

## The Herald

News for those who served with the Peace Corps in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

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### Editor's Note

Posted on [February 3, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [3 comments](#)

## Exit Strategy

*After seven years, it's time to go*

By **Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 63-65)**

Back in 2004 E&E RPCV president Marian Beil, speaking at the meeting of our group at the RPCV Conference in Chicago, asked whether there was anyone interested in helping her with the HERALD. I had recently retired after working 34 years at TIME magazine. I knew something about writing and editing. So I thought, hey, I could lend a hand. It would be a piece of cake.



Barry

Well, some piece of cake. For the last seven years I've fretted a lot over the HERALD, which Marian correctly says binds us all together. I worried that we were not running the right stories. I worked hard, at times, to make sure the newsletter was bright and informative. I put out seven issues that were printed on nice light beige-colored paper, and then, after we switched to electronic publishing, I edited nine editions which were delivered online. Still I worried that the HERALD was not appearing as often as it should. There were some very long dry periods without an issue. Those that did appear were mostly fun to produce. I badgered friends and complete strangers into writing for us. I managed to get contributions from those who served in Ethiopia/Eritrea in the '60s and '70s and from PCVs currently serving. Lots of people helped.

I am particularly indebted to John Coyne, of PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org, who generously wrote for us while turning out his own blog, editing his excellent site, and writing charming novels about golf. (Rumor has it he also holds down a full time job. I think it's unlikely.)

And I owe a great debt to Shlomo Backrach, editor of the East Africa Forum, who — sad to report — died in December after a struggle with lung cancer. Shlomo cared passionately about Ethiopia and Eritrea and graciously shared his knowledge and wisdom with me over our regular long lunches at our favorite Lebanese restaurant on Connecticut Avenue here in Washington. He wrote long pieces analyzing Ethiopian/Eritrean politics, and we were all so much better informed because of his labors. Of course, he not only wrote for us, but worked tirelessly sending out his daily summaries of news from the Horn of Africa. We will all miss a colleague who contributed so much. I mourn a friend.



Shlomo

But most of all, I am grateful to Marian for all the work she did on the HERALD. Sure, she bamboozled me into editing the HERALD, a task she did by herself for years, but she continued to do an enormous amount of the work required to produce the HERALD. She laid out the pages, cropped the photos, corrected my spelling errors, sent out notices to us all

that — at long last — an issue was available on line. Then she'd listen to all the complaints about what I had put in the edition. Without Marian there would be no HERALD and no E&E RPCV.

In recent years one of the HERALD's most reliable and graceful writers has been Janet Lee (Emdeber 74-76). Recently Janet spent her six-month sabbatical from Regis University in Denver back in Ethiopia overseeing the establishment of the Segenat Children and Youth Library in Mekelle. She just can't seem to stop volunteering. And I am pleased to announce that Janet, an experienced editor, has volunteered to take over the HERALD. We will be well served. And I can stop fretting.



Janet

So thank you all for your patience and your support over these years. It was really just a piece of cake.

Posted in [Editor's Note](#)

**3 Comments**

## RPCV Legacy Program

Posted on [February 3, 2012](#) by [eerpcv](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## New RPCV Legacy Program projects

*In recent months the Board of Ethiopia & Eritrea RPCVs approved the applications for two more RPCV Legacy Program projects.*

by **Marian Haley Beil (Debre Berhan 62-64)**

### ITC FOR METTU SCHOOL

Patti Garamendi (Mettu 66-68) and her daughter Faith Garamendi are championing "Supporting the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Lab for Mettu." This RPCV Legacy Program project will join in the efforts of the Ethiopia-approved NGO Alumni Association of St. Gabriel School along with parents and community members to bring computer literacy and enhanced learning to the students of this primary-middle school through a project entitled "Enhancing the Quality of Education Through ICTs at St. Gabriel Primary School." The long-term goal of the team is to:



- Set up, in existing space, a computer lab that will be furnished with 20 computers, appropriate furnishings, and necessary wiring.
- Provide computer literacy training to the school's 25-30 faculty members.
- Assure that the faculty members are capable of designing curriculum and teaching students and community members using computers and the Internet in their own areas of study.
- Provide enhanced educational opportunities for the students and citizens of Mettu.

Patti and Faith's RPCV Legacy Program project has established an initial goal to raise \$10,000 for the purchase of 20 computers, and 20 desks and chairs for the workstations in the ITC Lab.

