

A Week in the Horn of Africa

8th January 2016

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News in Brief

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn has been designated by Pan–African magazine AfricaWorld News as its AfricaWorld Man of the Year for 2015. (See article)

Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom, presented the Ministry’s Annual plan and first quarterly report of the year to the Foreign Affairs Standing Committee of the House of People’s Representatives on Friday (January 1). (See article)

His Holiness, Abune Mathias, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido-Church, Archbishop of Axum and Echeque of the See of St TekleHaimanot, in a Christmas message on Thursday (January 7) said that no one could benefit from the absence of peace and stability. He called on people to stand by the ongoing development and said development was an endowment that assured survival.

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom met with the Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation commission for South Sudan, former President of Botswana, Festus Mogae, on Wednesday (January 6) to discuss the challenges and opportunities of peace and stability for South Sudan and the implementation of the August 2015 Peace Agreement.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs disclosed on Tuesday (January 5) that Ethiopia planned to expand volume of trade exchanges with Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti.

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros said on Saturday (January 02) that preparations had been made to make Ethiopia a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

The President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Dr Mulatu Teshome, hosted a farewell ceremony for newly appointed Ambassadors at the National Palace on Saturday (January 2). On the occasion, President Mulatu congratulated the newly appointed Ethiopian Ambassadors on their appointment and wished them a successful tenure.

The State Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Wakgari Furi, said on Thursday (December 31, 2015), that China’s POLY-GCL Petroleum Group Holdings Ltd had finished drilling two appraisal wells in Ethiopia’s southeast and would soon know the size of gas

deposits. The State Minister said, “They have finished drilling and are now conducting tests on the reservoir.

Djibouti

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Djibouti on Tuesday (January 5) condemned the attacks on the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in the city of Mashhad in Iran, and urged the Iranian authorities to assume their responsibility to protect diplomatic missions. Djibouti cut diplomatic ties with Iran, joining several Arab nations that have taken the step over the week.

Eritrea

In a statement on Tuesday (January 5), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Eritrea, reaffirmed “its strategic neighborly ties with Saudi Arabia and condemns the violation perpetuated against the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Tehran”.

Billboards thanking Eritrea and President Isaias for their support of Yemen, for training Yemen’s national army and for allowing the use of Assab for the liberation of Aden, were set up in Aden at the end of last week. Eritrea announced last month that it had joined the Saudi-led coalition fighting to restore President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi in Yemen.

Kenya

The ICC have announced that the case against Deputy President William Ruto and journalist Joshua arap Sang will resume on January 14 and 15 at the Hague, and the attendance of both is required. Their lawyers have applied for the cases to be dismissed on a motion of no-case-to-answer.

Transport Cabinet Secretary James Macharia said on Tuesday (January 5) that Kenya had completed “almost all” the relevant requirements of the US aviation authorities, and anticipated that direct flights between the US and Kenya would start by May this year.

Garissa University College in Kenya reopened on Monday (January 4) nine months after Al-Shabaab murdered 147 people in an attack on the university campus. 142 of those massacred were students and another seventy-nine were injured.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization says an estimated 1 to 3 million people in Kenya are in need of food aid due to the effects of climate change and the El-Nino phenomenon.

Somalia

Somalia on Thursday (January 7) cut diplomatic ties with Iran and ordered all Iranian diplomats and embassy staff out of the country within 72 hours. "This step has been taken after careful consideration and in response to the Republic of Iran's continuous interference in Somalia's internal affairs," Somalia's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Defense Minister Abdiqadir Sheikh Ali expressed the government’s commitment to resume the anti-militants offensive aimed at flushing out Al-Shabaab from areas they still controlled on Sunday (January 3). His statement followed talks with the incoming AMISOM force commander, General Mohammedsha Zeyinu. (See article)

Ethiopian troops arrived in Kismayo on Sunday (January 3) as replacement for the Sierra Leone soldiers previously deployed there. (See article)

Turkey has started to build a military training base in Somalia as part of its pledge to build up Somalia's national army, a senior Somali foreign office official said on Tuesday (January 25). (See article)

A new contingent of 140 Nigerian police officers arrived in Mogadishu on Wednesday (January 6). They were replacing colleagues who had completed a one-year tour of duty in Somalia as members of the Formed Police Unit of AMISOM.

Somaliland has announced that Saturday January 16 will be the day for the start of voter registration for presidential elections. The opposition parties have endorsed the date. The date for Presidential and Parliamentary elections is March 28, 2017.

South Sudan

South Sudanese parties successfully concluded the selection of ministries for the forthcoming Government of National Unity on Thursday (January 7) without disagreement on key ministries.

The leadership of the SPLM-IO submitted its full list of 50 nominated members for the transitional national legislative assembly in Juba to the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission on Tuesday (January 5), in accordance with the peace agreement signed in August 2015.

