

**"Peace Dialogues for a Sustainably Stable Ethiopia"**  
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**Final Report**  
**April 2012-August 2013**

**Submitted To:**  
**Carol Wilson, DG Office Chief**  
**US Agency for International Development (USAID/Ethiopia)**

**Submitted By:**  
**The National Committee on American Foreign Policy**

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## *Executive Summary*

The project “Peace Dialogues for a Sustainably Stable Ethiopia” commenced in mid- 2012 with the intention of bringing sustainable and lasting peace to Ethiopia. Within the guidelines given to the Program Director by the late Prime Minister Meles, this project sought to bring together divided groups, create a place for open dialogue, and eventually bridge these peoples together within one peaceful Ethiopia. Despite the late and slow start, the unexpected death of Prime Minister Meles, the hold placed on this project by USAID, and eventually early termination of this project, a great deal of momentum was established and several breakthroughs occurred all of which will be described in the following report.

## *Background*

A component of the new Country Development Corporation Strategy for USAID/Ethiopia was the Support Objective to improve the governance enabling environment for sustainable development. In order to achieve the above objective, an intermediate result of reducing local tensions, violence and insecurity was established. The Democracy and Governance office, in collaboration with the US Embassy offices identified a set of activities to promote peace building and inter-party dialogue thereby assisting in achieving the intermediate result of reduced local tensions, violence and insecurity.

In Ethiopia, one of the oldest countries in Africa, conflict mediation by elders remains a well-established tradition. Throughout Ethiopian history, conflicts have been mediated and settled by elders engaging in the transitional indigenous systems of conflict resolution. Less than formal government bureaucracy, it contributes to proving security and stability in the community. As in many parts of Africa, among the dominant Oromo, Amhara, Tigre, Somali, Gurage, Walayta, Hadeya, and other national and ethnic groups, elders called jarsa, shimagle, and shango are respected. Their role in reconciliation is highly regarded and sought after. Today, in the Horn of Africa, conflicting parties, including political leaders, turn to Elders and confront with honor serious national problems, and endeavor to solve them without outside intervention that often only exacerbates the situation.

## *Program Objective*

The ultimate objective of the program of the Elders was to urgently contribute to overall nationwide sustainable peace building and reconciliation efforts grounded in human and democratic rights that would result in diverting and releasing the national energy into a focus for strong and sustainable economic development projects and untimely better international relations. The program intended to use eldership mediation on a large scale with all political groups and between opposition parties, including the OLF, ONLF, CUCD, and the Government of Ethiopia and the Diaspora supporters.

In order to achieve the above objective the program was broken into two components. Component 1: Mediation between the Government and opposition (MGO); and component 2: Political dialogue forums.

Component 1 was meant to focus on mediation efforts between the Government of Ethiopia and the Opposition and Conflicting parties within Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Diaspora, including, but not limited to the OLF, ONLF, CUCD and their Diaspora members and supporters. The

objective of the MGO was to facilitate a place for the disputants to engage in constructive dialogue and settlement of political differences and misunderstandings peacefully.

Using Track II diplomacy the series of dialogues was meant to focus on the merits of peace, and the value of restoration of relationships among the leadership of groups such as the OLF, ONLF, CUDP, and the Government. This was to involve a form of quiet Eldership diplomacy improving group understandings of issues and dialogue to influence officials, leaders and members through a series of discussions (dialogues) and forums that Eldership calls for. These dialogues were meant to take place abroad and within Ethiopia over a two year period with each dialogue session addressing a different topic of discussion. In the cases where the participants agree that a broader discussion should take place, a public discussion forum was to be arranged. Such public forums were meant to encourage the public to nurture the culture of dialogue and tolerance.

### *Description of Accomplishments*

As a result of the political situation in Ethiopia, and the sensitivity of the goals of this project, much of the work that took place over the past year and a half has been behind the scenes. The Project Director and his staff worked on a confidential basis conducting private dialogues and phone conversations with the various political groups and members of the Diaspora. These private and confidential dialogues were meant to lay the groundwork for the meetings and dialogues proposed in the calendar of events and activities.

The following is a description of the various interactions and accomplishments that took place between April 2012 and August 8, 2013.

