



From: Broadcasting Board of Governors

Date: November 15, 2017

Subject: **Minutes of the BBG Meeting of November 15, 2017**

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) met today in the Cohen Building (BBG headquarters) in Washington, D.C. The meeting was open for public attendance as seating capacity allowed and for public observation via streaming on the BBG website.

The meeting was attended by the following Board members:

Chairman Kenneth Weinstein  
Governor Ryan Crocker (by telephone)  
Governor Michael Kempner (by telephone)  
Governor Karen Kornbluh  
Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Public Affairs Susan Stevenson

Governor Leon Aron and Governor Jeff Shell were not in attendance. Other persons in attendance are listed at the end of these minutes.

The agenda of the meeting is set forth in Attachment 1.

Chairman Weinstein called the meeting to order and noted that the meeting was being held in compliance with the Government in the Sunshine Act and streamed live over the Internet at the BBG website.

The Chairman welcomed Susan Stevenson, Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Public Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. He noted that Ambassador Wharton had retired at the end of September, and that Steven Goldstein had been nominated by the President as the new Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. He stated that, while Mr. Goldstein awaits his appointment confirmation, Ms. Stevenson was representing and carrying out the Secretary's responsibilities with respect to the BBG. He added that the BBG has benefited by its strong partnership with the State Department, and particularly the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and invited Ms. Stevenson for brief remarks. Ms. Stevenson expressed that the cooperation between the State Department and BBG is essential while maintaining and respecting the Firewall. She noted that the collaboration in the Global Engagement Center (GEC) is an example of the perfect cooperation between the State Department and BBG. She noted further that an assignment of a BBG detailee currently at GEC allows the State Department and BBG to take advantage of their respective strengths, and to ensure that they leverage resources to efficiently and effectively combat disinformation and counter terrorism while making sure they do not duplicate efforts.

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The Chairman said that the Board recognizes the difficult working conditions many of our journalists operate in, and the importance of highlighting incidents of threats to the journalist since the last Board meeting.

Chairman Weinstein noted the horrific bomb blast in Mogadishu on October 14 that impacted the Voice of America (VOA). Somali stringer Abdulkadir Mohamed Abdulle was injured, while freelance cameraman Ali Nur Siad working with Abdulle on assignment for VOA, was killed in the blast. Also killed that day was Ahmed Abdikarin Eyow, a valued member of the Somali community in Minneapolis and trusted friend of VOA. Eyow was instrumental in making VOA's town hall between Somali diaspora in Minnesota and citizens in Mogadishu possible. The Chairman then asked for a moment of silence in honor of those brave men.

In addition to the terrible event in Mogadishu, Chairman Weinstein also noted a number of incidents in which BBG journalists were targeted: 1) In Cambodia, two former Radio Free Asia (RFA) journalists had been arrested, and it was reported that they are under suspicion of working for RFA; 2) In Turkmenistan, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Saparmamed Nepeskuliev remains in prison, and Stanislav Aseyev continues to be held by pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk; 3) In China's Xinjiang Province, three RFA reporters have had family members jailed or detained in the last few months – a retaliation against family members is a common tactic to try to silence reporters; 4) In Ukraine, RFE/RL Ukrainian Service's "Schemes" program journalist Mykhailo Tkach and his TV crew were attacked on November 7 by masked bodyguards at the Kyiv airport while reporting on the arrival from Russia of powerful Ukrainian politician and businessman Viktor Medvedchuk, who leads the pro-Russian Ukrainian Choice Organization; 5) Also in Ukraine, RFE/RL "Schemes" journalist Oleksandr Chornovalov were being followed by unknown men for consecutive days and, on September 15, Tkach and a cameraman were physically assaulted by members of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's security guard; 6) In Pakistan, there has been a dramatic increase in threats against journalists working at VOA's Radio Deewa and RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal and Radio Azadi, including RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal taken special measures to protect its reporters in northwest Pakistan after a separatist group threatened to attack Pakistani journalists whom they claim are biased in their news coverage in favor of the government, and in 2017, no fewer than four Radio Mashaal journalists have been threatened, stalked, kidnapped for up to 72 hours, fired upon, or otherwise harassed, both by the Taliban and by Pakistani intelligence agency officials; and 7) In Africa, VOA Portuguese to Africa stringer Moniz Muquebele was detained by police, who questioned and beat him, and on October 12, Swahili stringer Kennes Bwire was one of four local journalists robbed outside their homes after reporting on parliamentary resistance to removing presidential age limits.

