

A Week in the Horn

7th February 2014

News in brief:

- **African Union**
- **Ethiopia**
- **Djibouti**
- **Eritrea**
- **Kenya**
- **Somalia**
- **South Sudan**
- **Sudan**

Articles from page 3:

- **South Sudan: progress in peace talks**
- **Major Outcomes of the 22nd Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government...**
- **...and the major achievements of Ethiopia's AU Chairmanship**
- **Eritrea's session at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.....**
- **...and the road to rehabilitation for the regime in Asmara**
- **Prime Minister Hailemariam hails Ethiopia's progress in education**
- **The fiction of allegations of "land grabbing" in Ethiopia**

News in brief

African Union

The inaugural meeting of the African Union Foundation, established by the AU Assembly in May last year to assist the AU's vision for sustainable development, was held on Wednesday (February 5). The AU Commission Chairperson, Dr Dlamini Zuma, said the Foundation would strengthen and deepen cooperation and partnership among prominent African figures, investors, the business community and others, to mobilize resources.

Ethiopia

Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom held talks with Mrs Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, on bilateral and regional issues on Saturday (February 1). Mrs Thomas-Greenfield welcomed Ethiopia's decision to join AMISOM and appreciated Ethiopia's role in regional stabilization. She said the US fully supported the efforts of both IGAD and Ethiopia to stabilize the region.

Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African Integration of the Republic of Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, signed a General Cooperation Agreement on Saturday (February 1) with the aim of strengthening cooperation and partnership between the two countries.

Dr Tedros Adhanom held talks with the UK Home Office's Minister of Security, James Brokenshire on Thursday (February 6). They agreed on the importance of enhancing partnerships to fight the global menace of terrorism, and Dr Tedros underscored Ethiopia's readiness to further deepen its relations with the UK in the area of security.

Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom, met with the Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Dr Francis Gurry, on Thursday (February 6). WIPO has been supporting the Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office (EIPO) and Dr Tedros encouraged WIPO to strengthen this partnership.

Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom, met with artists and other stakeholders from the Ethiopian National Theatre on Monday (February 3) to discuss the progress of public diplomacy and national image building through the use of art and creativity. Culture and Tourism Minister, Amin Abdulkadir, stressed that art was

one of the most important tools for realizing development, democracy, good governance and the country's renaissance.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Yinager Dessie and the General Manager of the Ethiopian Postal Service Enterprise, Gidey Gebre-Yohannis, signed a postal service agreement on Thursday (February 6), to cover both domestic and international postal services and allow the Ministry to access efficient, secure and effective communication services.

Djibouti

The second Gulf of Aden Counterterrorism Forum has been taking place in Djibouti this week. The three-day meeting which started on Monday (February 3) brings together some sixty government and security officials from Djibouti, Somalia, and Yemen, and from the United States, to discuss regional counter-terrorism challenges.

Eritrea

Eritrea's National Report for the Second Cycle of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was reviewed at the 18th Session of the Working Group of the United Nations Human Rights Council on Monday (February 3). (See article)

Eritrea's Ambassador to Israel, Ambassador Tesfamariam Tekeste told journalists last week that journalist Dawit Isaac, arrested in Asmara in 2001, was still alive. Reporters sans Frontieres called on the Government to produce "solid evidence proving that Dawit Isaac, (last seen in 2010), really is alive and to allow humanitarian organizations, his family and his lawyers to visit him in prison."

Kenya

Former New York Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, on Monday (February 3) announced a US\$10-million initiative to support pan-African business and financial journalism and advance transparency, accountability and governance on the continent with an initial focus on Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.

The African Union Executive Council selected the Republic of Kenya to host the African Institute for Remittances (AIR) and has asked the African Union Commission to conclude a Host Agreement with Kenya in order to ensure the implementation of the Institute, scheduled to become fully operational by 2015. Dr Mustapha S. Kaloko, AU Commissioner of Social Affairs, said AIR would be "a cornerstone in harnessing Diaspora resources for social and economic development in Africa."

Following a police raid on Sunday (February 2) on a mosque in Mombasa to break up a jihad meeting, in which three people, including a police officer, died, there were three days of clashes with police in the port.

Somalia

Somalia has announced three days of official mourning for the late Prime Minister Abdirizak Haji Hussein who died aged 90 on Friday, January 31 in Minnesota, to begin after a state funeral and burial service in Mogadishu on Friday this week (February 7). Abdirizak Haji Hussein served as Somalia's second civilian prime minister between 1964 and 1967.

Somali Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed on Monday (February 3) opened the second meeting of the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility (SDRF). The SDRF was set up to organize coordination between the Federal Government and donors to enhance the delivery and effectiveness of assistance. It is intended to be a central element of the New Deal Compact signed at the Conference for Somalia in Brussels in September 2013.

The Food and Agricultural organization has announced that an estimated 857,000 people in Somalia will be in Crisis and Emergency situations requiring urgent humanitarian assistance between now and June. The assessment was made by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit for Somalia and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network. This assessment follows a below-average harvest, continued conflicts, floods, and a tropical cyclone.

The Somaliland army celebrated the 20th anniversary of its establishment at a ceremony at the beginning of the week, with Somaliland Vice-President, Abdirahman Abdilahi Ismail Sayli, as guest of honor. The Armed Forces Chief of Staff, General Ismail Mohamed Shakale congratulated the forces for their two decades of service.

