

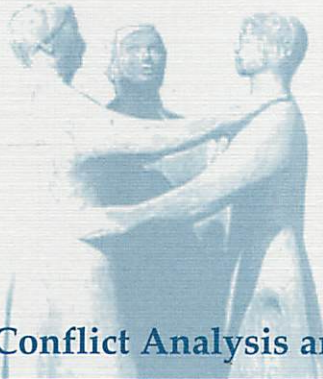


ICAR Report Number Four

The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue

An Analytical Report 2000-2003

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Contents

About the Institute	iii
Preface—The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue	1
Diasporas, Conflict, and the Roles of Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans	3
Organizing the Ethiopian Dialogues	6
Process—The Sustained Dialogue Model	10
The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue Process	12
The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue: Substance and Analysis	19
An Analysis	29
Conclusion	32
Book Order Form	33

About the Institute

The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, has as its principal mission to advance the understanding and resolution of significant and persistent conflicts among individuals, communities, identity groups, and nations.

In the fulfillment of its mission, the Institute conducts a wide range of programs and outreach. Among these are its graduate programs offering doctoral and master's degrees in conflict analysis and resolution, clinical consultancy services offered by individual members of the faculty, and public programs and education that include the annual Vernon M. and Minnie I. Lynch Lecture Series.

The Institute's major research interests cluster into four overall themes: globalization and conflict, religion and conflict, reflective practice, and change and conflict. The Institute's Applied Practice and Theory Program (APT) develops teams of faculty, students, and allied practitioners to analyze and address topics such as conflict in schools and other community institutions, crime and violence, jurisdictional conflicts between local agencies of government, and international conflicts.

For more information, please call (703) 993-1300 or check the Institute's web page at www.gmu.edu/departments/ICAR/.

The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue: *An Analytical Report, 2000-2003*

This report is an analytical summary of an extended dialogue among Ethiopians in the Washington area known as the Ethiopian Extended Dialogue (EED) that has been facilitated by a team of faculty and graduate students at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR). It has been written in response to a request from the EED participants and focuses on both the process and content of the seventeen meetings that took place between 2000 and 2003. It has been drafted by the ICAR team and does not necessarily reflect a consensus among the Ethiopian participants. Individual participants are likely to disagree with how some parts of the discussion are recalled and naturally will have differing interpretations on some of the analysis.

None of the content, therefore, should be attributed to any participant in the dialogue process. The ICAR team hopes it will serve as a useful document both to recall the tremendous amount of ground covered over the past two and a half years and potentially as a basis to move forward in a manner agreeable to the participants.

The report is organized as follows. The first Background section begins with a consideration of the linkages between diaspora groups and conflicts back home in order to situate the EED process in relation to larger questions of conflict analysis and resolution. The Background section also includes an analytical narrative of the origins ICAR's work facilitating dialogues within the Ethiopian community. The next section, Process, reflects upon the design of the EED and in particular its relationship to other models of Extended Dialogue. It includes some thoughts from the ICAR team regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the process and its implementation. The third section of the report includes a Narrative of the Dialogues, recalling many of the topics discussed in the meetings, and an Analysis section reflecting upon the nature of the major issues. A short final section, Next Steps, recalls the various options raised by one or more of the participants regarding where the EED process might move.

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Diasporas, Conflict, and the Roles of Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans

As globalization increases with rapid and inexpensive global communications, international travel, and money transfers, local conflicts are increasingly linked to larger, global processes. Globalization has encouraged new diaspora identities as groups living outside of their homelands create new social networks and solidarities that straddle their original and new place of residence. In particular, diaspora groups play a critical role in setting the boundaries for acceptable options for conflict resolution and in some cases undermine movements toward compromise and settlement. Diasporas often remain active in the politics and the conflict of their homeland, in part because engagement in such issues serves as a means to maintain a sense of identity distinct from their new place of residence and as a way to understand their exile while remaining engaged in the issues that contributed to their displacement. Diaspora communities often create social networks that link exiled leaders and intellectuals with political movements and parties to the conflict back home. They also continue to reflect rivalries and conflicts still existing back home.

Most diasporas develop social networks both to retain a sense of identity and to promote community self-help programs for finding jobs, housing, and managing immigration issues in their new host land. They often form church groups, schools to maintain languages and cultural practices from the homeland among their children, and other social clubs to celebrate religious holidays or to mark other symbolically important dates and ceremonies. Annual events such as the Ethiopian soccer tournament in North America bring thousands together not only to compete and socialize but also to talk about and organize around politics. Humanitarian organizations to promote development in their homeland, adopt a school, or collect medical supplies further the linkages. The Society of Ethiopians in Diaspora (SEED) holds awards ceremonies to honor Ethiopians in the United States for their contributions to the community both at home and abroad.

Of particular importance to the question of diaspora links to homeland conflict, many exile groups publish newspapers, create websites and e-mail discussion groups, or produce other media that develop communications among exiles, keep the community informed of events back home, and frame the homeland conflicts in a way that is meaningful to those in the diaspora. The conflict that was the cause (at least in part) of their exile is not surprisingly a topic of considerable interest and mobilization.

Diasporas play an important role in setting the terms of discussion around issues of conflict and national identity. For such diaspora communities as the Armenians, Irish, Kurds, Tamils, Croatians, to name just some illustrative cases, the concept of homeland is inherent in the diaspora identity and therefore serves as a focal point of diaspora political action and debate. The “old country” is often romanticized and past glories and grievances kept alive in an “allegiance to the land of memories” that serves as a way of asserting continued belonging.¹ In some cases, diaspora groups frame issues relating to conflict in their homelands in ways that delegitimize compromise and favor hard-line resistance. This framing is quite powerful because exiles often have greater access to the media and the time, resources, and freedom to articulate a framework that actors in the conflicted homeland may not. Parties to the conflict back home often rely upon diasporas for resources and support. Uncompromising exile narratives therefore often constrain the ability of actors in the homeland to propose different ways to understand the struggle or to engage in constructive conflict resolution. The devotion to the cause by the diaspora may make it more difficult for political actors back home to accept compromise solutions that may be condemned as appeasement or treason among the émigrés. On some occasions, a move by a leader in a conflict to seek a negotiated outcome will be undermined by diaspora leaders committed to hard-line positions.