Turning to Board business, the Chairman stated that the presence of five or more Governors satisfies the Board's quorum requirement, permitting the Board to conduct business based on majority vote. He said that the Board had received by email materials for the consent agenda on November 1. He added that he did not receive comments from any Governors.

The Chairman noted that there were three items on the consent agenda for the Board's consideration: draft minutes of the August 30, 2017 meeting of the plenary Board; a draft

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resolution honoring 35th anniversary of Voice of America broadcasts in Amharic-Language; and a proposed 2018 BBG Board meeting schedule. Governor Kornbluh moved for adoption of the consent agenda. Acting Assistant Secretary Stevenson seconded. Without objection, the consent agenda was unanimously adopted by the Board.

In accordance with the Board's prior protocol for allowing members of the public to speak at meetings, the Chairman invited the following members of the public to address the Board for three minutes: Adam Powell, University of Southern California; Gang Liu, Chinese Dissident; and Xianminxiong Xiong, journalist for Boxun News.

Chairman Weinstein asked CEO Lansing to report on agency operations since the last Board meeting. Mr. Lansing announced the appointment of Matthew Walsh as Chief of Staff and Dr. Haroon Ullah as BBG's new Chief Strategy Officer.

CEO Lansing stated that the BBG fosters and sustains free and democratic societies by exemplifying and supporting free media, and that the BBG also advances U.S. national interest by providing audiences in closed societies, or where free media is not yet fully established, with consistently accurate, compelling, and professional journalism. He then invited the U.S. International Coordinating Committee (ICC) to highlight their progress in several key strategic areas of the BBG. Office of Cuba Broadcasting Acting Director Andre Mendes highlighted the second Cuba Internet Freedom Conference in Miami. VOA Director Amanda Bennett summarized the documentary roll-out of VOA's *Boko Haram: A Journey from Evil*, and spoke briefly about VOA's recent project with Greta Van Susteren. RFE/RL President Tom Kent described the current situation for operating in Russia. RFA Executive Editor Bay Fang depicted how RFA is providing context for the complex situation for the Rohingya by previewing an impactful video that combines difficult reporting by both RFA's Myanmar-based reporters and Bengali stringers for Benar News. MBN President Alberto Fernandez spoke about his work to improve MBN through a series of initiatives and his plans for MBN's future.

The CEO noted the release of the Fiscal Year 2017 Performance Accountability Report (PAR), which the BBG has continued to maintain its record high reach of nearly 280 million unique audience viewers (per week). He said that part of BBG's significant reach and impact was its skyrocketing digital reach, as exemplified by *Current Time* which had been viewed over 300 million times this year. At the CEO's invitation, Chief Strategy Officer Haroon Ullah presented some highlights in the PAR.

In closing, CEO Lansing discussed the winners of this year's David Burke Distinguished Journalism Award which recognizes courage, integrity and originality in reporting by journalists within the BBG networks, enlightening and informing listeners and exhibiting a commitment to the free exchange of ideas. The winners included: VOA Middle East Correspondent Heather Murdock for the strength, courage and journalistic skill she demonstrated while documenting the drive by coalition forces to retake the city of Mosul from ISIS; Marti journalist Ricardo Quintana for documenting the difficult and dangerous immigration routes that many Cuban migrants took in their attempt to reach the U.S.; employees of RFE/RL's Uzbek Service for their tireless and courageous determination to break stories and provide Uzbekistan's citizens with a means to

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speak truth to power, despite grave risks to themselves and their families; RFA Albert Hong, Jaewan Noh, and Hee Jung Yang of the Korean Service for their fastidious investigative reporting that exposed a forced labor scheme by the North Korean government in seven countries; and Alhurra-Iraq correspondent Abdul Hamid Zebari and cameramen Yaser Salim and John Saeed, for taking extreme risks to accurately and objectively report on Iraq's deepening catastrophe as a result of ISIS's inhumane actions.

Chairman Weinstein stated that the next Board meeting is scheduled to be held at BBG headquarters in Washington, D.C., on March 14, 2018. He said that the Governors were encouraged to give input regarding other topics that they may like to see addressed at the next meeting.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors agreed to the following decision elements (all decisions were adopted by a unanimous vote unless otherwise indicated):

1. Adoption of Minutes of August 30, 2017 Board Meeting. The Board adopted the minutes of the August 30, 2017 meeting of the plenary Board as set forth in Attachment 2.
2. Resolution Honoring 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Voice of America Broadcasts in Amharic-Language. The Board adopted the resolution honoring 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Voice of America broadcasts in Amharic-language as set forth in Attachment 3.
3. Resolution for BBG Meeting Dates in 2018. The Board adopted the resolution for BBG meeting dates in 2018 as set forth in Attachment 4.