You can help this project by making a tax-deductible donation. Go to [About the RPCV Legacy Program](#) to learn how to either send a check or donate through PayPal.

## PUBLISHING “ERITREA REMEMBERED”

Readers may recall an article in a previous issue of the Herald entitled “[Memories of Eritrea](#)” in which Scott Rasmussen, the Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Asmara suggested a project to video record the recollections of PCVs who served in Eritrea. I volunteered to help in any way I could. After some discussion and thought, we decided that logistically it would be easier to produce a book. A notice was sent out to all Eritrea RPCVs for whom E&E RPCVs had an email address to invite them to submit pieces focusing on relationships between them and the people of Eritrea.

It was decided that the book would be published under the [imprint of Peace Corps Writers](#) – the publishing arm of [Peace Corps Worldwide](#). I would edit, design and lay-out the book, and it would be printed by CreateSpace, a print-on-demand subsidiary of Amazon. The only cost for the production of the book would be approximately \$400 to pay for the initial printing set-up, and distribution management services from CreateSpace. To cover that cost I proposed an RPCV Legacy Program project to the board to raise the funds for this project that would contribute to one of the stated purposes of our group – “promoting world peace and understanding, especially among peoples in the United States, Ethiopia and Eritrea.” The project was approved. With donations from some of the authors who had submitted pieces for the book, the necessary funds were raised.

The book, [Eritrea Remembered: Recollections and Photos by Peace Corps Volunteers](#), was published this past December 15th. Those with pieces in the book are Marianne Arieux (Asmara 65-67), Mike Bannister (Asmara 73-74), Leo Cecchini (Asmara 62-64), Tom Cutler (Agordat 63-64), Harold Freeman (Mendefera 65-67), Walt Galloway (Adi Teclesan 70), Tom Gallagher (Agordat 62-64), Cathie Hulder (Decamere 64-66), Paul Huntsberger (Saganeiti 65-67), Wayne Kessler (Adi Teclesan 64-66), Cynthia Tse Kimberlin (Mendefera, Asmara 62-64), Neil Kottler (Asmara 64-66), Curt Peterson (66-70), Joann Feldman Richards (Keren 66-68), Mary Gratiot Schultz (Mendefera 65-67), Lois Shoemaker (Asmara 62-64), Judy Smith (Asmara 63-65) and Kate Yocum (Kudo-Abuor 97-98).



Read a [review of Eritrea Remembered](#) by Bryan Cramer (Adi Gudem 09-11).

*Eritrea Remembered* is available in [paperback](#) and [Kindle ebook](#) (without photos) versions.

All royalties from the sale of *Eritrea Remembered* support the RPCV Legacy Program project “Healthcare Books for Rural Communities.”

Posted in [RPCV Legacy Program](#)

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## PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [February 3, 2012](#) by [janetlee](#) | [8 comments](#)

# Sliding in Broadside: “What a ride!”

*PCV Keith Keyser may be three times the age of most PCVs, but his energy (and success) is a wonder to behold.*

By Janet Lee (Emdeber 74-76)

“He may be retired, but I have a hard time keeping up with him,” says a twenty-something male PCV about fellow Volunteer Keith Keyser. To look at Keith, one would not imagine that he had just celebrated his 70th birthday. Nothing slows him down. He is adored and respected by the other Volunteers, many of whom are the age of his own grandchildren. In fact, he signs most of his emails Keith/Dad/Grandpa/Great Grandpa. He is also more wired than most of the other Volunteers, updating [his Facebook page](#), blogs and emails at all hours of the day and night through the use of CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access) technology — electricity and internet permitting, of course; this is Ethiopia after all. That should not come as a surprise; he retired as the IT Director from Denver Water not so long ago.



Although assigned to the Finote Selam office that is in charge of the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and the support of those with suffering from the diseases, Keith has tallied up a wide variety of successes in his short two years in Finote Selam.

Among them are:

- Creating an Access database for the hospital to manage its patient medical records
- Setting up a chicken project complete with a three-room chicken house and an incubator room;
- Writing a handful of grant proposals;
- Setting up a community library and securing reference books for the secondary school library;
- Helping set up two urban gardens;
- Hosting weekly English language discussion groups in his home;
- Helping obtain soccer balls for a youth and sports group;
- Working with a health club at the Preparatory School to distribute mosquito nets;
- Accompanying three girls to the summer Camp Glow, Girls Leading our World camp in Gondar;
- Volunteering with Operation Smile in Jimma, an organization that performs surgery on cleft lips.

