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Chargé d’Affaires Troy Fitrell
USEPA Megacities Partnership Launch
UN Conference Center
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(As prepared for delivery)

Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am greatly honored to be here today to celebrate the launch of the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s Megacities Partnership with the City of Addis Ababa and UN Environment.

Clean air is not a luxury, it’s a necessity. Quite literally, we can’t live without it. And so I don’t think there are many who would disagree that we all have an interest in protecting the air we breathe.

But in reality, when it comes to environmental protection, we tend to count the cost of action but fail to consider the cost of inaction.

I want to assure you that we can tackle this challenge together while also sustaining rapid economic growth. The idea that environmental needs counter our economic or development needs is a false choice. Advances in environmental standards can improve economic performance.

The United States believes that an investment in improving Ethiopia’s air quality is an investment worth making. In part, that’s because of the undeniable link between a healthy population and a healthy economy.

In the U.S. we know from our own experience that the benefits of environmental standards can far outweigh the costs and through this project, we want to share those lessons with Ethiopia.

Since 1970, U.S. emissions of six key air pollutants dropped by an average of 70 percent, while our GDP grew by 246 percent. This is not a coincidence. We made those gains through sensible policy and more efficient technology. Moreover, we have enjoyed greater productivity due to improved health.

The links between air quality and health are well established. In a 2016 study, the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation found that air pollution accounted for approximately 6.1 million deaths, or more than 10% of all deaths worldwide. Recent studies have also shown that exposure to air pollution can affect everything from infant mortality, to childhood development, even mental function in older populations.

And while I think we can all agree that protecting people's health is a worthy goal by itself, failure to do so comes at a tremendous cost. A recent World Bank study found that in 2013 premature deaths due to air pollution cost the world economy over \$5 trillion. That's trillion with a "T". In that context, fighting pollution isn't an economic cost; it's an economic driver.

At the U.S. Embassy we have already begun the work of understanding the challenges. Over the last two years, we have had two air quality monitors in two different parts of Addis, which make real time data available on the USEPA's "airnow.gov" web portal. Any of you can check the real time air quality in Addis Ababa any time you like. I have the page bookmarked on my computer.

AirNow reports the readings in the form of an Air Quality Index, which is designed to tell you how clean or unhealthy your air is. At the Embassy we use the Air Quality Index to help our community make informed decisions about how to protect our health but also to understand the overall cumulative effects of air pollution. Again, that same information is open to the public and it is informing our Megacities Partnership right now.

These monitors measure particulate matter smaller than 2.5 micrometers, a size that is particularly dangerous because it can penetrate deeply into the lungs and raise the risk of heart and lung disease.

Particulate matter and other air pollutants are linked to a range of significant health effects, including premature death. And we know these effects are likely to be more severe for sensitive populations, including people with heart or lung disease, the elderly, and young children. In fact, a Stanford University study estimated that exposure to particulate matter in sub-Saharan Africa led to 400,000 otherwise preventable infant deaths in 2015.

That's a frightening statistic, but we can find hope in highlighting the fact that those deaths are preventable. Today we are here to support the City of Addis Ababa as it embarks on leading the development of a written air quality management plan with guidance from the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

The United States will continue to support that effort under the Megacities Partnership. Our primary objective is to identify the air pollutants and emission sources that contribute most to poor air quality and to help the City of Addis Ababa develop an air quality action plan to improve air quality.

In the process, the data we collect will be used to evaluate the impacts of poor air quality on health and economic growth before and after the implementation of air protection policies so that policy makers can clearly understand the value of protecting the air we breathe.

This is a partnership that will change the lives of Ethiopians living in Addis. But this is only the first step as the Megacities Partnership will provide the starting point for broader efforts to improve air quality management, reduce air pollution emissions, and improve public health.

We are already seeing results in other partner cities around the world and I know that Addis Ababa can help lead the way in East Africa.

We all share this planet and its resources. With the Megacities Partnership you have taken an important step in a critical journey that will preserve our environment for generations to come.

Congratulations and thank you.

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