Locust control teams from Egypt, Ethiopia and Italy arrived in Somaliland this week, at the request of Somaliland's Minister of Agriculture. Planes to spray the swarms reported in several areas in the eastern part of Somaliland, in Lasqoray, Sylac, Baladik, are expected to arrive from Dire Dawa in Ethiopia.

South Sudan

The next round of talks between the South Sudan Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-In-Opposition) will open in Addis Ababa on February 10. The seven released opposition detainees have been invited to participate in the talks when the parties are expected to be discussing root causes of the conflict as well as issues of democratic reform and transparency. (See article)

On Sunday (February 2) an advance team of the IGAD technical committee arrived in Juba to establish the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism agreed under the implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The 14-member team is led by Major General (rtd) Gebre-egziabher Mebrahtu (Ethiopia) with Major General Mohammed Amin Moustafa Eltinay (Sudan) as deputy. The advance team reports back to the IGAD mediators on February 7. (See article)

On Tuesday (February 4), President Salva Kiir reduced the dawn to dusk curfew, imposed in Juba after conflict broke out in Juba in mid-December, from 11pm to dawn. He warned that punitive measures would be taken should violence flare again.

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations called for a "political solution" in South Sudan following a two-day visit to the country. M. Herve Ladsous reiterated the importance of adhering to the conditions of the accords mediated last month by IGAD in Addis Ababa.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has warned that up to 7 million people in South Sudan, nearly two thirds of the total population, are now at risk of some level of food insecurity, with 3.7 million already facing acute or emergency levels. The FAO now says over 870,000 South Sudanese have fled their homes since fighting broke out on December 15.

South Sudan formally joined the Eastern Nile Council of Ministers (ENCOM) which held its first meeting in four years in Debre Zeit, Ethiopia, last week Sudan and Ethiopia also attended. Egypt did not, continuing its "freeze" of membership of all Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) activities.

Sudan

Sudan President Omer Al-Bashir expressed his keenness to see the ties between Khartoum and New Delhi develop further during a meeting with India's Foreign Minister, Salman Khurshid who was on a two-day visit to Khartoum for talks with Sudan's Foreign Minister, Ali Karti. Meetings of the Sudan-India Joint Ministerial Committee are to resume after a break of eight years.

South Sudan: progress in peace talks

In Addis Ababa on January 23, the South Sudan Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Under this, both parties agreed to the establishment of a Monitoring and Verification Mechanism under the aegis of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in order to monitor implementation of, and compliance with, the Agreement. A Joint Technical Committee (JTC) established by IGAD Special Envoys in consultation with the parties is currently working to operationalize the monitoring mechanism and its field-based verification teams (MVT). This is also responsible for drawing up the modalities for the implementation mechanism.

On Sunday (February 2), IGAD, dispatched an advance team from the Joint Technical Committee to start the process of establishing the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism. The 14-member team led by Major General Gebre-egziabher Mebrahtu of Ethiopia will be meeting government officials and other stakeholders to assess the situation in the main flashpoint towns of Juba, Bor, Malakal and Bentiu, before the deployment of Monitoring and Verification Teams in various parts of the country. The members of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism include military and civilian experts drawn from IGAD Member States and other partners. They will conduct patrols in areas where monitors may be deployed.

Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, IGAD's chief mediator for the South Sudan conflict, has urged the two warring parties to "respect and expeditiously implement" the Cessation of Hostilities agreement. He further called on the two sides to fully cooperate with the ceasefire monitoring team, noting that there had been "much restraint and encouragement" for the process. Kenya's President Kenyatta has also called on South Sudan's leaders to put the interests of the hundreds of thousands of people suffering from the violence in the country above all other considerations.

The consistent position taken by IGAD regarding the situation in South Sudan has emphasized the importance of direct negotiations between the parties and the need for a peaceful political solution, not just to the conflict that erupted in mid-December, but also for the long-term political stability and development in the world's newest nation. IGAD's effort to bring the armed conflict to an immediate end began almost as soon as the violence broke out. IGAD Foreign Ministers, led by Dr Tedros Adhanom of Ethiopia, undertook a two-day shuttle diplomacy mission to Juba on December 19 and 20 last year. Their aim was to gain understanding of the dynamics of the conflict and to secure immediate strong and uniform support for peace initiatives. Their visit was followed by a joint visit of Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam and Kenyan President Kenyatta to South Sudan to hold discussions with President Salva Kiir and also the political detainees.

The results of these visits was then consolidated at an Extraordinary Summit of IGAD States on December 27 in Nairobi, at which the Parties committed themselves to resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue, agreed to an immediate cessation of hostilities, including a monitoring, verification and stabilization mechanism, and to ensure protection of civilians and humanitarian workers. The Extraordinary Summit in Nairobi agreed on the appointment of three Special Envoys: Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin from Ethiopia, General Lazaro Sumbeiywo from Kenya, and General Mohamed Ahmed Mustafa El Dabi from Sudan. They were given a mandate to coordinate, conduct and lead negotiations between the warring parties. This practical move towards achieving a negotiated settlement to South Sudan's crisis marked the critical stage in the whole peace process.

