



Integrated Country Strategy

ERITREA

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

The July 2018 agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia to end the 20-year stalemate of “no war, no peace” and work collaboratively for peace and development has the potential to reshape relations and development in the Horn of Africa. The U.S. Embassy in Asmara, Eritrea strives to build on this positive change and increase understanding between the people of the United States and the people of Eritrea, and also encourage more positive relations between Eritrea and its neighbors. To accomplish this, the Embassy will share information on American values, seek opportunities to increase cultural and technical exchange programs between Americans and Eritreans, and promote the inclusion of Eritreans in regional initiatives. . Managing this revived engagement is an Embassy team of ten USDHs and 249 locally employed (LE) staff, led since 2010 by a Chargé d’Affaires, given past unwillingness of the host government to accept the credentials of an American ambassador. The host government now seeks to normalize relations and exchange ambassadors. . In addition to the Chargé, the present USDH staffing pattern includes a Deputy Chief of Mission, Management Officer, Pol/Econ/Public Affairs Officer, Regional Security Officer, Security Technical Specialist, Consular Officer, Information Management Officer, Information Management Specialist, and Office Management Specialist.

Promoting Fundamental Rights, Liberties, and Governing Standards: The Eritrean leadership, in place since the nation won a 30-year independence struggle from Ethiopia in 1991, implemented, in the name of national security, a range of policies making it one of the most repressive, autocratic, and self-isolating governments. The constitution, while drafted, has not been adopted, and freedom of speech, assembly, and religion remain restricted. Citizens are subject to arbitrary arrest and detention and there are reports of widespread human rights abuses. The sole political party, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), is the successor of the movement that brought Eritrea into being as an independent nation and sets both political and economic policy. In 2001, the President detained without charge a group of reform-minded ministers and other prominent individuals calling for elections and implementation of the constitution. Two U.S. Embassy LE staff were arrested for association with the reformers; they remain incarcerated without charge with the larger group. Other Embassy LE staff as well as an American citizen are also being detained.

Despite a tradition of self-reliance, which contributed to its isolation, Eritrea, in 2017/2018, initiated tentative outreach to the international community, including sending officials to western capitals; receiving visitors, including high-level American and UN delegations; and welcoming UN-organized training for mid-level government officials. In 2018, the heads of

government of Eritrea and Ethiopia as well as other officials took part in a series of high level meetings in both capitals, signed a peace agreement to formally end their 20 year border conflict, restored direct telephone communication between the two countries, and took steps to reopen the borders, including resuming commercial flights between the countries. The President of Somalia also visited, the first trip by a Somali President in 22 years, for discussions on regional peace and stability, economic integration, and establishing embassies. The Embassy's ability to leverage such initiatives to promote democracy and good governance, however, is constrained by the absence of the usual foreign assistance tools. In 2005, the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) ordered USAID, other bilateral donors, and international NGOs to depart the nation. In 2008, it ordered the Embassy's Defense Attaché Office to close, severing any military-to-military relationship and making even standard practices, such as gaining overflight clearances for U.S. military aircraft, difficult. Unilateral sanctions, Eritrea's tier 3 rating for Trafficking in Persons, and designation as a Country of Particular Concern with regard to religious freedom further impede use of assistance funds for targeted programs.

The United States has not had an ambassador to Eritrea since 2010 and there is no Eritrean ambassador in the United States. Under these conditions, this Mission's overriding priority, without consistent ability to influence the Eritrean leadership, is to monitor governance, urge improvements to human rights protections, and lay the groundwork for better relations in the future by building ties to progressive officials pushing for increased political space, protection of fundamental rights, and improved accountability of leaders toward citizens. Close partnership with diplomatic counterparts, particularly those who share these and other Mission objectives, is essential.

Encouraging Better Economic Governance and Development Strategies: The Eritrean ruling party and government adhered for many years to command economics and self-reliance.