Still nothing has touched his heart as much as his work with the mentally ill and in particular, a young woman named Ana (not her real name). His emails are filled with her trials and tribulations, ups and downs, bumps and bruises, progress and relapses. She is schizophrenic with a persecution complex, and like so many mentally ill in Ethiopia was ignored, abused, and left to fend for herself. While working as a housemaid for a family, the son took advantage of her sexually. When she became pregnant, the family kicked her out of the house. She was approximately 16 years old and on the street when she gave birth. She struggled to raise her daughter while begging, but ultimately her child was taken from her and given up for adoption. Until she met Keith, her only protector was a Moslem bike repair shop owner who allowed her to while away her time at his shop. She slowly came to trust Keith and called him her “father and mother.”

It took some doing, but Keith was able to put together the proper papers, accompany her to Addis Ababa and have her admitted to a hospital where she was treated. Although nearly everyone else had given up on her, “Her eyes tell me that there is a vibrant person in there that wants to come out!” It is unclear what may have triggered her illness. It may have been brought on by her poverty and lack of ability to care for her daughter who was then taken away from her, or some

other traumatic event in her life, including being sexually molested while living on the streets. Her situation is further complicated by being HIV positive.

Even though the hospital may be one of the best mental hospital in East Africa, Keith felt like he was abandoning her at the hospital, a bit like in “One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest.” Ana shared a ward with 19 other women, each in varying stages of illness and delusions. Patients usually have a family member to watch after their affairs, provide them with care, food, tea, and other types of support. Keith was able to find a surrogate caregiver for a fee. In the meantime, Keith needed to deal with the typical Ethiopian bureaucracy of paperwork and signatures for her treatment.

After nearly two months of hospitalization, she returned to Finote Selam where the community was surprised at how “normal” she had become. She seemed to be recovering well emotionally, but was having difficulty adjusting to the HIV/AIDS medication, a common occurrence for the first few months as the body’s immune system is challenged by the medications. For the most part, she has reliably taken the medications on her own, but has occasional mishaps. She developed a severe infection on her head while Keith was away on Christmas holidays, an infection that is not that uncommon in AIDS patients. That has been treated and her life has some resemblance to normality.

Keith’s reputation as a miracle worker and sympathetic soul has drawn others with mental illness to him for assistance. He and Ismael, the bike repair shopkeeper, have taken over 45 patients to the Addis Ababa hospital for treatment, a harried and eventful eight-hour mini bus experience, each direction. But Ana will always have a special place in his heart.



Ismael

Keith has decided to extend his service and transferred to Mekelle at the beginning of this year to work with the Clinton Foundation to help improve the management of the country’s hospitals. This extension will allow him to occasionally check on Ana and his other projects. It seems that Ethiopia has had as much an effect on him as he has had on it. The extension will also give him an opportunity to travel further within and outside of Ethiopia and pursue his passion for photography. One of his recent photos, “Preparing the Garden for Planting,” was selected as a finalist in the Peace Corps 50th anniversary photo contest.

His wry, self-deprecating sense of humor comes through in his emails, blogs, and Facebook page, especially in the captions to his most exquisite photos. In a pre-Peace Corps experience in a Masaii village in Tanzania, he reflects, “The Masaii village people gave us gifts before we left; I was given a goat since I was the oldest member of our group.”

What keeps him going? Where does he get that passion for life? He explains that he believes in this adage: “Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming, wow . . . what a ride!!!”



Preparing the Garden for Planting

Posted in [PCVs in Ethiopia](#)

**8 Comments**

## PCVs in Ethiopia

Posted on [February 3, 2012](#) by [janettlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# Meeting Everyday Challenges in Ethiopia Head On: The Development of a Peer Support Network

*Looking forward, looking back*

By **Teri Enomoto (Emdiber 09-11)**

THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR is time to make resolutions and take a personal inventory. As many of us emerge from the holiday-induced haze like zombies from a horror movie, we begin to re-assess our lives. We put 2011 to bed as we look forward to new experiences, habits and personal growth.

I find that while I am looking to the future, I also have one eye on the past. For many recently returned RPCVs, this is the time when the finality of two years of experiences coalesces and there is nothing that can be altered to that chapter of life on Ethiopian soil. It is not only about saying goodbye to one's Ethiopian friends, family and town but also about a very distinct part of oneself; it is also about making peace with the



Eating kitfo with Tewolde



Teri with her host parents Aschalew Taye and Helen Tayu of Dera

experience by reconciling the good and the bad. It is a time to reminisce about what may end up being a very defining part of one's life.