Sudan

Sudan announced on Monday (January 4) that it was severing diplomatic relations with Iran, one day after Saudi Arabia announced it was cutting off ties with Tehran after its embassy was attacked.

President Omer Al-Bashir affirmed Sudan's support for the realization of peace in South Sudan on Monday (January 4) when meeting South Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Barnaba Benjamin. Mr Benjamin was visiting Khartoum at the head of a delegation to participate in the celebrations marking the anniversary of Sudan Independence Day. His visit coincided with meetings of the Joint Sudan/South Sudan Security Committee.

Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour on Thursday (January 7) met with the newly appointed UNAMID chief Martin Uhomoibhi. He suggested a meeting on the margins of the African Union Assembly summit for the tripartite committee to discuss the exit strategy for the UN/AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn: "2015 AfricaWorld Man of the Year"

The Pan-African magazine, AfricaWorld News, after considering nominations from across the world, named Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn as its Man of the Year for 2015.

Africa World News started as a Pan-African Magazine in May 2011, on the basis of the old African adage that "*Unless the hunted gives their account, the story of the hunt will always favor the hunter.*" Before identifying the specific qualities that led the magazine to bestow

this title on Prime Minister Hailemariam, the magazine noted that it is “remarkable how Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn has sustained economic progress in Ethiopia after the sudden death of his predecessor in 2012,” adding that “it is worthy to note that, in a country dominated by major ethnic groups, Hailemariam Desalegn hails from the minority Wolaita people in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region.” In arriving at its decision for Africa’s Man of the Year, the magazine listed some of the Prime Minister’s qualities under different headings: political activities, as an international security ally and a global champion, as well as an African Statesman, a dependable partner, visionary, pacesetter and a family man.

The magazine, after a brief outline of the Prime Minister’s biography, noted his appointment as vice-president after a few years as a member of the ruling party and then as president of the Southern Regional State. It underlined his achievements in improving the region’s economy and, more importantly, his key role in ensuring ethnic stability in the region. It also noted that he moved into the national political scene in 2006 as adviser to Meles Zenawi, and was appointed as the Government’s Chief Whip in the House of Representatives. He was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in 2010.

“The progress recorded by the Government of Hailemariam has been tremendous,” said the magazine, which described Ethiopia “as a key diplomatic player in the region” and “a country long considered as a bulwark against volatility in the Horn of Africa.” It pointed out that its reputation in this respect was strengthened by its chairmanship of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and its role in “mediating in the peace talks between Sudan and South Sudan on one hand and the warring parties in new South Sudan on the other hand.” AfricaWorld News magazine emphasized Ethiopia’s strategic importance in ensuring the stability of the Horn of Africa, with its soldiers remaining integral to the ongoing fight against Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Ethiopia joined AMISOM in January 2014 and AMISOM’s presence in Somalia is playing a major role in the fight against Al-Shabaab and in helping the country to create an effective federal state as part of Somalia’s Vision 2016.

The magazine stressed Prime Minister Hailemariam’s role in bolstering “the peace process in old and new Sudan since he came to power in 2012”. He visited both Sudan and South Sudan in 2013, as part of “the efforts to co-ordinate and facilitate face-to-face entente between the presidents of the two countries” and to encourage the two countries “to complete consultations on outstanding issues like the status of Abyei and the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement, particularly on the details of the 14-mile Temporary Security Zone Arrangement.” The Prime Minister’s role as chairperson of IGAD, working together with President Kenyatta of Kenya, facilitated talks between former Vice President Riek Machar and the Government of President Salva Kiir, leading to the signing of the peace agreement over the South Sudan conflict. This was one of the factors which earned the Prime Minister a point in the magazine’s category of “international security ally”.

The magazine described the Prime Minister as a Global Champion, noting that during the 70th UN General Assembly earlier in the year, Ethiopia received the South-South Award 2015 for achieving the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty. It recalled that Prime Minister Hailemariam, receiving the award at the South-South Award Gala Event, said, “Ethiopia was inspired by the successful development experience of countries of the Global South and in the same spirit it was ready to share its experiences with others.”

The magazine called Ethiopia a dependable partner for others, describing Prime Minister Hailemariam's administration as moving Ethiopia ahead in other sectors, apart from regional security and international diplomacy. It noted the bilateral and internal projects that are helping position Ethiopia as a major target for direct foreign investment in Africa. It noted the Prime Minister was leading Ethiopia to partner Kenya in the ambitious 24.5 billion dollar Lamu Port Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor project, a project that includes a railway, highways, and an oil pipeline. This will provide the landlocked countries of Ethiopia and South Sudan with a new export pathway and reduce Kenya's dependence on the heavily congested port of Mombasa. Ethiopia was also partnering with Djibouti to sign an agreement for a \$1.55 billion fuel pipeline. It also noted the framework agreements signed in September 2015 for construction of the 550-kilometer (340-mile) line to transport diesel, gasoline and jet fuel from port access in Djibouti to central Ethiopia, a joint project construction scheduled for completion in two years.

