



news release

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U.S. Ambassador Aurelia E. Brazeal Visits Gambella

Addis Ababa (U.S. Embassy) -- On Friday, January 28, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Aurelia E. Brazeal paid her first ever visit to Gambella. Accompanying the Ambassador were Mr. William Hammink, Mission Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Ethiopia; Mr. Steve Smith, USAID Democracy and Governance Officer; Lieutenant Colonel Lee J. Whiteside, Defense and Army Attaché; and Mr. Brian Goldbeck, Political/Economic Counselor.

During her visit, Ambassador Brazeal called on Vice President Keat Tuach Bithow of the Gambella People's National Regional State Administrative Council and met with key personnel from the Council's Cabinet. Vice President Keat expressed his appreciation for the Ambassador's visit and thanked her for the assistance provided by the Government of the United States. He and members of his cabinet briefed Ambassador Brazeal and her delegation on humanitarian, development and capacity-building concerns, as well as on the region's current security situation.

The Ambassador and her delegation also met with representatives of Gambella's Security, Justice and Administration Coordination Bureau, the Police Commissioner's Office, and the Army for a security update. The Ambassador stressed that, as promised by the Ethiopian Government, it was important that all those involved in the outbreak of ethnic strife in the region in December 2003 and early 2004 should be brought to justice, including those in the government, police, or military. Doing so, she said, would discourage renewed violence and restore confidence. She also urged the security services to protect the people's human rights.

In a meeting with members of the region's Annuak, highlander, and Nuer communities, the Ambassador heard their personal views and experiences as well as their ideas about how to resolve the underlying causes that led to the outburst of ethnic violence in 2003 and 2004. At the close of the meeting, the Ambassador described Gambella as "the conscience of Ethiopia." She noted that the United States, like Ethiopia, was a land of many ethnic groups, and that the U.S. drew strength from this diversity. She lauded the wisdom of the speakers from all three communities who had focused not upon retribution but upon peace, reconciliation, and building a better future for themselves and their families. She assured them that the U.S. would do what it could to assist the region in this process.

Vice President Keat and Gambella Regional Parliament Speaker Weynito Abera hosted the Ambassador's delegation to lunch. During the lunch, representatives from local, national, and international organizations and non-governmental organizations described the humanitarian and developmental assistance work they are doing to help the people of Gambella.

At the final stop of her visit, the Ambassador met with teachers and students at the Gambella Secondary School. There she learned she was the first ambassador ever to visit the school. Ambassador Brazeal said she was delighted to see young people who sought to improve their own lives and that of their community. She acknowledged, in particular, two U.S. Ambassador's Girls Scholarship program recipients, citing the hardships they and their parents had to overcome to enable them to attend school and praising their dedication to education.