

A Week in the Horn

6th March 2015

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News in brief

Africa and the African Union

The Women in Parliament's Global Forum Annual Summit 2015 will be held in Addis Ababa later this month (March 23-25). The theme of the meeting will be "New Leaderships for Global Challenges" and the discussion will focus on the most pressing issues on the global agenda as well as provide political dialogue on the influence of female decision-makers in today's world.

China's first Ambassador to the African Union, Ambassador Kuang Weilin, said this week that he would do his best to boost the existing excellent relations between China and Africa, adding that China is interested in cooperating with African countries based on mutual benefit and mutual respect. He said peace and security, economic cooperation, investment, people-to-people, business-to-business relations and other political areas would be emphasized. China would support the AU's capacity for major infrastructure projects including railways and airports.

Ethiopia

The 119th Adwa Day, commemorating the Ethiopian victory over Italy at Adwa on March 1 and 2, 1896, was celebrated on Monday, (March 2) in Addis Ababa and across the nation. (See article)

Prime Minister Hailemariam, Chair of IGAD, met the leaders of South Sudan's warring parties, President Salva Kiir and Dr Riek Machar, separately on Tuesday (March 3) in advance of their face to face talks to encourage them to address the outstanding issues and reach a final peace settlement before the IGAD mediators' deadline. He said very little time remained and they must make compromises rather than merely reiterate old positions. (See article)

Prince Fahad Bin Mugrin Bin Abdul Alziz Al Saud, head of the Saudi Arabian Recon International Africa, heading a business delegation, told Prime Minister Hailemariam on Tuesday (March 3) that he wanted to invest in Ethiopia's agriculture and infrastructure sectors.

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom is in Kigali, Rwanda to attend The 9th Northern Corridor Integration Projects Summit held from 4th-7th March. The Summit will focus on how best to fast-track implementation of the 14 projects planned to help transform the prosperity of the Northern Corridor Partner States. Leaders from Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan are also attending.

Ethiopia on Tuesday (March 3) renewed its assurances that the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam will not cause significant harm to downstream states. Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom attending a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan in Khartoum said the Dam would not harm the interests of downstream nations. Subsequent technical talks on Thursday (March 5) considered the choice of a firm to conduct the agreed technical studies. The name of the firm is expected to be announced next week.

Ethiopian Airlines won the Best Regional Airline of the Year award on Wednesday last week (February 25). The award, voted by airline journalists is among the most coveted in the aviation industry. It was given by Air Transport World (ATW) at the 41st annual Air Transport World Airline Industry Achievement Awards ceremony held in Washington D.C.

The Communication Affairs Director at the Federal Transport Authority, Ato Abeneh Agidew, announced on Friday (February 27) that Ethiopia and Sudan had reached an agreement to start public bus transport between the two countries within 45 days.

An Ethiopia delegation on Thursday (February 26) paid a visit to the Spanish company AORA Solar, a producer of solar power generation technology to investigate best practices and explore partnership possibilities between AORA and Ethiopia's research institutions.

The Chairman of the Ethiopian Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association (EHPEA), Zelalem Messele, announced on Friday (February 27) that Addis Ababa had been chosen to host a two-day International Exhibition on Horticulture from March 25-27 this year. The exhibition will showcase the opportunities available in the horticulture sector in Ethiopia for international investors.

Djibouti

President Ismail Omar Guelleh chaired a Cabinet meeting on Tuesday (March 3) at which the Ministry of Justice presented a bill to establish a code of legal protection for minors; the Ministry of Energy in charge of Natural Resources submitted a draft law regulating the activities of independent power producers and a bill to establish the legal framework for energy efficiency to encourage more responsible use of energy to support Djibouti's objective to use 100% green energy by 2020.

The inaugural meeting of the US/Djibouti Bi-national Forum, an outcome of the May 5, 2014 White House meeting between President Barak Obama and Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh, took place in Washington last week (February 25-26). Ministerial-level discussions, with US Secretary of State, John Kerry and Djibouti's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, covered security cooperation, economic development, energy exploration, and education.

Kenya

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta set fire to 15 tonnes of elephant ivory in a ceremony in Nairobi's National Park this week as part of Kenya's efforts to curb poaching. The ivory, with a black market value of US\$30m was the largest consignment ever destroyed in Kenya. President Kenyatta promised the government would destroy the country's entire stockpile of ivory, an estimated 115 tonnes by the end of the year.

Somalia

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Nicholas Kay and the Special Representative of the AU Commission, Ambassador Sidikou, made a joint call this week for increased measures to protect Somalia's women and girls and reiterated their commitment to support efforts to combat sexual and gender based violence in Somalia.

Somalia's Foreign Minister, Dr Abdusalam Omer, on Friday last week, expressed his concern about the dangers posed by the threat of closure of remittances to Somalia. He said the foundation for Somalia's recent economic

and security gains were the members of its Diaspora, who send remittances to support their families. These were a lifeline for the Somali people. (See article)

The next round of talks between Somaliland and Somalia in Istanbul, due to start on Sunday (March 1) failed to take place after Somaliland refused to accept some of the Somali Government delegation which included members who hailed from Somaliland. (See article)

South Sudan

President Salva Kiir and Dr Riek Machar began face-to-face talks in Addis Ababa on Tuesday afternoon (March 3), after Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who met the two leaders separately, told them to address outstanding issues and take tough decisions. He said very little time remained. IGAD Chief Mediator, Seyoum Mesfin, also urged the parties to waste no time in reaching a final peace deal. Despite an extension of IGAD's deadline on March 5 into Friday, the peace talks adjourned on Friday afternoon. (See article)

The United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution on Tuesday (March 3) to create a framework for a sanctions regime for South Sudan. The resolution demands the warring parties fully observe the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and commit themselves to finding a comprehensive agreement without further delay. It allows for targeted sanctions and sets out the criteria to punish individuals or entities responsible for actions or policies threatening peace and security in South Sudan.

Seventy-six South Sudanese and international organizations, mainly from Africa, have called on the African Union to "immediately" publish a report of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan. In a letter to the AU Peace and Security Council the organizations said publication of the report would be a positive contribution for lasting peace in South Sudan. The last AU Summit decided to delay publication of the report in case it impacted negatively on the peace process.

The UN's Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA) has reported an attack last Sunday (March 1) by a group of about a 100 armed Misseriya that killed four people and wounded three others. Eight children were reported missing. A spokesperson for South Sudan's ministry of foreign affairs, Mawien Makol claimed the Popular Defense Forces, supported by Sudan Armed Forces, were behind the attack.