Beginning in 2012, the party announced that Eritrea would henceforth pursue development, economic opening and privatization in conjunction with international partners, along the lines of China's opening in the 1980s. The first international mineral exploration venture became productive in 2011-2012, and Eritrea is now earning more revenue than it has at any time in its history, although transparency on how earnings are being used is lacking and earnings are almost certainly insufficient for social welfare-related needs. Aside from mining, diaspora remittances and recent assistance from Gulf States appear to serve as major sources for income and for foreign exchange. IFIs departed Eritrea in 2010 due to non-cooperation, but the World Bank and the African Development Bank are negotiating a return.

In late 2012, the Eritrean government reversed an earlier decision to close all UN operations, and in January 2013 signed an agreement with UN agencies allowing international access to populations in need and supporting the country in achieving some Millennium Development Goals related to health ahead of schedule. Eritrea asserts its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2017, the UN signed a five year plan to pursue projects worth \$328 million and the EU negotiated the National Indicative Programme (NIP) for the period 2014-2020 under the 11th European Development Fund with grants worth €200 million, of which EUR 175 million shall be allocated to energy and EUR 25 million to governance and supporting measures, although there have yet to be any expenditures

The Mission's next priority is promoting sound, transparent international development strategies and economic policies to encourage a vibrant economy to help stem economically-driven emigration, which is one of the biggest challenges to Eritrea's national viability and to regional stability and prosperity. The introduction of a new currency in late 2015 resulted in a sharp decrease in bank liquidity, with cash withdrawals limited by regulation. In late 2017, Eritrean authorities closed and fined hundreds of businesses across the country for failure to comply with banking regulations due to the shortages of hard currency, which resulted in increased prices on imported goods and higher unemployment. Furthermore, the suspension of import license issuances has led to a shortage of consumer goods and consequently high prices. Expectations are that peace with Ethiopia will lead to economic growth as a result of the reopening of trade routes, joint ventures, and Ethiopian investment. Previously, Ethiopia represented 70 percent of Eritrea's external trade.

Advancing Regional Peace and Security: Eritrean officials frequently blame their nation's poor human rights record, and the use of involuntary National Service, on the previous "no war, no peace" situation with Ethiopia. Eritrea and Ethiopia fought a border war between 1998 and 2000, followed by several cross-border attacks and skirmishes, most recently in June 2016. Ethiopia in July 2018 committed to withdrawing the military presence it maintained in a small territory that was assigned to Eritrea by the Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission in 2001. Relations with Djibouti remain strained following a separate short border conflict in 2008. The border with Djibouti remains un-demarcated, and Eritrea continues to hold several Djiboutian prisoners of war, despite releasing a group of four POWs in early 2016. In 2009 the UN imposed an arms embargo and sanctions on individuals and entities for past involvement with regional destabilizers, including al-Shabaab. Although the Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) has indicated in its past three annual reports that assistance to al-Shabaab in Somalia had likely ceased, restrictions remain in effect, as the SEMG has not been permitted access to Eritrea to complete its reporting mandate. In 2018, Ethiopia made a formal recommendation to the UN to lift the sanctions against Eritrea and Somalia similarly called for the termination of the sanctions

regime. the regional organization the Intergovernmental Authority of Development welcomes Eritrea's renewed involvement.

Our third priority is to encourage Eritrea to become a more responsible member of the international community, including improving relations with neighboring countries, , and enhancing regional peace and stability. We will also continue to press for security sector reform within Eritrea, as restiveness in the Eritrean military (manifesting itself in January 2013 as occupation of a government building by combat troops) may continue to pose threats, if political evolution remains stalled.

Promoting Opportunity for Citizens and Civil Society: Despite poor government-to-government relations and limitations on U.S. ability to influence Eritrea's leaders, the Embassy has maintained an active American Center in Asmara that attracts 100 - 250 visitors per day. We cultivate close relations with students, educators, artists, intellectuals, businesspersons, religious leaders, organized workers, and other civil society contacts, as well as with disabled communities. Private citizens and civil society contacts make clear that our English language activities, Internet access, book and magazine distribution services, educational advising, invitational travel, and events marking international and U.S. holidays give them hope for the future and courage to continue pressing for democratization and economic opening.