#### *Meetings before April 2012*

Despite the fact that the project did not commence until May 14, 2012 the Project Director met with Leenco Lata Waqayyo, the former founder and chair of the OLF, and his colleagues in Oslo, Norway in the spring of 2012. Direct email correspondence was also established with the chair of the OLF in Asmara. Numerous email correspondences and one in-person meeting in Princeton, New Jersey took place with Dr. Fido T. Ebba, Foreign Secretary of Asmara OLF. Several email exchanges took place between the Project Director and the Deputy Head of the OLF in Asmara to arrange for a travel visa for him. A representative of the Oromo Elders group traveled to Princeton, New Jersey three times for an extended consultation and remained in contact with the Project Director on a daily basis.

A founder and former head of the OLF, who is based in Frankfurt, was also in touch with the Project Director in person in the US and Germany.

### *Meetings from April 2012 – June 2012*

From April 1, 2012 until June 30, 2012 the following correspondence and meetings took place:

- After several months of email correspondence and phone conversations an in-person meeting between the Project Director and the Foreign Secretary of OLF took place on April 15, 2012 in Washington, DC.
- During this time there was uninterrupted direct and forthright engagement with representatives of the three OLF groups by Project Director.
- A meeting took place in Berlin with some members of the Ethiopian opposition.
- The Project Director gave a talk to about 70 Ethiopians regarding Eldership, in the Berlin Listro Gallery (which was established by a former OROMO shoe-cleaner). The Ethiopian Ambassador to Germany also attended this meeting.
- The Project Director kept in constant contact with Leenco Lata Waqayyo and Dr. Dima Nagaw Sarpo, both founder and former Presidents and Secretary Generals of the OLF, Obbo Dawwud Ibsa in Asmara, Dr. Taddessa Ebba (OLF –Asmara group-US representative), Professor Mekuria Bulcha (OLF –Kenya group-Europe representative), and Ato Amin Jundi (OLF –General Kemal group-Canada representative), and numerous other Oromos worldwide.

### *Meetings in Ethiopia in September 2012*

In late August 2012 Prime Minister Meles Zenawi passed away. The Project Director traveled to Ethiopia and during the time between September 3 and 14, 2012 took part in extensive conversations with the new Prime Minister, then Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Haile Mariam Desalegne. The Project Director had a one and half hour personal discussion about the work of the project. Similarly, the day the Deputy Prime Minister was appointed as Prime Minister he called him to congratulate him and had an additional brief discussion. While in Ethiopia, the Project Director had meetings with several government officials, including the Minister of Justice and the Police Commissioner, regarding the release of Swedish prisoners and approximately 1,900 other prisoners on September the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012. In addition there were other conversations about the future release of the imprisoned OLF members and supporters, journalists and members of other political parties charged with criminal activities. The Project Director also had several meeting with Muslim elders and leaders regarding Muslim prisoners, and future peace dialogues. The Project Director was engaged in conversations with leaders of the political opposition groups Professor Beyene Petros, Dr. Negaso Gidada, Dr. Marara Gudina, and their colleagues, to name a few. After his return to the US at the end of September the Project Director also had several conversations with Woiz. Birtukan, Ato Seeye, and other political activists in

an effort to establish mutual respect among political parties and the Government and establish a lasting peace in the Horn of Africa.

During his September trip the Project Director also met and discussed with the Acting Patriarch and several Archbishops about the future of peace between the conflicting synods and establishing overall sustainable religious peace and tolerance in Ethiopia.

### **Laying the Groundwork for Democracy: A meeting with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia**

On November 15, 2012 the NCAFP hosted two members of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Dr. Addisu Gebreigzabhier and Professor Merga Bekana, as well as several other honored guests including representatives from the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations, Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, the Ambassador of Sweden to Ethiopia, and members of the Ethiopian Diaspora, for roundtable discussion, hosted by Professor Isaac. The discussion was focused on the achievements of the Electoral Board since the 2005 elections and the electoral and political process in Ethiopia in general.

The NCAFP submitted a more detailed meeting report that included an attendee list to Carol Wilson on December 17, 2012. A copy of the report and participant list is included in Appendix A.

