

A Week in the Horn

4th January 2013

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Prime Minister Hailemariam answers MPs questions on foreign policy

On Tuesday this week (1st January 2013) Prime Minister Hailemariam responded to questions raised by MPs in a special Parliamentary question and answer session. The Prime Minister was questioned on a wide variety of subjects including the performance of the Growth and Transformation Plan, transport problems in Addis Ababa, the challenges posed by human trafficking, the recent restructuring of the executive and the creation of the three executive clusters as well as matters on foreign policy.

In his response to foreign policy related issues, the Prime Minister highlighted Ethiopia's emphasis on building strong and peaceful relations with its neighbours, based on the mutual interest of all parties. This, he said, "emanates from the conviction that the absence of peace in any neighbouring country can have a spill-over effect which will ultimately have a negative impact on our own peace and on the region as a whole". He added that Ethiopia had embarked on a policy of inter-connection with its neighbours through various methods, including infrastructural developments of roads, telecom and power transmission lines. These were part of the country's efforts to form strategic partnerships with its neighbours by integrating the economies of the region. He reiterated this view when underlining the point that Ethiopia had an unwavering stance on the importance of maintaining good relations with its neighbours. We fully understand the importance of maintaining regional peace for our development, the Prime Minister said.

An MP asked a question on whether the Prime Minister's recent statement to Al Jazeera that he was willing to negotiate with the Eritrean government, and even to go to Asmara to do so, indicated any change of policy. The Prime Minister made it quite clear that Ethiopia's policy towards Eritrea has not changed in the last eight years, remaining quite constant since the issue of the Five-Point Peace Plan in November 2004 which accepted the Eritrean Ethiopian Boundary Commission's Decisions, and offered to resolve all issues in dispute through a comprehensive dialogue. The Prime Minister said Ethiopia's willingness to hold talks with Eritrea, with or without

a mediator, in any place or at any time had remained unchanged since then. He said, regrettably, the Eritrean government has continued to reject all calls for dialogue or negotiation.

The Prime Minister also emphasized that despite the continuing belligerent behaviour of the regime in Asmara and its destabilizing activities, Ethiopia had continued to look for peace and its response remained one of peace. He added that his reference that he was ready to travel to Asmara was made merely to underline more specifically and boldly that Ethiopia was ready for peace. He repeated that Ethiopia's commitment to peace had, however, not been reciprocated in any way, and that the regime in Asmara has continued with its destructive policies. In this regard, the Prime Minister also noted there had been no change in policy: "as before Ethiopia will continue to defend itself through proportional measures as permitted in international law".

On Somalia, the Prime Minister said his government would continue working with the new government of Somalia to help consolidate peace across large parts of Somalia now liberated from Al-Shabaab. He said that Ethiopia, as the current chair of IGAD, had a bigger responsibility to move forward the progress witnessed in Somalia over the past year. Ethiopia was therefore working with other countries in IGAD and with the Somali government to ensure that recent political and security gains cannot be reversed. He underlined the importance of ensuring the present opportunity to form a stable Somali state was not missed.

The Prime Minister also outlined the peace efforts made by the government of Ethiopia, including his own recent mediation visits to Khartoum and Juba, to bring the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan to successful negotiations on the remaining post-independence issues. He reminded MPs that although the two sides had signed the Addis Ababa Agreements in September, implementation of these agreements had been delayed for the past three months. He was, however, pleased to say that the two sides had now agreed to hold discussions on the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreements, covering 90% of the issues in dispute, and also to negotiate on the remaining issues. The Presidents of Sudan and South Sudan are holding a Summit in Addis Ababa today, Friday 4th January.

Nigeria's Foreign Minister in Addis Ababa this week

The Foreign Minister of Nigeria, Ambassador Olugebenga Ashiru, was in Addis Ababa this week to deliver a message from President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria to Prime Minister Hailemariam. The message related to Nigeria's bid for an alternate seat in the UN Security Council, and Prime Minister Hailemariam said Ethiopia would provide every support for Nigeria, a country which played a key role on the African continent.

The Nigerian Foreign Minister also met with Foreign Minister Dr Tedros on Thursday (3rd January) to discuss bilateral affairs. Dr Tedros emphasized the importance Ethiopia attached to its relationship and its strategic partnership with Nigeria. He stressed that Ethiopia and Nigeria had a long history of warm relations and said the two countries worked closely "as a voice of Africa in continental and global issues".

