

A Week in the Horn

9th April 2015

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News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

A Regional Dialogue, for the Horn of Africa and Africa, has been taking place this week in Addis Ababa, (April 7–9) under the theme ‘**Road to Paris: What Kind of Agreements Do We Need?**’. The aim is to build responses to the climate change and sustainable development agenda of the UNFCCC-COP21 scheduled to take place in Paris later this year. (See article)

The Annual Commemoration of the Anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide took place on Wednesday (April 7) under the theme: “Let us keep the memory alive”. The occasion of the 21st anniversary of the genocide was organized by the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Rwanda in Addis Ababa. (See article)

Ethiopia

The Speaker of the House of Federation, Kassa Tekleberhan, in Beijing this week, met with the Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Yu Zhengsheng on Tuesday (April 7) who said the CPPCC welcomed development of China-Ethiopia ties and valued cooperation with Ethiopia’s House of Federation. Ato Kassa will visit South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Guangdong Province.

The Ethiopian embassy in the Yemeni capital, Sana’a, was shelled on Friday last week (April 3); it appeared to have been caught in crossfire. Nobody was injured and damage to buildings was minor. Ethiopians in Yemen have been registering to be evacuated and a National Committee, headed by the Foreign Ministry has been established to organize this.

Following the recent visit of an Omani business delegation to Ethiopia, a Joint Ethio-Oman Business Council will be set up later in the year to help streamline trade procedures between the two countries and bolster bilateral economic ties as well as expand trade relations.

Ethiopia has been selected as the “Official Portrait Country” for the 2015 Specialty Coffee Association of America’ Annual Event, to be held in Seattle, USA, next week (April 9-12).

Ethiopia's year-on-year inflation rose from 8.2% in February to 8.5% in March. The Central Statistics Agency said food price inflation increased to 10.1% in March, up from 9.6% the previous month with price rises in cereals, vegetables and fruits. Non-food inflation rate also increased from 6.8 to 6.9%.

Professor Donald Levine, "Gash Liben, Ethiopian scholar, lover of Ethiopia, founder of the Aikido Ethiopia Project", died on Saturday April 4, aged 83. A prominent social/sociological theorist, best known for his "Wax and Gold" (1965) and "Greater Ethiopia" (1974), his final book published last year was fittingly entitled "Interpreting Ethiopia: Observations of Five Decades".

Djibouti

Major General Zakaria Sheikh Ibrahim, the Chief of Staff of Djibouti Armed Forces, heading a delegation to Egypt had a meeting with Colonel General Sedqi Sobhy, Egypt's Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defense, and Lt General Mahmoud Hegazy, Chief of Staff on Sunday (April 5). Discussions covered events in Yemen, instability in the south Red Sea area and concern over the Houthi threat to the Bab al-Mandeb Straits as well as cooperation between the two countries.

The UNHCR Office in Djibouti said on Monday (April 6) that it expected a "massive influx" of refugees from Yemen. The UNHCR says it has met with the Prime Minister of Djibouti, the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Health, and preparations were now being stepped up to larger numbers with a site in Obock identified as the site for construction of a refugee camp.

Eritrea

Assertions by the EU and the UK Home Office that there is a real prospect of change in Eritrea have been criticized by leading scholars and academics. They say there is no independent evidence of any changes in policy in Eritrea and that the claims are being used to cut protection of Eritrean asylum seekers. A petition has been started calling for full protection for Eritrean asylum seekers to continue. (See article)

Kenya

The Government's inter-ministerial committee on counter-terrorism met on Tuesday (April 7) and took decisions to deny resources to Al-Shabaab. The measures included freezing the bank accounts of over 80 entities and individuals suspected of financing terrorism and closing down 13 forex exchange bureaux and hawala money transfer companies.

Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Minister, Amina Mohamed said on Tuesday (April 7) that Kenya needed more help from its U.S. and European allies in surveillance, and reconnaissance as well as improved capacity, improved intelligence gathering and equipment to help deal with Al-Shabaab attacks. She said Kenya was looking at ways to increase the number of border posts and improve surveillance along the border as well as how to determine the scale of the problem posed by radicalized and extremist youth.

The Kenyan air force bombed two Al-Shabaab camps in Somalia on Sunday (April 5), attacking the camps in Gondodowe and Ismail, both in the Gedo region bordering Kenya. There were no estimates of the damage or of numbers killed.