Our consular services to private Americans have included regular town hall meetings, the establishment of a consular corner in the American Center, and the coordination of social security benefits with the Social Security Administration.

Staffing Priorities: In mid-2012, the Department decided to send a strong message to Eritrean authorities by reducing Embassy staffing. Post's GSO, PAO, and FSHP positions were abolished. The GSE is slowly welcoming back diplomatic partners – Sweden opened a diplomatic office in 2018 and Ethiopia has announced an ambassador and will reopen its embassy -- international development agencies, and foreign assistance. The minimal USG footprint created in 2012 is no longer sufficient to capitalize on the new opportunities for increased dialogue and the potential for better relations. With an improving bilateral dialogue and continued improvement in the issuance of Eritrean visas for official visitors, the Embassy needs adequate resources to support those visits and to respond to a growing list of bilateral and regional priorities in the Horn of Africa. We make the case herein for restoring and filling both the GSO and PAO positions and for creating three time-limited OBO construction management positions.

Our first staffing priority is restoring a full-time GSO position. Our management team is stretched unacceptably thin in its efforts to maintain a functioning, safe physical plant and communications setup and to ensure compliance with financial, personnel and property-related regulations in a degraded local infrastructure environment. Significant staffing gaps also mean

key functions can go unfulfilled; for example, during the summer 2018 transfer season, there are periods when Post will be without a contracting officer or certifying officer. The recent improvement in visa issuance also increases the support requirements for an expanding number of TDYers and official visitors, not to mention the significant support required to address many years of deferred maintenance and to coordinate several upcoming multi-million dollar OBO projects. M/PRI's August 2017 Rightsizing Review noted that post's customer-to-management ratio is nearly triple that of its comparators. M/PRI's model projects 3 USDH positions for the work currently handled by 1 USDH. That analysis did not take into account the increased customer base and workload associated with the upcoming OBO construction projects. M/PRI supported the addition of a GSO position. The dedicated oversight of a USDH GSO would lead to more efficient and cost effective management-related activities.

Our second staffing priority is the creation of three time-limited OBO construction management positions. On the security front, Post has watched the compound's infrastructure deteriorate even as post-Benghazi security requirements have added new standards to those we are struggling to meet. The upcoming \$6.5 million Compound Improvement Project, anticipated to break ground in mid-FY19, will address many of these security issues. To manage this \$6.5 million project, OBO anticipates the addition of three time-limited USDH/PSC positions. The size of the project exceeds post's ability to manage with existing resources, so there is no alternative to having new OBO positions at post for the duration of the construction project.

Our third staffing priority is re-establishing a dedicated PAO position. The Department's decision to abolish the PAO position despite the popularity of U.S. public diplomacy programming left a vulnerable staff of nine local employees with inconsistent leadership and a budget of \$380,000 with little management oversight. M/PRI's August 2017 Rightsizing Review noted that Asmara's diplomatic density is lower than the comparator posts due to the lack of a PD Officer. Each comparator post has a dedicated PAO. M/PRI notes that the American Center receives over 4,000 visitors per month and supports the addition of a PAO position, which would enable the Pol/Econ Officer to focus on reporting and engagement with the GSE. Having a full-time, dedicated PAO would also ensure that PD programming remains consistent with Embassy and USG regional priorities, as well as responsive to citizen demand.

Mission operations: Although the Embassy seeks to add a Marine Security Guard (MSG) detachment and to pursue site acquisition for a future New Embassy Compound (NEC), neither proposal has met with a positive response on the part of the GSE. While bilateral relations are steadily improving, the Embassy has yet to reach the point where the host government would grant the approvals and provide the cooperation necessary to initiate acquisition of a new site.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: An Eritrea with strengthened civil society, improved governance, and protected human rights.

Mission Objective 1.1: Supported by Mission outreach and encouragement, by 2020, civil society groups will be allowed to register so as to render them better able to influence government decision making and political processes.

Mission Objective 1.2: Economic growth and integration are encouraged through improved policies and increased transparency.