As I ruminate about my own Peace Corps experience, there are many things that I wished I could do over again: things I wished I said, people I wished I met and events in which I wished I participated. While I may have a few regrets, there are some events that fundamentally changed who I am in positive ways. One such experience was my involvement with the post's Peer Support Network (PSN).

The Addis staff decided that some form of peer support was needed because the number of PCVs doubled while the staff size did not. There were nine of us who were elected: four Volunteers from Group 2 (2008–10): Karen Simms (Fitch), Mike Mallon (Debre Sina), Peter Buonincontro (Fincha) and Rich Gelicame (Hawassa); and five from Group 3 (2009–11): Aimee Uchytel (Bichena), Laura Copeland (Quiha), Raymael Blackwell (Mizan Terefi), Sher Vogel (Mertolemariam), and myself. We underwent an emotionally intense three-day training in October 2010 with Daynese Santos, the Peace Corps Medical Officer in Swaziland. We learned about supporting fellow PCVs through active listening and communication skills, as well as identifying common service challenges, red flags and grief resulting from loss.

After the training, we had several long meetings where we collaborated on what we envisioned PSN to be. I recall the shortest meeting lasted six hours. We elected our officers with Karen as President, Rich as Logistician, Laura as Secretary and Sher as PR Coordinator. Our first step was to create an internal structure. We crafted a mission statement that reflected our aim: "To provide, with integrity and confidentiality, a supportive, non-judgmental, and safe environment that will endure and evolve to meet the diverse needs of every Peace Corps/Ethiopia trainee and volunteer." We also drafted a constitution. Once we understood what our mission would be, we came up with a calendar of events that consisted of trainings and PCV support events (e.g., encouragement cards, care packages, etc.).

Rich devised a detailed budget based on the calendar of events. We proceeded to set upon the task of developing a framework for the trainings. We wanted to make these sessions systematic so that it would be sustainable; future PSN members would be able to facilitate training content because the topics would be preset and recorded in written form (e.g., pre-service training would involve diversity and resiliency issues while in-service training would deal with sharing community integration suggestions and experiences). We split up the content and each of us devised specific goals, objectives and activities for the sessions. We then reviewed and edited the content as a group and Karen formatted it into a working document that we called our Internal Manual. In addition, we began the process of establishing a manual that we would send to newly sworn in Volunteers with coping strategies, as well as identifying physical and emotional wellness issues. Each member was assigned a few topics to write.

We each contributed a photo and an inspiring quote in December which Mike used to create a color calendar for Volunteers and Staff. It included PCV birthdays and holidays (American and Ethiopian). He also sent congratulatory emails to Group 2 Volunteers who finished their service.

During the spring of 2011, we continued to work on the development, testing and modification of our training content. When Karen finished her service, we added Jess Miner (Assella) to supplement the team with the technical expertise of an art therapist. She completed the editing and layout process for both the Training Manual (formerly the Internal Manual) and the New PCV Manual. Emily DiGiovanni (Konso), Libbey Brown (Goba), Nancy Sturtevant (Wondo Genet), and Seth Kammer (Sebo) were elected from Group 4 (2010-12) and went through a PCV-run PSN training orientation.

I learned so much from the individuals on PSN. Each person brought such a unique personality and set of skills to the table. It was, and continues to be, a collaborative environment. I can honestly say that I have never been part of a group that was as hard-working *and* supportive as PSN and I may never be again. I would come out of our marathon meetings exhausted, overwhelmed with the ideas and options but satisfied with the work we were doing. As I look forward to the post-PC phase of my life, I will bring the skills I developed during this time with me as a thoughtful reminder of what can be achieved.

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## Projects

Posted on [February 3, 2012](#) by [janettlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

# Continuing a Tradition

*PCVs have long had an interest in preserving trees. Now a new project to save a unique verdant treasure is underway.*

**By Janet Lee (Emdeber 1974-76)**

As Returned Peace Corps Volunteers from Ethiopia and Eritrea, we have many shared memories: the sights, sounds, and odors we experienced in country. Some assaulted our senses and others were quite delightful — although they may have affected each of us individually in a different way. Who doesn't remember the first burning taste of berbere, women singing invitations to each other to come for coffee, the chilling whoop of the hyena in the middle of the night, the fragrant smell of roasting coffee, or that first sour bite of injera?