Other Attendees:

The following persons were also present during all or part of the meeting: BBG CEO and Director John Lansing; Chief of Staff Matthew Walsh; General Counsel and Board Secretary David Kligerman; Managing Director Oanh Tran; Director of Global Communications and Office of Public Affairs Nasserie Carew; Director of the Office of Internet Freedom Nnake Nweke; BBG Deputy Director Jeffrey Trimble; Acting Director of Technology, Services, and Innovation Terry Balazs; Chief Financial Officer Grant Turner; Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs Ellona Fritschie; Public Affairs Specialist Chelsea Milko; Contractor for BBG Public Affairs Gigi Frias; Amanda Bennett, VOA Director; Sandy Sugawara, VOA Deputy Director; Kelu Chao, VOA Program Director; Bridget Serchak, VOA Director of Public Relations; Andre Mendes, OCB Acting Director; Thomas Kent, RFE/RL President; Bay Fang, RFA Executive Editor; Bernadette Burns, RFA General Counsel; Alberto Fernandez, MBN President; and Stephanie Forman Morimura, Special Assistant, Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy & Public Affairs.

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Kenneth Weinstein  
Chairman

## **Minutes of November 15, 2017 Meeting**

Witnessed:

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David Kligerman  
Board Secretary

Attachments:

1. Agenda for November 15, 2017 Board Meeting
2. Minutes of August 30, 2017 Board Meeting
3. Resolution Honoring 35th Anniversary of Voice of America Broadcasts in Amharic-Language
4. Proposed 2018 BBG Board Meeting Schedule

## Minutes of November 15, 2017 Meeting

ATTACHMENT 1

### BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS

#### November 2017 Meeting Agenda

(ALL MEETINGS ARE AT COHEN BUILDING, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.)

Wednesday, November 15

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#### 1:00 - 2:00 Broadcasting Board of Governors' Open Meeting

- A. Chairman Remarks
- B. Consent Agenda (**Board and CEO Vote**)
  - Draft Minutes of August 30, 2017 Meeting
  - Draft Resolution Honoring 35th Anniversary of Voice of America Broadcasts in Amharic-Language
  - Proposed 2018 BBG Board Meeting Schedule
- C. Public Comment
- D. CEO & Director's Report
- E. Other Items for Consideration at Next Board Meeting

## Minutes of November 15, 2017 Meeting

### ATTACHMENT 2

From: Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Date: August 30, 2017  
Subject: **Minutes of the BBG Meeting of August 30, 2017**

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) met today in the Cohen Building (BBG headquarters) in Washington, D.C. The meeting was open for public attendance as seating capacity allowed and for public observation via streaming on the BBG website.

The meeting was attended by the following Board members:

Chairman Kenneth Weinstein  
Governor Ryan Crocker  
Governor Michael Kempner  
Governor Jeffrey Shell  
Acting Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Bruce Wharton

Governor Leon Aron and Governor Karen Kornbluh were not in attendance. Other persons in attendance are listed at the end of these minutes.

The agenda of the meeting is set forth in Attachment 1.

Chairman Weinstein called the meeting to order and noted that the meeting was being held in compliance with the Government in the Sunshine Act and streamed live over the Internet at the BBG website.

The Chairman announced the retirement of Acting Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Bruce Wharton at the end of September. He said that this will be a big loss for both the U.S. Department of State and BBG, and that Ambassador Wharton is a true patriot and a wonderful colleague. He added that, in recent years, the Board had benefited by its strong partnership with the State Department, and particularly the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. He noted that, from the time of his appointment on the Board, Ambassador Wharton has shown a keen understanding of the importance of the BBG's work and its challenges, and has been enormously helpful to the success of the BBG. On behalf of the Board, the Chairman thanked Ambassador Wharton for his service and invited him to give brief remarks. Ambassador Wharton expressed his appreciation for serving on the Board for a brief period and his strong belief in the BBG's mission. He stated that the BBG's mission remains vital due to its credibility and independence, and it serves as a model for freedom of expression and free media. On a final note, the Ambassador added that he will find ways to continue to support the BBG.