Foreign Minister Ambassador Olugebenga Ashiru recalled the long and historic relations of cooperation and emphasized the need to raise this to a higher level through private investment. He said "the economy will continue to be a focus of the bilateral relations", and he underlined the importance of holding discussions with the private sector to increase Nigerian investment in Ethiopia. He also noted the informal grouping of the G-4, of Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Rwanda, and its activities in activities of forging a common position on African issues, expressing Nigeria's

desire to continue with this. Dr Tedros reaffirmed Ethiopia's readiness to continue with the tradition and to work closely with Nigeria with issues of common interest.

Dr Tedros said that the weak economic links between African countries was a major hurdle for African integration. He briefed the Nigerian Foreign Minister on Ethiopia's efforts in building infrastructure networks within the IGAD region to facilitate economic integration. He said "building infrastructure can help us better integrate within the continent by complimenting other efforts". The two ministers agreed on the importance of strengthening the Ethio-Nigeria Business Association to bolster business ties. They also agreed to hold the second Joint Ministerial Commission meeting within the next few months. Dr Tedros mentioned the request by Ethiopian Airlines for additional flights and destinations in Nigeria. Ambassador Ashiru said discussions were now going on about this at expert level.

Discussing regional peace and security matters, Ambassador Olugebenga Ashiru thanked Ethiopia for its efforts to bring about peace between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan. He underscored the importance of continuing these efforts within the auspices of the Africa Union. Dr Tedros briefed the Foreign Minister on Ethiopia's recent shuttle diplomacy which had made today's presidential summit possible. The Nigerian Foreign Minister asked for Ethiopia's support for the Abuja+10 Summit to mark the 10th anniversary of the African Summit on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and other Infectious Diseases. Dr Tedros affirmed Ethiopia's full support for Nigeria to hold the Summit.

Calls for uninterrupted international support as Somalia makes progress

As the New Year begins, there is growing hope among Somali leaders and the international community that Somalia could become free of the turmoil created by Al-Shabaab if previous progress can be maintained and the efforts against Al-Shabaab consolidated. This must be compounded with more strengthened political progress. For this, more coordinated international support is required. Somali Cabinet minister, Ms Maryan Qasim Aweys, noted that international aid in the past did not relate properly to the needs of the country. Now, Somalia had emerged from the transitional period and needed to see changes: It "expects all international agencies to present their plans and consult with the Somali Federal Government prior to aid operations in the country", she said, adding that "aid operations should match the expectations designed by the Somali Federal Government".

The United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative and Head of UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), Ambassador Mahiga, in a "year end" letter called for "uninterrupted international support" for Somalia to consolidate and advance the gains of the past year. Ambassador Mahiga said "a safe, secure and prosperous Somalia at peace with itself and its neighbours seems more like a reasonable aspiration than a distant dream" for the first time in a generation. At the same time Somalia remained a state in need of support from the international community, adding that this would "need to re-invest comprehensively and generously if it is to capitalize on its massive investment of time and resources". The peace process had succeeded over the past year because "the process was inclusive, transparent, legitimate, participatory and Somalia-owned". He expressed his belief that the New Year would be "full of promise and hope" for Somalia. UNPOS and half of its staff had relocated to Somalia and was in the process of bringing all its remaining staff members to Somalia in the coming weeks. He called on other members of the international community "to come to Mogadishu". UNPOS would be completing a major strategic review shortly to ensure full alignment of its policies and programmes with the goals and aims of the new Somali government. Among its activities in the last year had been the establishment of a "joint framework" for the AU and the Intergovernmental Authority on

Development (IGAD) to ensure “close collaboration on issues affecting the Somali peace process.” This had “harmonized international and regional responses to challenges within Somalia [and] played a critical role” in enabling the international community to support the process.