The magazine points out that Ethiopia enjoys one of Africa's highest economic growth rates, experiencing "near-double-digit economic growth and huge infrastructure investment under Prime Minister Hailemariam's leadership, positioning it among the elite in Africa." Although "the economy is state driven", it emphasizes that Government-owned companies are ambitious. Examples include the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, set to be Africa's largest hydropower project; Ethio Telecom working to unveil a 4G mobile phone network in Addis Ababa; and the Sugar Corporation building 10 new factories, with an eye to becoming a high-flyer in the global sugar trade.

The magazine called the Prime Minister a pacesetter for the remarkable achievement of rail developments including the Addis Ababa Light Rail; the first in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is a 17-kilometre line running from the city centre to industrial areas in the south of the city and was opened on 20 September. The second section, a west-east line across the capital, began operations a few weeks later on 9 November. It also underlined that Ethiopia's first sovereign credit ratings from global agencies in 2014, a B1 from Moody's and B ratings from both Fitch and Standard & Poor's, opened the door to international capital markets and foreign direct investment.

The magazine concluded: "The year 2015 was remarkable for Ethiopia and Prime Minister Hailemariam as a global and African leader of immeasurable value. Hence, AfricaWorld decided to etch his name on our Hall of Fame as 2015 MAN OF THE YEAR."

Dr Tedros presents the Foreign Ministry's annual plan to the Parliament

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom, together with State Minister Yonas Yoseph and the Ministry's Director-Generals, presented the annual plan and first quarterly performance report (September-December) to the Foreign Affairs' Standing Committee of the House of People's Representatives on Friday, (January 1). Dr Tedros told the Standing Committee that the Ministry's responsibilities, given to it under the law and the Constitution, included augmenting the government's policies and strategies to build a democratic system and ensure sustainable economic development in Ethiopia. In line with this, the Ministry had implemented its own five-year strategic plan, which had been largely aligned with the national Growth, and Transformation Plan (GTP I). He also pointed out that the Ministry had undertaken a critical evaluation of its own GTP I performance in preparation for its own annual plan, also part of the current GTP II (2015/2016-2019/20).

Dr Tedros highlighted the priorities of the Ministry's annual plan for 2015/16. These were based on four pillars: establishing and strengthening strategic partnerships, business and economy diplomacy, national image building and boosting the participation of the Ethiopian Diaspora. With regard to establishing and strengthening strategic partnerships, the Minister said that the prime focus would be given to strengthening ties with neighboring countries. He explained that Ethiopia was striving to establish and strengthen effective partnerships with all countries. This would be done without any interference in their internal affairs in order to ensure mutual benefits and Ethiopia's national interest. Ethiopia had been promoting the principle of equitable water sharing, he said, and working to create mutual understanding over environmentally sound hydropower projects that would benefit all the riparian countries involved. He underlined the Ministry plans to engage with think tanks, advocacy and lobby groups, the media and the Diaspora with a view to influencing these organizations to report positively on the overall development of Ethiopia.

Dr Tedros said the Ministry plans for economic diplomacy this year envisaged pre-investment level visits by nearly 50 high-level investors, as well as nearly a thousand small and mid-level investors, to the country. The Ministry would also be planning so that at least 20 of the high-level investors and 228 of the small and mid-level ones should move into operation during the year. Related to this were 15 familiarization trips included in the plans to boost the tourist flow to Ethiopia. The Minister noted that the Government had created an investment friendly environment for Foreign Direct Investment and, accordingly the country had become a preferred destination for investment. He added the plan underlined the year as a year for Diaspora movement and Diaspora engagement. It envisaged the formation of 110 umbrella organizations, increasing the participation of women members to 20,000 and encouraging them to play their part fully in the socio-economic development of the country. The Ministry's plan also provides for contributing US\$6.2 million to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. It aims to carry out various activities to make the Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Strategic Studies Center operational, in line with its new mandate, and coordinate its activities with the Foreign Service Institute.