### **Meetings with the Diaspora and other Officials in the United States**

During the course of this project, the Project Director, and project staff working in the United States, interacted with Diaspora leaders regularly, via telephone, email, and on a personal basis, gathering extensive information and listening to recommendations pertaining to the views of all those concerned as to how to promote lasting peace and reconciliation as the basis for a peacefully sustainably stable Ethiopia.

The Project Director met in Washington, DC and Minneapolis, MN, not only Oromo Diaspora leaders, including Obbo Taddessa Eba, Obbo Leenco Bati, Obbo Bayen Soba, and others, but also the members of the Diaspora that support the opposition. In Washington, he met several times with the H.E. Ato Girm, Ethiopian Ambassador to the United States and with H. E. Ambassador Yamamoto at the Bureau of African Affairs. In Boston, he met with Ms. Birtukan Midaksa and her supporters. In New York, the Project Director had had several consultative luncheons with Ambassador Takeda at the United Nations.

## **Oromo Democratic Front**

On March 27, 2013 Leenco Laata Waqayyo and Dr. Dima Sarbo, founding members and Chair and Co-chair of the Oromo Democratic Front (ODF), issued a declaration formally announcing the launch of a new Oromo political movement that advocates justice for the Oromo and all other groups in Ethiopia. The ODF has changed its name from the Oromo Dialogue Forum to the Oromo Democratic Front and intends to work for the transformation of the Ethiopian state into a genuinely democratic multinational federation for lasting sustainable peace.

The ODF — Leenco, Dr. Dima and five others who have been elected as the new leaders — have been in touch with the Project Director regularly. While not all other branches of the OLF have refrained from criticizing the ODF, the Project Director believes that the founding of the ODF is a good sign and a positive step towards overall peace.

This is a significant step forward, and builds on the momentum that has that has been created over the past year. The Project Director (and this project) has played a pivotal role in encouraging this group to abandon force. He continues to encourage the OLD fractions to focus on sustainable peace and development and to abandon the idea of overthrowing the Government of Ethiopia by force. It is anticipated that the ODF will sharpen its mission even further to focus on concrete steps to bring about total peace and reconciliation for the Oromo and Ethiopia.

### *Updates on the Oromo Dialogue Front (ODG)*

The Oromo peace and reconciliation project started with the blessings of the late Prime Minister has made tremendous progress over the past year. The birth of the Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) is the direct result of the work on this project. This organization represents the founders, former fighters and chairmen of OLF. The leaders of the ODF have assured the Project Director and staff that they will no longer seek to overthrow the Government by force or engage in armed struggle.

*Confidential and off-the-record:* A significant breakthrough in this project was that the Project Director succeeded in getting a travel visa for a prominent OLF leader then living in Asmara. He is now in the United States with his family. The Project Director was in regular contact with international officials, State Department officials, the Ambassadors of the United States, Sweden and Norway, and other European representatives for assistance in moving this OLF leader out of Asmara. It is hoped that with his arrival in the U.S he will be able to shed more light on the situation in Asmara and speak about future sustainable peace with the OLF.

## **Memorandum of Understanding between Haramaya University and the Peace & Development Committee**

Haile Selassie Belay, Assistant Director, traveled to Ethiopia in November 2012 to continue his work on this project. He also met several times with Carol Wilson in the USAID office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In the second quarter of 2013 Haile Selassie Belay traveled to Haramaya University, the oldest and largest agricultural university in Ethiopia located in the sensitive area adjacent to the Somalia region of the country inhabited mostly by the Oromo, to facilitate the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the University and the Peace & Development Committee (PDC). The MOU outlines four main areas of cooperation:

- An analysis of the needs and resources for promoting a culture of peace within the University and identifying preferred forms of engagement in conflict and transformation and peace building.
- Developing and strengthening various peace and gender clubs at the University.
- Strengthen the leadership capacity and members of the peace and gender clubs
- Assist the peace and gender clubs to execute projects and reach their goals.

The Project Director has reinforced that this MOU is another great step forward in this process as it will work to reinforce peace throughout the University and this are of the country.