Former Kenyan Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, leader of the opposition CORD party, on Sunday called for the immediate withdrawal of Kenya's military from Somalia. He said their presence in Somalia was one of the reasons the country was being attacked by Al-Shabaab. He said it was time that "we look into ways that will see how our troops can withdraw from Somalia." The former Prime Minister also called on Kenyans to reject the efforts of Al-Shabaab to drive a wedge between Muslims and Christians in Kenya.

Somalia

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, in an interview with Voice of America on Sunday (April 5), said that his administration began secret talks with high-ranking Al Shabaab officials who are keen to renounce extremism, some time ago. He said the Government "had a visible strategy in this matter," adding that negotiations were ongoing and protracted: "We are in talks with them. Anybody who takes a backseat over the terrorism and killings is welcome."

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud met with the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and head of AMISOM, Ambassador Maman Sidikou on Sunday (April 5) to discuss implementation of federalism, regarded as crucial for achieving Vision 2016. The President said Parliament, other government departments and civil society, were taking the necessary initiatives. (See article)

President Mohamud and Prime Minister Sharmarke on Wednesday (April 8) called on Somalis and the international community to back a new initiative to launch a multi-agency **Special Task Force on Remittances** to support efforts to protect Somali remittances. This will have the task of organizing into law bills on Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Financing of Terrorism and other related financial and transparency measures, as well as initiating a comprehensive plan to formalize the financial sector.

Somalia's government has officially acknowledged that it has allowed Saudi Arabia to use its airspace for conducting airstrikes against Houthi militia forces in Yemen. Somalia's Foreign Minister, Abdisalam Omer 'Hadliye', said on Tuesday (April 7) that Somalia had "officially approved its airspace, land and territorial waters to be used for the air invasion to prevent the Shia Houthi takeover of Yemen."

Interim Jubba Administration President Ahmed Madobe on Saturday (April 4) called for joint security patrols to be carried out along the Somalia/ Kenya border and said his administration is working to create a security force for the border. He also suggested an end to the open Somalia-Kenya border and the setting up of specific entry points to control cross-border activity.

The Central Somali State formation conference is expected to start on Saturday (April 11) in Adaabo town. The technical committee and other delegates including intellectuals and elders have arrived as have most of the participants.

Somalia's Ulema Council urged the Kenyan Government on Tuesday (April 7) to protect Somali refugees in Kenya following Thursday's murderous assault on Garissa University by Al-Shabaab. The Council of leading scholars and religious leaders said the attacks and assassinations carried out by Al-Shabaab contravened Islamic values and Somali traditions. It hoped Al-Shabaab's actions would not threaten the "peaceful coexistence" between the Kenyan and Somali peoples.

Former Somali Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmaajo) has called for the US and its allies to concentrate on building up a Somali national army capable of defending the country and its people against Al-Shabaab. He said "If western nations train, supply and finance an effective fighting force in Somalia, Al-Shabaab would be less capable of carrying out attacks through the region."

South Sudan

In separate Easter messages last weekend, both President Kiir and rebel leader Dr Machar reiterated their promises to resolve the conflict. President Kiir said he would do all possible to bring peace to the country by reaching out to those he said "went astray and took up arms against the state and the people of the Republic of South Sudan." Dr Machar assured the South Sudanese people of his commitment to restoring peace and said he was hopeful that peace would come soon.

The UN Mission in South Sudan said on Tuesday (April 7) that recent skirmishes in Upper Nile state had forced nearly 4,500 more people to seek shelter at the UNMISS base in Malakal. Over 115,000 people are now reportedly being sheltered at various UN compounds across the country.

Sudan

The Arab League and IGAD have announced their participation in monitoring Sudan's general election scheduled for Monday (April 13). The Arab League is sending a team of 33, and IGAD's 30 strong team will be observing elections in Khartoum, Omdurman, Khartoum North, Madani, Kosti, Shendi, Gedaref, El-Obied and Dongola. The AU is also sending an election observation mission led by the former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obsanjo.

The Commemoration of the 21st Anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide

The African Union Commission, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Rwanda in Addis Ababa, organized (April 7) the Annual Commemoration of the Anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide under the theme: “Let us keep the memory alive”. This year is the twenty first anniversary and speaking on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the occasion, Dr Elham Mahmoud Ahmed Ibrahim, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy, stressed that the commemoration of the Rwanda genocide should be an opportunity for all Africans to remember the tremendous tragedy suffered by the people of Rwanda. It also provided the opportunity for all to reaffirm their commitment to ensuring an Africa free from any form of genocide or war crimes. Dr Elham Mahmoud also pointed out the different initiatives undertaken by the African Union Commission that were aimed at promoting fundamental human rights and security in Africa. These included the African Peace and Security Architecture and the African Governance Architecture and its platforms as well as the overriding commitment of African governments “to silence the guns by 2020.” Equally, he said the achievement of Agenda 2063 with its vision of a united, prosperous, and peaceful continent, would undoubtedly depend upon the success of these different programs.