¹Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London, 1997), p. 185.

The Ethiopian community in the United States is estimated at 250,000, with a large concentration in the Washington metropolitan area. Since the 1991 transition, a number of organizations that are intensely opposed to the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front regime have developed within this community. The community has a wide range of organizations and newspapers, several radio shows that broadcast weekly, and a strong influence on the strategies of political actors back in Ethiopia. Ethiopian political leaders, both in the government and in the leading opposition organizations within Ethiopia, regularly send delegations to brief the community in Washington and to solicit its support.

The community is sharply divided, in part on the basis of ethnicity. Some Oromos regard the Ethiopian state as an empire in which northern Ethiopians (Amharas and Tigreans, referred to as "Abyssinians" by some Oromos) dominate the South. Some argue that the Oromo people therefore have the right to self-determination and their own state. Some Oromos in North America support the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), an opposition party that left the transitional government in 1992 and subsequently claims to be engaged in an armed struggle to liberate its people.

Another significant voice within the community is that which supports the idea of a united Ethiopia. This group includes some Amharas, but others who are either of mixed ethnicity or who perceive their primary identity as "Ethiopian" support this point of view as well. Some within this community have supported the non-ethnic, ideological parties of the late 1960s and 1970s (such as the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party or Meison) while others supported the All-Amhara People's Party. Southern Ethiopians and smaller ethnic groups such as the Afar and Somali are also present but less vocal and less well connected to the major media and community organizations.

Finally, a portion of the Ethiopian diaspora in Washington supports the current EPRDF regime. Some favor the existing government out of ethnic solidarity, others out of distaste for the opposition, and still others regard the EPRDF as the best regime to foster development and democracy in Ethiopia. This community is organized in part through the activities of the Ethiopian embassy in Washington. Support from the diaspora has funded large development projects, particularly in northern Ethiopia, the regime's geographic and ethnic homeland.

The Ethiopian diaspora in the North America is not limited to Washington. Significant communities also exist in Los Angeles, Houston, Atlanta, and Toronto. Large numbers of Oromos live in Minneapolis, building on their connections through Lutheran missionaries active in education among the Oromos in western Ethiopia. The Ethiopian exile community is politically powerful with relation to their homeland. They have lobbied the U.S. government and international financial institutions to reduce aid due to human rights conditions in Ethiopia and have raised funds for humanitarian and development projects. They have a large number of newspapers and other media outlets that play an important part in setting the political agenda back home. The diaspora is relatively wealthy and therefore has the resources to play a large role despite their distance.

Organizing the Ethiopian Dialogues

The dialogue among the Ethiopian diaspora was an initiative by a group of interested faculty and graduate students from George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) in 1999 as an academic exercise with the goal of exploring the potential of such a process to encourage peace in Ethiopia and the broader Horn of Africa region. The ICAR team decided to begin its work on internal conflicts within Ethiopia,

in part because the then more violent Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict was already engaged by a wide variety of international actors.

The initiative was conceptualized as a third party intervention organized by an independent, nonpartisan, academic institution. Numerous meetings within the Ethiopian community to address the conflict had been organized over the years but most were called by political organizations and hence perceived as partisan. Many Ethiopians regarded these meetings as contentious and served as opportunities for political organizations to attack one another rather than to discuss issues constructively, share experiences, and design a common understanding of the causes of the conflict.

ICAR's model built on the work done by Harold Saunders, who developed a type of intervention he called a "Sustained Dialogue" and had implemented to encourage discussions between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and among parties to the internal conflict in Tajikistan.² The goal of a Sustained Dialogue is to address protracted social conflict, rebuild relationships, and to "change conflictual relationships over time."³ Sustained dialogues are unofficial by design with an open-ended agenda subject to the desires and interests of the participants, not forums for formal negotiations among official parties to sign a peace agreement. The dialogue takes place among individuals from diverse backgrounds and emphasized open, respectful discussion. In order to build on trust and relationships, extended dialogues are conducted with small groups (ten to twenty participants) where participants attend a linked series of meetings. ICAR's major role as facilitators was to provide participant's space and facilities where participants could express their views and perceptions about the conflict in Ethiopia without fear and intimidation.

²Harold H. Saunders, *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts* (St. Martin's, 1999) details his model.

³Saunders, *A Public Peace Process*, p. 43.

It was challenging to recruit the participants to the ICAR-sponsored dialogues. The time commitment was considerable (one Saturday a month) and many Ethiopians were tired of endless meetings and doubtful that additional meetings would result in any benefit. The ICAR team developed a concept paper, "Ethiopia in 2005 C.E.: Towards a Peaceful Society" that the facilitators hoped would explain the goals of the meetings and why they promised to result in a more satisfying process.

In order to begin its work, the ICAR team decided in October 1999 to initiate the dialogue process with a group of Ethiopian students at George Mason University, a series of meetings labeled the Ethiopian Youth Dialogue (EYD). After identifying some fifty Ethiopian students at GMU by going through the student directory and identifying Ethiopian names (a process that admittedly risked both including non-Ethiopians such as Eritreans and missing some Ethiopians with Islamic or other names of ambiguous origin), ICAR sent letters of invitation. The response rate was low, in part because of the proliferation of e-mailed invitations and junk mail, leading ICAR to recruit participants directly on campus.

The first EYD meeting was held on December 1999 and subsequent meetings were held in February, March, and April 2000. The group met for six or seven hours once a month at the George Mason University's Arlington campus every month. ICAR professors Christopher Mitchell and Terrence Lyons served as faculty coordinators and a number of ICAR graduate students participated as organizers and co-facilitators.

During the first meeting participants expressed opposing views about the conflict in Ethiopia. In subsequent meetings, however, they were able to synthesize the issues and produced a consensus document, which outlined the Causes and Conditions of the conflicts in Ethiopia with sections on Economic Sources, Political Sources, and Ethnic Issues, and a final section that envisioned a peaceful Ethiopia in the Year 2006. The EYD participants decided to disseminate this report by posting it on the ICAR website and

opened up a channel for communication with the larger community by creating an electronic "guest book" for comments and reactions. The EYD experience helped the facilitators to understand the complexity of the conflict in Ethiopia, the nature of the Ethiopian community in the Washington area, and thereby design a more effective strategy to continue its work.