2012 had seen AMISOM’s forces increased to nearly 18,000 troops and Al-Shabaab forces expelled from Mogadishu, Kismayo and from many other strategic strongholds by the joint efforts of AMISOM forces together with TFG forces, allied militias and some Ethiopian troops. Ethiopian forces, at the request of the Somali Government and with the approval of the African Union and the United Nations, had successfully cleared several areas and liberated Belet Weyne and Baidoa from Al-Shabaab. At the same time, Ethiopia had strongly encouraged, and continues to encourage, the necessity of providing meaningful international support to the political process and to the new Federal Government. Political progress had included the National Constituent Assembly’s approval of the draft provisional constitution; the choice of members of the new parliament; the election of a Speaker and a President; the appointment of a new Prime Minister, the choice of a cabinet and parliamentary approval of the 2013 budget. The IGAD Joint Committee on the Grand Stabilization Plan for Southern Central Somalia, covering promotion of political reconciliation, establishment of a local administration, development of integrated national security capacities, establishment of the rule of law, and delivery of necessary assistance to communities in need, has launched itself. With the Joint Committee now including four new committee members appointed by the federal government of Somalia, and chaired by Somalia, this process is now effectively owned by Somalia. It allows for a more coordinated approach in both political and military areas and will be of vital importance in sustaining and consolidating the successes achieved.

There are signs that Al-Shabaab's leaders and foot soldiers are on the run after losing significant ground to the Somali National Army and allied forces in recent battles. Al-Shabaab’s leader, the reclusive Ahmed Abdi ‘Godane’, (or Mukhtar Abu al-Zubeir), in a message released on 11th December, admitted that Al-Shabaab had suffered a series of reverses. He said during the year “the crusade against Islamic rule in Somalia has been mounting and the crusader enemy has intensified its military, security, political and media capabilities to dim the light of Sharia and defeat Islamic rule”. ‘Godane’ said Al-Shabaab would resort to guerrilla tactics after allied forces intensified their operations. Nur Ahmed Dahir, an al-Shabaab defector, has been quoted as saying ‘Godane’, who reportedly always carries a Kalashnikov rifle and dozens of hand grenades in a bag, has been moving between mountains close to Dinsor and other areas in Hiiraan and Bakool regions. Dahir claimed ‘Godane’ conceals his identity by covering his face with a black scarf to blend in with the fighters. He said “the group bans any questions relating to a jihadi's nationality, name, family background or tribal affiliation to guard against spying, a charge that may lead to execution by firing squad or decapitation...few soldiers can identify their emir”.

Reports from Gedo region also claimed this week that Al-Shabaab leaders have withdrawn from the town of Bardhere, one of the last towns occupied by Al-Shabaab in Gedo. Residents said Al-Shabaab had imposed a curfew on Sunday to make sure its leaders were able to leave the town without problems. A number of foreign fighters also apparently left, but local Al-Shabaab fighters remained and were preparing to resist the Somali National Forces, allied militia and Ethiopian troops advancing towards the town. Elsewhere, government forces backed by AMISOM troops secured Saqiro sub-district, an area of 30 kms north-west of Mogadishu from where Al-Shabaab fighters had staged sporadic attacks. This is a major step in making the Mogadishu- Afgoye road secure.

Further north, General Abdullahi Ali Anood said the Somali National Army, with backing from AMISOM, would soon take over Bulo Burto in Hiiraan region. This would be a large-scale joint

operation by Somali soldiers from Lower Shebelle and Hiiraan regions, joined by AMISOM forces, and aimed at preventing Al-Shabaab from rebuilding its infrastructure and re-grouping and at denying its fighters any safe haven to hide. It would also seriously disrupt Al-Shabaab's flow of military supplies and its logistical support, cutting the links between Al-Shabaab forces in Bakool and Galgudud regions, and effectively trapping Al-Shabaab fighters in the central regions. Hiiraan's Deputy Governor, Mohamed Maalim Yusuf, has called for terrorist leaders who have been moving between El Bur, Bulo Burto, Tayeglow and Dinsor to be targeted.

The Somali Interior and Security Ministry this week set an ultimatum of one hundred days for Al-Shabaab fighters to surrender and join the process of peace and nation building. Interior and Security minister, Abdikarin Hussein Guled, said that the youth fighting alongside Al-Shabaab should take the opportunity to abandon its ideology of violence and surrender to the government. He promised they would be welcome and get proper care from the government. The Minister also called on the Somali National Forces not to scare or harm any youth from Al-Shabaab who surrendered peacefully. He said the army should welcome any defectors from Al-Shabaab with open arms "because these young guys have been brainwashed and misled".