The Chairperson of the AU Permanent Representatives’ Committee, Ambassador Albert Ranganai Chimbindi, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe to the African Union, emphasized the importance of always remembering the victims and the necessity to collectively move in a direction where such atrocities could never recur. He commended the exceptional capacity of the people of Rwanda to overcome the wounds of the past and to shift their focus towards the country’s development. They had created a model of social, political and economic emergence in Rwanda, he said. Ambassador Chimbindo said “the Permanent Representatives’ Committee will always work shoulder to shoulder with the heroic and resilient people of Rwanda to move forward.”

Ambassador Wahide Belay, Ethiopia’s Permanent Representative to the AU and the UNECA, on behalf of Dr Tedros Adhanom, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, reminded those present that the devastation in Rwanda could only happen when Africa and the world failed to take on its collective responsibility to prevent such mass atrocities. He said that “those in the international community, who had the position and the means, and most of all the obligation, to prevent the genocide, lacked the will to do so.” Ambassador Wahide underlined the urgent need for the continent to strengthen its capacity as a continent to prevent such occurrences, and increase its ability to act when necessary to stop such egregious crimes. He said the genocide “gave us all a sad lesson that Africa has to take a leading role in matters relating to its own peace and stability.”

Ambassador Wahide acknowledged the fact that times have changed in Africa, and for the better. The continent had established various mechanisms to manage as well as prevent conflicts. He pointed to the establishment of the AU Peace and Security Council, for example, which together with other organs, such as the African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights, provide an institutional affirmation of the continent’s collective determination to give the African Union the right to intervene in Member States in grave circumstances such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. This underlined the importance of the commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda which was an occasion for all to renew the commitment of Africa to prevent all forms of crimes against humanity, including genocide, from ever happening again on the continent.

Ambassador Wahide also hailed Rwanda’s transformation from the position it had been 21 years ago. He noted its expanding economy and its significant achievements in creating reconciliation among its communities. It had also become a major Troop Contributing Country for UN Peacekeeping missions and emerged as a major voice in Africa’s collective call for a reformed UN peacekeeping system. Ambassador Wahide said “we are of the view that the world should learn a lot from the people of Rwanda, who used home-grown solutions to bring reconciliation and overcome the after-effects of the genocide in their country.” It is an impressive lesson.

Mr Philip Karenzi, Deputy Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda in Ethiopia, said that all Africans had a duty to recall the tragedy and stand against genocide in Africa and in the world. He called upon African States to promote unity among their peoples, build powerful institutions to ensure nothing like that could happen

again and create a culture of peace. He attributed the present success of Rwanda to its commitments to such principles as consensus building, power sharing and reconciliation.

The Commemoration of the Rwanda Genocide as an annual event of the African Union follows the AU's Decision to commemorate 7 April as a Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Genocide and as a reaffirmation of Africa's resolve to prevent and fight genocide whenever or wherever it might appear on the Continent. It is also an example of the objectives and principles of the African Union, enshrined in its Constitutive Act, concerning the promotion of good governance, human rights, the rule of law and bringing an end to impunity.

Regional Dialogue on the future of Climate Change negotiations

A Regional Dialogue, for the Horn of Africa and the African continent, has been taking place this week in Addis Ababa, (April 7–9). Under the theme 'Road to Paris: What Kind of Agreements Do We Need?' the aim is to build responses to the environmental and climate change negotiations. The dialogue, organized by the Horn of Africa-Regional Environmental Center and Network (HoA-REC&N) of Addis Ababa University, and a number of other regional and international partners, brings together government representatives, academia, women and youth groups and civil society organizations. It was also attended by senior government officials and various sector representatives from Ethiopia, Sudan, Djibouti, and Kenya, and France. Discussions covered past challenges and successes as well as needs, gaps and the way forward for improved responses to the climate change and sustainable development agenda of the UNFCCC-COP21 (the 21st Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) scheduled to take place in Paris later this year.