Usually injera was baked in some type of outdoor kitchen with dangerously long sticks of burning wood poking out from underneath a clay metad, the lid shaped from dried cow dung. Do I remember correctly that a large bundle of wood cost a mere semuni, about 25 cents? Women and girls would comb the nearby forests for large branches and carry them back to their village hunched over under the weight and bulk. Generation after generation of females repeated this process, roaming further and further into the countryside.

Slowly the forests were converted into pastures, fields, or deserts. Often wood was used for building materials. Over a century ago, eucalyptus (bahir saf—the tree from across the sea) was introduced as a quick fix. Its leaves had an



unmistakable fragrance, remarkably like cough drops! Although it spread quickly, it depleted the soil and soaked up all of the water. Today, nearly 95 percent of the ancient, natural Ethiopian forests are gone.

Some of our Peace Corps colleagues did what they could to reforest small areas of Ethiopia and encouraged a younger generation to take up the cause. PCV Glen Gish was [profiled in The Herald](#) for his work in the formation of a forestry club and for planting trees across the mountainsides in Mekelle.

Now a new project has the potential for a similar effect of reviving Ethiopia's tree cover by preserving the country's Church Forests. More than 35,000 of these small emerald green forests dot the northern highlands of Ethiopia, each a sanctuary in what is often an otherwise barren landscape. An Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church stands prominently in the center of each forest, serving as both a caretaker of the forest and of the souls that live in the surrounding area. There has been little recognition or research on these remnant pieces of forest ecosystems, until now.



Dr. Alemayehu

Alemayehu Wassie Eshete, an Ethiopian Forest Researcher who dedicated his doctoral work on Coptic forests, enlisted the support of Margaret Lowman, an internationally known tropical ecologist and researcher for the project. Lowman, fondly known as "Canopy Meg," has studied forest ecosystems on five continents and was intrigued by the Church Forests in Ethiopia after having made an initial visit to the area where she met with church elders. She has written prolifically about forest canopy ecology and is the author of *Life in the Treetops*.

This month Lowman is returning to Ethiopia with a film crew where she will team up once again with Alemayehu in an effort to document the existence of these small sanctuaries and the perils that threaten their survival. In addition to funds to support the documentary project, the team needs to expand its network of supporters to increase awareness of this fragile ecosystem. Peter Buntaine, a filmmaker and graduate of the New York University Film School, is leading the production. [A movie trailer provides](#) insights on the expectations of what they hope to accomplish.



Meg  
Lowman

Without protection, the Church Forests could vanish. The first step may be as simple as building a stone fence around each forest to serve as an enclosure protecting the vegetation from further grazing, and also to serve as a point of demarcation to prevent encroachment from a farmer's plow. The Church Forests project will be equal parts science and outreach, working with children's church groups and neighboring schools. Church elders have also requested that simple pit latrines be dug within the enclosures since church services are long, some lasting the better part of a day, and many in the congregation must answer the call of nature.

During initial trips by the team, children were intrigued by and participated in insect collection. With such activities, it is hoped that engaging young people will assure that there will be stewards of the church forests in the future. The intent is that the church infrastructure will inspire the local community to create sustainable solutions. The Tree Foundation and National Geographic have contributed partial funding to this project.

Further information about preserving Ethiopia's Church Forests can be found at the [Tree Foundation website](#).

# News of Ethiopia

Posted on [February 3, 2012](#) by [janettlee](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

**Written and compiled by Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 63-65)**

## HOW TO RAISE SOME CASH

Ethiopia is in need of cash for development projects. Sure, the World Bank and other donors give Ethiopia a lot of help, especially in food aid, but the country's five year growth plan unveiled in 2010 calls for more than \$35 billion to be invested in infrastructure projects including roads, dams and railroads. How to get the cash? Ethiopia has already sold off some farm land to foreign investors causing considerable controversy, but now an Addis research company suggests that the government sell five of the crown jewels of state-owned companies, including Ethiopian Airways, Ethio Telecom and the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. That could raise nearly \$7.8 billion, which would build a lot of bridges.

## DIFFICULT TRIALS

Several important trials are taking place in Addis, with the government dragging various opposition leaders and journalists in front of courts charged with terrorism. Right after the Genna Christmas celebration, Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa appeared in federal court to hear charges accusing them of conspiring to overthrow Ethiopia's government by force. They were also accused of being recruiters for the Oromo Liberation Front, an outlawed separatist group.