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The Chairman outlined the ongoing threats to the press around the world. He noted that, since the last Board meeting, some of BBG's journalists had been harassed, beaten, and intimidated. He highlighted following incidents: 1) In China, on August 16, Radio Free Asia (RFA) journalist Palden Gyal and his family planned to visit relatives during a stopover in Guangzhou on their way back to the U.S. from a family vacation, but airport customs and security detained Mr. Gyal and forced him to turn over his cell phone and instructed him to leave China that evening, which prevented him from seeing his China-based family, including his 80-year-old mother; 2) Also in China, on August 14, Voice of America (VOA) Mandarin Service's Beijing Correspondent Yibing Feng and his news assistant Ai Lun were questioned by what appeared to be Chinese plainclothes investigators and later taken to a police station where they were held and interrogated for more than four hours; 3) In Dar Es Salaam, on August 17, Khalid Abubakar, a VOA Swahili stringer who identified himself as a VOA journalist to the police, was arrested and beaten by police while trying to cover a story of a traffic standoff between police and drivers in downtown Dar Es Salaam; 4) In Nairobi, on August 10, VOA Nairobi correspondent Jill Craig and Nairobi Bureau TV Producer Amos Wangwa were threatened by plain clothed police while reporting on the announcement of election results and were held for several hours; 5) In Crimea, on August 3, the presiding judge for Crimean journalist and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Contributor Mykola Semena again delayed the trial – pushing it back to August 31 – for the article Mr. Semena wrote criticizing Moscow's seizure of the Black Sea Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014; 6) In Vietnam, RFA contributor and blogger Nguyễn Ngọc Già was serving a four-year prison term with another three years of probation for the nebulous charge of “propaganda against the state”; 7) Also in Vietnam, RFA videographer Nguyen Van Hoá was being held in violation of Vietnam's penal code for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe on the interests of the state,” which carries a maximum sentence of seven years in prison; and 8) In Turkmenistan, RFE/RL photographer and contributor Saparmamed Nepeskuliev remains detained by Turkmenistan's National Security Ministry, where he has been incommunicado for more than two years.

In closing, Chairman Weinstein mentioned two journalists who had gone missing: 1) Stanislav Aseyev, blogger and contributor to RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, went missing since June 2, 2017, when he was forcibly disappeared by Russia-backed separatists in Ukraine's war-torn Eastern Donetsk region; and 2) Middle East Broadcasting Networks' (MBN) Alhurra TV correspondent Bashar Fahmi went missing in Syria five years ago after an August 2012 fire in Aleppo.

Turning to Board business, the Chairman stated that the presence of five or more Governors satisfies the Board's quorum requirement, permitting the Board to conduct business based on majority vote. He said that the Board had received by email materials for the consent agenda on August 17. He added that he did not receive comments from any Governors.

The Chairman noted that the only item on the consent agenda for the Board's consideration was the draft minutes of the June 14, 2017 meeting of the plenary Board. Governor Kempner moved for adoption of the consent agenda. Ambassador Wharton seconded. Without objection, the consent agenda was unanimously adopted by the Board.



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In accordance with the Board's prior protocol for allowing members of the public to speak at meetings, the Chairman invited the following members of the public to address the Board for three minutes: Ann Noonan, Committee for U.S. International Broadcasting; Yan Zhao of Zhaoyan Broadcasting and his translator Xiu Qun of Zhaoyan Broadcasting; and Adam Powell, University of Southern California.

Chairman Weinstein asked CEO Lansing to report on agency operations since the last Board meeting. Mr. Lansing began with an announcement on the departure of his Chief of Staff, Rob Fallon, who will be leaving the Agency in September to join the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands as its Director of External Relations. There followed brief remarks by Mr. Fallon.

CEO Lansing stated that the BBG networks advance U.S. national interest by providing audiences in closed societies, or where free media is not yet fully established, with consistently accurate, compelling, and professional journalism. He noted that, in this rapidly evolving global media environment, the work of U.S. international media is so critical. He then invited the U.S. International Coordinating Committee (ICC) to highlight their progress in several key strategic areas of the BBG. RFE/RL President Tom Kent depicted RFE/RL's reporting in Central Asia and the importance of such reporting to its mission. Office of Cuba Broadcasting Director Malule Gonzalez previewed the upcoming Cuba Internet Freedom Conference in Miami from November 7 to November 8. RFA Managing Director for East Asia Min Mitchell gave a progress report on the DPRK project. MBN President Alberto Fernandez, who joined the BBG as MBN's new President on July 17, spoke about his strategy for MBN and some of his new initiatives. VOA Director Amanda Bennett noted an increased focus by VOA to tell America's story and described *My American Story*, a 26 episode documentary series featuring a wide variety of Russian speakers who came to the U.S. to start a new life. In closing, CEO Lansing invited his Executive Assistant Yoruba Mitchell to give an update on the partnership between Peace Corps and VOA by which teaching materials and lesson plans designed by VOA Learning English staff are provided to Peace Corps volunteers in order for them to conduct English training in remote areas around the world.