Ethiopia's Minister of Environment and Forests, Belete Tafese, highlighted the significant impact of climate change in his opening remarks, noting major challenges, recent developments and some Ethiopian success stories. He underlined the critical need for mitigation, for reduction of the emission of greenhouses gases and for adaptation. He called for a real reduction in the use of fossil fuels (charcoal, petroleum and gas) and their replacement by increased production of renewable energy: "reducing the fossil fuels we burn through generating electricity using hydropower, geothermal power, wind power, solar power and bio-energy, without producing greenhouse gases, can address the intended amount of energy for industrialization and sustain continuing industrialized societies." The need for reforestation, he added, was the catalyst to removing more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

The Minister shared some of Ethiopia's successes in implementing both mitigation and adaptation. He noted that as of last year, "Our electric power in the [national] grid is generated entirely from hydropower, wind power and geothermal power." He said the country also generated some electricity from solar power in areas not yet linked to the grid. Ethiopia has also started building a network of railway lines that will be powered by electricity from the national grid, so entirely powered by renewable energy. The Minister also noted that the country was exporting its renewable energy to neighboring counties and when the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is completed the potential to provide cheap electricity for industrialization, as well as to export to neighboring countries, will increase substantially.

Minister Belete said that "if the world is genuinely united, sufficient mitigation is possible to stop global warming from continuing, and adaptation to the warming that has already taken place will become possible." Referring to the Kyoto protocol, he said the world has changed significantly since 1992 and a new agreement that requires all countries to mitigate and adapt according to their respective capabilities is needed. All the countries should accept their responsibility and rich countries must help poorer ones, especially the least developed countries, with finance, technology generation and transfer of technology as well capacity-building. He reminded his listeners that the 17th Conference of the Parties in Durban four years ago had established the "Ad Hoc Working Group on the Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP)" with the aim "to envelop a protocol, another legal instrument or agreed outcome with legal force under the convention applicable to all parties" and decided to complete its work not later than 2015 in order to present conclusions to COP21 this year. COP20 last year had endorsed the elements of the draft negotiating text that give equal emphasis to mitigation and adaptation and include the issues of finance, capacity building, technology generation and transfer for the poorer countries. His expectation was that the ADP would complete its work on time. He said

Ethiopia was fully engaged in these negotiations and doing everything possible to encourage a successful march along the road to the Conference.

Ismail Elgizouli, Acting Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel (IPCC), also urged for quick and decisive action to avoid the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impact from climate change on people and the ecosystem. He said that there are options to adapt to and prevent the adverse impact of climate change, but it was necessary for action to be taken. During the discussions, a number of suggestions for mechanisms to help withstand climate changes were made. Among these was the strengthening of adaptation programs to put more effort into **agricultural conservation and enable protection of agro systems and the livelihoods of the people involved**. Another possibility was extending and increasing climate finance and overhauling the whole financial architecture starting with the green climate fund. This, coupled with other forms of domestic mobilization of resources, would pave the way for sufficient finance for sustainable development. **The Conference noted that climate change creates a unique opportunity to reconsider the process of development**. It provides insights about the use of natural resources, their use as a conduit in the service industry, diversification of production systems, moves towards industrialization and methods of adding value to unprocessed raw materials. Climate change also presented opportunities to use intended nationally-determined contributions to open up space for technology transfer. It also offers an opportunity to embark on a low-carbon resilient pathway for development, and the Conference emphasized that growth and climate resilience can be two sides of the same coin in fostering sustainable development.

Africa - Planning for Development: Vision 2063 and the African perspective

The Eighth Joint Annual Meeting of the African Union's Specialized Technical Committee on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration and the Economic Commission for Africa's Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development was held in Addis Ababa at the beginning of last week (March 30-31). The Ministerial Conference was preceded by the Eighth Meeting of Experts held from March 25-27 and the Second Caucus of African Central Bank Governors that took place on March 29.

Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Dr Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, made introductory remarks at the opening session of the Ministerial segment of the Conference. The Ministers were then addressed by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn of Ethiopia and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda. They requested that the African Ministers of Finance, Economic Planning and Integration identify means of financing the African Union Agenda 2063, and both underlined the timeliness of the topics for the scheduled conference discussions : the overview of Agenda 2063 - transformation framework and the first ten-year implementation plan; domestication of Agenda 2063 at regional and national levels; financing of Agenda 2063-strategies for domestic resource mobilization and partnership; and consideration of the Third Finance for Development Conference, scheduled to be held in Addis Ababa between July 13 and 16, 2015.