The ICAR team next decided to focus their attention on the broader Ethiopian community in the Washington metropolitan area outside of GMU. The team prepared a concept paper and began to initiate contacts with various Ethiopian community leaders. This set of extended dialogues was called the Ethiopian Extended Dialogue (EED). Like EYD, EED was unofficial and aimed to promote a culture of open dialogue among the Ethiopian community. EED participants were residents of the Washington metropolitan area pulled from different ethnic, educational, and professional backgrounds. The participants were knowledgeable about the political situation in Ethiopia but did not represent any ethnic or political group and were willing to discuss the conflict in Ethiopia unofficially. The first, exploratory, EED took place August 26, 2000 with eight participants. During subsequent meeting the number fluctuated between ten and six. The group met twenty times and discussed issues related to the internal conflict in Ethiopia.

Participants had different views about the conflict in Ethiopia due to their background and political orientation. Participants discussed and addressed issues openly and expressed their views freely. Sometimes participants felt that there were missing voices and sought to invite additional members from other points of view. As the dialogue progressed, the trust level among the participants increased dramatically thus leading to shared personal and group stories.

Process

The Sustained Dialogue Model

As noted above, during the year prior to the start of the Ethiopian Extended Dialogue (EED), the ICAR team had conducted a project with Ethiopian graduate and undergraduate students from George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College under the title of an Ethiopian Youth Dialogue (EYD), a project that had utilized a process known in the field of conflict analysis as “sustained dialogue.” The ICAR team had decided to try out this process during the Ethiopian Youth Dialogue and, in that case, it had met with some success in that the process appeared to enable young Ethiopians from varied backgrounds to talk about themselves, their knowledge of conflicts within Ethiopia, and their visions for acceptable and viable future alternatives. Bearing this in mind, while planning for a follow up project, the ICAR team felt that it would be appropriate to use a similar process in any further development of the project, although during initial planning sessions that took place during the summer of 2000, a variety of modifications to the original scheme were debated, and some changes made to make the process more appropriate to senior members of the Ethiopian communities in the Washington area.

The underlying principles of the “Sustained Dialogue” process involve gathering together representatives – or representative “voices” – of the parties to some protracted and intractable conflict in a series of regular meetings over a considerable period of time in order that the participants can analyze the nature and underlying causes of their shared conflict (rather than the contemporary positions and behaviors of the adversaries that usually are the center of attention of much so-called “analysis”) and explore possible futures in which these underlying causes are dealt with in a mutually satisfactory manner and a new relationship created between erstwhile adversaries. The dialogue is “sustained” in that it takes place over a number of months, if not years, as opposed to the shorter (one or two weeks), continuous and intensive problem solving “workshops” that have been used

in efforts to deal with other protracted conflicts (e.g. Cyprus, Georgia/Abkhazia). It is wide ranging and intended to cover thoroughly as many of the issues as are found to be relevant to the conflict; and, on the basis of a thorough analysis of underlying “problems” and “dilemmas,” it seeks to develop some suggested solutions acceptable to both decision makers and constituents within adversary parties. Such dialogues, which in the past have taken place on a monthly, quarterly or even half yearly basis, are “facilitated” by a third party team, which usually contains individuals standing, to a large degree, “outside” the conflict but some with knowledge of the conflict and others with knowledge of helpful process skills. The ICAR team had acted as facilitators of the EYD and planned to do so again for a subsequent project involving Ethiopian community leaders.

The original process of sustained dialogue was developed by Ambassador Harold Saunders, formerly U.S. Under Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs during President Carter and President Reagan's administrations; and his associate from the Kettering Foundation, Dr. Randa Slim. While insisting that the dialogue process should always be regarded as highly flexible and open to useful innovations, as well as allowing participants to steer the discussion in any way that seemed fruitful to them, Saunders did suggest that, based on his experience, the dialogue process often falls into five broad phases:

- Stage 1: Deciding to Engage in the Dialogue, which involves finding respected individuals who can represent the viewpoints of their communities, who can agree on the nature, purpose and rules for a dialogue and who can agree to meet regularly over the months.
- Stage 2: Mapping the Relationships, which involves agreeing on the nature of the problems confronting the communities and identifying those, which are key to understanding the conflict.
- Stage 3: Generating a Will to Change, which involves probing deeply into existing issues, dilemmas and relationships, into what futures might be envisaged if current interactions continue and into what might need to be changed to avoid outcomes undesirable to all.

- **Stage 4: Building Scenarios**, which involves envisaging desirable futures, analyzing obstacles to achieving such future states and considering ways of removing or circumventing such obstacles.
- **Stage 5: Acting Together**, which involves developing practical ways in which scenarios developed in the previous stage might be brought to fruition.

Saunders and Slim emphasize that, inevitably, actual dialogues will never conform neatly to these five stages but they felt that – used flexibly – these five stages might serve as a useful framework for those conducting the discussions. As this had proved the case in the EYD, the ICAR team determined to use the process once again in the proposed Ethiopian Extended Dialogue among community leaders.

The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue Process

In the event, the ICAR team found that much flexibility was, indeed, required in launching and then conducting the various stages of the dialogue that have been attempted up to this date. An initial problem in implementing the Saunders-Slim Stage 1 arose in arranging a group of community leaders who were interested enough to be willing to commit to what was likely to be at least a one year process of regular all-day meetings on a monthly basis, with no reward save the possibility of establishing a forum in which analysis could take place and ideas about solutions developed.

A second problem was that of trying to determine, a priori, which groups, communities or organizations should have their voices “represented” around the table, although it was vital that those invited to be present should be asked to come simply as individuals in a wholly unofficial capacity. In other words – given the complexities of the various interlocking conflicts existing within the region – which were the key “parties” to which particular “conflicts?”

One suggestion made during this preparatory stage was that the focus of the dialogue could well focus on the then highly violent conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea over their mutual border. It was felt, however, that this particular conflict might merely be symptomatic of deeper and more general problems. A decision therefore was taken to try to focus the dialogue more broadly on what seemed to be the underlying issues of unity and diversity, autonomy and separatism among the communities living within the boundaries of the existing Ethiopian state – leaving open the distinct possibility that, once the dialogue had begun, other key issues and divisions might well reveal themselves.