South Sudan and Sudan started negotiations this week on aspects of the 2012 Cooperation Agreement, focusing on the costs of oil exported through Sudan. Last year South Sudan paid US\$884 million to Khartoum for the transport of oil. It would like to see costs reduced following the global fall in oil prices which has affected South Sudan's economy.

The Egyptian government has pledged \$2 billion for the construction of a multi-purpose hydroelectricity power project on the Jur River in South Sudan's Western Bahr el Ghazal state. Egypt's Minister for Water Resources and Irrigation, Dr Hossam Moghazy, said Egypt wanted to improve cooperation with the South Sudan government through provisional assistance in the areas of electricity, education, agriculture and clean water supply.

Sudan

Sudanese president Omer Hassan al-Bashir has pledged to achieve security in Darfur, and said it is the highest priority for his electoral program for the April election. Speaking on Wednesday (March 4) in the capital of West Darfur state, El-Geneina, he said the government aims to improve basic services including health care, education and electricity. He pledged to build a railway linking between the capital of South Darfur state, Nyala and West Darfur.

The African Union Commission has sent a pre-election assessment mission to Sudan ahead of the country's general elections scheduled for April 13, 2015. The mission, which includes four independent election experts, will hold consultations with various political and electoral stakeholders in Sudan from 1st to 10th March 2015 and consider the state of preparedness by all stakeholders.

Direct talks between South Sudanese leaders adjourned

Face to face talks that started on Tuesday (March 3) between President Salva Kiir and Dr Riek Machar continued on Thursday night in Addis Ababa. The mediators said talks would continue and the deadline would be extended. IGAD, which is mediating the talks, extended the original deadline of March 5 by another day, to March 6. In a brief statement on Thursday, IGAD said President Salva Kiir and his former deputy and rival Riek Machar "will continue negotiations tomorrow morning." However, on Friday afternoon it became apparent that no agreement would be reached and IGAD adjourned the talks.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who met the two leaders separately on March 3 before they themselves met, told them firmly that they must expeditiously address the outstanding issues and take the tough decisions necessary for a final peace settlement. He said they must make "compromises and alternatives rather than only reiterating old positions." The Prime Minister, who is also the Chair of IGAD, said "Very little time remains," and he noted the resolution being considered by the UN Security Council on Tuesday, which he said was "a sign of the frustration that the international community feels in relation to the parties in South Sudan, and their continued intransigence in resolving the crises." IGAD Chief Mediator, Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, also urged the parties to waste no time to accelerate the final peace deal. He appealed to IGAD leaders, the UN, the African Union and the international community at large, to join IGAD calls and to exert pressure on the warring parties. The two principals in their closed door meetings were discussing the outstanding issues of the mediation agenda laid out in the Working Document of February 1. Amongst these are the structure of the executive for the Transitional Government of National Unity, the power sharing ratios, the composition of the National Assembly and transitional security arrangements.

On Tuesday (March 3), the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2206 (2015) creating a framework under which it could impose sanctions on those blocking peace in South Sudan. The Council endorsed the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, previously accepted and signed by both the Government of South Sudan and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM)-in-Opposition on three occasions last year, January 23, May 6, and May 9. Reiterating that there could be no military solution to the conflict, the Council demanded that all parties adhere to, and immediately implement the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, "including the progressive withdrawal of foreign forces deployed in South Sudan since 15th December 2013," and, among other issues, demanded that the parties commit themselves to finding a comprehensive agreement without further delay. The resolution also expressed deep concern at the "failures" of both parties to engage in a palpable peace process which would lead to political resolve and bring an end to the violence.

The resolution underscored the Security Council's "willingness to impose targeted sanctions in order to support the search for peace." These will be expected to apply to those responsible for, complicit in, or engaged directly or indirectly in actions or policies threatening the peace, security or stability of South Sudan. It sets out a list of the possible criteria for application. These will apply but are not limited to those expanding or extending the conflict or obstructing reconciliation and peace talks or processes, threatening transitional agreements or undermining the political process and planning, directing or committing acts that violate applicable international humanitarian and human rights law and human rights abuses. The resolution will also apply to those targeting civilians or attacking hospitals, religious sites, schools or locations where civilians seek refuge, and recruiting or using children by armed forces or groups. In addition, it will affect those obstructing the work of international peacekeeping, diplomatic or humanitarian missions or hindering the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid or access to such aid.

The Council also decided that it could impose a travel ban and an assets freeze for an initial period of one year on any individuals and entities, designated by a sanctions committee to be established under the resolution. The travel ban would apply to individuals, while the assets freeze would apply to individuals as well as entities such as government, opposition or militia groups. To assist the relevant Sanctions Committee in its work, the Council requested that the Secretary-General set up a five-member panel of experts to provide information relevant to the potential designation of individuals and entities. Among other responsibilities, the panel will have the task of collecting and analysing information regarding the flow of arms and related military assistance to those undermining the peace process and committing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

In conclusion, the Security Council said it would review the situation after IGAD's deadline for completion of the talks in Addis Ababa, and again after the envisioned start of the pre-transition period on 1 April, and at 60-day intervals thereafter, or more frequently, as needed.

During the meeting, the UN Secretary-General recalled the deadline set by IGAD and strongly urged President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar to show leadership, put the wellbeing of the people of South Sudan ahead of all other interests, and make the necessary compromises to conclude a power sharing agreement that paved the way for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict. He reminded both parties that the best way to avoid the enactment of actual sanctions by the Security Council was to strictly adhere to the Cessation of Hostilities agreement of January 2014, to fully comply with International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, extend full cooperation to United Nations and humanitarian personnel in the discharge of their mandates and duties, and conclude a Comprehensive Peace Agreement that places South Sudan back on the path to stability and prosperity. He commended and supported the efforts of the region to facilitate the conclusion of the negotiation process.

US Secretary of State, John Kerry, in his statement said "the warring parties in South Sudan must seize the current and final round of negotiations to deliver a sustainable peace." He said "We are well past the point where enough is enough," and he urged leaders to put the interests of their people above their own. He criticized the South Sudan Government pointing out that "legitimacy is not a presumed right of any government. It is conferred by the people, and it is sustained only by demonstrating leadership to protect and serve all citizens - responsibilities the government has neglected." He also strongly criticized the opposition for not making "the hard choices required of leaders." He said the United States would work with international partners, including those in the region, the UN Security Council, and beyond, to take further concerted action against those who do not demonstrate a willingness to make the difficult decisions needed for peace.