Prime Minister Hailemariam emphasized that the chosen theme for the conference "Implementing Agenda 2063-Planning, Mobilizing and Financing for Development" would help to provide a basis for agreement on an African Common Position to take the agenda of the continent to the Third Conference on Finance for Development. He spoke of the challenges associated with domestic resource mobilization, and drew the attention of the Ministers to this, stating that "Africa has untapped domestic public and private resources that would be sufficient to meet the needs for Agenda 2063". He underscored the enormous unfulfilled potential for tax collection, currently undermined by poor tax administration and limited tax bases.

The Prime Minister argued that domestic resource mobilization in rural areas was hampered by lack of access to financial services. He cited the issue of "inclusive finance" which can offer people living in poverty a diverse range of financial instruments through micro-finance institutes and initiatives. He said these could enable rural and poor communities to run businesses, build assets, stabilize consumption and become self-reliant. This amounted to strengthening the opportunity for increased domestic savings and the financing of Agenda 2063. The Prime Minister also reminded the Ministers that sustainable development cannot be accomplished through microfinance alone, and therefore it was also crucial to search for new opportunities that could meet the ever-growing financial needs of those at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

Prime Minister Hailemariam mentioned the need to acknowledge the significance of Official Development Assistance, which still constitutes the largest proportion of finance for development programs in the third world. In the context of financing Post-MDG developments, he said, it is necessary to press partners to meet their ODA commitments and provide a timetable for the realization of their promises. The Prime Minister also emphasized that to meet the financial needs of Agenda 2063, the role of South-South Cooperation, increasing allocation of ODA to finance infrastructure developments, sustainable energy, agriculture and industrialization, remained important elements for cushioning domestic resource mobilization.

President Kagame emphasized that as Africa moved forward with its integration agenda, aiming to bring prosperity and stability to the continent, it was important to ensure its equal partnership with the rest of the world. To implement Agenda 2063 and build the future of the continent, he said, it was a necessity to advance and expand financial sectors at national level and at continental level through collaboration among African countries. The President insisted on the importance of deciding what to do and where to focus efforts so that African states could put their money in the right place at the right time, since external supports do not really allow the continent to work on choices of its own. He told the Ministers that Africa should commit itself to implementing “quick wins” in the integration agenda such as launching an African Passport, liberalizing cross-border trade and working for inter-connectivity of infrastructure projects. The importance of promoting private sector development and strengthening Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) are, said President Kagame, the fundamental basis for the implementation of Agenda 2063. He also emphasized the concern that “we Africans seem to have everything to implement Agenda 2063 except the required sense of urgency and ownership,” and underlined that if all were sufficiently willing and committed, all the issues of integration and all the priorities set out in Agenda 2063 were achievable.

Both leaders argued that the Least Developed Countries should focus on trade access. This was an important voice to forge a global alliance at the level of international financial institutions and the WTO. It would help to enhance Africa’s ability to capitalize on those of its own resources required to implement Agenda 2063. The two leaders also requested that the Ministers not spare any efforts to identify any means for financing Agenda 2063 and called on them to agree on the modalities to implement options.

The Ministerial Conference was conducted with a format of panel discussions in which ministers from AU members states, including Ethiopia’s Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Sufian Ahmed, as well as representatives of international financial institutions and the private sector and renowned journalists like Ms Zeinab Badawi, of the BBC, and the Chairperson of the Royal Africa Society participated.

During the panel discussions a number of reflections and points were emphasized including the fact that Agenda 2063 was the first comprehensive long-term development vision outlined by Africans, and the impetus for its implementation are African grass roots. It is therefore necessary to define and develop the fiscal space of African countries as the foundation for sustainable development. There was agreement that Africa should primarily depend on its domestic resources to implement Agenda 2063, but equally, the initial stage of implementation of this grand strategy could not be realized in the absence of proper utilization of ODA resources. These are a significant component of the national budget of a number of African countries. In addition, the developed world had an obligation to meet those ODA commitments which it has failed to meet for decades.

The private sector, which had already started to make up the majority of Gross Domestic Product in some African countries, deserves the utmost attention of policy makers. Implementation of Agenda 2063 should, therefore, place central emphasis on the development of the private sector, including foreign direct investment and Public-Private Partnerships. African integration and implementation of Agenda 2063 need huge investment in infrastructure and energy development. Policy makers should institute appropriate measures to expand and interconnect infrastructure across the continent. In this context, the importance of liberalizing or co-managing border posts, harmonizing legal frameworks and providing for free movement of people and goods are necessary actions that can speak louder than mere words.