With that in mind, the ICAR team began to enquire within the Ethiopian communities in the Washington area about possible participants for the dialogue. It was felt essential to obtain representative “voices” from a number of key communities to obtain a balanced discussion, but this raised the dilemma of the size of the group – about 12, plus the facilitators, being an ideal number to aim for – given that it was the general experience that at least two participants from each relevant community helped to create a sense of security and support within the group. In the end, it was decided that the dialogue should involve at the least representative voices from Oromo, “Southern,” Amhara, and Tigrean communities (especially the last, given the current dominance of Tigrean voices in the current EPDRF regime in Addis Ababa) plus as many representatives of smaller communities as could be included in a manageable dialogue group.

Efforts to assemble such a representative group of participants were pursued vigorously during the summer of 2000, with considerable help from organizations within the Ethiopian communities in Washington such as the Ethiopian Community Center, Ethiopian Community Development Council, for which we are most grateful. The ICAR team was fortunate in being able to engage the commitment of several individuals both interested and well able to articulate the positions, viewpoints, and aspirations of some of the communities whose voices were necessary to a rounded and representative analysis of the problems within present day Ethiopia.

However, the ICAR team was less successful in other respects. One major failure was that it proved impossible within the time available to involve any participants able to represent the voice of those supporting the present regime in power in Ethiopia. This proved a major drawback once the dialogue was under way as any critiques of present government goals, policies, and tactics tended to go unanswered, and there was a temptation to scapegoat the regime for many ills that might otherwise have been seen as structural and systemic, rather than peculiar to those currently "in office" – or those who had been in power in previous historical periods. On occasions, some of the facilitators even felt it necessary to act as "devil's advocate" or surrogates for a pro-government "voice" by making suggestions along the lines of "Perhaps, if participant who supported the EPRDF government were to be here, they might respond or comment thus..." However, this was less than satisfactory and, in the view of the ICAR team, the absence of such a voice was a distinct drawback during the dialogue. In addition to adding a pro-government voice, the lack of a Somali or Afar voice was also noted from time to time. Another major failing was our inability, despite strenuous efforts during the first year of the dialogue, to include any women in the group of participants.

The initial problem of making the group of participants both representative and inclusive gave rise to a subsequent and continuing dilemma as the dialogue unfolded. This was the question of adding new members to the group. Ideally, as Saunders and Slim suggest, the group members remain the same throughout the process, although they also acknowledge that, while it is important that "core" members remain committed and (for the most part) present, others can be added at later stages of the process. In fact, however, it proved difficult to do this once the dialogue had been continuing for some time, as adding newcomers would clearly mean "backtracking" over ground already covered and a delay in moving to new and desired activities. In fact, and not unusually, there developed some clear divisions within the participants between those who wished to proceed slowly and deliberately – particularly with the analytical aspects of the process – in order to ensure that the nature of sources, problems and issues had been clearly examined, understood, and agreed upon; and those who wished to proceed rapidly to the question of viable solutions and related action. Many times during the dialogue, when discussions circled

back to issues previously talked about, some participants evinced impatience that “we had been here before,” while others argued that the analysis “before” had left out important elements and further analysis was needed. In the event, new participants were added to the group following the summer of 2001, to the enrichment of the discussions, but the debate about additional members re-occurred at several points, even during the second year of the meetings, and – in the view of the ICAR facilitators – was never successfully resolved.

Another sensitive issue, especially in the early stages of the dialogue before any level of trust had been developed in the process, in the facilitating team and in other participants, was that of confidentiality of the proceedings and what might be done regarding any records of the discussions. Given that the whole point of such dialogues is to enable participants to speak openly and freely about their understandings, views and feelings, and yet feel protected from having information about such matters revealed to outsiders, this was a key issue. It was decided at the initial meetings, and reiterated later, that the content of the discussions would be kept confidential; that in any written reports of what took place no individual attribution of statements or views would be made (and that such documentation would only be circulated among members of the dialogue unless otherwise agreed); and that “outside” distribution of any subsequent report or other documents would need the prior approval of all the members of the dialogue. This agreement – which has been wholly honored to date – appeared to be acceptable and to reassure participants, one result being that, as the dialogue proceeded, it became characterized by increasing levels of trust, open-ness in exchange of views (even when strong disagreements existed) and honesty in expressing viewpoints, feelings, perceptions, historical memories and future aspirations. The ICAR team has been greatly impressed by this aspect of the dialogue, as well as with the relationships of respect that appear to have been built up over the three years of meetings that have taken place.

Another innovation that demanded flexibility from both facilitators and participants was the presence at the dialogue of a number of graduate students from ICAR who were learning about the dialogue process and about the role of facilitators. Though the core facilitation team remained

the same, three classes of students have participated in the processes to date, thus changing the balance of participants representing "voices" from the communities and "others." Moreover, this factor raised for participants the whole question of visitors and observers. Early on in the process it was agreed to allow the students to continue to observe and assist and this seemed to offer no interruption to the flow of ideas and suggestions or to the open-ness of the discussion. In fact many of the students played valuable roles both in the preparations for and conduct of the dialogue and most regarded their participation as a highly valuable learning experience. On the other hand it was also agreed by the participants that occasional visitors or observers from outside who asked to attend sessions of the dialogue would not be permitted to do so, and this decision has been respected up to now, although a number of interesting and interested individuals have had to be disappointed in their desire to attend.

Finally, even though the ICAR team of facilitators were generally agreed on the overall shape of the dialogue, the flexibility of the process obviously permitted different views about the tactical details of the sessions, so that there were a number of differences in both the style of facilitation and in suggestions about desirable topics to pursue, issues on which to focus or next steps to be undertaken. Clearly there were some facilitators who were interested in the perceptual and attitudinal aspects of the conflict as exemplified by voices heard within the dialogue itself; and others whose main focus was on structural, behavioral and political issues. Occasionally these different emphases caused some discontinuities in the process, leading to some concern on the part of even the most tolerant of participants. Usually, however, there was generally a sense of forward movement in the process, often not fast enough to suit every participant, although among the ICAR team there was also sometimes a sense of important processes left half finished between one session and the next, and issues left "hanging in mid-air" that warranted further examination. Perhaps such gaps were inevitably the result of having monthly sessions rather than more frequent meetings.