South Sudan has expressed its disappointment at the action of the Security Council. The Permanent Representative of South Sudan to the UN, Francis Deng, said after the meeting that "What the President and the Government of South Sudan need is encouragement and support, not condemnation." He said a solution could not be achieved through the imposition of sanctions and this amounted to a threat. Ambassador Deng said if sanctions were meant to be an inducement for peace, they were in fact "a negative measure that could only generate a negative response". South Sudan's Vice President, James Wani Igga, also said United Nations sanctions would undermine efforts to resolve the ongoing conflict. The Vice President said imposing sanctions on individuals for allegedly blocking the peace process would only complicate the progress already made at the negotiations being overseen by IGAD and regional leaders. He said: "we fully understand the concerns and frustrations behind such decisions, but imposing sanctions while the clock is ticking towards reaching final agreement will not serve any purpose."

Growing concern over Somali remittances....

An estimated 80% of Somalis rely on cash remittances from the Diaspora, depending on this assistance for such basic everyday needs, including food, clothes, education and shelter. Remittances have developed as a collective solution to the conflicts that have affected Somalia for over two decades and have become hugely important with outside funding providing an estimated 25% to 45% of the country's economy. The United Nations estimates that Somalis in the Diaspora send home between US\$1.3 and US\$1.5 billion annually from around the world and at least \$215 million from the U.S. alone. It is substantially more than the entire foreign aid Somalia receives. Indeed, over 40% of Somalis rely on money sent from abroad according to aid agencies.

This lifeline is now under very real threat as US banks, under pressure from the tightening of U.S. anti-terrorism regulations, are cutting off the transfers made through the money transfer, hawala, companies to Somalia. Last month, one of the last banks involved in this service, Merchant Bank of California, announced the closure of the accounts of all its Somali-American money transfer company clients, after years of pressure from US financial regulators. Aid agencies calculate that the decision will stop up to 80 percent of the \$200 million sent home to Somalia annually by relatives in the US. A joint report by Adeso and Oxfam warned that Somalis were "losing their only formal or transparent channel through which to send money." The report suggested the restrictions could actually increase criminality, by driving transfers underground where they are hidden from scrutiny. "Informal business networks, supported by couriers carrying hundreds of thousands of dollars, would likely replace the current formal systems that are accountable to regulators and the communities they serve," the report said. "Families that depend on remittances would suffer, while the criminal networks that seek to exploit the system would benefit."

Others were equally alarmed. Somali Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, said the decision came at a time when nearly three quarters of a million Somalis were facing acute food insecurity, and the number would rise if money transfer companies were unable to remit funds. In January, the United Nations warned that more than 38,000 Somali children were at "high risk" of dying of starvation as the country grapples with drought and acute food insecurity. In Washington, a number of Congressmen, including senior Democrats on the House and Senate banking committees, called on the Obama administration and the global community to take emergency steps to get the money lifeline open again. They wrote to the heads of the State and Treasury Departments, the National Security Administration, and a host of financial regulators in early February saying the move "could throw [Somalia] and its already vulnerable economy deeper into crisis." They had a meeting last week with representatives of a number of federal agencies including the State Department and the US Treasury, but reportedly came away frustrated by the lack of proposals to resolve the problem.

The problem has arisen as bank regulators push for banks to keep a closer eye on who uses their services, demanding the banks stop illegal money laundering and terrorist financing. Banks also face pressure to manage risks and operate at a profit. Financial institutions can be penalized heavily if they don't meet strict money laundering regulations. The US government's argument against bank transfers is that Somalia's informal banking infrastructure, years of civil war, and the insurgency by Al-Shabaab has created fertile ground for money laundering and funding terrorists. Over the last few years, in the face of pressure from the US Treasury and other regulators, more and more US banks have been cutting their services for Somali money transfer companies. Regulators say they aren't trying to stop the flow of legitimate money to Somalia, but they have put increasing pressure on banks to monitor business for funds that could be going to terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab. The UN Monitoring Group claims that Al-Shabaab receives between \$70 to \$100 million a year through taxation, extortion, and other means - including money transfers or funds from Diaspora communities. In fact, no Somali money transfer operators in the US have ever been convicted of sending money to an illicit entity. Nevertheless, with Somalia having no recognized banking system, the result is that virtually no bank in the United States will now handle this business; and without legitimate US bank accounts and banking services to process their own financial concerns, remittance companies cannot continue to operate from America.

Last week, (February 27), Somalia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion, Dr Abdusalam Omer, also expressed his concern. He said Somalia was at a critical juncture. At one level, Al Qaeda and its affiliate Al-Shabaab were on the back foot, thanks in large part to the critical support being given to the national security forces by the US and coalition partners on the ground. In addition, the economy was rebounding with thousands of Somali-Americans returning and making significant investments. The Minister said the foundation for these recent gains were members of its Diaspora, who work multiple jobs and send back to Somalia whatever they can to support relatives. These remittances, he said, were also a lifeline on which nearly half of the population depended to meet their most basic needs like food, shelter, healthcare and school fees.

Now, said the Foreign Minister, the remittance corridor was being threatened with a near-total closure as the principal American bank facilitating remittances to Somalia, Merchant Bank of California, closed the accounts of the Somali-American remittance companies. The big banks, he said, claimed transmitting funds to Somalia were not profitable enough to offset the reputational risks involved; the smaller banks, which had filled the gap until recently, say they are unable to bear the costs of compliance with US government regulations. Without bank accounts, remittance companies are unable to send money in a way that is transparent and secure. Soon, he said, they may not be able to send money at all.

The result, the Minister stressed, was that a perfectly legal and functioning industry, and one critical to Somali livelihoods, would soon be replaced by an unregulated, underground system that would be highly susceptible to abuse. It would also risk the survival of many of Somalia's most vulnerable families. He pointed out that Somali remittance companies were "licensed and regulated by federal and state authorities; they pay taxes; and they send money not just to Somalia, but to countries the world over...They have set up above-industry-standard compliance mechanisms for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism." The Minister, who said that no market solution appeared to be in sight, emphasized that without urgent US government intervention there could be "an unparalleled catastrophe for millions of people in Somalia." He pointed out that in the long-term US government support for Somalia's public financial management and financial regulation would help secure and diversify financial inflows. In the medium-term, the Somalia Government would also greatly appreciate assistance to set up a payment gateway in Somalia to facilitate the

kind of transparency that banks and regulators need. However, in the short-term an urgent stop-gap solution was needed to avert the imminent crisis. He said the Government's priorities now were to ensure "the survival of our people and prevent Al-Shabaab from gaining a foothold in the midst of free-fall," adding that "the free flow of remittances is nothing less than a national security priority."