The issue of weak national institutions unable to execute the priorities of Agenda 2063 was also discussed. It was agreed that institutional capacity building was largely a national responsibility but at the same time the Regional Economic Communities had a key role to play. The importance of learning from each other and adopting African solutions to African Problems was emphasized as a remedy for capacity shortfalls. Other

subjects debated during the discussions included the effect of the growing middle class in Africa, accelerated industrialization, building resilient agriculture, utilizing private equity funds, the importance of accurate statistics, responses to commodity price/exogenous shocks, diversifying African economies, expanding service hubs, the demographic dividend, democracy and productive societies, the need to launch a strategy to popularize Agenda 2063, issues of monitoring and evaluation, curbing the devastating effect of illicit financial flows, and the need to promote new international partnerships.

The Ministerial Conference concluded by endorsing the Communiqué of the Second Caucus of African Central Bank Governors and issuing a Ministerial Statement. It agreed on nine resolutions listing the major priorities and the relevant framework for actions at different levels: Implementing Agenda 2063: planning, mobilizing and financing for development; Third International Conference on Financing for Development; African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development; Data revolution and statistical development; African Social Development Index; Framework for a renewed United Nations-African Union partnership on Africa's integration and development agenda for 2017-2027; Vienna Program of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024; Least Developed Countries in Africa; Progress and further development of the African Risk Capacity Agency.

Academics claim EU proposals on Eritrea are “rewarding repression”

A group of over twenty leading independent international scholars and authorities on Eritrea and the Horn of Africa, from a wide range of European and American universities, together with Eritrean human rights activists and former Eritrean diplomats, issued a statement last week strongly criticizing EU proposals to triple the amount of EU bilateral aid to Eritrea. The EU Commissioner of International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica said that there was a need to assist processes that benefitted the framework for human rights and democracy in Eritrea as well as to address long-term development needs. This, he suggested, would stem the number of Eritrean refugees leaving the country and seeking asylum in Europe and beyond. News reports, indeed, suggested the aid would be provided in exchange for promises by the Eritrean Government that it would stop those trying to leave the country and limit the numbers of Eritrean refugees arriving in Europe.

In their appeal, issued on Tuesday (March 31), the scholars noted “with grave concern the stream of official assertions by governments and official representatives, which suggest that there is a real prospect of “change in Eritrea.” This, they say, is being used to justify changes in official policy affecting the protection of Eritrean asylum seekers” despite the fact that there is no reliable independent evidence that there has been any change in policy in Eritrea or evidence of any change in the Eritrean Government’s approach to human rights.

In fact, the EU’s decision appears to be based on reports of the Danish Immigration Service which visited Eritrea last year, the reports of a UK Home Office’s three-day visit last December, a report of the Norwegian Immigration Service and a debate in the Canadian Parliamentary Subcommittee on Human Rights. These all suggested that the situation in Eritrea has changed. In particular, the UK Home Office reports claimed the Eritrea’s policy of indefinite military conscription had been reduced to a period of no longer than the official 18 months and that this policy was implemented as of November last year.

The group of scholars seriously questions the reliability of these reports on which this proposed change of policy is based. They point out that neither President Isaias nor any other official has made any official announcement to this effect, nor has there been any indication of its implementation on the ground in Eritrea. No members of the National Service have been informed of the supposed change. Indeed, there is no independent evidence that the government of Eritrea has implemented any change in its human rights regime, whether with reference to the unending national service conscription or in any other area. Indeed, all it has done is to provide “hearsay promises about what it may do in the future” These “promises”, the group of scholars point out, are also “vigorously disputed in great depth and detail by the testimonies of refugees who have fled the country within the past twelve months.”

They also emphasize that the UN Human Rights Council’s official UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea continues to be refused entry into Eritrea to undertake a comprehensive and authoritative review of its human rights practices. They note that offering more funds to a government “with a lengthy and consistent

track record of egregious human rights violations will only exacerbate the refugee crisis,” adding that in these circumstances the EU proposals will do nothing to cut the numbers leaving Eritrea.

The scholars note that the UK Home Office reports claim that policy changes have been taking place in Eritrea. Although the authors of the reports visited Eritrea, their conclusions appear to be largely based on the highly controversial and largely discredited Danish Immigration Service report last year. Indeed, the UK's Home Office report on Eritrean Asylum-seekers makes 48 references to the Danish Report, but the group of scholars suggest, the UK Home Office report “conceals the serious flaws of the Danish Report and obscures the criticism the report has met. Its intent appears to be to mislead, rather than serve the truth.”