From the beginning of January, the three Special Envoys, in collaboration with the IGAD Secretariat, immediately began to engage with the Parties and to work out details and issues of the negotiations. The Envoys, holding individual consultations, and both proxy and direct talks, made initial progress with the Parties, obtaining agreement to a number of basic process documents. These included: Rules of Procedure, Terms of Reference and Modalities of Engagement. Some difficulty was encountered in addressing the substantive agenda items with both Parties suggesting different approaches. This led to protracted negotiations. However, the concerted efforts of the mediators, with the support of the international community, meant that IGAD's initiative finally paid off with the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement reached on January 23.

Following the decisions of IGAD Heads of State and Government reached at their 24th Extraordinary Summit last week, the Special Envoys have planned to visit all capitals of IGAD Member States. The mediation team, led by Ambassador Seyoum, held meetings with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam, the current IGAD Chair, and then visited Nairobi where they met President Kenyatta. During these meetings, the Envoys outlined their plans and sought the guidance of the leaders before the second round of the mediation that is due to focus on political dialogue and national reconciliation. In Nairobi, the Special Envoys also met with the seven released detainees of the SPLM leadership. According to a statement by IGAD, the ex-detainees were appreciative of the IGAD initiative and the practical results achieved so far and in particular of the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. The released detainees expressed their wish to join the IGAD mediation process for political dialogue and national reconciliation. This has been accepted.

The Special Envoys have now sent invitation letters to the Parties for the second round of negotiations to start on February 10 in Addis Ababa. In the meantime, the Envoys have resolved to shuttle between Juba and other areas to engage the Government of South Sudan and the SPLM/A in Opposition, as well as other actors, including women's groups, youths, religious leaders, traditional leaders, refugees, and intellectuals, with a view to ensuring wide consultations in the lead-up to the second phase of the talks. It is in context, that IGAD and the Special Envoys have underlined the importance of ensuring the implementation of the ceasefire agreement as an important condition for the continuation of political dialogue.

Major Outcomes of the 22nd Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government...

The 22nd Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union was held on January 30 and 31, 2014, in Addis Ababa under the Theme: "2014 Year of Agriculture and Food Security: Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture and Development Programme (CAADP)". The Summit was preceded by the 24th ordinary session of the Executive Council and the 27th meeting of the Permanent Representatives Committee.

This Summit had great significance for Ethiopia because it marked the successful conclusion of its year-long Chairmanship (see following story). As he passed the gavel to the in-coming Chairperson of the Union, the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn reiterated the great importance Ethiopia attaches to the African Union and reassured his peers of Ethiopia's unwavering support to the values and principles enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the Union. He also reaffirmed Ethiopia's readiness to continue to play its part to raise the role of the African Union on the global stage.

Agenda 2063 was one of the most important issues discussed during the meetings of the policy organs. Member States commended Ethiopia for the successful Ministerial Retreat it organized on this important topic, which has such significant importance for the future of the Continent. The Assembly evaluated the progress made by the AU Commission in the development of the Agenda 2063 Framework Document, which is expected to be submitted for adoption in June 2014.

The Assembly debated and adopted decisions on various political, security and socio-economic issues of strategic importance to the Union. With regard to political, peace and security issues, the Assembly discussed various conflict situations on the continent and particular emphasis was given to the current crises in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. On the crisis in South Sudan, the Assembly expressed its full support for the IGAD mediation process and urged the parties to the conflict to cooperate with the sub-regional organization in its endeavour to find a lasting solution to the crisis. The Assembly also expressed the need to find a solution to the alarming situation in the Central African Republic.

The Assembly welcomed the conclusion of the process of transition and the restoration of constitutional order in Madagascar. A decision was passed to lift the sanctions against Madagascar and allow it to re-join the African Union after an absence of five years. The Assembly also issued a Declaration to welcome the peaceful settlement of the Bakassi border dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria and called upon the international community to recognize this event as a strong point worthy of praise and as a significant contribution by Africa to safeguard world peace.

On the establishment of an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC), the Assembly took note of the expression of readiness by member States including Algeria, Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, South Africa, Senegal, Guinea, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda to voluntarily contribute to the ACIRC. It decided to operationalize the ACIRC as a transitional arrangement. The implementation of the mandate will be coordinated by the Peace and Security Council. The Assembly appointed 10 new members of the Peace and Security Council for a two-year term to start on April 1. Ethiopia and Tanzania were appointed from the Eastern Africa Region, and join Uganda whose three-year term on the Council started in April 2013.

With regard to the socio-economic development of the continent, the Assembly took an important step in adopting the Common African Position Document on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This was prepared by a High-Level Committee of 10 African Heads of State and Government under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia. The Common Position Document will be launched during a meeting of the High-Level Committee in Njamena, Chad, before the end of this month.

Other important social and economic issues discussed during the meetings of the Union's policy organs include an item proposed by Ethiopia on the "Establishment of an African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention". This proposal was put forward during the AU Special Summit on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, held in Abuja, Nigeria, in July last year. The Assembly stressed the urgency of establishing the centre and requested the Commission and Ethiopia, in collaboration with interested member States, to work on the modalities and submit a report in January 2015.

On administrative and budgetary matters, the Assembly, *inter alia*, endorsed the amended Financial Rules and Regulations of the Union and a new Scale of Assessment. Consequently, Ethiopia's assessed contribution to the Union has increased from 1.15% to 1.42%.