During this time, the Project Director and his three colleagues, Dr. Tilasun, Dr. Haile Salassie Belay, and Dr. Ahmed, members of the international Board of PDC, spent over three hours with the Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonen (at the time the Minister of Foreign Education) discussing the question of sustainable peace in Ethiopia with a focus on the Oromo, Christian Muslim relations, and the Ogaden. The Project Director also met with the visiting Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Tedros and other visiting dignitaries in Washington for additional discussion.

### **Updates on the PDC and the Role of the Diaspora**

Through the direct and personal relations of the Board members of the PDC, some of whom are American-Ethiopians with strong ties to the homeland and the Diaspora, direct contact was established with key leaders of the Ethiopian Diaspora. It is important to note that these Board members are the very founders of the modern day

traditional peace building revival in Ethiopian as well as the creators, over the last 23 years, of various Coalitions of Elders. Member and affiliates of the PDC are particularly concerned with finding ways to channel the negative energy of the leading, yet hostile, members of the Diaspora in a positive direction to create sustainable peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

The aim of this grass-root approach was twofold: One is to create an atmosphere for the understanding of the Diaspora community between each other and avoid hostilities and the other is to empower this community to bring the opposition party and the Government to the negotiation table.

In short, despite the delays in initiating and early termination of this project, the Project Director and his staff have continued to remain in contact with members of both the ODF and OLF. This contact is critical in laying the path for peace between the OLF and the Government of Ethiopia. At a time when some outsiders are trying to influence the OLF to continue armed struggle, the staff has created an open door to bring about a peaceful resolution of conflict, remove confrontation, and promote reconciliation. No other group can claim such persistence and continual dialogue with prominent OLF leaders in order to lead to sustainable peace. This is a great accomplishment.

### *Lessons learned and recommendations for future follow-up on activities*

Though an attempt was made to do what we could with this project, we did not reach all of the goals laid out in the calendar of events and activities. The death of the former Prime Minister Meles came as a shock to many and impeded progress we started to make.

We are pleased with what we were able to achieve; however, we believe that we could have even done more if initially if we spent more time focusing on the workings of the projects rather than logistics. Not only did discussions such as these take a lot of time and energy away from the work itself, worse still, it kept robbing us more than once of a timely action on some urgent issues.

The Project Director asserts that contacts within the conflicting parties confirmed the belief that that all Ethiopian contestants, persons or groups, prefer finding the way for the settlement or resolution of all disputes and issues in a peaceful dialogue forum rather than winning their battles by force.

We also learned that these people have strong feelings that the moderators of such peaceful dialogues should be respected ad hoc individuals and elders that come together for specific purposes, not groups that claim to be formal organizations.

We would recommend the consideration of future projects to capitalize on the momentum and accomplishments described above. The OLF leader from Asmara that is now in the United States is considered a great accomplishment and one that took a great deal of effort on the part of the Project Director and several countries, including the United States. It is unfortunate that this project was terminated just at the point when this major breakthrough occurred.

Members of the OLF, Diaspora, and founding members of the ODF are in contact with the Project Director on a regular basis and are concerned that the termination of this project will impede sustainable peace in Ethiopia.

### *Resource Use/Expenditures*

The funds requested, spent, and reported on from April 2012-August 8, 2013 totaled \$285,042.06. These costs were for staff salary and expenses, meeting logistics, regular telephone conversations, discussions and negotiations with all political bodies, and travel costs associated with the Project Director's trips to Ethiopia and Washington, D.C.

## *Appendix A*

### **"LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR DEMOCRACY"**

**PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY AND NEW YORK, NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 13-15, 2012**

#### **MEETING SUMMARY**

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#### **Introduction**

The National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) is pleased to submit the following report to USAID discussing the meetings and events that took place from November 13-15, 2012 as part of the NCAFP's Ethiopia Project "Peace Dialogues for a Sustainably Stable Ethiopia." We were delighted to welcome the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) visiting the United States as part of a greater US Election Observation Mission. The discussions and activities were planned to facilitate experience sharing between the Chairman and Deputy Chairman and representatives of the Ethiopian Diaspora as well as the academic and diplomatic community in the tri-state area.