The Governor of Somalia's Central Bank, Bashir Issa Ali, agrees. He was quoted this week as saying that "Somalia may live without a government but it cannot live without remittance companies." He said Somalia certainly had to address the concerns of the international community, and the Central Bank was working with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and others on regulations for the financial sector, but he noted that money transfer firms, many with properly regulated and licensed offices in the West and elsewhere, insist they already meet requirements. Equally, they were ready to do more to keep channels open, if only regulators explained what was needed. The effects of the new regulations in the US are making it impossible to provide any legal means of transferring money from Somali-Americans to their dependents in Somalia. Without legal means to transfer money to Somalia via the Somali money transfer companies, as well as the serious humanitarian risks, there is a greater risk that funds will find their way through other illegal [channels] and the US Congress described it as "a crisis and it needs to be solved now."

...and the Somalia-Somaliland talks collapse

The latest round of talks between the Federal Government of Somalia and Somaliland were due to start in Istanbul at the end of last week. There were two days of postponement but then talks were supposed to start on Sunday (March 1). The delegations had arrived in Istanbul, the Somali Federal Government delegation led by Interior Minister, Abdirahman Mohamed Odowa, and the Somaliland delegation led by Foreign Minister Mohamed Bihi Yonis.

Problems, however, arose almost immediately before the two sides even sat down together. Somaliland Foreign Minister Mohamed Bihi told the BBC's Somali Service that Somaliland would not participate in the talks while the Somali Government delegation included members who originally came from Somaliland. He said they would only talk to a delegation composed of people from southern Somalia. Mohamed Bihi also made it clear that the Somaliland delegation expected that the issue of Somaliland independence would feature at the top of the agenda in the course of the talks.

Turkey has been brokering the talks between the two sides since 2013, but despite Turkish efforts to mediate a compromise, no talks took place. The two sides subsequently blamed each other for the breakdown of the talks. A statement from the Office of the Somali Prime Minister, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, on Monday, said that it was unfortunate that "our brothers from Somaliland failed to come to the negotiating table" as they produced conditions that presented a challenge to continuing the dialogue. The Prime Minister's statement said neither side had the right to dictate to the other party; the issue, the statement said, was "violation of previous agreements and international standards of negotiations." The Prime Minister's statement said the Somali Government delegation had come to the negotiating table in a spirit of brotherhood and good optimism and the Somaliland delegates will unilaterally shoulder blame for the collapse of the talks.

Somaliland's State Minister for the Presidency, Hirsi Ali Haji Hassan, in turn accused the Somali Government of irresponsibility. Earlier, Somaliland had said it suspected that Somalia was not serious about the talks and accused Somalia of breaching previously agreed provisions including an airspace control agreement reached in an earlier round of the talks. Somaliland opposition parties had also expressed their concern recently about Turkey as a host for the talks, suggesting it was providing so much aid and assistance to Somalia that it could no longer be considered as an independent mediator. They suggested a better choice to host any further talks would be Djibouti.

Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and President of Somaliland Ahmed Mahmoud Silanyo met last year (December 26, 2014) with Djibouti President Ismail Omer Guelleh who oversaw the penning of a "Djibouti declaration". The two leaders pledged their determination to continue a peaceful dialogue to overcome their differences. They agreed to issue a six point resolution in which they vowed to facilitate international aid and development support for both Somalia and Somaliland. They pledged to boost their cooperation in a wide array of areas and agreed to hold this next round of talks in Turkey when the two sides would discuss important and sensitive points related to unity and independence. At the time, the two sides also emphasized the significance of the talks and agreed that any remarks and actions inconsistent with the dialogue process should be avoided at all cost.

Celebrating the 119th anniversary of the Battle of Adwa

The nation marked the 119th year of the victory at the battle of Adwa on Monday (March 2). Adwa was the first major victory over colonialism by the people of Africa and the defeat of Italy by Ethiopia has had wide significance for Ethiopia and for Africa as a whole in the fight against colonialism. Adwa, indeed, became an emblem to trigger the continental struggle against the colonial powers and the fight for emancipation and freedom across Africa.

The cause of the war with Italy was the Treaty of Wuchale which had been drawn up in Italian and Amharic versions in 1889. The major issue proved to be Article XVII of the treaty. According to the Italian version, the treaty bound the Emperor Menelik to making all foreign contacts through the agency of Italy. This would, in effect, have made Ethiopia a protectorate of the Kingdom of Italy. The Amharic version was very different and made any such action to use Italy purely optional. When this disparity became apparent, Ethiopia revoked the treaty. The Italian government, aiming ultimately for the colonization of Ethiopia, decided to use the excuse to force Ethiopia to abide by the Italian version of the treaty. The result was a confrontation, known as the First Italo-Ethiopian War, when the Italian forces advanced into Ethiopia.

After some preliminary skirmishes, the main clash between the Italian and Ethiopian armies took place in the mountains around Adwa. It was an overwhelming victory for Ethiopia and a disastrous defeat for the Italians. The Italians suffered 7,000 killed and 1,500 wounded with a further 3,000 taken prisoner as they retreated back into their colony of Eritrea. Ethiopian losses were estimated around 4-5,000 killed and 8,000 wounded. In their precipitous retreat to Eritrea, the Italians left behind all of their artillery and 11,000 rifles, as well as most of their transport. The impact of the defeat in Italy was enormous. Public opinion was outraged with street demonstrations in most major cities. The Prime Minister was forced to resign and the King of Italy declared a day of national mourning.

Adwa was a major anti-colonialist battle, in which an army drawn from all over Ethiopia, under the skilful leadership of the Emperor Menelik and Empress Taitu, routed an invading force and brought Italy's attempted war of further conquest in Africa to an end. A well-disciplined and massive Ethiopian army did the unthinkable. In the age of relentless European expansion and domination, Ethiopia successfully defended its independence and cast doubt upon the unshakable certainties of the age of late 19th century colonialism. On the local and regional level it forced European powers to recognize Ethiopia as a sovereign nation state and put an end to their expansion in the Horn of Africa, but the victory also resonated well beyond the Ethiopian-Italian war and the region.