The Executive Council discussed Africa's partnerships with the rest of the world. The results of the various partnership summits held during 2013 were evaluated. Furthermore, agreement was reached on the necessary preparations for the upcoming Africa-EU and Africa-Turkey Summits, both scheduled for this year. Member States also emphasized that a comprehensive evaluation should be carried out for all Africa's strategic partnerships.

The Executive Council and the Assembly considered and took decisions on the reports of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee (NEPAD-HSGOC), the Committee of African Heads of State on Climate Change (CAHOSCC), the Committee of 10 Heads of State on UN Reform, the High-level African Trade Committee (HATC), the Ministerial Committee on Candidatures and the various Organs of the Union as well as the different sector ministries.

A total of 58 decisions were taken by the Assembly and the Executive Council, and all three policy organs carried out their deliberations in a spirit of consensus and cooperation, with meetings being concluded successfully and on time.

...and the major achievements of Ethiopia's AU Chairmanship

It was with a great sense of pride and humility that Ethiopia served as the chair of Africa's premier continental organization, the African Union, during the year 2013, in particular because the year was marked by the year-long celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU. For Ethiopia, it was a significant and happy coincidence to assume the rotating chairmanship of the Union at this historic time, and it endeavored, with the Commission, Member States and all other relevant stakeholders, to mark this historic milestone by undertaking a collective reflection of the past, present and future of Africa under the theme of "Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance".

During Ethiopia's chairmanship, the strategic plan of the African Union Commission for 2014-2017 was adopted after a series of consultations among concerned bodies. Building Africa's human capacity, expanding agricultural production, promoting inclusive economic development, promoting peace and security, gender mainstreaming, implementation of strategies for resource mobilization, building people-centred union and strengthening institutional capacity building were identified as the top priorities for the strategic plan. Ethiopia successfully hosted a ministerial retreat of the Executive Council of the African Union to contribute to the efforts aimed at defining Agenda 2063; and a Ministerial Committee on Agenda 2063 was established.

Ethiopia's proposal for the establishment of a committee of African Heads of State and Government to lead the efforts in canvassing support for Africa's development priorities in the context of the post-2015 development agenda was accepted. The Assembly endorsed the common African position proposed by a committee of Heads of State and Government under the chairmanship of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia.

In the peace and security area, Ethiopia was actively engaged in the search for peaceful resolution of conflicts on the continent. As the chairman of the AU and of IGAD, Ethiopia led the peace process in South Sudan in order to resolve the current crisis there. During this year, the AU also deployed the African-led International Support Mission in Central African Republic (MISCA) to bring an end to the conflict in the CAR.

The past year has witnessed enhanced cooperation and partnership between Africa and its strategic partners with successful meetings of the 3rd Africa-South America Summit, the 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V), the 3rd Afro-Arab Summit and the 12th Annual AGOA Forum. These partnership forums served as excellent platforms to advance Africa's development agenda and further strengthen its partnerships with a view to ensuring mutual benefit and win-win cooperation.

In the context of promoting Africa's collective voice and enhancing its visibility on the international stage, Ethiopia, in its capacity as the Chair of the African Union, participated at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Warsaw (COP-20) and delivered Africa's key messages with regard to the ongoing global climate change negotiations. It also participated at the G-8 and G-20 Summits held in Northern Ireland and St. Petersburg, respectively, and advanced the continental development agenda.

In conclusion, despite monumental challenges facing the continent, Africa has made significant strides over the past year during Ethiopia's chairmanship. This has been achieved with the full cooperation of the Commission and Member States, and Ethiopia has expressed its profound appreciation to all those who contributed to the advancement of all these pan-African objectives.

Eritrea's session at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.....

Eritrea's National Report for the Second Cycle of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was reviewed at the 18th Session of the Working Group of the United Nations Human Rights Council on Monday (February 3). The National Report presented the Government's view of its achievements, its practices, constraints and challenges on human rights, and the responses it had made to the recommendations of the First Cycle of the UPR. All UN states undergo the UPR every four years. Eritrea's first National Report and review took place in 2009 and the review was finally adopted in March 2010.

The Universal Periodic Review is a process involving a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. It is a State-driven process, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations. The UPR is designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed. It was created through the UN General Assembly on 15 March 2006 which established the Human Rights Council itself. It is a cooperative process which, by October 2011, had reviewed the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States in the First Cycle of review. It is now involved in the Second Cycle of reviews. The Universal Periodic Review is one of the key elements of the Human Rights Council which reminds States of their responsibility to fully respect and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The ultimate aim of this mechanism is to improve the human rights situation in all countries and address human rights violations wherever they occur. This is why advance questions are put to the countries to provide the opportunity to indicate progress and efforts that have been made to address concerns raised previously. The discussion at the session on Monday (Feb 3) covered many of the areas of most concern for members of the international community. 70 States spoke at the review with speakers covering a wide range of concerns. There were demands that Eritrea should end its policy of forced conscription of child soldiers and indefinite military service, put an end to arbitrary and extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary and incommunicado detention without recourse to justice, and detention in inhumane and degrading conditions. There were also calls for the Government to end its severe restrictions on freedom of opinion and expression, on freedom of information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including putting an end to the detention of journalists, human rights defenders, political actors, religious leaders and practitioners in the country. It was condemned for its "brutal repression of basic rights" and accused of prompting the ongoing mass exodus by its lack of freedom.