Mission Objective 1.3: Greater respect in practice for civil liberties and religious freedom is fostered through Mission outreach and activities.

Mission Objective 1.4: Greater GSE cooperation with the Embassy, the Department of State, Department of Homeland Security/Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the repatriation of its nationals, who have no legal right to remain in the United States and, after due process of law, are subject to final orders of removal.

Mission Objective 1.5: Mutual respect for the international treaty system that supports consular access to detained U.S. citizens and facilitates consular assistance to U.S. citizens traveling to or residing within Eritrea.

Mission Goal 2: An Eritrea that advances regional peace and security, with minimal destabilizing actions.

Mission Objective 2.1: By 2020, the peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia will have resulted in the resolution of all border differences and the reopening of border crossing points for trade and individuals.

Mission Objective 2.2: GSE regional participation in Counter Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremeism (CT/CVE) coordination efforts and training is encouraged by Mission support and facilitation.

Management Objective 1: The Embassy's aged infrastructure is upgraded to provide a safe, secure, functional, and welcoming Embassy as a foundation for Mission operations.

Management Objective 2: Adequate human capital is ensured to enable timely and successful implementation of the Mission's Goals and Objectives.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: An Eritrea with strengthened civil society, improved governance, and protected human rights.

Description and Linkages: This Mission Goal links to the following Strategic Goals of the Joint State/USAID Strategic Goals:

- Strategic Goal 1: Counter threats to the international order and advance civilian security;
- Strategic Goal 3: Expand the ranks of stable, democratic states by promoting democratic governance and respect for human rights;
- Strategic Goal 4: Provide humanitarian assistance and support disaster mitigation;
- Strategic Goal 5: Support American prosperity through economic diplomacy;

And AF Bureau Regional Goals:

- Regional Goal 1: Strengthen democratic institutions;
- Regional Goal 2: Spur economic growth, trade and investment;
- Regional Goal 4: Promote opportunity and development in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mission Objective 1.1 Supported by Mission outreach and encouragement, by 2020, civil society groups will be allowed to register so as to render them better able to influence government decision making and political processes.

Justification: Eritrea has not held elections or implemented its constitution since gaining independence in 1991. In order for Eritrea to develop as a democracy that is characterized by inclusivity and transparency, encouragement for democratic progress and citizen involvement in building enduring institutions of governance and ensuring civil liberties through civil society involvement is essential.

Mission Objective 1.2 Economic growth and integration are encouraged through improved policies and increased transparency.

Justification: Eritrea's economy is not expanding rapidly and job creation is minimal, due to a variety of circumstances, including a high rate of outward migration by the nation's productive class, high expenditures for the security sector, limited exports, currency hoarding, unreliable rainfall to support agriculture, and UN arms embargo the GSE has manipulated to affect

broader trade. Encouraging Eritrea's economic diversification and increased investment would permit a higher level of living standards and greater economic integration with neighboring states.

Mission Objective 1.3 Greater respect in practice for civil liberties and religious freedom is fostered through Mission outreach and activities.

Justification: Eritrea severely limits freedoms of speech and media – there is no private sector media presence, no freedom of assembly, no peaceful redress, and no freedom of religion. Just four faiths are permitted to practice. To minimize human suffering and improve civil liberties generally, fostering greater respect for basic human freedoms is essential.

Mission Objective 1.4: Greater GSE cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security/ Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the repatriation of its nationals, who have no legal right to remain in the United States and, after due process of law, are subject to final orders of removal.

Justification: Eritrea has at times in the past insufficiently cooperated with the Department of Homeland Security/ Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) by refusing or delaying repatriation of its nationals who have no legal right to remain in the United States and, after due process of law, are subject to final orders of removal. Improvement in this area will help to keep Eritrea off both ICE's designated "watch list" and its actual list of "recalcitrant" countries with regard to alien removals.

Mission Objective 1.5: Mutual respect for the international treaty system that support consular access to detained U.S. citizens and facilitates consular assistance to U.S. citizens traveling to or residing within Eritrea.