The common goal of all national policies, strategies and programs was, the Minister said, to ensure lasting peace in the country by building a sustainable democratic system and delivering fast and equitable economic growth that would improve the lives of ordinary Ethiopians. In this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had its own role to play, especially in creating a conducive external environment and gathering critical support from foreign partners. In this regard, a prime focus was improving domestic capacity in terms of building infrastructural developments to cover gaps with the country's own resources as well as bringing about speedy technological transfers in the infrastructure sector. We have to make sure, the Minister said, that exports had sustainable markets and to achieve this it would make maximum efforts to boost exports of goods and services both in terms of quantity and quality, as well as identifying new export products for the world market. This had absolute importance for overall development endeavors. In other words, the Minister added, the Ministry had a very important role to play in finding better markets for export commodities as well as ensuring quality and fair-priced imports. Together with other relevant ministries, Foreign Affairs had to promote the country's tourist attractions and boost the flow of tourist by recruiting new tour operators. The Minister said that the Ministry would be cooperating with both the Federal and Regional Governments to improve the mobilization and collaboration with Diaspora communities so these could play an effective role in their home country.

Dr Tedros also presented the report for the first quarter of the year. He told the Committee that Ethiopia was working with Djibouti on a strategic plan for full economic integration. He detailed Ethiopia's infrastructural developments linking with Kenya and Sudan, as well as the border integrated developments for peace and development that were underway to create an enabling environment for trade and people-to-people contacts as well as consolidating further economic integration.

Dr Tedros briefed the Committee on Ethiopia's key role in regional state formation in Somalia and in maintaining peace and stability to help improve the political and security situation there as well as in the ongoing IGAD-led South Sudan mediation peace process. With reference to Eritrea, the Minister reported that the extension of the UN sanctions had been a major success. He also told the Committee about the work undertaken to support Eritrean refugees and to strengthen people-to-people ties.

The Minister explained that Ethiopia was bidding to be a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for 2017/18. The members of IGAD had expressed their support and the Seychelles had withdrawn as a possible candidate. If the AU Heads of State and Government Assembly approved, Ethiopia would be the only African country bidding for a seat for that period. Equally, any candidate had to gain the support of over two-thirds of the General Assembly and much effort had to be made to obtain this. The Minister said Ethiopia's commitment and contributions to peacekeeping missions in the region and more widely would be taken into consideration.

On the subject of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), the Minister said that the Tripartite Technical Committee meetings were being held in a manner that ensured Ethiopia's national interests, as well as promoting cooperation with downstream countries. He mentioned that the recent Khartoum discussion between the Ministers of Water and of Foreign Affairs of Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia had reached a consensus and the ministers had signed the agreed minute for selecting the two firms tasked with carrying out the remaining studies on the impact of GERD.

The Minister noted that 120 companies had made pre-investment visits to Ethiopia, and he said the Diaspora Day celebration had been hailed as a highly successful event that brought together over 7,000 members of the Ethiopian Diaspora. He highlighted the fact that Ethiopia was fast becoming a preferred investment destination in Africa, and stressed this was contributing to the country's remarkable economic achievements. He said Ethiopia's economic diplomacy would continue to pursue its core objectives of attracting FDI and promoting export trade to realize the necessary structural transformation for laying the foundations for rapid industrialization.

Concerning image-building, Dr Tedros said that, following recent coordinated government efforts, the image of the country was changing for the better, though the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognized that there was still a lot that remained to be done. He said the Ministry's primary focus would be the promotion of the way Ethiopia's democratic-developmental state was delivering real results in terms of ensuring basic rights to the people, putting foreign development assistance to the right use to ensure all-inclusive growth that benefited the population at large, and to convince Ethiopia's partners to strengthen their support. The Ministry had also identified the need to demonstrate the efficacy of the country's democratic-developmental policies to the rest of the developing world, especially to low-income Sub-

Saharan countries. He said it was the Ministry's responsibility to work on coordinating the action of African countries under various African agendas for the benefit of the continent, and to conduct image-building works that enable Ethiopia to play a coordinating role. The Minister stressed that the improvement in Ethiopia's image could be seen in the way so many political and business leaders made official visits. The visit of President Obama and others to Ethiopia underlined Ethiopia's expanding diplomatic relations and increasing influence.

Following the presentation of the Ministry's report and aims, Dr Tedros responded to questions. These covered the Ministry's budget utilization, the Ministry's plan on loans, protection of the rights of Ethiopian migrants; progress on safeguarding their right to work in other countries through bilateral labor agreements; and the promotion of border development policies with the neighboring countries. In conclusion, the Foreign Affairs Standing Committee of the House of Peoples' Representatives broadly expressed their appreciation of the Ministry's plan and of its first quarter performance. Members also commented that much still needed to be done in the future. "The Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Standing Committee of the House, Tesfaye Daba, noted some limitations in the Ministry's performance over issues of gender mainstreaming and budget utilization. The Committee also drew attention to the lack of information in the report on internal auditing and supervision work and on the issue of remittances, which, it said, fell short of the Committee's expectations."