Many of these points, and other concerns, were also raised in the advance questions from many different states, put to Eritrea prior to the session on Monday and which covered most aspects of concern about human rights in Eritrea. There were questions about the detentions of the G15, Djibouti prisoners of war and the ongoing detention of journalists. How did Eritrea justify the length of imprisonment, or its refusal of appropriate legal representation and lack of information for families? When was Eritrea going to grant access for the International Committee of the Red Cross and representatives of the international community? How was the Government of Eritrea collaborating with the UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea in implementing her mandate and what measures had been adopted by the Government of Eritrea to

address the assessment of the Special Rapporteur? How was Eritrea planning to improve the rule of law, prison conditions and counter impunity? Would the Government consider changing the legal conditions of military service in order to counter impunity, alleged life-long conscription and severe punishment for alleged infringements? How had the Government implemented the 2009 recommendations of the UPR? Whether the freedom of expression, association and religion had improved? Was the Government planning to ratify the Convention Against Torture, the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, and the Statute of Rome of the International Criminal Court, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and ILO Convention No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, or the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty? What concrete steps had been taken by the authorities to tackle the issue of arbitrary detention, incommunicado detention and detention in secret detention centers.

The questions put to Eritrea in advance also included: What progress has been made in developing freedom of the press and why has there been no independent media in Eritrea since 2001? What progress has the Government made in limiting national service to 18 months, as specified in Proclamation No. 82/1995? What efforts has Eritrea made to prevent human trafficking, including by introducing anti-trafficking legislation, prosecute perpetrators and protect victims? Since the Eritrean Constitution enshrines the right to practice any religion, why in practice are only four religions sanctioned; will the Government drop its restrictions on freedom of religion and release all prisoners detained because of their religious belief? What steps will the Government of Eritrea take to end indefinite national service, to stop using national service conscripts as forced labor, and to demobilize those serving for more than the statutory 18 months? What strategies does Eritrea follow in order to protect minors from the worst forms of child labor? What measures is Eritrea taking in response to the frequent allegations of rape and sexual harassment, particularly in military and educational training camps or during interrogation? What measures are being taken to investigate allegations of violence committed by police and security personnel, as well as other government actors? Will Eritrea commit to making preparations to hold free and fair elections in the future? Are there plans for political party development, identification of candidates and platforms, and establishment of electoral machinery? What steps will the Government take to ensure that physical and mental abuse of detainees does not occur and that treatment of prisoners and prison conditions comply with Eritrea's international human rights obligations and meet minimum international standards? When will the Eritrean Government inform families of the whereabouts of many detained Eritreans, including journalists and members of the 'G-15'?

Eritrea is ranked as having one of the worst press freedom records in the world, and in a submission to the session, PEN International, the world-wide writers association, urged the Eritrean government to implement all recommendations accepted in 2009 and, in particular for the government to respond positively to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights requests for information and allow her to visit the country. It called on Eritrea to issue a standing invitation to all other UN Special Procedures mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the Special Rapporteur on Torture. It said an estimated 28 journalists in detention, and "as many as nine journalists have died in custody due to torture and ill-treatment," or from harsh conditions or lack of medical treatment, as had a number of detained politicians.

In his response at the Monday session, Eritrea's Ambassador to the UK, Ambassador Tesfamichael Gerahtu, insisted that if anything was limiting human rights in Eritrea, it was the "unjustified sanctions" imposed on the country by the international community, adding that "to add insult to injury, Eritrea has been subjected to a litany of accusations of gross violations of human rights... [that] are mainly motivated by sinister political agendas." He said there was "no media censorship in Eritrea," and that the ten journalists and eleven opposition politicians arrested in 2001, many who have since died in custody, "were not detained because they expressed their ideas, [but because of] treason."

Ambassador Tesfamichael said the meeting should focus on Eritrea's progress in areas of reducing maternal and child mortality and fighting HIV, and claimed Eritrea would hold its first free elections and implement a 1997 constitution once "the threats against its national security had dissipated." The British representative said "Eritrea's security situation does not and never has justified the denial of basic human rights to its people," and only when the country had a democratically elected government and a constitution that ensured basic rights would Eritreans stop fleeing. The UNHCR has registered more than

300,000 Eritreans refugees in neighboring countries, with thousands fleeing every month, often under very dangerous conditions.

...and the road to rehabilitation for the regime in Asmara

The whole tenor of the discussion and questions on Eritrea's National Report for the Universal Periodic Review was a rebuke to Eritrea with firm calls for reform and changes to its oppressive policies. For a regime which implements a shoot to kill policy against those of its own people trying to flee repression from their own country, this was hardly surprising. Many of the activities of the Eritrean Government concerning human rights violations and abuses have been exposed and detailed in the reports of the United Nations Monitoring Group, including the regime's involvement in human trafficking and smuggling networks designed to extort money from its own people. The tone of the comments and questions underlined the international community's concern over Eritrea's attempts to escape from its responsibilities over these grave violations with unconvincing denials or by trying, as so often to blame Ethiopia or the US in some way.