The Danish report has certainly been heavily criticized and the source of much controversy in Denmark. The major source of information quoted in the Danish report, Professor Dr Gaim Kibreab, publicly declared he had been misquoted and disassociated himself from the report, demanding his name should be removed. Two of the three officials concerned in the writing of the report subsequently resigned from the Danish Immigration Service after denouncing the report's methodology and conclusions. There have been accusations that the report was politically driven to limit acceptance of Eritrean asylum cases. While the report has not been officially withdrawn, the Danish Immigration Service subsequently announced that its conclusions will not be used to determine asylum case applications.

The group of scholars points out that over the last two decades, “the government in Asmara has become so repressive that thousands of Eritreans decided to flee in search of shelter abroad.” In June last year, the government's brutal treatment of its own people prompted the UN Human Rights Council to set up an International Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea.” This produced an interim report last month which said, *inter alia*: “Most Eritreans have no hope for their future: national service, whether in a military unit or in a civil assignment, is the only thing that from the age of seventeen they can expect to spend their life doing – paid between less than one and a maximum of two dollars a day.” The Commission of Inquiry said: “The Government has curtailed most freedoms, from movement to expression; from religion to association. It has created a condition in which individuals feel that they have hardly any choice with regard to the main decisions in their lives: where to live, what career to pursue, when to marry or who to worship.” The regime continues to subject the population to untold cruel and inhuman punishments, including “extra-judicial executions, enforced disappearances and incommunicado detentions aimed at silencing all perceived critics and teaching a lesson to them and others.” Similar assessments have been made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea, all Eritrean human rights organizations and international advocacy organizations.

The scholars say the EU's plans to offer new funding resources will allow the regime to continue to carry out its ruthless policies with impunity, using the pretext of “No peace, No war” with Ethiopia to perpetuate perennial National Service, which they describe as “a policy which in essence enslaves the youth while keeping them hostage” and as “enslaved hostages are bound to do” they will either leave or be targeted by the regime's shoot-to-kill policy. Those that ultimately end up in Europe are “only the survivors of a treacherous journey that claims the lives of thousands of men and women, children and the elderly,” in their attempts to cross the Sahara, the Sinai or the Mediterranean. There is certainly a need to address the refugee crisis urgently, but the scholars note that the Eritrean government “is singularly responsible for the mass immigration of the population from the country. When not brutalizing its own people, the regime is prone to wreak havoc elsewhere. Isolated from the international community and marginalized in the region and beyond, the Isaias regime has repeatedly drawn UN sanctions for playing a destabilizing role in the Horn of Africa.”

The group of scholars, therefore, suggests the EU should use its funds to provide food, shelter, counseling and transitional assistance to the refugees. A clear and unequivocal message should be sent to Asmara, declaring that the EU stands squarely behind the Eritrean people in their struggle to remove from power and bring to justice key members of the regime. They also urge that Eritrea should give full access to the UN Commission of Inquiry; that all governments, particularly in the EU, should observe the principle of non-refoulement and implement asylum procedures in line with UNHCR guidelines, refrain from discriminating against Eritrean refugees and continue to ensure that their protection remains based on international refugee law and fair domestic asylum policies and procedures; and that the European Commission delays its preparations for an aid package to the Eritrean government until the UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea has been given full and unfettered access to Eritrea and presented its conclusions. The EU, they emphasize,

must act in accordance with its own legal provisions identifying human rights as an essential element of EU development policy.

...and strong criticism of the new UK Home Office policy on Eritrean refugees

Professor Dr Gaim Kibreab, one of the group of scholars criticizing the EU proposals, also commented on the UK Home Office guideline reports on Eritrea this week. Professor Gaim, who has been studying the impact of Eritrea's national service on conscripts for some twenty years both in and out of Eritrea, noted that in the past the UK had provided refuge for Eritrean asylum-seekers because of the reports of the UNHCR and other reputable human rights organizations describing the indefinite Eritrean National Service as "persecution." National service, in effect, became a "modern form of slavery proscribed in international law and the inhumane and degrading treatments meted out to conscripts as punishment for overstaying permitted leave, disobeying commanders, attempting to escape from the national service, absconding to avoid conscription, answering back to commanders." Many conscripts sustained permanent injuries or died as a result of these punishments as "amply documented by reputable human rights organizations".