Clearly, the fact that the Ethiopian Extended Dialogue lasted for two and a half years speaks for itself as regards both the success of the process and the commitment of all those involved. Initially, and naturally, the participants first approached the meetings – and one another – with a great deal of caution and all came with a variety of interests, although all were clearly committed to understanding some of the problems they and their communities “back home” in Ethiopia were facing and had faced in the past.

However, it seemed to the ICAR team that a level of “working trust” was established, whereby participants were willing to speak honestly to one another, not to gloss over major differences when these clearly exist, but also willing to respect others’ right to hold different views and to explore the origins of these differences and the possible existence of some common ground. On occasions this has proved a painful process, but at least participants have proved admirably willing to talk through differences, both in the formal sessions and over meals and in the corridors during breaks. One of the participants even remarked that this was the first setting in which he meet members of other communities. (One of the most encouraging informal indicators of the fact that participants have begun to “get something out of” the meetings has been the tendency to carry on conversations outside the meeting room once the formal sessions for the day have ended.) Some earlier participants have dropped out of the process, perhaps as a result of the often tense exchanges that have occurred – although equally plausible explanations have to do with the pressure of other commitments or the requirement to make a monthly sacrifice of a whole Saturday which also involved a great deal travel for some participants!

However, the ICAR team was encouraged by the persistence of those who became the essential “core members” of the dialogue and by the development of respectful and often friendly relations among participants, even those who hold very different views of the nature of the situation and what might be acceptable solutions. They were also encouraged by the statement made on a number of occasions that this process – slow as it might seem –

was the only example of meetings held on the past, present, and future of Ethiopia in which people of very different persuasions have managed to listen constructively to one another and to carry on a dialogue in which ideas are considered and discussed rather than dismissed.

For some participants, the process has clearly seemed too slow and deliberate, and often there some frustration has been expressed with the facilitators' apparent unwillingness to move discussion on to action or to "doing something" about the latest events within Ethiopia. (In formal dialogue terms, this is to get on to Stage 5 rather than to hover somewhere between Stages 3 and 4.) For others, however, there was a strong feeling that much remained to be done to express long felt wrongs and to deeply analyze the historic origins of the unsatisfactory relationships among groups in the region. However, to everyone's great credit, the group has been content with the facilitators' view that more needs to be done to pin-point accurately the basic underlying sources of the interlocking conflicts, and that only once this has been successfully accomplished is it realistic to move on to the questions of "What might be done?" and "What might this group do?" – a point that may, indeed, have been reached at this stage of the EED. Whether this is the case, of course, depends upon whether the group and the facilitators are satisfied that they have made a satisfactory analysis of the key problems, and that is clearly linked to the exhaustive or incomplete nature of the analyses that have been undertaken – the "content" of the discussions – over the last three years. It is to the details of what has been discussed and how that this Report now turns.

The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue: Substance and Analysis

Narrative of the Dialogues

The first two sessions of the dialogue were exploratory, with participants and the ICAR facilitation team discussing ICAR's objectives and the participants familiarizing themselves with one another. During the first session the facilitators provided background about the dialogue, introduced the Sustained Dialogue model, and opened discussion of ground rules, possible objectives, and potential outcomes. Participants referred to similar NGO initiatives and expressed their concern because such meetings generally had little positive impact on the conflicts in Ethiopia.

Others issues and concerns raised in the early meeting included whether participants represented organizations or communities or were participating as individuals, the use of language in the deliberations, identification of common problems, and anticipated outcomes. Participants raised and discussed issues related to identity, especially how contemporary Ethiopians often carry multiple identities due to intermarriage. The discussion was rich because participants had different perspectives about the conflict in Ethiopia due to their varied educational, professional, and political background. During the second session participants developed an agenda and focused their discussion around it. Participants identified a history of dominance and state structure as central to problems in Ethiopia. In the process, participants generated a list of current dilemmas and roots and underlying concerns.

Among the issues raised during the third session was the missing voices in the dialogue, especially women and people who are knowledgeable about the incumbent government. The facilitators reported, that it was difficult to identify participants who represent the missing voices and requested participants to suggest names. It was made clear, however, that representation did not imply representing groups or organizations but representing a perspective or point of view.

The following four broad categories were suggested as the root causes of the problem in Ethiopia: (1) Historical (including social and cultural); (2) Governance and structural issues; (3) Identity; and (4) External influences. In the process of expanding the four broad categories, language issues were raised and discussed. It was noted as there were over eighty languages spoken in Ethiopia but not all of them function at the same level. In multilingual societies like Ethiopia, participants stressed and noted the importance of a common language. It was noted, however, that choosing a common language requires care and the language should be “functional” in serving as a lingua franca for business, administration, and international purpose.

In relation to Political Structures and Governance, participants observed that since the government change in 1991 one group (from Tigray region) has been favored at the expense of other regions. Some noted that the incumbent government followed the footsteps of previous regimes where inequitable distributions of resource also were widely practiced. Furthermore, several participants stated that the government violated peoples’ right. The discussion went back and forth between governance, policy analysis, and leadership issues. It was noted however that the problems in Ethiopia were beyond individual leaders, thus requiring closer analysis and understanding of state structures.

During the fourth meeting participants agreed to accept Facilitators Notes and Reports as participants’ perception rather than a consensus document. The following themes were highlighted: (1) History and the use of language; (2) colonialism vs. cultural domination; and (3) governance. In relation to history, participants affirmed that there is no objectively written history because history reflects the perceptions of the historians. People therefore understand the past in different ways according to their experience and perceptions. It was noted, however, that people should not be entrenched in the past, but acknowledge the past and jointly plan the future. The use of language and the concept of colonization were some of the contentious issues raised during the fourth and the fifth meetings. As to the use of language it was suggested that using cordial rather than abusive language would help create clear communication and help advance

the dialogue. The concept of colonialism and domination was discussed in light of people's movement from the north to different parts of Ethiopia. However, participants had different views whether these movements were similar to classical colonialism, or internal colonialism or cultural dominance. It was reiterated that lack of good governance and structure were the major contributing factors in creating tension between the people in the north and the south. The democratic government system of gEDA, which was practiced by the Oromo was obscured, according to some participants due to the expansion of the Amhara political system. Participants acknowledged that previous regimes including the incumbent government may have drafted good constitutions but none honored them. Since governments did not practice democracy, justice was not served, and people's rights were violated. Due to this some participants advocated separation as an option. However, if inclusive, democratic governments are formed and human rights protected, then people may opt to live together.