The public forums in Oromia Regional State-successfully ongoing

Over the past few weeks, a number of peaceful demonstrations driven out of a legitimate public concern, and which later changed to a series of clashes with security forces, took place in some parts of Oromia. It eventually appeared that the issue that originally led to the protests was a lack of clarity over the essential elements of the relationship between the draft joint Integrated Master Plan of Addis Ababa and the administration of the Oromia Special Zone, and a misunderstanding over possible implementation.

The protest, started by students of higher education institutions and secondary schools, stemmed from a perception that the Plan was going to allow the capital to swallow up special zones, disrupt the activities of farmers, change the cultural-linguistic identity of the zones and facilitate land grabbing. Protestors also raised other issues including holding corrupt officials accountable and effective service delivery.

Unfortunately, and regrettably, the confusion allowed some individuals and groups, both in Ethiopia and outside, to hijack the protests and refocus the legitimate concerns of people on something rather different. In fact, the protests provided an opportunity for some opposition parties to organize opposition to the draft Master Plan on the basis of deliberate misinformation, misleading people about the Plan, its details and about the stage it had reached. They even claimed the Plan was about to be implemented, even though no conclusions had been reached and the discussions were far from finalization.

Outside forces, including some groups based in Asmara and funded by the Government of Eritrea, promptly set to work to exaggerate the situation, diverting the legitimate public concerns and trying to coordinate the protests and introduce a level of violence. These external elements, with the aid of local opposition parties, orchestrated the violence across the Oromia Regional State and also encouraged criminal elements to get involved in the destruction of property and looting. As incidents turned violent, unfortunately and most

regrettably, there was some loss of life and a considerable number of injuries. The situation also led to the destruction of a number of private and public property. It was hardly a coincidence that these activities followed the public announcement in the Eritrean capital of Asmara a few months ago of the formation of yet another new group of opposition organizations, including the Oromo Liberation Front and Ginbot 7. The announcement said the main aim of these terrorist groups was to launch an armed struggle dedicated to the violent overthrow of the [democratically elected] government in Addis Ababa. Its leadership also announced that members of Ginbot 7 were actively engaged in fomenting the violence in some parts of Oromia.

Despite the outbreak of violence, and all the external and other efforts to distract efforts to resolve the situation, the Federal Government and the Government of the Oromia Regional State underlined that the Master Plan was only in draft form and that its details were still under discussion and had yet to be decided. They welcomed questions to address all the issues under consideration and consistently emphasized there were no constraints on raising any questions on any aspect of the Plan. Equally, government authorities underlined that anyone could organize peaceful and lawful protests whether on the subject of the Draft Master Plan for Addis Ababa or any other subject. The Federal Government repeatedly reiterated that there would be wide, in-depth discussions on the draft Plan and all associated issues with the public before any steps over implementation were taken. It also gave assurances that all relevant subjects could be raised in these discussions.

To underline this, government authorities, both at federal and state level, organized a series of peace and development conferences. Officials from both state and federal government level have been chairing meetings and discussions with the public in many different towns throughout Oromia. The President of the Oromia State Government, Mukhtar Kedir, and the Head of the Oromia State Communication Bureau, Fekadu Tesema, have addressed the issues repeatedly in a number of meetings, and both Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn and the Head of the Government Communication Office with the rank of Minister, Getachew Reda, have also spoken about the situation and addressed the issues.

Prime Minister Hailemariam said firmly that the Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan was only in the planning stages and had not reached any stage in which implementation had been discussed. It was nowhere near ready to be implemented. In a recent statement, the Prime Minister noted that the current disturbances were under control, but he issued a stern warning to those who had been trying to use the occasion to try to destabilize the country and destroy public and private property. He said that the Government had the responsibility to protect the nation and its people from terrorist forces and the Government and the people would take legitimate action, to the full extent of the law, to ensure this sort of activity was stopped. Both the Federal Government and the Oromia State Government have expressed their deep regrets for any deaths that have occurred, and they expressed their sincere condolences to the families of all those who lost their lives or who were injured in the demonstrations.

Now that the situation has returned to normalcy, the federal and regional authorities are beginning to carry out investigations into the violence and into the response to it. Several of the towns affected by the violence are continuing to organize peace meetings and conferences, as well as discussions on development to address the causes of the disturbances.

Various religious group leaders and institutions have also been working to sustain normalcy by holding further discussions with community members on the way local problems were

manipulated by outside interests in some cases. A series of public discussions to create a platform of awareness has been launched to make sure this won't happen again. These are underlining the importance of working within the framework of the Constitution to ensure continued peace and development in the country.