The most important immediate effect was that the independence of Ethiopia was assured, and Ethiopia after the victory gained special importance in the eyes of Africans as the only surviving independent African state. The battle, in fact, meant that Ethiopia became the emblem of African valour and resistance to colonialism, the symbol of hope for the millions of Africans who were beginning to experience the full shock of European conquest and exploitation. The victory disproved the widespread European misconceptions of the inferiority of Africans and the falsification of their history and achievements as portrayed by writers of social Darwinism. It disproved the idea of the inevitability of superior European armies. It was clear that given the right leadership, unity of purpose, and the necessary mobilization of resources, Africans were quite capable of protecting and promoting their own national interests. Indeed, the victory played a major and positive role in uplifting the morale of colonized and racially oppressed Africans across the continent and in the Diaspora. In fact, it challenged the status quo and inspired freedom fighters across the world to increase their efforts to oppose colonialism and imperialism in all its forms.

The victory at Adwa, unexpected as it was, played a major role in the birth of Pan-African solidarity, planting the seeds of unity and cooperation of black people throughout the world and helping to launch efforts to break the yoke of colonialism in a united fashion. It not only thwarted any future movement by Europeans to colonize Ethiopia but, in its shattering of centuries-old negative myths about Africa and Africans, seriously affected further implementation of colonialism. Pan-Africanism was a movement forged by Africans and people of African descendants, into a unified force against oppression, colonialism, imperialism and racial domination. It launched the concept into the realm of the possible by reigniting the imagination of Africans in their quest for freedom throughout the world, signaling the real possibility of a victorious outcome to the anti-colonial struggle. The post-Adwa spirit of Ethiopia, instilled in successive generations, also gave Ethiopians a confidence and a special world view. The image of independent Ethiopia, the nation that successfully stood up

to Europe, gave inspiration and hope to Africans and Afro-Americans fettered by racial discrimination and apartheid wherever these existed. Ethiopia's victory, in fact, provided a model of independence and dignity for people everywhere seeking independence from colonial servitude.

The defeat of a colonial power and the ensuing recognition of African sovereignty became rallying points for later African nationalists during their struggle for decolonization, as well as activists and leaders of the Pan-African movement. Adwa, in addition to an Ethiopia victory over Italy, was the first major victory of Africa over colonialism. Indeed, it became increasingly associated with Black Nationalism across the world and with resistance movements in Africa. It challenged the fundamental economic, political and social attitudes of the time and threatened the colonizers. It emboldened all Black people to rise up and challenge social injustice, racial discrimination, and colonial domination, both in Africa and elsewhere including the United States. Indeed, the Black Movement of the 1890s was specifically associated with Ethiopia because of Ethiopia's civilization, its long political independence, its rich historical and cultural legacy and its successful defense of these at the battle of Adwa.

Adwa played a fundamental role in helping to inspire and realize today's African Renaissance, enabling Africa to emerge as strong, independent and proud, by the end of the last century. It was no surprise when the 50th anniversary celebration of the formation of the Organization of African Unity/African Union declared Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance as the basic elements in the search to promote "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena".

Today, the victory of Adwa can still be remembered as something to be imitated in the battle against the enemies of today. It still has lessons for this century. The main effort may no longer be a military struggle but rather a socio-economic one, directed to the efforts to eradicate poverty from Ethiopia, but victory still requires the same determination, effort, political will and unity of purpose. Adwa remains meaningful to Ethiopians and Africans as a symbol to inspire implementation of pro-poor economic policies that can lift people out of poverty, bring about social transformation, democracy and prosperity and allow people to claim full economic independence. At the commemoration in Addis Ababa on Monday, the Speaker of Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives, Abadula Gameda, said the victory achieved over great odds at Adwa should now be replicated over the country's major enemy today, "poverty". He urged the youth of Ethiopia to stand for sustainable peace and stability and the development of the nation as their forefathers had done, and to play an active part in the renaissance of the country.

Ethiopia's Communication Ministers speak to journalists on the election and press freedom

Redwan Hussein, Head of the Government Communication Affairs Office with the rank of Minister and his deputies, Shimelis Kemal and Ewenetu Bilata, held a press conference at the end of last week, to discuss a wide range of issues including the upcoming national elections, press freedom and terrorism.

On the election, Ato Redwan noted that there was a visible change towards resolving disputes among political parties through discussion. He said there had been steady development in the nascent culture of accommodating differences and understanding the concerns of each other. This, he said, was playing an important role in building trust and confidence in the electoral process. Unlike the past elections, the political parties were tending to resolve differences through the Joint Political Parties Forum rather than trying to take every minor mundane dispute to a court of law. He noted that both the opposition and the ruling party had shown improvements in accepting and correcting faults. He underlined the point that the responsibility of ensuring a peaceful election rested on all the parties. He also stressed the importance that all parties participating in the election should respect the result. Ato Redwan praised the active participation of the public in voter registration as evidence of a developing culture of involvement in the electoral processes and exercising their constitutional rights. The registration of 36 million voters was more than expected, he said, and was a substantial increase in the number of voters over past elections. Ato Redwan said given the increased number of voters and of candidates, the election this year was bound to be different. The wider participation of the general public was an essential element, and he emphasized that the Government was actively engaged in creating the necessary enabling conditions for the free, fair and peaceful conduct of the election.

Asked about the claims of opposition parties whose candidates were disqualified, Ato Redwan said that no candidate had been disqualified except those who had failed to register properly. Only those who had not gone

through the right procedure or fulfilled the legal criteria to stand as a candidate were disqualified as candidates. He pointed out that opposition parties were fielding candidates in a large number of constituencies. The Semayawi (Blue) Party, for example, was fielding candidates for 18 constituencies out of 23 in Addis Ababa. It was true that four members of the party lost in the draw in four different constituencies where more than 12 candidates had been registered. This, however, was done in accordance with the election rules which prescribe that the candidates should be decided by the drawing of lots in a constituency in which there were more than the 12 permitted candidates. Ato Redwan said the fact that 58 political parties had been able to register more than 800 candidates was praiseworthy. It was a significant development in the democratization process of Ethiopia.

Asked about the allegations that the National Ethiopian Electoral Board (NEBE) and the Government might be behind the split within the Andinet party, Ato Redwan said this was nonsense. He pointed out the NEBE had been “generous in its patience as it did not quickly take action over the infighting within the Andinet party”, and this had indeed gone on for so long that the public had become weary of the situation. He pointed out that if “the intention of the NEBE was to liquidate Andinet, it would have done it from day one when the party by-laws were flagrantly transgressed.” Indeed, far from that, “the patience shown by the NEBE had rather [saved] Andinet from complete dissolution”. Any such allegation was “baseless”, he said, adding that opposition leaders should look first at their own internal party problems rather than rush to externalize problems. That would not help to ensure the internal cohesion of their parties.