No updates for President Isaias' New Year sermon as Ali Abdu leaves

President Isaias allowed his official media to 'interview' him at the New Year to provide the Eritrean people yet again with his lengthy, meandering and repetitious opinions on a wide spectrum of internal and external affairs. One observer even described the "gibberish and incoherent rumbles of the President" being given subliminal meaning, coherence and passion by the voiceover translation from Arabic to Tigrigna.

The second part of his 'interview' covered international affairs, and the President gave his usual version of the "international conspiracy" facing Eritrea; and as usual, this conspiracy was identified both in the UN sanctions against the Eritrean government and in numerous other forms of international activity. The President first pointed out that the international community, the United Nations, the UN Security Council, the African Union, the AU Peace and Security Council and IGAD had no hand at all in what he called "the US-instigated sanctions resolution". He ignored the fact that the sanctions resolutions were adopted by the United Nations Security Council, and supported and implemented by the members of the international community as well as members of the UN, the AU and IGAD. Then, contradicting himself, he claimed all these organizations must be seen as to be in the pocket of the United States, and described the resolutions as no more than a continuation of "the anti-Eritrea enemy strategy over the past five decades;" identifying their efforts as part of serving "Washington's hegemonic, adventurous and exploitative policies and agendas."

The President also managed to describe the UN Security Council sanctions resolutions as "rooted in baseless issues and unfounded allegations". Eritrea, of course, has been pressing hard for the sanctions to be lifted, despite the President's claims that they have already ended in utter failure. This, he said, was due to people's resistance and the nation's accomplishments in development. The only result of the sanctions, he said, has been frustration for the authors. Indeed, the result of these stratagems against Eritrea was no more than a fiasco, and had only reinforced the people's unity and their spirit of defiance.

He repeated once again his 'discovery' of Washington's agenda in the organizing of human trafficking of Eritrean nationals in general and its youth in particular. This, he said, was intended to drain Eritrea's resources and to weaken the Eritrean people who were responsible for frustrating the conspiracies against them. The President said major intelligence agencies (among

which he normally includes the CIA) were openly involved in these activities. They did this in violation of international law and human rights using others to do their work, among them UN agencies, the Red Cross and other international NGOs. Despite this widespread 'conspiracy' and the well-publicized fact that thousands of people a month, most of them youngsters, regularly cross the borders into Sudan and Ethiopia, the President said Eritrean youths did not fall prey to the traps laid by these international bodies. Rather their patriotic stance, he claimed "caused frustration and bankruptcy within the enemy ranks."

President Isaias added that the sanctions resolutions, described by him as "illegal and unjust", had the effect of targeting the whole region of the Horn of Africa. It was, indeed, these resolutions and the US agenda, he claimed, that were responsible for all the prevailing problems and crisis situations to be seen across the whole region. Every difficulty, whether in Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti or Ethiopia, were the consequence of the US agenda! And during his 'interview', President Isaias gave his own versions of a number of these, including "ongoing popular opposition in Ethiopia, the issues of Somalia and the two Sudans".

The President repeated his continued and total opposition to talks on implementing the Eritrea Ethiopian Border Commission (EEBC) ruling on border demarcation, or of having any dialogue on normalizing relations with Ethiopia. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam in a recent interview on Al Jazeera underlined Ethiopia's wish for resumption of normal relations between the two countries, noting that he would be prepared to talk to President Isaias "anywhere and anytime", even to go to Asmara. His offer, which was fully in line with Ethiopia's principles of promoting peace, cooperation and economic diplomacy in the region, was actually nothing new. The Prime Minister pointed out that his predecessor had offered such talks dozens of times. Indeed, ever since its full acceptance of the Boundary Commission's Decisions in principle in November 2004, Ethiopia has repeatedly offered a dialogue on any problems between the two states. As it has repeatedly made clear, the issues between Eritrea and Ethiopia are not border issues but relate rather to Eritrea's policies of regional aggression and deliberate destabilization and its activities of acting as a conduit for finance and weapons destined for terror groups throughout the region.

Eritrea, however, has consistently refused to participate in any dialogue with Ethiopia whether on placing of the boundary demarcation pillars, on normalization of relations or any other topic. President Isaias dismissed the latest speculation that the death of the late Prime Minister Meles might provide a fresh opportunity for negotiations. He said Eritrea was fully aware of the source of such ideas, and that this was no more than a public relations gimmick, dismissing it as 'drama'.