The direction of the dialogue and anticipated outcome were revisited during the fifth meeting. Participants mentioned several alternatives such as writing a report but the issue was tabled for later discussion. The group continued discussing how governance and external forces contributed to the generation and exacerbation of conflicts in Ethiopia. The incumbent government, participants reiterated, is not inclusive and made it difficult for opposition parties to participate in the political processes. Some participants noted that the incumbent government is not working alone and that the international community has contributed to the regime by providing loans and assistance in spite of the regime's bad record of human rights violation. Some participants felt limiting or restricting the flow of such resources would pressure the government to respect people's rights. Using the analogy of a broken car, participants discussed the pros and cons of replacing or fixing the broken car. In both scenarios there would be some kind of change though the level might vary. In any case it was noted, as it would be advantageous to do cost benefit analysis before making the decision.

Per participants request during the fifth meeting, the facilitators presented an analytical overview of the first five meetings. According to the dilemmas identified earlier, the facilitators grouped the causes of the conflict in Ethiopia into five overarching, overlapping, and intersecting themes: (1) identity, (2) social and cultural, (3) structure, (4) governance, and (5) history. Participants raised a variety of questions related to the themes. How does one create a political structure that works for all? Was the problem in Ethiopia due to leadership incapability or structure?

It was also noted that there are no checks and balances in the Ethiopian political structure, thereby limiting accountability. Historically governments in Ethiopia had some connection to a particular ethnic group. Such an arrangement, participants felt, is not ideal for a multiethnic society. The major challenge according to participants was to end this cycle of undemocratic government and to put in place accountable and democratically elected government. In principle there are two ways to break the cycle either peacefully or violently. Violence, some participant mentioned, would be the last resort for Ethiopians who do not want to go through the agony of war and killing again. Thus groups have to work peacefully, using the ballot box to oust undemocratically elected government.

The political unrest in Ethiopia, especially the split within the leadership of the incumbent government in May 2001, caught participants' attention. Participants noted that the non-violent nature of the split was a positive sign and some participants felt that it was an opportune time for the ruling party to address fundamental issues, such as the Oromo question, land reform, and access to the sea. Several members observed that neither group among the divided leadership was interested in non-Tigrean because both groups appealed to the people in Region One. In relation to the Oromo issue some participants suggested that the recent statement by OLF leadership had created hope that OLF would join a united opposition against EPRDF. However, some participants responded that the Oromo agenda has not changed and the struggle will continue until repression stops.

Reiterating issues raised in previous meetings, it was noted that elites from all nations and nationalities had oppressed Ethiopians in spite of their ethnic origin. Some participants expressed their concern about the danger

of ethnically based government. If the trend continues and a group such as the Oromos took power the fate of minorities in an independent Oromia was a concern.

The student riot in Addis Ababa in April 2001 drew participants' attention and led to a discussion of the excessive power used by the government against unarmed peaceful demonstrators. The leadership of the incumbent government who were part of student movements in the 1960s should not undermine or neglect the consequence of student riots.

In response to participants' request, the ICAR facilitation team presented a one-page preliminary document, which included one overarching question and seven constituent questions. The group discussed the usage and meanings of some words and phrases, and requested the facilitators revise the document by incorporating the issues and concerns raised, and leave out the overarching questions. The group agreed to discuss the revised document during subsequent meetings. The revised document also raised a number of issues. For some participants the questions were not core, and for others the language was problematic because some words carry multiple meanings. The discussion generated questions such as: How can we move to a democratic society? How can we empower people? How can we create a structure that is inclusive, open, participatory, and address peoples' needs? One of the core questions mentioned the past, thus the question of history was raised and discussed. Some participants felt anchoring on past history may negatively impact developing a future vision. However, it was noted that the past should not be neglected but recognized.

In the context of forming accountable government, participants emphasized the need for "free negotiation" among various groups in Ethiopia that can lead to new "social contract." A social contract mutually agreed and accepted by all parties involved in the negotiation processes could lead to rewriting history; prepare fertile ground for peaceful coexistence, and subsequently to favorable social change. However, some felt that the incumbent government is not interested in negotiating a new social contract rather than in maintaining the status quo.

The concept of social contract was discussed during subsequent meetings, and emphasis was made on identifying common problems, then developing action plans. Participants pointed out obstacles such as the political willingness of the government, attitudes of superiority by some groups, political ambitions by leaders, questions regarding what defines a political community, social bonds within Ethiopia, and the role of intellectuals. Some reiterated the negative roles elites have played in slowing the development of a social contract in Ethiopia. The media in Ethiopia and the diaspora was used to deceive and misinform the public thus escalating the conflict among different groups, according to some participants.

In reiterating the issues raised and reflecting on the processes, participants appreciated ICAR's professional service, neutrality, and favorable atmosphere created in running the dialogue. Participants acknowledged that ICAR's facilitation helped them to increase their level of trust, develop a stronger culture of dialogue, and develop a new group culture. Many expressed a desire to share this experience and these lessons with the broader community. Some suggested that exposing the Ethiopian leadership to the process of dialogue would help to break the culture of violence. To this, some participants suggested generating a written report, hosting dialogue among Ethiopians in the diaspora and in Ethiopia, or expanding the EED group by inviting new members especially women and youth. In any written report the identity of participants should be concealed. The group agreed to raise the issue again when they reach a sense of a closure to the process.

In light of the political situation in Ethiopia, some members mentioned that a process of self-evaluation (*gimgmea* in Amharic) was going on in Ethiopia, which the government argues will increase accountability. Others criticized the process, arguing that it was top-down by design and intended to strengthen EPRDF by identifying the ruling regime's enemies.

Some participants mentioned the recent high-level delegation visits from various opposition political groups to Washington area. These leaders met with their supporters and gave briefing about the political situation in Ethiopia; the question of forming strong opposition politician group seemed remote. Some suggested, however, that a dialogue among political parties would help. In any case political organizations should focus their attention

on their constituents back home rather than the diaspora, even if the diaspora plays a significant role in the political process back in Ethiopia. The ongoing defection of EPRDF leadership, some suggested, was a sign that the EPRDF was cornered and in the process of crumbling.