According to a Voice of America report, Bekele and Olbana had been considered among the brightest of the young generation of politicians being groomed to take over following the 2010 electoral disaster, when the opposition was virtually shut out of Parliament. Bekele had been named deputy chairman and external relations chief for the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM), and Olbana held a similar post in the Oromo People's Congress.

The men were arrested last August after meeting with a visiting delegation from the Amnesty International rights group, which was later expelled from the country. Along with seven co-defendants, Bekele and Olbana had also assisted a BBC news crew that been investigating allegations that Ethiopia used billions of dollars in development aid as a tool for political repression. The government strongly denied the report, calling it irresponsible.

In court, Bekele tried to argue that he had been working for peaceful change on behalf of what he called "downtrodden Oromos." Chief Judge Endeshaw Adane cut him short, saying the hearing was only for entering a plea.

The trial of Bekele and Olbana is being heard in the same high-court complex where a verdict is due soon in the case of two journalists also charged with terrorism. Reeyot Alemu, a columnist with the weekly paper Fitih [Justice], and Woubshet Taye, deputy editor of the now defunct Awramba Times, are charged with plotting to sabotage telephone and electricity lines.

In a third terrorism trial, opposition politician Andualem Aragie and internet blogger and political analyst Eskinder Nega are among 30 defendants charged with conspiring to overthrow Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's government by violent means. While Eskider and Andualem will be in the courtroom, most of the defendants are in exile and being tried in absentia.

And in a related ruling, Ethiopia sentenced two Swedish journalists to 11 years in jail in December on charges of supporting terrorism after the pair illegally entered the country with a Somali rebel group. Photojournalist Johan Persson and reporter Martin Schibbye were arrested by Ethiopian security forces in July during a gunfight between Ethiopian soldiers and rebels in the no-go region of Ogaden, and were put on trial in October.

Judge Shemsu Sirgaga ruled on 27 December that Persson and Schibbye should suffer “rigorous imprisonment” following their convictions. The verdict, he said, “should satisfy the goal of peace and security.” Prosecutors had asked for 18 years in prison for the pair. Speaking from Stockholm, Karin Schibbye, Martin’s mother, told The Guardian, “It’s absurd. You can’t really take in that they are sentenced to 11 years. It’s obviously so wrong. They are innocent. They entered the country illegally and should be punished for that and nothing else.”

## **IN AND OUT OF SOMALIA**

In 2006 Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia to support a fragile and largely ineffective Africa Union backed government against Islamists, including al-Shabab. While the Ethiopians managed to secure parts of Mogadishu and some outlying towns, they were not really comfortable nor successful. The Somalis were always resentful and suspicious of the Ethiopians, who had fought a war with them in the 1970s. In 2009 Ethiopian troops withdrew.

Since then, conditions in Somalia have not improved greatly, but a growing African Union force, called Amisom has gained strength as countries like Uganda, Djibouti and recently Kenya have contributed troops. But still the Islamists have power and in last August Ethiopian troops once again entered Somalia. In December Ethiopian forces ousted Al-Shabab from a border town called Bulo Hawo. They helped secure Beledweyne, long a strong hold for the government. But Ethiopia is once again pulling back. They will give their positions to the African Union forces — and wait for the next call for assistance from the AU.

## **STICK TO MARIJUANA**

The Netherlands, long famous among young travelers in Europe for its lenient soft drug policies and pot cafes, is banning khat. Four times a week fresh shipments of khat came through Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport. Khat leaves, as some RPCVs may, err, ahh, recall hearing tell, need to be fresh, otherwise they lose their potency. The trade is worth some \$18 million per year (bless those EU statistics), but the Dutch are eager to limit the trade because it is causing problems in the Somali/Ethiopian/Eritrean communities in Holland. Khat is banned in the U.S., Canada and several other EU countries.

## **COMMITMENTS NOT FORGOTTEN**

Since leaving office three years ago, President George W. Bush has kept a relatively low profile, but in December Bush traveled to Ethiopia to support a project which may be one of the proudest accomplishments of his administration. Bush delivered the keynote address to an international conference on AIDS in Africa. He spoke to an audience of mostly African scientists, health professionals and AIDS activists. But he addressed his most pointed remarks to U.S. lawmakers and taxpayers. According to a VOA report, he drew enthusiastic applause when he said this is not the time to cut back funding for the battle against sexually-transmitted diseases. “During lean budget times, the United States and the developing world must set priorities, and there is no greater priority than saving human life,” he said.