As usual, President Isaias repeated allegations that implementation of the EEBC ruling on border delimitation had been impeded by Ethiopia. As usual, he completely ignored Eritrea's own repeated illegalities in forcing the UN Mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) out of Eritrea and its seizure of the Temporary Security Zone, while still claiming the rule of law should be respected. Eritrea's actions, of course, effectively nullified the Algiers Peace Agreements following Eritrea's defeat in June 2000 and have been the major reason for the non-implementation of border delimitation. President Isaias reiterated his claim that the problem came from the activities of a US Administration which saw cooperation and co-existence of the two peoples as a threat to its own strategic interest. It is, indeed, very clear that President Isaias has no desire to resolve Eritrea's problems with Ethiopia or put an end to all the destabilization efforts directed by Eritrea at Ethiopia and other IGAD states.

None of this was new or at all surprising, and it could have been written at any time during the last decade. Indeed, most of it probably was as it seems that President Isaias' propaganda chief, Ali Abdu, the Minister of Information for the last decade, appears to have abandoned the regime. It

now seems certain that he has decided to defect. Despite claims that Ali Abdu was seen in Asmara in late November, he appears to have left the country in early November and did not return. There has been speculation that he has decided to stay in Canada as his wife has been living there for several years. Other members of his family also live abroad including his brother, Salah Abdu Ahmad Younis, co-founder and major contributor to Awate.com, who lives in California. The opposition website, Awate.com, run by Salah Abdu, confirmed last week that their 87 year-old father, Abdu Ahmad Younis, has been arrested. In addition, their brother Hassen Abdu Ahmed and Ali Abdu's fifteen year old daughter Ciham Ali Abdu have reportedly been detained. An erroneous report that Ciham had escaped to Khartoum a few weeks ago may have precipitated her arrest. Now it seems some of her cousins have also been arrested and, according to Awate.com are currently undergoing interrogation. It is certainly not the first time that the families of defectors have been detained and more recent reports suggest that the arrests have not stopped with Ali Abdu's family. Nesredin Abderahman, an influential figure in the Ministry of Information and one time Director of the Minister's office, before being assigned to head the Arabic Desk at Eritrean Television, has apparently now been detained.

Ali Abdu was a very powerful figure in government, running extremely tough information controls continuously strengthened and expanded during his long tenure as Information Minister. He had a central role in what has been described as one of the most oppressive governments in the world. In his role as Minister of Information, he confined the press to upholding the interests of the regime, with story topics passed down from above and nothing allowed outside the prescribed limits. One classic example, perhaps, was the total blackout on all reporting in Eritrea of the Arab Spring. As far as the government media in Eritrea was concerned, there was indeed no Arab Spring at all; and the events in Egypt, for example, when President Mubarek was overthrown received no coverage in Eritrea.

Overall, Ali Abdu ensured that there was no independent press of any kind. He was the architect of the government's complete control and direction of the media. He told the media exactly what it should report and dictated all the propaganda for the regime. Nothing was put out in the media without Ali Abdu's approval or direction. His office was responsible for suspending all journalistic activity except government media in September 2001 and oversaw the arrest of all the editors of private newspapers. This accompanied the arrest of as many as possible of the critics of the president and the G15 reformists who had been calling for the implementation of the constitution and the holding of elections. Since then, the only news officially available inside the country has come from Ali Abdu's office and gathered under his auspices and control. He was recently described as "a secretive and arbitrary individual who would promote, demote or fire his subordinates with little explanation...very much engaged [in and] concerned with office politics, [running] the ministry as if it was his backyard...he controlled the office through everybody informing on one another."

The only indication that he may have been less enthusiastic about his job than he always appeared to be, came in a US cable as long ago as 2006. A US official, giving an account of a meeting with Ali Abdu, suggested that "the minister's demeanour belied the force of his rhetoric. Seemingly unconvinced of his own arguments, his charges [against the US] lacked vigour and he was clearly [at a loss] when pressed for specifics or justifications for his statements. In fact, the tone of the meeting was surprisingly friendly despite the rhetoric and he said he hoped the two countries could work together someday." Whatever the reality of Ali Abdu's [stance on] the regime in Asmara, President Isaias will find it difficult to replace someone who has been one of his closest political henchmen for so long.