Justification: Since 2001, the GSE has pursued policies that consistently isolate the country from the international community, international assistance and international trade. An important first step in reducing Eritrea's international isolation is to encourage the GSE to respect its obligations under international laws and treaties.

Mission Goal 2: An Eritrea that advances regional peace and security, with minimal destabilizing actions.

Description and Linkages: This Mission Goal links to the following Strategic Goals of the Joint State/USAID Strategic Goals:

- Strategic Goal 1: Counter threats to the international order and advance civilian security;
- Strategic Goal 3: Expand the ranks of stable, democratic states by promoting democratic governance and respect for human rights;
- Strategic Goal 7: Build a secure U.S. presence internationally.

And AF Bureau Regional Goals:

- Regional Goal 3: Advance Peace and Security;

Mission Objective 2.1: By 2020, the peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia will have resulted in the resolution of all border differences and the reopening of border crossing points for trade and individuals.

Justification: Border tensions with Ethiopia justified keeping Eritrea's security forces forward-deployed and give cause for the nation's leadership to extend National Service beyond the designated 18-month timeframe. Following the peace agreement with Ethiopia, demobilization would benefit Eritrean society by allowing public resources to be reallocated to more productive sectors, such as health and education, and improve human rights for those who had been compelled to serve for long terms under National Service.

Mission Objective 2.2: GSE regional participation in Counter Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism (CT/CVE) coordination efforts and training is encouraged by Mission support and facilitation.

Justification: Eritrea shares common interests with the United States in the area of countering terrorism and violent extremism. Due to UN sanctions and policy limitations, opportunities for assisting in developing Eritrean cooperation and capacity building have been severely limited. Encouraging Eritrean participation in regional efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism would serve U.S. interests.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: The Embassy's aged infrastructure is upgraded to provide a safe, secure, functional, and welcoming Embassy as a foundation for Mission operations.

Justification: Post continues to face daunting challenges with respect to fuel, water, electrical power, and communications capabilities. Unreliable city power, coupled with shortages of fuel needed to run 24/7 generators, brought the Embassy close to drawing down staff at the end of CY2016. Addressing the Embassy compound's infrastructure deficiencies resulting from many years of deferred maintenance is post's top management priority. Post's power supply, upon which we rely for all communications, technical security, and basic services, is especially vulnerable. Power fluctuations and power surges have repeatedly damaged post's equipment. Key components of the power supply system are approaching obsolescence. To resolve post's overall power issues and improve the safety of Embassy operations, comprehensive changes and improvements to post's primary power systems are required. In the absence of a major upgrade of our power supply system, the series of old transformers, by-passed AVR's, malfunctioning ATS units, and substandard wiring upon which post relies, leave post vulnerable to a single equipment malfunction resulting in a catastrophic power failure. For water, the Embassy is dependent on deliveries by an Embassy-owned water truck. With the deterioration of Asmara's Italian colonial-era water system, city water is extremely limited and frequently lacking for weeks on end. Fuel supplies are rationed by the host government, which limits the Embassy to purchasing no more than 20,000L per month. The majority of post's vehicles and all compound and residential generators consume diesel fuel. The Embassy compound, converted from a residential compound built in the 1950s, lacks adequate setback for security. Post's communications center is housed in a termite-ridden building with a leaking roof, plumbing problems, sub-standard wiring, and no setback. Post relies on satellite-based internet with significant latency issues that impede all Mission operations requiring access to State Department online systems.

Management Objective 2: Adequate human capital is ensured to enable timely and successful implementation of the Mission's Goals and Objectives.

Justification: After 15 years of dedicated service, dozens of senior LE Staff are receiving Special Immigrant Visas and leaving on short notice to emigrate to the U.S. The resulting vacancies and loss of institutional memory and expertise dramatically impact post's ongoing operations. Over the years, many LE Staff were unable to obtain exit visas from Eritrea and never had formal training for their positions. In addition, post's minimal USDH footprint established several years ago in response to the highly strained bilateral relationship is insufficient to maintain Mission

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operations and adequate management controls and to capitalize on the current potential for improving relations and re-engaging with Eritrea on key foreign policy issues.

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