Ato Redwan also warned against any inclination of some political groups to hijack the election process and attempt to achieve a hidden political agenda through street violence. He cautioned any such parties to abide by the law and refrain from indulging in activities that might disturb the peaceful conduct of the election process. He said the Government would certainly take all necessary action to maintain law and order. He also cautioned parties against listening to those who advocate the untenable argument that foreign governments might come and rescue them from being held accountable for any destruction they might cause in the election process. Concluding his remarks on the election, Ato Redwan said “the increase in participation of voters and candidates, combined with the government’s strict stance in ensuring law and order, has contributed to a widening political space in Ethiopia.” He reiterated the Government’s readiness to ensure a level political field for all parties to disseminate their views freely and promote their political programs. He urged all political parties to utilize properly the available broadcast airtime and newspaper columns allocated for the campaigning.

Ato Redwan also noted that democracy was not something that so-called human rights non-governmental international organizations could teach Ethiopians. In today’s Ethiopia, he said, Ethiopians were nurturing their own hard-won democratic system for which they fought a bitter armed struggle. The improvements in democratization were visible in the increasing participation of all citizens in all those affairs that affected their lives. He emphasized that the Government’s policies and strategies were helping in fostering the decision-making role of the general public, and so enhancing democratization. He said Ethiopians were able to accomplish many activities which was their right and duty. This left no space for foreign NGOs that served as agents of certain governments to try to play a role in the internal affairs of the country. The Ethiopian Government, he said, had an unshakable position that deciding on the political system was the constitutional right of Ethiopians, and Ethiopians alone. Any attempt of so-called international NGO’s to impose a political system could only be considered as an attempt to trample on the sovereignty of the nation, and this was not a matter to be tolerated.

Ato Redwan also spoke of the problem of terrorism, pointing out that Ethiopia had been facing this threat for 16 years. It had identified terrorism as a major threat to peace and security long before the rest of the world gave it due attention and Ethiopia was taking all necessary measures to defeat this scourge. Ato Shimelis Kemal, State Minister in the GCO, added that because Ethiopia had been able to put in place the requisite legal framework, create awareness and set a clear foreign policy to deal with terrorism, it had been able to prevent the destruction and loss of life that had happened elsewhere. Now that the international community had understood the need for global cooperation in fighting terrorism, Ethiopia had, of course, joined hands with others to help deal with the problem. Ato Shimelis said the close and seamless coordination and cooperation between the public and the security forces had been able to prevent any major terror attacks on Ethiopian soil. Equally, he stressed this coordination must continue and be intensified. Ato Shimelis said that once religious extremism had been identified as a source of terrorism, effective preventive activities had been carried out in Ethiopia to ensure peoples’ security. He emphasized the importance of the media playing a role in educating the public about the dangers of terrorism, the threat it posed to security and on ways to fight it.

Ato Shimelis dismissed claims that the country's anti-terrorism law was used to stifle press freedom. He said that only one journalist had been jailed in relation to his profession as a journalist. This was Temesgen Dessalegne whom, he said, had been found guilty of offences in the Penal Code related to transgression of press related provisions. This was the only such case. Any other claims were simply untrue. The anti-terrorism proclamation, he said, had no other purpose than to ensure the peace and security of the general public. All the charges brought under this legislation related specifically to terrorist or possible terrorist activities and nothing else.

GERD is the symbol of Ethiopia's commitment to mutual development of the Nile

Ethiopia's Minister of Water, Energy and Irrigation Alemayehu Tegen, has reaffirmed that the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is a living monument showcasing the country's principled commitment to mutual development and the fair and equitable utilization of the Nile waters. The Minister, underlining the country's long-held principles of partnership and cooperation with its neighbors, and also reaffirmed GERD's instrumentality for peaceful coexistence and sustainable regional integration among riparian states and other countries in the region.

In an interview with the Turkish Anadolu Agency, Minister Alemayehu noted that the construction of the GERD and of the other major development projects in which Ethiopia is currently involved provide the basis of the country's all-round efforts to fight poverty. And in all these cases, the Minister emphasized, "Ethiopia will undertake its development projects in a way that does not cause any significant harm to any country." He also stressed that all these development projects were based on solid principles of commitment to friendly and healthy relations with other countries in the value chain.

Minister Alemayehu confirmed Ethiopia's principled position that no development project would cause any significant harm for lower riparian countries. In response to Egypt's repeated call for a guarantee from Ethiopia that the construction of the GERD would not reduce the flow of the Nile water reaching Egypt, the minister repeated Ethiopia's commitment to the principle that no development would cause significant harm to lower riparian states. This, he said, was a dependable guarantee.

Responding to critics who have been concerned that Ethiopia might face financial difficulties in completing the construction of the GERD, given the huge amount of capital required, in addition to the costs of other major projects, the Minister said this was groundless. Such an idea merely reflected what some critics wanted to be the case. There were, he said, no financial difficulties apparent in the construction of the GERD to date, nor would there be in the future. He made it clear that the construction of the GERD, and of the other major development projects, were all on track according to the timetable laid down in the five-year Growth and Transformation Plan (2010/11-2014/15). He pointed out that Ethiopia was also undertaking construction of railways, asphalt roads, water facilities, irrigation schemes, and many other projects, all costing significant amounts of money. None, he said "have ever been delayed even for a day"; indeed "all are being carried out as per schedule."

Asked whether Ethiopia was deliberately delaying the tripartite dialogue on the Nile to buy time to complete the construction of the GERD as Egypt has alleged, the Minister said it had no intention to delay the activities of the national technical committee and any delay or halt of the construction of the dam for any length of time was unimaginable. Such suggestions were no more than gossip or mere fabrications of people trying to cause problems. Ethiopia was, he underlined again, committed to a positive and robust posture of principled commitment for a win-win pact on the utilization of the waters of the Nile.

The Minister similarly dismissed claims that Egypt wanted the studies recommended by the International Panel of Experts to be conducted within six months after the award of the contract, while Ethiopia had insisted that this might need to take longer. The Minister said that while the issue of who will conduct the study needed to be left to the consultants, the question of the time taken rested on issues of quality and quantity. He said there had been some disagreement over Egypt's initial suggestion of giving higher marks to a company which proposed finalization of the studies within a short period. Both Ethiopia and Sudan felt, in light of international standards and from previous experience, that this might cause problems. In any case, the Minister said, agreement on this issue had now been reached.