Ethiopia adopts the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy

Ethiopia has adopted the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy agreed by the 2nd Conference of African Ministers in charge of Maritime Affairs, held last month in Addis Ababa (3rd to 6th December). Ethiopia's adoption of the 2050 AIM Strategy was welcomed by the African Union, and a statement from the African Union Commission acknowledged that this was the beginning of a long journey towards improved global security and enhanced wealth creation. The Commission said the 2050 AIM Strategy would have a significant role in sustainable wealth exploitation of Africa's Maritime Domain for the benefit of all African peoples and for the global community. It expressed its readiness to forward the approved 2050 AIM Strategy and the Addis Ababa Declaration on the 2050 AIM Strategy to the AU Permanent Representatives' Committee and to the Executive Council.

The Conference of African Ministers in charge of Maritime Affairs was a continuation of the 1st Conference of African Ministers responsible for Maritime Affairs held in Addis Ababa in April 2012. It praised the AU Assembly decision adopted at the 13th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, in July 2009, at which the Heads of State and Government underlined their serious concern at mounting insecurity in Africa's maritime domain.

The Conference appreciated the initiatives undertaken by the African Union Commission to develop a comprehensive and coherent strategy to address maritime challenges and opportunities. It strongly condemned all illegal activities in the maritime domain including acts of piracy and the taking of hostages from ships. It also welcomed the initiative undertaken by the AU Commission to develop the 2050 AIM-Strategy. This underlined the Commission's concerns on the increasing risks to sustainable development and the fact that in addition to loss of revenue, illegal trafficking in Africa's maritime domain fuels violence and insecurity, feeds corruption, finances the purchase of weapons, corrupts youth, causes environmental pollution and destabilizes communal life.

The 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy consists of concerted and coherent long-term multi-layered plans of action to achieve the objectives of the AU to enhance maritime viability for a prosperous Africa. The overarching vision of the Strategy is to foster increased wealth creation from Africa's oceans and seas by developing a sustainable thriving 'blue' economy in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner.

The Strategy also aims at a comprehensive understanding of existing and potential challenges, including allocation of resources to identified priorities over a pre-determined time-frame; a comprehensive, concerted, coherent and coordinated approach to improve maritime conditions with respect to environmental and socio-economic development as well as the capacity to generate wealth from sustainable governance of Africa's seas and oceans; a common template for the AU, the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms, other relevant organizations and Member States, to guide maritime reviews, budgetary planning and effective allocation of resources, in order to enhance maritime viability for an integrated and prosperous Africa; and a business plan that specifies milestones, capacity building targets and implementation requirements, including technical and financial support from within the Continent and from development partners.

This strategy will be achieved through continuous cooperation among stakeholders which are identified in the AIM Strategy as including all the beneficiaries and implementers of improved maritime conditions, that is all AU Member States, the African maritime private sector, strategic development partners and the international community as a whole. The promotion of the AU's

primary objectives will also require a collaborative, concerted, cooperative, coordinated, coherent and trust-building multilayered approach among all these organizations.

The 2050 AIM Strategy concludes by noting it is not an end, but “an avenue to get to the End, which is growth in Africa. It presents a vision for the achievement of maritime viability for the people and interests of the whole African continent.” The Strategy notes that “as a vision for the future, it certainly faces some serious challenges [but] collectively, these challenges can and shall be overcome.” It adds “It will require the utmost political will of Member States.”

News and Views :

International community urges President Bashir and President Kiir to resolve issues

The UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon and the foreign ministers of Norway, UK and US (the Troika) welcomed the Sudan/South Sudan presidential summit on Friday, (4th January) here in Addis Ababa. They called on the two leaders to address decisively the remaining outstanding issues and to implement the security arrangements between the Sudan and South Sudan. In a statement on Thursday [3rd], the UN Secretary General encouraged both Presidents to address decisively all outstanding issues between Sudan and South Sudan regarding security, border demarcation and the final status of the Abyei Area, to urgently activate agreed border security mechanisms, and to implement all the other agreements signed on 27th September in Addis Ababa. Hilary Clinton, US Secretary of State and the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Espen Barth Eide, in a joint statement, welcomed the meeting, saying it would bolster efforts to resolve outstanding issues. They commended the “continuing valuable” role of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) as well as the efforts of Prime Minister Hailemariam, but expressed regret over the slow implementation of the September agreement: “We call on the two leaders now to address concretely all outstanding issues and ensure that the armed forces of the two countries immediately withdraw from the demilitarized zone and deploy the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism in line with what has been agreed. Dr Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, also called on the two leaders to overcome the challenges encountered in the implementation of the landmark agreement on the post-secession relations between their countries, as well as to find solutions to the issues of Abyei and the borders.