In a recent two-day meeting the executive committee of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front also discussed the recent violence in Oromia Regional State and considered longer-term remedies. While acknowledging the efforts of the security forces in averting the anti-peace developments the Front, in a press release, stressed that it was the overall participation of the peace-loving public whose efforts decisively helped to keep the situation under control. It noted that the questions raised could have been resolved peacefully and the Front's press release indicated that it had been a lack of awareness among the public about the integrated developmental master plan that had created a fertile ground for those who wanted instability. It emphasized that the master plan could only be practical if it had acceptance from the public and stressed that the Government would be holding further discussions with the public on the plan. The Front called for the strengthening of efforts to prevent the activities of external and internal forces which try to create havoc in the country.

It also underlined the importance of dealing with rent-seekers who were concerned that the fight against mal-administration might affect their own interests, and called for expanded operations against this obstacle to effective and efficient government.

As the impact of El-Nino is expected to persist into 2016, efforts to mitigate the drought intensify

The failed spring rains in Ethiopia last year caused significant impacts for planting and livestock production across the country and inevitably increased food insecurity and malnutrition in some parts of the country. This was rapidly followed by the arrival of the on-going El Niño weather phenomenon in June that affected the rainfall pattern of the summer rains that normally provide much of the country's agriculture harvest and its potable water. The combination resulted in the onset of efforts of mitigating the drought. Currently it is estimated that close to 8.2 million people are in need of food aid as a result of these conditions. It was in response to such El-Nino-induced drought that the Government, recognizing the increased needs, initiated extensive internal response as well as calling for international assistance, and for this to continue well into 2016.

The Government is making every effort to mitigate the effect of the El Nino phenomenon and is continuing to do everything possible to make sure people are protected from the worst effects of this environment-related crisis. In addition to the continuous provision of both food aid, including special supplements for the malnourished, and water to affected areas, **the Government has issued international tenders to purchase nearly a million tons of wheat to ensure food supplies will continue to be available. Further tenders will be issued as necessary.** It has also called for international assistance for helping those currently in need of food aid. The Government has been working intensively to minimize the impact of the drought and remains determined and committed to ensure that there will be no loss of life from the drought.

The December monthly report of the Famine Early Warning Systems Network makes it clear that the ongoing El Niño, following from the already existing drought, led to below average Meher harvests in most eastern cropping areas. It has also contributed to massive livestock

deaths, poor livestock body condition and very low livestock production in Afar and northern parts of Somali Region.

The report concluded that the most acutely affected areas were Southern Afar and Sitti Zone in Somali Region and the agricultural lowlands of East and West Hararghe Zones in Oromia. The result is that “between January and March 2016, large populations in the east of the country will experience very significant food consumption gaps.” The report also notes that larger areas of Tigray, Amhara, Afar, Oromia, Somali and the SNNPR will remain in difficulty through at least March 2016 and emergency food assistance will be required to protect household food consumption.

Meanwhile, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) of the World Food Program issued a country report in December underlining the extent and severity of the 2015 drought in Ethiopia. The report noted that assessment of historical rainfall data indicated that central and eastern Ethiopia had experienced the worst drought in more than 50 years. As a result, it says, the food security emergency is expected to persist through much of 2016. The report presented a series of maps that illustrated the extent and severity of the drought as well as its impact on water availability, crop and rangeland conditions, and food security.

Overall, the Meher harvest production was well below average with up to 75% losses in the worst affected lowland areas. By contrast, most of the west of the country has seen average agricultural production in 2015, and, as rainfall performance has been much better across much of the west and south west, near normal harvests are expected for the current season. The report notes that the cumulative amount of rainfall in November and December was above average in most parts of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region, and although some of this was unseasonable for some areas, it also favored planting of some crops. Harvesting of some late-planted crops is expected to continue in January in the SNNPR though most of the Meher crops have been harvested.

The Afar Pastoral and Agricultural Development Bureau says there have already been livestock deaths in the Afar Regional State. The report notes livestock feed interventions are ongoing in the worst affected woredas in Afar and northern Somali, as well as water trucking operations. Livestock prices showed a decline due to the increase in number of livestock sold in parts of drought-affected areas. However, the report also noted that, despite erratic distribution and longer dry spells between rainy days, the cumulative rainfall amount for October to December, for the Dyer/Hagaya rains, was normal in most southern and southeastern pastoral areas, and this had improved water and pasture availability, with an improvement in livestock body conditions and productivity.

Inevitably, prices for most food commodities in eastern areas are higher than in the same period last year, but following the required intervention, nutritional conditions in October showed a slight improvement compared to September in most parts of Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR. The number of malnourished children admitted to the Therapeutic Feeding Program in the SNNPR in October, for example, fell by 27% from the previous month, and the figure for East Hararghe showed a fall of 41%.