The Minister also responded to other questions relating to what he described as groundless claims including the suggestion that the construction of the GERD had received the backing of the US, Israel, Qatar and Turkey. He reiterated that the dam, in practical terms, was being constructed by the Ethiopian people and Government alone. The construction of the dam is being carried out by an international civil contractor and by the Metals and Engineering Corporation (METEC), an Ethiopian firm. In addition, the GERD contract is being administered by the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation. He added that Ethiopians constituted over 95% of the construction workforce. Equally, the Minister said, that while none of these countries were helping finance the dam, they did all extend support in other development sectors. Turkish investors, for example, were now taking part in various development activities in the country, generating foreign currency and creating job opportunities. Ethiopia also had substantial collaboration, which it duly acknowledged, with the US and Qatar in other development sectors.

The Minister went on to explain how the project is poised to benefit other countries in the sub-region, notably Egypt and Sudan. He underscored Ethiopia's determination to ensure that the construction of the GERD and other national major projects were designed to provide the maximization of regional integration as elements in partnership and collaboration. The Minister said the construction of roads, telecom, electric power and water facilities were all designed to benefit neighboring countries as well as Ethiopia. To that end, he said, "we are supplying electric power to Sudan, Djibouti, and Kenya; upon completion of the GERD, we will be able to supply significant amounts of electric power to Egypt, Sudan and other African countries". In addition to undertaking additional works to connect with Sudan and Djibouti, the Minister said Ethio-Kenya power transmission links were being constructed to include power connections to South Sudan and Somalia, and a Memorandum of Understanding had already been signed with Yemen to allow for a power connection through Djibouti.

Asked about the prospects for Egypt and Sudan to sign the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA), the Minister said the CFA had been signed by six countries so far and ratified by Ethiopia and Rwanda. Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, he said, had referred the CFA to their respective parliaments and "are in the process of ratification." He expressed his hope that Egypt and Sudan would now come on board and sign the CFA. He said the fact that Egypt's Minister of Water and Irrigation had attended the recent Nile Day celebration in Khartoum after a hiatus of five years and Sudan, having rejoined the Nile basin Initiative, had now taken the chairmanship of the Nile Council of Ministers, were positive indicators. He said it was no longer possible to uphold former views as a pretext for not signing the CFA. The right attitude now was to think in terms of mutual development, reason and equitable resource utilization as well as cooperation as the necessary way forward. "This was indeed no longer an option but a necessity among the Nile family."

Referring specifically to Egypt and Sudan, the Minister reiterated that Ethiopia was committed to fair and equitable utilization of the water. Ethiopia, he said, "has no intention to harm Egypt even for a day." He stressed the fact that "Egyptians are our brothers and sisters," and that Ethiopia "does not want to harm Egyptian farmers, whose lives are based on irrigation." With regard to the Sudan, Minister Alemayehu recalled that "we have been working very hard in the spirit of cooperation in all the areas that bind us together", including the road and power connections already in place and the ever increasing numbers of Sudanese investors in Ethiopia. Ethiopia, he said, was their "second home." In conclusion, the Minister re-emphasized that these concepts of partnership, cooperation and regional integration, all arose from Ethiopia's principled commitment to a win-win agreement over the fair and equitable utilization of resources such as the Nile waters.

Ethiopia's Health Minister charts progress in health development

Ethiopia has been making remarkable progress in the development of the health sector, providing national self-reliance in health development, instituting an equitable and acceptable health service system, demonstrating an impressive commitment to financing access to health services and pursuing indigenous, creative and innovative ways to ensure the health of its citizens. The interaction between the country's health policies and strategies, carefully identifying needs and conditions, and the sustained practical implementation of these, coupled with participatory health development schemes and programs has produced important and meaningful results. Among these have been the attainment of Millennium Development Goal 4, reducing under-five mortality by two thirds, three years ahead of the schedule; significantly reducing preventable maternal deaths; eliminating new HIV infection by more than 90%; providing increased community access to health services by raising the number of health centers from 519 to 3,245 between 2005 and 2013; and,

overall, accelerating the pace of health coverage across the country. A recent report highlighted that Ethiopia is likely to achieve MDG 5 in the not-so-distant future.

Health Minister, Dr Kesetebirhan Admasu, explained the orientation of the health sector policy, and the challenges it faced, to EurActiv's Senior Editor, Georgi Gotev over the weekend. Dr Kesetebirhan also detailed the reasons why the country had been able to make such significant progress, moving on the right track as planned by the Government. The well-organized, participatory and carefully structured system had enabled the country to broaden access to primary health care services over the past ten years with the construction of around 16,000 health posts and 3,500 health centers. During the 1990s, the Minister noted, the spread of major communicable diseases such as malaria, HIV, TB and others remained major threats. Since then, Ethiopia has made significant progress in the health sector, attaining health-related Millennium Development Goals, reducing new HIV infections, moving significantly towards eradicating TB and malaria, as well as reducing maternal mortality by 69% in the past 20 years. These, he said, were tangible outcomes from the Government's employment of an innovative health service delivery model across the country. **This model was regarded by many as an exemplary model for Africa and other areas of the developing world.** Health extension workers, the Minister said, constituted the biggest element in the success story of the provision of basic health services including immunization, family planning and treatment of common diseases. They had allowed the country to reap positive outcomes in the health sector.

The Minister said these innovations had come about in part because Ethiopia championed country ownership in development and this had played an important role in the development of the health sector. This country-led roadmap had produced the Health Extension Program, "a community-centered strategy to deliver preventive, promotive services and selected high impact clinical interventions at community level" to the health development infrastructure and the system. The new program had set the stage for everything else, including leadership, development partners and communities, to play their part, as well as allowing for mainstream community-centered, equitable, and quality health service delivery. Closing the divide between the community and health facilities had been one of the most remarkable achievements of the Health Extension Program. This home-grown approach, the Minister noted, had allowed communities to own the program and obtain basic health services.

The Minister pointed out that this innovative health approach had upheld the importance of engaging communities at its heart with its mantra of "we organize people, particularly women, to build on the social and cultural networks we have." He gave an example of a new initiative called the 'Health Development Army', started three years ago. This involved an 'army' of "three million women volunteers across the country, organized in small groups, to talk about their health, to talk about the health of their children and see how to rally support to improve the health of community members." The deployment of this 'army' had enabled the country to produce surges in the provision of critical services. The Minister said the new initiative paid attention to possible indigenous activities, including the use of coffee or porridge-eating (after child birth) ceremonies to deliver critical health information and facilities. He added that women from the 'Health Development Army' had made it clear: "if you let us use these services in the health centers, women will come."