President Guelleh of Djibouti calls for release of prisoners held by Eritrea

The President of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Guelleh, in his New Year address to the Nation, has called once again for the release of the prisoners of war seized by Eritrea during Eritrea incursions into Djibouti when Eritrea attacked Djibouti in June 2008. In his message, the President said it was fitting that Djiboutians should remember and honour those martyrs who had died in the service of their country. He said that the country should especially remember those still detained in Eritrean prisons. “We pray that they will be returned to us in 2013”, he said, and added that “we will spare no effort to see this come true, and that we will be able to reach a speedy and favourable end” to the conflict over Ras Damera.” Djibouti has repeatedly called for the release of the prisoners of war still suffering in the prisons of Eritrea, a call ignored by the Government of Eritrea. Nor has there been any progress in resolving this since the end of the fighting, despite the efforts of the Emir of Qatar to mediate between the two countries. The President mentioned that 2012 had seen

the completion of a number of projects, including the port of Doraleh, and of others now in process, among them the new port of Tadjoura, a memorandum of understanding with Ethiopia for a cross-border supply of drinking water and a seawater desalination plant agreed with the European Union. He also reminded his listeners that 2013 was an election year for the House of People's Representatives, and for the first time this will involve proportional representation. He called upon his listeners to be responsible, sincere and increase their participation in public affairs.

Eritrean website honours an Eritrean human rights activist

Elsa Chyrum, Director of Human Rights Concern - Eritrea, and a prominent human rights activist and advocate for Eritrean refugees all over the world, has been chosen as Woman of the Year 2012 by one of the main Eritrean websites, asmarino.com. The website notes that she has done much to help refugees stranded in the middle of nowhere; highlighted the lawlessness of mining companies and their use of forced labour in Eritrea; helped Eritreans in detention centres outside the country; and generally brought to light the humanitarian plight of Eritreans inside and outside the country. The website particularly noted Elsa Chyrum's role in bringing about the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Eritrea. It says "Mrs Chyrum has been advocating and lobbying at the Human Rights Council for recognition of the severe human rights crisis in Eritrea since September 2008. She is passionate about justice for Eritrea, and has doggedly campaigned for the appalling human rights record of Eritrea to come to the fore of the international agenda." She was finally successful in her efforts last year despite the attempts of a six-man Eritrean delegation that included two ambassadors to stop her. Four years' of work culminated in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) appointing Ms Beedwantee Keetharuth as Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Eritrea. Ms Keetharuth recently issued a statement saying that she hoped "the Eritrean government would consider the mandate of the Special Rapporteur as an opportunity to start a fresh and constructive dialogue on the human rights issues that have been raised by the international community and other stakeholders." She is expected to present a report on Eritrea's human rights situation to the Human Rights Council in June. [Asmerino.com](http://asmerino.com) identifies Elizabeth Chyrum's selfless and hard work as having made this opportunity possible. It calls her a woman of determination, persistence and integrity who has achieved change for the better for many Eritreans in desperate situations, and calls her life an example to others. It concludes "she has been the recipient of humanitarian awards; she deserves many more."

2012: one of the bloodiest years for journalists

The number of journalists killed in Syria and Somalia over the last year makes 2012 one of the bloodiest years ever for journalists. The International Federation of Journalists, based in Brussels, says 121 journalists and media workers died during the year, 35 of them in the civil war in Syria, and 18 in Somalia where Al-Shabaab has frequently and deliberately targeted journalists. Organized crime in Mexico and insurgents in Pakistan were also responsible for the deaths of 10 journalists in each of these two countries. Others put the figure higher: the Press Emblem Campaign calculates that 141 journalists were killed during the year. The International Federation, representing more than 600,000 world-wide, said that journalists were often deliberately attacked with the aim of silencing them. It said governments and the United Nations should be more effective in fulfilling "their international obligations to protect and enforce journalists' basic right to life." The United Nations is currently implementing a new plan of action for the safety of journalists. This will include helping countries draw up laws promoting freedom of expression, awareness campaigns about media freedom and guidance on keeping journalists safe.