The report includes projections for the next three months, noting that the below average agricultural production agricultural areas of Eastern Amhara, Tigray, Central and Eastern Oromia, and the Rift valley areas of SNNPR will continue to limit household food availability as well as restrict livestock sales and agricultural work opportunities, limiting

incomes and capacity to purchase. This means households in these areas will need assistance to meet minimal basic food needs through at least March 2016. The lowlands of East and West Hararghe Zones have been particularly badly hit, as have the pastoral areas of Afar and Sitti (Shinile) Zone of the northern Somali Region. Cereal prices are likely to rise in January due to low production in some of the eastern parts of the country and the possibilities for work income is likely to remain very low during the dry season and until March.

The situation in southern and southeastern pastoral areas (southern Somali region, southern Oromia and the lowlands in South Omo Zone in the SNNPR) are slightly better following some flooding in October in specific areas. Areas that experienced less flooding had good seasonal rainfall for the last three consecutive seasons, contributing to good crop and livestock production. In addition, most of the west of the country saw average agricultural production in 2015, and in the higher lands of the SNNPR, in Western Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and much of Benishangul Gumuz and Gambella, the harvest obtained from the Meher season is likely to meet the food consumption requirements of most households through March 2016.

New developments in Somalia aim at further promoting peace and stability

Somalia's Defense Minister, Abdiqadir Sheikh Ali, met with incoming AMISOM force commander, General Mohammedsha Zeyinu, and the Somali Chief of Defense Forces, Major-General Mohamed Adan Ahmed, last weekend for high level security talks and a briefing on the latest security developments and the military plans for the New Year. The Minister subsequently underlined the Somali Government's commitment to resume the offensive against Al-Shabaab. He said the aim is to drive Al-Shabaab out of the areas still under their control during this year, the year in which Somalia proposes to hold parliamentary and presidential elections. The Minister told reporters on Sunday (January 3) that operations would aim to "oust the anti-peace elements from the country in the very shortest time possible." He stressed he wanted to see Somali National Army and AMISOM military operations "ramped up". The AMISOM-led 'Indian Ocean' multi-pronged and successful offensive against areas still under Al-Shabaab control halted mid last year, after Al-Shabaab fighters launched two heavy attacks on AMISOM military bases. This allowed Al-Shabaab more freedom to organize guerrilla attacks and recapture some towns and villages.

Major-General Mohamed Adan Ahmed, who took over the position in late September, promised that his soldiers will defeat Al-Shabaab fighters and recapture remaining areas under Al-Shabaab's control during this year. He said "We have overpowered Al-Shabaab in Somalia, they are weak and now melting away, therefore the remaining minor issues will be completed within this year." Major-General Ahmed said the troops were fully prepared to carry out the final assault against all Al-Shabaab controlled areas. "The aim of SNA soldiers is to recapture all Al-Shabaab controlled areas. We will annihilate Al-Shabaab from Somalia's regions," he said. He also underlined that he would take steps to crack down on all those who planned and financed attacks. The Chief of the Defense Forces stressed that the Somali National Army's working relations with AMISOM were "very good", adding that "from the time operations started, we found that AMISOM are very keen; in the major operations that we have conducted, we have worked together with AU troops and we are grateful." Major-General Ahmed reiterated his commitment to strengthening the partnership between the SNA and AMISOM, as both have a common goal of ensuring peace in Somalia. He said: "We promise that we will cooperate, we will sit and plan together. We are willing to

work together and review together the concept of operations because we are all undertaking the same mission”.

The Government has also stressed that it wants to pool resources with the African Union to boost military operations against Al-Shabaab and resume the successful joint AMISOM/SNA offensive that halted in mid-year last year, allowing Al-Shabaab more time to organize guerrilla attacks and even recapture some towns and villages across Somalia that they had lost to the allied forces. One element in this will be expanded operations in Jubaland along the Juba River. Following a recent visit to Kenya and Ethiopia, the President of Jubaland, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed Islam “Madobe”, told reporters in Kismayo last weekend that the level of operations against Al-Shabaab in Jubaland would be increased. He said his visits had focused on security and on the imminent offensives planned against Al Shabaab militants in areas along Juba River. The operations aiming to flush Al Shabaab out of Juba region would “kick off soon,” he told reporters, adding that AMISOM peacekeepers would support Jubaland forces in the operations.

The Jubaland President’s remarks came as the first Ethiopian troops arrived in Kismayo to replace the Sierra Leone contingent, which was previously based in Kismayo along with the Kenyan AMISOM forces. Sierra Leone ended its involvement in AMISOM last year during the Ebola epidemic after the Somali Government expressed fears over possible transmission of the disease into Somalia. On Sunday (January 3), Ethiopian soldiers, together with their military hardware, helicoptered into Kismayo airport, adding that the troops were expected to be involved in guarding Kismayo as well as in launching operations against Al-Shabaab in Lower and Middle Juba regions.