Eritrea has been making an increasing number of diplomatic efforts to rehabilitate itself as a normal state. So far, as the UPR underlined, these can hardly be considered convincing. As the UN Security Council reports and its sanctions resolutions have demonstrated in detail, Eritrea is, to all intents and purposes, a rogue state that has been found guilty of acts of destabilization throughout the Horn of Africa, supporting terrorist organizations like Al-Shabaab, affiliated to Al Qaeda, and obstructing the efforts of the international community to rebuild a functioning state in Somalia. Eritrea is also unique in contemporary politics in having invaded all of its neighbors. Under a brutal dictatorship, its policy of aggressive belligerence continues to attempt to destabilize the region, regularly violating international law. Its recent diplomatic acrobatics to try and offer an alternative appearance can only be an empty façade. It is impossible to consider them in any sense genuine as they have not been accompanied by the smallest sign of any change of policy or character. All they have tried to do is divert the attention of the international community away from the regime's oppressive and violent actions in and out of Eritrea.

Eritrea could hardly have had a more promising start to its existence as an independent state. It was welcomed as a new state by Ethiopia under its new government, by other neighboring countries, and by the international community, all of which shared the hopes of its people for a state of peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, social justice and sustainable development. There were fervent hopes that with the independence and recognition of Eritrea, it would be possible to discard the long history of conflict in the region and begin to build harmonious and good neighborly relations based on the principle of mutual respect and benefit. Unfortunately, almost from the beginning in both word and deed, the regime in Asmara demonstrated again and again that it preferred the rule of the jungle, openly and repeatedly declaring that "might is right." Indeed, it did not take long for the regime in Asmara to reveal its true colors, launching vicious attacks against its neighbors, and, dashing all hopes for itself and for the region, making clear its response to any disputes was to be aggression and military invasion.

Eritrea's decisive defeat in the Ethio-Eritrean war, in 2000, and the signing of the Algiers Peace Agreements appeared to offer another opportunity that Eritrea might take practical measures to reduce hostility towards its neighbors. On the contrary, however, the regime in Asmara merely intensified its hostility, refusing to make any effort to support the creation of peaceful resolution mechanisms for the border dispute and ignoring all other possibilities to normalize relations with Ethiopia or resolve divergences either with Ethiopia or indeed other countries in the region. In fact, it actively and deliberately continued its policy of destabilization, launching another military attack against Djibouti a year or two later. Characteristically, the Asmara regime also refused to resolve that dispute peacefully and indeed has consistently denied it has had any dispute with Djibouti. It also directly and openly supported and hosted terrorist groups from Somalia and Ethiopia, providing them with arms and training. Demonstrating its disrespect for regional diplomatic institutions, Eritrea unilaterally suspended its membership to IGAD when other members of the organization refused to accept its suggestions, and made a series of self-serving and false allegations against other IGAD states.

Following its clear transgressions of international law, Eritrea was unanimously rebuked by the African Heads of State and Government. Ironically, this decision was taken by the AU at a Summit in Libya, whose then leader, long the financier of Eritrea and one of its few remaining allies, was unable to prevent the determination of the African Union to try to control Eritrea and put an end to its acts of destabilization. In

an unprecedented measure against one of its own members, the AU requested that the UN Security Council impose sanctions on Eritrea. The Security Council accepted the request, imposed sanctions and instituted a monitoring system that subsequently exposed many of the details of Eritrea's activities as an active supporter of armed extremist and terrorist groups throughout the region.

These are the activities from which Eritrea is now apparently trying to distance itself while still resolutely refusing to show any indication of changes in policy. There are, of course, some simple, legal and peaceful ways to achieve this end, not least demonstrating compliance with Security Council resolutions. Without any such meaningful action, Eritrea's complaints about the sanctions and its lobbying efforts can only be considered superficial. The reality is that the regime in Eritrea is still following the same aggressive, belligerent and predatory policies that led to its isolation in the first place. The continued, and indeed intensified, repression against its own people, has resulted in tens of thousands of young Eritreans fleeing into the Sudan, Ethiopia or further afield. Hundreds, even thousands, have unfortunately perished in the deserts and at sea.

Eritrea still refuses to make any effort to respect and abide by regional and international obligations. It refused to accept that the normal way for states to act is to resolve disputes peacefully and by dialogue. This is not a choice. It is an obligation within the international community for all states to resolve disputes peacefully, either with the help of other states or handle the issue themselves, responsibly. Ethiopia has, time and again, reiterated its readiness to do exactly that with Eritrea. Eritrea has apparently yet to come to this same conclusion for any future peaceful resolution of its disputes, with Ethiopia or with other states. As everybody must now be fully aware, Ethiopia has made it quite clear for a decade that it has accepted the delimitation decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission. It is for the two countries to decide how to implement this decision and demarcate the border. It is absurd, and futile, for Eritrea to claim some of its territory is occupied when it refuses to discuss demarcation. It is clear it is trying to use this as an excuse to continue its internal repression while trying to get some sympathy abroad.