#### **Events and Activities**

- An informal reception was held on November 13, 2012 in Princeton, NJ. The purpose of this event was to exchange ideas on current socio-economic and political issues in Ethiopia.
- On November 14, 2012 the Program in Africa Studies at Princeton University hosted a discussion session featuring a presentation by the NEBE.
- On November 15, 2012 the NCAFP hosted a roundtable discussion at the Harvard Club in New York City featuring a presentation by the NEBE.

#### **Description of Events and Activities**

##### *November 13, 2012: Reception*

Professor Ephraim Isaac hosted Professor Merga Bekana, Chairperson of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia and Dr. Addisu Gebreigzabhier, Deputy Chairman of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, as well as members of the of the Ethiopian Diaspora in the Princeton area and its environs and other invited guests, including the Swedish Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Jens Odlander, for an informal reception on the evening of November 13. During this time, Dr. Addisu and Professor Mega shared their experiences thus far on the US Election Observation Mission and discussed many of the differences between the Ethiopian and US electoral systems. One of the issues highlighted was the electronic voting system as well as the obvious trust US citizens have in their electoral system.

*November 14, 2012: "Laying the Groundwork for Democracy," Princeton University*

Working in collaboration with Princeton University's Program in Africa Studies, as part of its Indaba Lecture Series Program, Professor Ephraim Isaac moderated a discussion and presentation by Professor Merga Bekana and Dr. Addisu Gebreigzabhier on "Election Management and Democracy: Laying the Groundwork for Democracy." The group of about twenty five, which included several members of the Princeton University community, Academics, Ethiopian students as well as students of political science, diplomats, and members of the Ethiopian Diaspora residing in the Princeton area. Professor Merga Bekana, presented on the overall achievements of the NEBE, the various improvements it has made since the 2005 election, and, among others, the challenges and opportunities of conducting an election in a country as diverse as Ethiopia. The panelist also responded to questions raised by the audience such as:

- Political party participation was much less in the 2010 election compared to 2005, what were some of the contributing factors? What events occurred in the years between 2005 and 2010?
- What impact will the anti-terrorism and/or civil society organization laws have on voter's education?
- How does the overall political context of the country affect the results of the election?
- What has the Election Board done to address the challenges related in 2005 election?

The responses from Professor Merga Bekana and Dr. Addisu Gebreigzabhier to the questions raised by the audience indicated that the Election Board has attempted to address many of the challenges of the 2005 election through focusing on voter education, increasing women's participation, and introducing a "code of conduct" for political parties. They also indicated that each country's experience should be taken within its own context. Ambassador Jens Odlander and Professor Isaac also reiterated that while the Electoral Board is trying to do its best it should be understood that democracy is a work in process.

*November 15, 2012: "Laying the Groundwork for Democracy," The Harvard Club, New York City*

On November 15, 2012 the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) hosted a group of twenty-five people including representatives from the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations, Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, and the Ambassador of Sweden to Ethiopia, for a roundtable discussion on "Laying the Groundwork for Democracy." The discussion was led by Professor Ephraim Isaac and featured a presentation by Professor Merga Bekana Dr. Addisu Gebreigzabhier. The group engaged in a fruitful and exciting conversation on the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and the electoral process in Ethiopia. Some of the major themes to emerge from the discussion were issues of trust, strategies for dealing with the opposition, and the role of media.

Dr. George Schwab, President of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, began the discussion with introductions. Professor Isaac then set the stage by describing the two images of Ethiopia, one that depicts a country plagued by drought and famine and another showing the democratic and economic renaissance.

Professor Merga led the presentation on the background of the NEBE and the election process in Ethiopia. The vision and mission of the NEBE is to create a strong constitutional system where nations, nationalities, and the people of Ethiopia enjoy and exercise their right to elect and be elected in a free, fair, peaceful, and inclusive manner.

In working towards its mission and mandate the NEBE provides internal trainings on basic managerial skills in order to advance office operation management, records and project management, to name a few; as well as certified trainings of election administration, study tours and experience sharing, raising awareness on gender issues and creating an overall gender strategy.