Chairman Weinstein stated that the next Board meeting is scheduled to be held at BBG headquarters in Washington, D.C., on November 15, 2017. He said that the Governors were encouraged to give input regarding other topics that they may like to see addressed at the next meeting.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors agreed to the following decision elements (all decisions were adopted by a unanimous vote unless otherwise indicated):

1. Adoption of Minutes of June 14, 2017 Board Meeting. The Board adopted the minutes of the June 14, 2017 meeting of the plenary Board as set forth in Attachment 2.

Other Attendees:

The following persons were also present during all or part of the meeting: BBG CEO and Director John Lansing; Chief of Staff Rob Fallon; General Counsel and Board Secretary David

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Kligerman; Managing Director Oanh Tran; Director of Global Communications and Office of Public Affairs Nasserie Carew; Director of the Office of Internet Freedom Nnake Nweke; BBG Deputy Director Jeffrey Trimble; Deputy Director of Technology, Services, and Innovation Terry Balazs; Chief Financial Officer Grant Turner; Congressional Liaison Marta McLellan Ross; Public Affairs Specialist Chelsea Milko; Contractor for BBG Public Affairs Gigi Frias; Writer-Editor (Multimedia) Laurie Moy; Executive Assistant Yoruba Mitchell; Senior Advisor to the BBG Jeffrey Shapiro; Associate Director for Program Support Gary Thatcher; Amanda Bennett, VOA Director; Sandy Sugawara, VOA Deputy Director; Kelu Chao, VOA Program Director; Maria “Malule” Gonzalez, OCB Director; Thomas Kent, RFE/RL President; Ben Herman, RFE/RL General Counsel; Pamela Goodnow, RFE/RL Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer; Min Mitchell, RFA Managing Director for East Asia; Bernadette Burns, RFA General Counsel; Alberto Fernandez, MBN President; Anne Noble, MBN General Counsel; Deirdre Kline, MBN Director of Communications; and Stephanie Forman Morimura, Special Assistant, Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy & Public Affairs.

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Kenneth Weinstein  
Chairman

Witnessed:

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David Kligerman  
Board Secretary

Attachments:

1. Agenda for August 30, 2017 Board Meeting
2. Minutes of June 14, 2017 Board Meeting

## Minutes of November 15, 2017 Meeting

ATTACHMENT 3

### RESOLUTION HONORING THE 35<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF VOICE OF AMERICA BROADCASTS IN AMHARIC-LANGUAGE

November 15, 2017

WHEREAS, the Voice of America (VOA) began broadcasting accurate, balanced and comprehensive news and information in the Amharic language to audiences in Ethiopia and Eritrea on September 26, 1982;

WHEREAS, VOA broadcasts in Amharic-language also reach diaspora populations in surrounding countries and the world on multiple media platforms, including radio, digital and mobile;

WHEREAS, Amharic, Afan Oromo and Tigrigna comprise the languages of VOA's Horn of Africa Service, the leading international broadcaster in Ethiopia with a weekly audience of more than five million adults;

WHEREAS, survey results indicated that more than 90 percent of VOA Horn of Africa Service's listeners say the "station is reliable and trustworthy," and that it has "increased their understanding of current events;"

WHEREAS, survey respondents inside Ethiopia and the diaspora consistently report that VOA is practically the sole source of independent news about political events in their country, in languages most Ethiopians and Eritreans can understand;

WHEREAS, VOA broadcasts local, regional, U.S. and international news, as well as an array of programming about Ethiopian, Eritrean and American culture, politics, current affairs, economics, health, education, entertainment and more;

WHEREAS, VOA broadcasts in Amharic-language have been providing comprehensive coverage of stories of great concern to its audiences, including Ethiopia's worst drought in 50 years, the migrant crisis, unrest and ethnic conflict and disputes between the Ethiopian government and opposition groups; and

WHEREAS, VOA broadcasts in Amharic-language have made significant progress on its digital platforms, with the website year-over-year traffic increasing by 14 percent, from 9.9 million in 2016 to 11.5 million in 2017.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved by the Broadcasting Board of Governors and Chief Executive Officer that we celebrate and commemorate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Voice of America broadcasts in Amharic-language.

## **Minutes of November 15, 2017 Meeting**

**ATTACHMENT 4**

### **BBG MEETING DATES IN 2018**

**(ALL MEETINGS ARE AT THE COHEN BUILDING, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.)**

**March 14 (Wednesday)**

**June 6 (Wednesday)**

**August 29 (Wednesday)**

**November 14 (Wednesday)**