In an attempt to address the issue of missing voices one participant joined the group during the eleventh session and the facilitators reiterated the ground rules, emphasizing confidentiality. The group discussed the impact of 9/11 on the political process in Ethiopia. Participants expressed their dismay about the attack and the incidents were perceived as attack against humanity. In relation to the political situation in Ethiopia, some participants expressed their concern because non-democratic government like Ethiopia might use the banner of anti-terrorism to purge legitimate opposition political groups. Furthermore, in pursuit of a global anti-terrorism campaign, significant resources might be channeled to Ethiopia that would be used to finance war against domestic opposition groups. Some speculated that the regime might not be as vulnerable today as it was before 9/11.

Some participants who visited Ethiopia shared their experiences and suggested that the split within the EPRDF opened space for free speech and opportunity for change. This opportunity, some participants' felt, was available to some groups rather than to all.

Participants inquired whether lack of education or structure repressed practicing democracy in Ethiopia. It was however noted that there was not consensus as to the definition of democracy. Furthermore, history, social memory, and power asymmetry have all shaped Ethiopian social dynamics. Issues related to identity, civil rights, human rights, and dignity cannot be neglected in the Ethiopian conflict.

The issue of disseminating the lessons learned from the dialogue and what the end product should be were raised again. One participant noted the important lessons learned from EED, especially regarding how to talk civilly about complex issues by respecting differences need to be shared with other Ethiopians. Others noted the importance of tolerance, respect, and the need to understand and respect differences. However, some participants

noted that it was easier to discuss issues associated to EPRDF rather than the root cause of the problem. Thus there are lots of “substantive issues” still to be discussed. One participant inquired whether the group was ready to recommend solutions to the internal conflict in Ethiopia. To this it was observed that some participants were still in the process of expressing their anger because the level of atrocities committed against some groups are severe.

Some members requested a more structured dialogue with a framework and mutually agreed agenda in order to move towards a product that could be shared with fellow Ethiopians. For a guided agenda some suggested returning to the core questions that were developed in the 8th and 9th meetings. Others, however, suggested that a consensus report was not advisable, as various groups have different views about the core problems and best solutions. Nonetheless, some suggested that the core questions reflect major problems in most ethnic groups. EED, some suggested, is a forum where participants discuss their differences and unpack and examine their misconceptions.

Issues of identity remained close to the surface. Some members urged participants to refrain from ascribing identities based on their perception of the “Other,” since such attitude could sidetrack communication. Participants were reminded that because no participant represented an organization or political group that all views expressed were personal. However, some argued that Northerners assume that they speak about Ethiopia and represent Ethiopians, thus their statements became an obstacle to dialogue.

Participants reached a consensus to discuss the following two questions in subsequent meetings: (1) What are the pros and cons of separation? (2) What are the pros and cons of regional re-organization? Others suggested that since these questions are tied to the core questions, thus modify the core question, as “how might it be possible to develop structures and process that would enable the peoples of Ethiopia live together in peace?”

During the thirteenth meeting the group discussed how to address questions raised during previous meetings, especially the pros and cons of separation. Some members suggested that the group should identify a goal and overarching framework to discuss specific issues, for example the costs and benefits of separation. However, others stated that they assumed a united Ethiopia and questioned whether there was a widespread support for separation within Ethiopia. Others questioned whether most Oromos really demand separation. In spite of various perceptions about Ethiopia, other members of the group suggested the need to discuss the "taboo" subject of Ethiopian unity. Some regard Ethiopia as "evil" and believe that in reality that there is no living in peace with "Abyssinians."

However, some participants suggested focusing on how to build democracy and engaging in joint analysis that emphasize class rather than ethnic differences or focusing on overarching ideas of democracy, human rights, and justice would be beneficial in building peaceful Ethiopia. In the process, some participants raised the usage and choice of language, especially labels such as "Abyssinia" to describe peoples from the north. Such label, for some participants was considered pejorative though some members argue that the term is used commonly among Ethiopians in the diaspora. However, some members requested the facilitators develop clearer ground rules and an agenda to guide the discussion. To be engaged in a constructive and fruitful dialogue, it was suggested, there is a need to address and acknowledge past injustices, this can help build trust and confidence consequently lead to reconciliation and forgiveness.

In response to the request of the group during the previous meeting, the facilitators provided a synopsis of the issues discussed and the process used to discuss these issues. The following issues were raised during the last twelve meetings: history, historical memories, identity, structures, external forces, governance, trust, use of language, security, injustices, and human rights violation. Harold Saunders five stages of Sustained Dialogue Model were used to discuss these issues though the five stages were not followed strictly. Participants went back and forth as deemed necessary to clarify issues, and discuss them in depth.

After the presentation, participants were requested to envision the futures for the geographic entity "Ethiopia," then develop scenarios, discuss whose futures, and how the futures in the scenarios should be met. Participants fleshed out the two scenarios: unity with diversity and separation. The scenario building process was to help conceptualize the futures.

The group continued the scenario building process and discussed regional integration within the Horn of Africa and regional coexistence within Ethiopia. It was noted that there are at least two variations in regionalist scenario, depending on whether one imagined the future based on unity with diversity or separation. It was noted that some words and phrases used on the chart are not final and definitive but simply short phrases and key words to recall preliminary discussion regarding the scenarios.

The issue of accepting new members as observers to the dialogue was discussed. The group in principle believed that new members or observers come with fresh ideas, thus enriching the dialogue. The group concluded that it was not constructive to bring an observer after fifteen meetings because the group has already developed a culture and set of expectations. The issue of sharing the EED experience with Ethiopians at home and the diaspora was raised several times, suggesting a desire by some to move toward a means to communicate the findings of the extended dialogue process.

After a brief recap of the scenario building process the group continued to discuss one of the remaining scenarios: the status quo in ten years. Some participants stressed that the scenario building process would be beneficial if the discussion could reflect both the positive and negative aspects of the status quo that is what will be the situation in Ethiopia if the status quo continues in the future. Furthermore the group emphasized it would enrich the discussion if participants reflected on the potential advantages and disadvantages of the scenarios.

The facilitators reminded participants that the scenario building exercise is designed to be an idealization of the future, an intellectual exercise based on facts and figures if available. Some participants suggested that if the status quo continues mass killing and human rights violation will continue in a large scale and that the status quo would not solve the problems in Ethiopia.