The Minister highlighted the nexus between development partners and country ownership and underlined that Ethiopia continued to cooperate with and gain support from its development partners: "When you deliver, when you demonstrate [those] plans you have developed, the strategies you have set in place, the policies you have designed to deliver, donors always support you." He went on to add that this was always what the country tried to demonstrate "whenever we discuss with donors our track record: we deliver, we account for every support we have received, and we are also accountable to the community we are serving." He pointed out that even though it may be done with good intentions "there are things that are designed and prescribed for poor countries in Africa, but a program designed in Brussels or Paris or New York or London may not necessarily fit into the local context." He said Ethiopia truly believed in country ownership "meaning countries designing their own strategies, coming up with their own ambitious plans." Referring to the relationship between the EU and Ethiopia in the health sector, Dr Kesetebirhan said: "When the EU provides sector support, it means there are no prescriptions. If the plan is good enough to be supported, what we expect to deliver is results." In other words any financial arrangements discussed must be results-based.

Ethiopia's success story in the development of the health sector had provided considerable inspiration for other African countries, as well as the developing world more generally, to emulate the creative and innovative pathways fit to their own conditions and peoples' needs with a view to making headway in achieving MDG 4 and other goals of their respective national health sectors. In this regard, representatives drawn from twenty

African Ministries of Health and their stakeholders paid site visits to look at the Health Extension Program (HEP) and Health Development Army (HAD) which has been accurately described as “a web of women volunteers formed to improve health and eradicate disease through community participation and empowerment.” The Ministry of Health, seeing the numerous requests from various stakeholders to make site visits to these programs, is intending to make Ethiopia an epicenter for Health Extension Programs in Africa. Establishing such an HEP centre is a testimony to the Ministry’s practical commitment to the improvement of health at local, regional, national, and continental levels. It is set to become an engine for the promotion, learning and researching of strategies adopted by the HEP and HDA programs. What makes Ethiopia’s progress unique in this context is that these new and innovative programs have cascaded down from the country’s health policies and strategies. They also communicate with and provide space for the close engagement of vulnerable groups, including women, people living with HIV, people with disabilities, and the elderly, allowing them to witness the practical application of the action plan for health delivery.

Ethiopia is home to around 90 million people and the success in achieving improved health coverage and provision of health services is suggestive of the way the country is improving the provision of maternal and neonatal care as well as pushing forward the reduction of major communicable diseases including TB, HIV and malaria. Prospects for the future development of access to health services and improvement in their quality is encouraging, as this is being linked to home-grown and innovative solutions, including community ownership and empowerment, practical integration of other sectors with health policies, enrichment of human capital and demonstration of strong and committed leadership. The conjunction of these features over the five years of the Growth and Transformation Plan has enabled the country to develop the health sector as part of its long-term vision to expand good governance, democracy and social justice, while driving development forward to create conditions for an industrial base as well as set the stage for the building of a Climate Resilient Green Economy by 2020. Equally, provision of quality health services still demands great attention to help the country save even more lives in the building of a developmental democratic state.

Ethiopian Day celebrated in Doha, Qatar

The Ethiopian Embassy in Doha has been holding a Cultural and Arts Festival over the last week from February 27 to March 4, in cooperation with the Qatari Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage. The Festival consisted of an art and cultural exhibition at Katara Cultural Village, a cultural dance performance at the Opera house at Katara and at the Qatar National Theatre and its aim was to display Ethiopia’s diverse historical, cultural and archaeological treasures. A delegation drawn from the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the National Theatre and the National Museum participated.

The cast of the 3.2 million years old fossil of Dinkenesch (Lucy) was among the artifacts displayed at the Katara Cultural Village in Doha. In addition, a presentation by the distinguished Ethiopian palaeontologist, Dr Berhane Asfaw, gave a glimpse of the earlier eras of human history and of the ancient civilizations of Ethiopia, its cultural and natural resources and the developments that have taken place more recently. The celebrated musician Teddy Mack (Tewodros Mekonnen), along with his band, added flavor to the show and the renowned Ethiopian National Theatre cultural troupe also conducted their traditional dance performance.

The arts and cultural exhibition was officially opened by the Ethiopian Ambassador to Qatar, Ambassador Misganu Arega and Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim al Sulaiti, the General Manager of the Katara Cultural Village. The exhibition showcased Ethiopia’s pre-historic remains with photographs of fossils of early humanoid ancestors discovered at Ethiopian archaeological sites, as well as Lucy herself. There were also pictures of some of Ethiopia’s World Heritage sites including the Axum obelisks, the 13th century rock-hewn churches at Lalibela, the Sof Omar Caves, the Negashi Mosque and other sites on display. Traditional and modern works of art by renowned Ethiopian artists also adorned the exhibition hall of Katara Cultural Village, depicting different themes and underlining the centuries’ old religious and cultural harmony and tolerance visible in Ethiopia. Among the artists whose paintings were displayed were works by the famous female artist Desta Hagos as well as Gebre Kristos Desta, Agegnehu Engida, Afework Tekle and others.

At the opening of the Cultural Show, Ambassador Misganu underlined the fact that Ethiopia is the home of ancient civilizations and indeed the very source of humanity. He pointed out that the country is home to more than 80 different nations and nationalities each with their own distinct cultures, and also to a number of different religious beliefs. Indeed, he emphasized that these nations and nationalities as well as the three major religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as well as numerous other traditional beliefs, had coexisted peacefully for centuries. They had indeed made Ethiopia a beacon of tolerance, he said.

The 6-day Festival aimed to introduce Ethiopia's rich and varied culture to the members of the international community residing in Doha and to the Qatari people, as well as reminding the Ethiopian Diaspora living in Qatar of their roots. It was organized under the framework of the 2013 Cultural Agreement between Ethiopia and Qatar, drawn up with a view to enhancing people-to-people relations between the two countries. The Festival was preceded by a soccer tournament between eight different football clubs comprising members of the Ethiopian Diaspora living in Qatar. It culminated in a final between the "Sew le sew" and "Muger and Friends" clubs on February 26 at the Aspire Academy of Sports' stadium.

Overall, the week-long Cultural and Arts Festival, apart from bringing members of the Ethiopian Diaspora together and enabling them to connect with their home country, was instrumental in offering a picture of Ethiopia as a "cradle of civilizations" and of its unique and diverse cultures to the Qatari people and others living in Qatar.