**BEST BUDS:** President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Addis

Mr. Bush was showered with gifts and honors during his one-day visit to Ethiopia for his leadership in creating PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief. The 10-year, \$39 billion program is considered the largest ever initiative dedicated to fighting a disease.

Bush said that he understood that in the U.S. there is pressure to balance budgets and cut spending, but he said that reducing successful humanitarian programs would diminish America's standing in the world. "I know that during moments of economic hardship, there can be a temptation for Americans to disengage from the world. But we cannot retreat. We cannot afford to falter when we're needed most. Isolationism is always short sighted. It's always a mistake. It can always lead to greater hardship and despair," he said. Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi presented Mr. Bush with his government's Outstanding Leadership award for PEPFAR's contribution to improving health.



Posted in [News of Ethiopia](#), [Uncategorized](#)

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## News of Eritrea

Posted on [February 3, 2012](#) by [janettlee](#) | [2 comments](#)

**Written and compiled by Barry Hillenbrand (Debre Marcos 63-65)**

### HOW BAD IS THE FAMINE?

Eritrea officially says that it has enough food and that it is not suffering from drought or famine. It had a good harvest, say officials. Because Eritrea is closed to reporters and many aid organizations, first hand information is difficult to come by. Eritrea's neighbors are suffering from famine, so the assumption is that some of those problems might be operative across the border.

But aid groups say there is some evidence that Eritrea has serious food problems. According to the BBC, there is an increasing trend of acute malnutrition in children under five in many areas. Satellite imagery from weather monitoring group the Famine Early Warning System shows below average rainfall from June to September, which is the main rainy season for Eritrea. This shortfall comes after years of severe drought in consecutive years. The human impact is to be found in northern Ethiopia. Emaciated Eritreans are crossing the heavily militarized border at the rate of 900 a month, according to journalists in the region.

### WHO'S JAMMING WHOM?

Jamming of radio broadcasts seems so, well, Cold War, 20th Century. But it is still a matter of considerable controversy on the Horn of Africa even in this age of internet and computers. Last March, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said that Ethiopia was testing jamming equipment and felt it had a right to block harmful broadcast, especially Voice of America's Amharic service.

Now Eritrea, hardly a country that is a paragon of free broadcasting, claims that its enemy Ethiopia has been jamming its satellite broadcasts. In a statement loaded with ironies, Asmelash Abraha, Director General of Eritrean Television,

said that Ethiopia “is continuing its hostile policy of blocking information disseminated from Eritrea . . . [by] engaging in jamming and interfering activities.”

He added that Eritrea has “both legal and organizational responsibility to ensure uninterrupted service for the satellite broadcast for which Eritrea has made heavy investment, and thus take legal action against the Addis Ababa regime which is conducting illegal jamming activities.” He added that “regimes that conduct such airwave banditry are those which lack courage and capacity to face the truth being disseminated.”

## **COME ON HOME. ALL IS FORGIVEN**

In an interview with Sudan state TV during a visit to Khartoum, Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki has said that he will guarantee the safety of tens of thousands of young people who have fled the country to avoid forced conscription in the military. Isaias said that any citizen willing to return home is welcomed. He assured that no returning Eritrean would be subjected to any harm.

Political repression and military conscription have pushed thousands of young Eritreans to flee their country. Eritrean national service is mandatory for all citizens both male and female aged between 18 and 48 years. Every month thousands of young Eritreans risk their lives attempting to sneak across the country’s heavily militarized border into neighboring Ethiopia and Sudan.

Currently Ethiopia houses over 60,000 Eritreans in four refugee camps. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimated in 2011 that there are over 100,000 Eritrean refugees in Sudan, with around 1,600 crossing the border every month.

In the past, the Eritrean President has dismissed concerns that his country is seeing a large number of youth fleeing the country, labeling them as “a bunch of traitors.” It’s unclear why Isaias had this change of heart.

In the same interview Isaias, who is the first and only head of state Eritrea has had since independence in 1993, rejected calls to conduct national elections. He said his country won’t hold elections just to please the West. Since independence from Ethiopia in 1993, Eritrea has not held an election. The Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice, which led the revolution, has since become the only legal political party.



President Isaias Afewerki in Sudan

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**2 Comments**