Foreign Ministers of Somalia and of Somaliland both in London this week

On Thursday [3rd Dec], Somalia's Foreign Minister Fowzia Yusuf Adam met with UK's Foreign Secretary, William Hague. It was the Minister's first visit to the UK in her new role. Speaking after the meeting, Mr Hague said Somalia had made tangible progress in recent months, both politically, following the end of the transitional period, and in improving security, with Al-Shabaab pushed out of major towns. It was, he said, critical that this momentum continued. Somalia's Foreign Minister outlined the Somali government's plans to tackle the challenges ahead including improving security, increasing access to justice, transparent financial management, political reconciliation and economic development. Also on Thursday, Somaliland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Mohamed Omar met with the UK Minister for Africa, Mark Simmonds, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Dr Omar briefed Mr Simmonds on Somaliland's recent local elections, and thanked the Minister for the assistance the UK is providing to Somaliland, its help with the security sector, and its support for the elections. Dr Omar said Somaliland was ready to resume talks with Somalia now that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud had established his new government in Mogadishu. Mr Simmonds confirmed Britain's commitment to supporting Somaliland development and democratic achievements and said the UK would be happy to facilitate dialogue between Somaliland and Somalia when the two sides are ready to resume talks.

Ethiopia to take delivery of nine new ships this financial year

Ahmed Tusa, Director-General of the Ethiopian Shipping and Logistics Enterprise (ELSE), has announced that Ethiopia will acquire nine new ships within the current Ethiopian fiscal year. The vessels, which are now under construction in China at a cost of 4 billion birr, are expected to be handed over in June. Ato Ahmed said the new vessels will make a significant contribution to strengthening the nation's maritime transport capacity and will help increase the amount of cargo carried by Ethiopian vessels from 20% to 50%. The Enterprise is currently studying possible new routes and destinations for the additional ships, which include two tankers and seven multi-purpose vessels. ELSE also received two vessels last December from China. Ato Ahmed also outlined the ELSE's efforts to resolve the problems associated with the newly introduced multi-modal transport system. He said that the recruitment of a foreign consulting company "which will have the task of charting procedures that [will] enable the Enterprise to offer efficient and effective service is now completed". Apart from the Mojo Dry Port and Comet Transport facilities, which have the capacity of holding 9,300 containers, a new terminal at Bekelcha Transport premises in Adama is underway. At completion, the terminal will be able to handle another 2,500 containers. The ELSE has been able to lower the number of containers stacked up in Djibouti Port which at one point reached over 25,000, to just over a thousand through the implementation of new procedures and coordinated efforts with other relevant government departments. It is now working on reducing the numbers of containers at the Dry Ports, and has asked importers to collect their containers on time to relieve congestion at the dry ports.

An Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist cell broken in Ethiopia

The National Security and Intelligence Service announced on Wednesday (2nd January) that fifteen members of a terrorist cell affiliated with Al Qaeda's network in East Africa had been arrested. Military training manuals, jihad war videos, black flags with Arabic inscriptions and a variety of weapons including rifles and grenades were also found. The 15 suspects were arrested after the National Task Force for Counter-Terrorism, drawn from members of the Federal Police and the National Security and Intelligence Service, secured a warrant for the arrests. A press statement said that the suspects had been trained by Al-Shabaab forces in Somali and in Kenya. The group had been sent to Ethiopia to carry out terrorist attacks. They had already selected strategic places

in Somali and Harar Regional States where they intended to start their activities, and had begun to carry out military training and agitation in preparation for launching jihad activities. The National Security and Intelligence Service statement indicated that the group was also aiming to try to use recent Muslim demands for their own ends. Meanwhile, on Tuesday (1st January), a court convicted ten other militants, one a Kenyan national, of terrorism-linked charges, including preparation of attacks on political and economic targets in Ethiopia with the help of Al-Shabaab. Of eleven suspects, one was acquitted and six were convicted in absentia. They will be sentenced later this month.

May we take this opportunity to wish all our readers: Melkam Genna 2005 – Best wishes for Ethiopian Christmas, 2005, on Monday next (7th January)