One of the most recent accomplishments of the NEBE is that for the first time The Board conducted a nationwide post-election evaluation on the general election process in 2010. The report has been completed, published and distributed in many of the Ethiopian languages. The results and findings of this evaluation identified strengths, weaknesses, and areas in need of improvements in the election process.

In addition to these activities the NEBE provides training to political parties, giving them an opportunity to revisit their roles as leaders contributing to the democratization process and promoting dialogue; developed a resource center and website; electoral database; translation of electoral laws and regulations; provided civic and voter education; and a consultative forum with political parties.

Subsequent to the presentation Professor Isaac opened the floor for questions and a broader discussion. Some of the key questions and ideas to emerge during this time were:

- The issue of trust between the citizens and the government for sustainable peace
- NEBE impression of the 2012 US elections and electoral system
  - The US has a much older and more complex system than Ethiopia making it hard to compare between the two.
- The Media in Ethiopia, what constitutes the media, how is media defined, what role does the media play in Elections?
  - The media usually serves impartially. There is public and private media and it should be used carefully to ensure elections are free and fair.
- What kind of information does the constitution provide about the Ethiopian democracy? Does the opposition accept the democratic and social state as it is defined in the constitution? When the opposition does not accept how is that handled?
  - The constitution was formulated and approved by all political opposition parties. Therefore, all legitimate political parties are meant to accept the rule of law. All

operating political parties are meant to have a license from the Election Board and submit a program in order to be classified as a legitimate party, move freely around the country to share ideas, gather supporters etc.

- How many of the 90 million Ethiopian citizens are eligible and registered to vote?
  - In 2005 there were 26 million registered voters. Female participation amongst this group high and voter participation is increasing rapidly compared to other African countries

### **Conclusion**

Participants of events and activities in New Jersey and New York expressed their satisfaction with the discussions and indicated that more of such discussions should be organized in the future. Representatives of the NEBE indicated that this has been a significant learning opportunity for them and applauded the efforts put towards organizing the events.

### **LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR DEMOCRACY**

#### **A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2012**

#### **PARTICIPANTS (in alphabetical order)**

**H.E. Mr. Tekeda ALEMU**

*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary*

Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations

**Yibza AYNEKULLU**

**Professor Merga BEKANA**

*Chairperson*

National Electoral Board of Ethiopia

**Mr. Carter BOOTH**

*Trustee*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

**Dr. Tsion FIREW**

**Lydia GOBENA**

*Partner*

Fross Zelnik Lehram & Zissu, P.C.

**Riki Mulu BIZU**

*Presiden*

Ethiopian Jewish Community in New York City

**Dr. Jannette O. DOMINGO**

*Dean of Graduate Studies*

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

**Dr. Addisu GEBREIGZABHIER**

*Deputy Chairman*

National Electoral Board of Ethiopia

**H.E. Ambassador Aman HASAN**

*Deputy Ambassador to the UN*

**Ms. Edythe M. HOLBROOK**

*Trustee*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

**Professor Ephraim ISAAC**

*Project Director, Peace Dialogues for a Sustainably Stable Ethiopia*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

**Yosette Jones JOHNSON**

*Assistant Vice President for Faculty and Staff Relations*

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

**H.E. Ambassador Negash KEBRAT**

*Head of Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly*

**Ambassador Jens OLANDER**

*Ambassador of Sweden to Ethiopia (and Permanent Representative to the African Union)*

**Mr. William M. RUDOLF**

*Executive Vice President*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

**Richard R. HOWE, Esq.**

*Trustee & Treasurer*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

**Herbert A. JOHNSON**

*Director, Security Management Institute and Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Africana Studies*

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

**Kassy KEBEDE**

*Founder and managing Partner*

Panton Capital

**Stephane LAURENT**

Congress for Rabbis and Imams

**Daniel ROSE**

*Chariman*

Rose Associates

**Dr. George D. SCHWAB**

*President*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

#### **OBSERVERS**

**Ms. Chenelle BONAVIDO**

*Grant Assistant, Peace Dialogues for a Sustainably Stable Ethiopia*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

**Mr. Harry SMITH**

*Assistant to the President*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy

**Ms. Elena GAROFALO**

*Program Director*

National Committee on American Foreign Policy