As to the future of the dialogue, participants shared their visions such as sharing the experience with fellow Ethiopians in various communities; gradually inviting political leaders to a similar dialogue or bring new individuals into the group. In either case participants stressed the importance of confidentiality. The group asked the facilitators to produce a comprehensive document that captures the processes, the issues discussed, and a guideline that would help in planning a transition.

An Analysis⁴

As was expected in a dialogue focused on what is at least in part a conflict over differing conceptions of identity, EED regularly returned to the issue of how processes of identity formation and the implications of identity shape current political processes. To speak in very broad terms, the discussions tended to be three sided. On the one hand, one group of participants emphasized the overarching unity of Ethiopians and stressed the interdependence among the Ethiopian people. Another group suggested that the starting point for understanding Ethiopia was to recognize the structural, colonial system of domination and emphasized that certain groups, most notably the Oromo, had been incorporated into the Ethiopian "empire" state without their consent. A third group also underscored the use of force and domination by successive despotic regimes from Northern Ethiopia against the people of Southern Ethiopia, but worried about potential Oromo domination of smaller groups. This group believed that lasting solution could only result from peaceful and genuine political engagements for democratization of the country and the establishment of the rule of law.

These differing assumptions about the nature of the "core problem" and consequent implications for potential solutions and future scenarios appeared in a variety of contexts. Considerable discussion took place in the first five or six meetings about the role of history and the issue of whether relationships among the peoples of Ethiopia are more accurately characterized as colonial/structural domination or cultural/elite domination. Some participants tended to emphasize the structural nature of domination while others emphasized how authoritarian, military leaders and elites were responsible for unjust relationships.

⁴This analysis reflects the perceptions of the ICAR facilitation team and should not be attributed to any of the Ethiopian participants.

The different assumptions about the core issues generated different implications for proposed solutions. Some of those who saw structural relationships of domination argued that the only solution was to transform the structure of the imperial state through self-determination and separation of the subjugated peoples. Many of those who regarded the history of domination as an elite led process of authoritarianism and military rule suggested that the solution was to build a stronger democracy within Ethiopia. Some participants tended to emphasize democratization rather than self-determination as the solution. Under conditions of broad and voluntary participation, several participants argued, there would be no need for groups to seek separation.

The Extended Dialogue group discussed a series of Core Questions, each of which was phrased in terms of "how." The first core question that received the most attention was "How might it be possible to develop structures and processes that would enable the peoples of Ethiopia to live together in peace?" The answers to these questions tended to fall into two categories based on the two sets of assumptions. Those who assumed that colonial relationships were the core problem argued that separation was necessary and sometimes suggested that nonviolent political change was impossible. Those who regarded the core question was the democratic deficit urged more democratization and were concerned that separation would lead to more conflict.

The very phrasing of the question "How might it be possible to develop structures and processes that would enable the peoples of Ethiopia to live together in peace?" generated debate because it implied certain assumptions. Some wanted to change the language to "the people of Ethiopia," to emphasize the essential unity of the population. Others wanted to change the language to "the peoples in Ethiopia," to reinforce the assumption that Ethiopia merely represented a geographic concept rather than a source of positive identity based on voluntary association.

Another reflection of this underlying difference on the core nature of identity in Ethiopia and differing assumptions about the nature of the problem and possible solutions related to the sometimes heated discussions on how people should be identified. On several occasions, the question of

identifying a group as "Abyssinian" raised contention while the question of who was included in the concept of "Ethiopian" similarly pointed to these differences. Some participants suggested that there was a concept of "Ethiopian" that was the product of deeply historical interactions and inherent interdependence while others suggested that "Ethiopian" was a term of domination and forced association from the perspective of some Oromos.

Individuals with different underlying assumptions reached a degree of consensus on the need for a new social contract in order to create peaceful relationships among the peoples of Ethiopia. Such a social contract would require a process that was broadly consultative and open-ended, without prejudging potential outcomes. A legitimate process to build a voluntary association among groups in Ethiopia would presumably overcome the colonial structures of domination that some argued characterize the current Ethiopian state. A social contract also would strengthen democracy and participation and appealed to those who believe authoritarianism and military rule was the problem.

Such a process, however, in itself begs further critical questions relating to what is the appropriate and legitimate "political community" that would participate in such discussions. Questions remain regarding who would have voice and a legitimate role in such a discussion and whether democracy was a necessary precondition for selecting representatives to such a process.

The participants often had differing perspectives on whether the EED process should move more quickly to some kind of "outcome." Some suggested that sufficient consensus existed on the nature of the core questions and the imperative to work for peace in Ethiopia called for tangible actions. Others, however, continued to believe that the underlying assumptions of how the core issues were framed required additional discussion and analysis and called for further dialogue before settling on an outcome for the EED process.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian Extended Dialogue reached a transition point at the end of its third year. This report represents both a stocktaking exercise, to assess and reflect upon the great distances covered by the dialogue process, and as a means to share the lessons that have been learned by both the Ethiopian participants and the ICAR facilitation team. The ICAR team anticipates continuing our work both with Ethiopians and on the methodology of sustained dialogues.

The participants in the EED have discussed a number of potential ways to move forward. Some have proposed opening the group up to include new members, possibly to include some of the “missing voices” and possibly to include links to the Youth or to political parties. On a number of occasions participants have wondered if it would be possible to start extended dialogue processes in other cities with significant populations from the Ethiopian diaspora or to start dialogue processes among other communities in Washington. Others have suggested turning the EED into a mechanism that could speak out on behalf of peace and conflict resolution issues in Ethiopia. This role might include engaging in more public activities such as publishing analytical or opinion pieces in the Ethiopian media or taking on advocacy roles. In addition, some members of EED wanted to get more directly involved in promoting a peace process for Ethiopia, including a role in facilitating dialogue among opposition groups and between the opposition groups and the current regime in Addis Ababa.

The ICAR team remains interested in and committed to activities that promote conflict resolution in Ethiopia. We believe this report will serve as a means to mark the transition between one set of discussions and the beginning of a new set of activities. We would like to thank all of our participants once again for their commitment, hard work, and willingness to share their memories and dreams of their homeland.

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