicates that a significant number of foreign fighters were found killed in various military actions that were taken by the Ethiopians. Now you will have to talk to the Ethiopians to get precise details about that. But all of this indicates that Al Qaida was exercising increasing influence with the Islamic Courts

and was posing an increasing danger. As I have indicated before, when I met with Sheikh Sharrif at the end of August or the beginning of September soon after I got here, under instructions from Washington, I indicated that the United States was open to dialogue with him and moderates in the Islamic Courts. We were only setting three conditions: one, that the Courts cease their military expansion; two, that they act against known terrorists; three, that they not aid terrorists. Of course those actions never happened. We also made clear that any dialogue would have to be conducted within the parameters of the Transitional Federal Charter and with recognition that the TFG was the legitimate authority of Somalia.

Q. Ed Sanders (LA Times) Did he respond to those conditions at all?

A. No, we talked about those points, but he made no commitment and I never received a follow-up call from him.

Q. Nation TV: Who are the other ministers being sent to recruit forces for Somalia?

A. Again I would direct you to the Kenyan government to talk about the specific ministers. I know Minister Tuju is traveling and I am not sure which others have been dispatched. The purpose of that is to assist the African Union and IGAD, Kenya is the Chairman of IGAD after all, to mobilize forces for this African force to go into Somalia. I think it is too early to know the results of that mission although you can talk to the Kenyan authorities. Various countries are considering a possible commitment to this force. However, I don't think any commitments have been announced, other than by Uganda, at least from the stuff I have seen this morning.

Q. Have the Kenyan authorities arrested Al Qaida suspects and turned them over to the USG?

A. Again, I direct you to the Kenyan authorities as to who they might have arrested. I know that they have arrested some people, none of whom were turned over to my government. In terms of precisely who those people were, again you should talk to the Kenyan authorities. What I will say is that we have good cooperation with Kenya. We have had good cooperation for quite some time, well preceding the current situation in terms of efforts to combat terrorism.

Q. What were the dangers posed by the ICU?

A. The danger posed in Somalia was not by the ICU per se, but rather by the increasing activity of Al Qaida. The danger was obvious. You have the fact that at least three people, perhaps more, involved in the attacks against the U.S. embassies in 1998 were taking refuge inside Somalia. There were indications at various times that they were planning other terrorist actions. They are known to be affiliated and closely linked to Al Qaida. Again, without going into too many sensitive details, we were certainly aware that those people were not there in a passive way. Al Qaida carried out attacks in Kenya in 2002. There were certainly indications of planning subsequent to the 2002 attacks as well, some of it emanating from Somalia.

Movements across the border of those Al Qaida people was a constant threat to this country, Kenya, to the United States, and to other countries as well. The terrorism problem is one we have in common with Kenya and other countries in the region.

Q. KBC: what's the role of the peacekeeping troops and will they be armed?

A. Their job is not to create peace and security in the country, their job is to support peace. Their involvement is premised on the fact that Somalia is moving in the direction of stability. The TFG does need protection during this period, so they will have this role to play. But they will also have a potential role to help train TFG security forces. So, it will be a positive type of role. These troops will, in fact, be armed just as they have been in other African peacekeeping operations, and they will certainly be well-equipped in order to be able to fulfill their mandate. The precise mandate of those troops and the precise mission is going to be worked out by IGAD and the African Union.

Q. Adam Mynott – BBC. What can you comment on U.S. military operations? Has anyone been handed over to the USG?

A. I am not going to talk about military operations or intelligence activities and that sort of thing. All I want to say is that we do have good cooperation with the TFG in Somalia, with Ethiopia and with Kenya. So this has been a cooperative effort. The primary purpose is not to try to turn people over to us.

Q. Ed Sanders (LA Times) Any information on Al Qaida entering into Kenya?

A. There are a number of people who were taking refuge in Somalia in whom we have direct interest. But there are also a number of other Al Qaida affiliated terrorists who are there.

(Tape ends prematurely)

(End Transcript)

Ranneberger