Eritrea needs to be told firmly that the only way to diplomatic rehabilitation is to behave according to international law and behave like a responsible state. It is surely time that the UNSC demands full implementation of its sanctions by all states against Eritrea and looks for ways of strengthening these further in response to Eritrea's still continuing efforts to expand its acts of destabilization beyond Somalia and Ethiopia and its blatant attacks against Djibouti. Eritrea has shown no indication that it is prepared to change any of its policies in this regard. It must be told firmly that it must start to demonstrate it is capable of acting in accordance with the UN Charter and live in peace with its neighbors before it can begin to climb out of its self-inflicted isolation. Any attempt to reward it for misbehavior and call for the lifting of sanctions without very clear policy changes, will only embolden Eritrea's aggressive and repressive policies. Without changes in policy, without an end to regional destabilization, without ending support to terrorism, and without a decision to act responsibly and be prepared to resolve disputes peacefully, any talk of rehabilitation remains bogus. Eritrea has only itself to blame for isolation.

Prime Minister Hailemariam hails Ethiopia's progress in education

Many African countries have experienced significant economic growth in recent years; and Ethiopia has achieved unprecedented double digit growth for the last decade, which has promoted social and economic development. This is the result of pro-poor and pro-development policies and strategies implemented through the integrated planning, coordination, management and cooperation of the Government and the people. It has yielded practical and tangible results. One sector that has shown enormous expansion has been the education sector, a central element in the country's determination to eradicate poverty and speed up the democratization process and create a stable, democratic and developmental state.

Ethiopia has attached great importance to education in its Growth and Transformation Plan as a necessary element, to produce and expand trained and creative citizens as a necessary factor in realization of a middle income economy. Prime Minister Hailemariam recently underlined the country's substantial advances made in the education sector. Enrolment of children in school rose from 37% in 1999 to 87% by 2011, which, he said, demonstrated exceptional progress. He stated that the literacy rate among the youth had increased from 34% in 2000 to 52% in 2011. There had been a substantial increase in expenditure on national education, doubling between 2000 and 2010, to 25% as well as improved planning and implementation capacity.

Overall, the role of Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan has made major contributions to accelerating the efforts to curb impediments on quality learning and increasing equal access to primary education. Ethiopia has made significant progress in meeting primary education targets, with a net enrolment ratio of children in school increasing from 77.5% in 2004/05 to 92.2% in 2011/12, according to the 2012 Millennium Development Goals Report on Ethiopia. It underlines the prospect of Ethiopia attaining the national vision and the targets of the MDGs by 2015.

These developments have resulted from rapid and equitable expansion of access to free education arising from the sustained government-led efforts to reduce poverty and expand the public education system. The Government committed itself to establishing a system of public education with the aim of increasing access to education and to better quality learning. It therefore increased public spending and assistance to the education sector to overcome such problems as unaffordable school fees and inadequate classrooms, particularly in rural areas. The Prime Minister pointed out that the major driving forces that propelled this were sustained government dedication, enhanced planning, coordination and implementation capability, increased participation of all stakeholders, and the decentralization of power to regional and local government.

In fact, the devolution of power to regional and local government was particularly important in helping the public education system to attract the support of different stakeholders, including parents, government officials at all levels, teachers, school administrators and others. This all-round participation paved the way for the creation of a real understanding of the significance of education to children in the minds of the various communities. Decentralization of leadership and responsibility also ushered in mother-tongue instruction that embraced and won the hearts of many communities and encouraged them to become involved in public education and to enrol their children in school.

Prime Minister Hailemariam said Ethiopia's experience underlined that countries could simultaneously expand access to education and provide improved quality learning. He encouraged countries of sub-Saharan Africa to concentrate their energy and strategies on quality education together with expansion of access to education to empower the lives of children and youth. He also recommended concentrating on meeting the needs of disadvantaged or marginalized students. Teachers should be trained to understand and recognize the challenges of the disadvantaged children. Countries should focus on continuous teacher development to address the numerous and different interests of children in the teaching-learning process. He also drew attention to the relevance of providing adequate opportunities for teachers for their professional development, the provision of sufficient salaries and additional incentives for teachers assigned in remote areas or helping disadvantaged children. These steps, he said, would help countries build up a cadre of motivated, innovative and qualified teachers who would work for the empowerment and betterment of present and the future generations. The Prime Minister said an education system is only as good as its teachers and that was why "we need to give them every bit of support we can". In Ethiopia, he said, we have made huge progress in a very short time, though there was still much to do, for example, in ensuring equal access to education and enhancing quality education in both rural and urban areas.

The Government of Ethiopia has now been commended by the United Nations for its sustained commitment, leadership and improved investment in public education in the country, being honored as a **Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) Champion Country** this year. It joins a Group of Champion Countries which includes Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Croatia, Benin, the U.S., Mozambique, Guyana, South Africa, and Tunisia. Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon noted that Ethiopia's leadership and success story in education would stimulate others to attain global education goals by 2015. He said that "with Ethiopia as a Champion Country for the Global Education First Initiative, I am confident that we will be able to further accelerate progress towards our aims of placing every child in school, improving the quality of education, and fostering global citizenship." It underlined how the country has committed itself to the rapid expansion of education, the improvement of quality learning, to increasing investment on education, and the all-embracing involvement and participation of all stakeholders.

Expressing his thanks to the UN Secretary-General for his comments, Prime Minister Hailemariam said the "the movement to get more children into school is unstoppable [and] Ethiopia aims to make a significant contribution to this process in its newly announced role as one of the champion countries for the UN Secretary General's Global Education First Initiative [which] recognizes my government's commitment to the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals."