Local commanders said they have been discussing a new military strategy aimed at routing Al-Shabaab fighters from the areas still under their control; and AMISOM commanders in the region say future operations will be intended to ensure that all the remaining areas in Jubaland will be liberated and peace restored to the whole region. In fact, discussions over the proposed offensive in Jubaland have been going on for the last three months after Ethiopian military officers visited Kismayo in September to hold talks with members of the Interim Jubaland Administration on the deployment of Ethiopian forces as part of the AMISOM contribution in the region, which includes the Kenyan contingent as well as some Burundi forces. Abdullahi Sheikh Ismail, Vice-President of the Jubaland Administration, said that the new troops were deployed in response to requests from the public to assist the administration in restoring peace and stability in the region. Colonel Tesfaye, the commander of the Ethiopian troops, said they came to help ‘liberate’ the region, through coordination with local forces and AMISOM forces from Kenya and Burundi. Earlier, the Jubaland Deputy Vice President, Abdullahi Sheikh Osman Fartaag, said that Jubaland was committed to consolidating the war against Al-Shabaab fighters in the Middle Juba region, pointing out: “we were able to eliminate military bases in the region from which Al-Shabaab carried out its subversive operations against government in the capital and other regions.”

The planned offensive comes at a time when Al-Shabaab has been affected by divisions between supporters of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. In recent months, the Islamic State has been trying to persuade Al-Shabaab leaders to join their transnational state. Al-Shabaab has largely resisted the suggestions, preferring to remain part of the Al-Qaeda ‘franchise’ which has provided it with financial assistance, a steady stream of recruits, training and logistical support. Its leadership has also responded violently to efforts to persuade its fighters to commit themselves to ISIS. In December, Al-Shabaab killed Sheikh Hussein Abdi Gedi, their

former deputy governor of the Juba region, after he joined over 100 Al-Shabaab fighters who defected to a pro-ISIS faction. Commenting on this and other killings, Abu Abdalla, the head of Al-Shabaab in Lower Shabelle, warned members of the organization “if you belong to another group, go where you belong. If you have a different flag, take it with you. It doesn't work here, and you will be beheaded, even if you have a big beard.”

Originally, Al-Shabaab's strategy involved controlling and governing territory in a manner very similar to ISIS's efforts. However, after it was forced out of Mogadishu and later Kismayo, and its military strength significantly degraded, it reverted to the former Al-Qaeda model of guerrilla attacks on local and regional, largely soft, targets in Somalia and Kenya, including hotels, schools, and establishments frequented by western tourists and Somali government officials. Its efforts in this kept Al-Shabaab in the headlines as a jihadi organization and encouraged ISIS to approach its members. Equally, ISIS's avowed aim to establish its self-styled “Caliphate” as the legitimate authority to govern all Muslims, poses a major challenge to Al-Qaeda's authority; and Al-Shabaab's refusal to accept is also a serious obstacle to ISIS's vision.

Al-Shabaab links with Al-Qaeda are both direct and indirect. One of the precursors of Al-Shabaab was Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya, funded by Osama bin Laden in the early 1990s and responsible for attacks in Ethiopia. Its leaders, including Sheikh Hassan Dahir ‘Aweys’, were closely involved in the creation of Al-Shabaab, with Sheikh “Aweys” sending Al-Shabaab's first commander, Aden Hashi Ayro, and other leaders including Ibrahim Afghani, Mukhtar Robow and Ahmad Godane, to train with the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan in the early 2000s. Al-Shabaab has also established links with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which had been in a position to provide Al-Shabaab with support.

Meanwhile, earlier this week, a senior Turkish Foreign Office official, Ms Emel Tekin, head of the Foreign Ministry department responsible for Somalia, said Turkey had started to build the promised military training center in Somalia. This, she said, was part of Turkey's pledge to build up the national army for the Somali government and of the bilateral agreement between the two countries on military cooperation. She said that the training facility was also planned to be an important base for providing military training for the entire continent of Africa. Turkey and Somalia signed their agreement on defense industry cooperation in January last year and the Turkish Parliament's Defense Commission approved it in December. Colonel Murat Yaman said at the Commission's hearing that the agreement, built on two earlier agreements signed in 2010 for military financial cooperation and military training, was a framework deal to boost bilateral defense cooperation. Turkey has provided defense assistance since then to Somalia to support its security forces. The Turkish army is also building a military school in Somalia to educate and train both officer corps and non-commissioned officers. Ms Tekin said that when she had visited Somalia, she had noticed Somali soldiers were wearing different uniforms and shoes provided by various donor countries from the Gulf and the European Union. She said Turkey was trying to help establish a military structure that is complete and under a single chain of command. According to the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Turkey has provided a total of US\$400 million in aid to Somalia in recent years, and it will be hosting the next High-Level Somalia Partnership Forum in Istanbul in February.