The fiction of allegations of “land grabbing” in Ethiopia

Ethiopia’s efforts to engage in agricultural investment have always been a favorite subject for critics of the government, certainly in the last few years. From so called ‘rights activists’ to disgruntled Diaspora opposition leaders, agricultural investment has been a subject for incessant attack, usually under the rubric of “land grabbing”. This politically loaded term has been used deliberately, and pejoratively, to try to liken agricultural investment initiatives with the old days of colonialism. Some seem bought such allegations without bothering to check whether they are made on any factual basis or on the objective reality on the ground.

One of the most common of such attacks usually centers on the Government’s agricultural policies. The claim is that the introduction of agricultural investment is a policy shift following a “failed small-scale holding agricultural policy.” This allegation has little credibility and actually is one of the weakest criticisms as it is based on selective, and inaccurate, readings of Ethiopia’s agricultural policy. In fact, the policy gives due consideration and focus to small scale-holding farming. The policy clearly makes the point that as small-scale holding farming employs 85% of the population it must be the centerpiece of agricultural policies. As such, the policy aims to increase productivity through adoption of improved agricultural technologies, diversification of agricultural products, improving rural finance and market access and information through improved infrastructure. Indeed, this has brought an 8% annual growth in the sector, though admittedly a lot can still be done to further boost the growth of the sector.

The policy does make it quite clear that its second strand is the role of agricultural investment in lowland areas, which have so far been largely uncultivated. These are sparsely inhabited areas which are conducive to large-scale farming. Here, the policy also outlines the importance of foreign direct investment to develop these areas. The policy rationale for involvement of foreign investment is, of course, the absence of sufficient domestic capital. While this is fact, critiques misread the recent flourishing of agricultural investment as policy shift, while the policy document clearly states it is the second arm of the policy.

Commercial agriculture is, of course, a necessary part of agricultural development and is not “giving away land” as some critics would like to claim. Indeed, the trustworthiness of agricultural investment arrangements is very apparent in the transparent and clear procedures for any potential investor in land acquisition or of termination in cases of failure. It is perhaps worth noting that the Government has gone a long way to assuage *bona fide* concern by posting details of the 46 investment contracts signed with foreign investors. This is an unprecedented move by any country engaged in agricultural investment. The fact that it is not “giving away land” is also obvious in the Ministry of Agriculture’s swift actions in cancelling contracts of Indian and Chinese companies for not developing the land within the agreed timeframe under the agreements. There is no opacity either in the objectives or in the execution of the policy. The talk of “giving away land” simply makes no sense if one scrutinizes the procedures and mechanisms of control set by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The criticisms also spread themselves into issues related to food security. Detractors of the agricultural investment processes going on in Gambella and Benishangul Regional States have tried to vilify the projects as failing to contribute to food security. This argument also suffers from major flaws. The first of these lies in the assumption that investors are free to grow whatever they like in the fields they are leasing. In fact, most of the 300,000 hectares of land leased by the Federal Government are given out under agreements to grow specific items prioritized by the government. The government has, for example, designated palm oil, cotton, rubber and tea as priority items for some of these large scale developments. The logic behind these selections is to encourage production of agricultural products that allow value addition over and above items that can be readily be packed as primary products. Selections are also made on the basis of the Growth and Transformation Plan’s core objective of transforming the economy from an essentially agrarian base in to an industry-led economy. On the basis of the shortage of cotton for the growing textile and garment industry, the government has given leases for those who agree to grow cotton. The demand for cotton, for example, meant the country had to import 20,000 tons of cotton this year alone.

Overall, land is allotted to priority products that complement the country’s industrialization efforts. Critics seem to ignore that much of the production in these areas is designed as commercial products, which make little contribution to food security, but which is the target of production in other areas. It is also important to note that the selection of products is made on the basis of, as well as the realities of, climate and soil condition. Most of the land in these semi-arid areas is less suitable for food production. The criticisms are

also made on the basis of the false assumption that food security can only be attained through increased food production alone. A number of studies have made it clear that increasing the purchasing capacity of individuals through employment-creation is as important in alleviating food security problems. Market factors are also critical in cases of severe shortage. The floriculture industry's growing share in employment creation and in contributions to the economy is also worth a mention as far as improving livelihoods is concerned.

The debate on exploitation of indigenous lands also usually ignores the realities. The claims of abuse by advocacy organizations are based on allegations provided by political bodies struggling to overthrow the incumbent authorities by violence. They cannot be called neutral sources of information, given their avowed goal of toppling the government. In fact, the majority of these lands are found in sparsely populated regions. They are largely inaccessible in terms of infrastructure, and their development involves discussion with local communities and compensation as appropriate as well as infrastructural development for the local inhabitants. It might be added that while there have also been these vociferous claims of extensive "land grabbing" so far no more than a tenth of the potentially available land, of some 3 million hectares, has been allocated. The meticulous care being observed when making the agreements is also worth noting.

Overall, the rationale behind the country's agricultural policies is to create employment opportunities, build up economic and social infrastructure and expand and increase the livelihood of local farmers. It is designed to help the country's economic growth and its poverty alleviation strategy, as well as generate foreign exchange by producing agricultural products for export. Much may still need to be done, but progress has been effective and impressive.