Professor Gaim notes that while the latest Home Office reports referred to such findings they apparently preferred to draw conclusions from last year's Danish Immigration Service report, totally ignoring the fact that the Danish report was deeply flawed and had been the subject to a series of very damaging criticisms. He said "the Home Office Team makes no mention of the criticisms or that the Danish Immigration Service has decided not to use the report's conclusions." He went on: "It is therefore alarming to learn that the UK Home Office has decided to change its policy on Eritrean asylum-seekers who flee from the indefinite Eritrean National Service, based on a report whose validity was rejected even by the people who collected the information in Eritrea." Professor Gaim also pointed out that the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in a report on "Eritrea, Country of Concern" issued in January, just two months before the Home Office report was made public, said "the Eritrean government made no visible progress on key human rights concerns ... continued to violate its international obligations and domestic law, including in the areas of arbitrary and inhumane detention, indefinite national service, and lack of religious freedom, freedom of the media and freedom of speech."

As far as can be judged from the Home Office reports, he said, "no new material which could justify a change of policy was collected by the Team during their visit to Eritrea except the questionable information provided by the President's advisor, Yemane Gebreab, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, regarding the duration of the Eritrean National Service," that it was now limited to 18 months. The Home Office reports said the authors were told by the Eritrean President's Adviser Yemane Gebreab, that "from November 2014 national service is reverting to a duration of 18 months. This will now all be based in military ... This has started with the 27th round and people have been informed we have had meetings with students and families at Sawa. We do not want to publicize this by a presidential announcement—this is not how we wish to do things."

Professor Gaim says categorically there no evidence whatsoever for this apart from this statement. The indefinite nature of the national service has not changed in practice or at a policy level. What the report calls "up-to-date information from inside Eritrea" is only drawn from the discredited report of the Danish Immigration Service. He went on: "information obtained from Eritrea, including from the Sawa military camp, indicate that no such information was disseminated to students or conscripts. Conscription is continuing as before." He also notes that in any case, there is nothing in the Home Office reports about the hundreds of thousands of others forced to join the national service before November 2014 when the 27th round took place. In other words, the vast majority of national service conscripts from the first 26 rounds will still remain under indefinite conscription.

Professor Gaim said indefinite national service and the associated severe punishment regime has been driving tens of thousands of Eritreans to flee in search of international protection, with the number arriving in EU member states increasing dramatically in recent months. He concluded that "It seems that the sole purpose of the Home Office Guidelines is to stem this flow, disregarding the consequences on those who desperately need protection against persecution, forced labor, accompanied with severe punishment regimes." He concludes that most of the Home Office recommendations are drawn "from a deeply flawed source that has been discredited by those who worked on it and by many who are familiar with the situation

in Eritrea” and adds that “it is disturbing that the UK Home Office is resorting to such unsafe practices that jeopardize the lives of many asylum seekers and the UK’s obligations to them under the refugee convention and EU and UN treaties.”

Last weekend, Italian navy and coastguard ships rescued some 1,500 refugees and asylum seekers from five boats in less than 24 hours. Three of the boats were in difficulties off the coast of Libya. More than 3,000 people died last year attempting to cross the sea from Libya in unseaworthy and over-crowded boats, many of them Eritreans. In the first two months of this year, arrivals were up 43% on the same period last year.

Concern growing over the delays in Somalia’s preparations for elections and Vision 2016

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Nicholas Kay last month welcomed the “firm commitments made by Somalia’s Federal and regional leaders to meet Vision 2016 deadlines”. Mr Kay emphasized yet again that these deadlines were necessary to complete the process of Somalia’s federal state formation. They include the review of the provisional constitution and its acceptance, as well as elections for a Federal President and Parliament, due in September 2016. His statement followed a series of meetings with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke and Parliamentary Speaker, Mohamed Osman Jawari, as well as with the President of Puntland, Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gaas in Garowe; the head of the Interim Juba Administration, Sheikh Ahmad Islam ‘Madobe’ in Kismayo; and the head of the Interim South West Administration, Sheikh Sharif Hassan Adan in Baidoa.

Mr Kay said he believed there was a strong understanding and consensus that, in the period before the beginning of Ramadan this year, several important milestones must be achieved. Among these were the appointment of the Commissioners of the National Independent Electoral Commission and the Commissioners for the Boundaries and Federation Commission. Both of these Commissions should be made operational. Inclusive regional assemblies must be created for the Interim Juba Administration and the Interim South West Administration. Interim administrations were also needed urgently for the proposed Central Regional State, and also for Middle Shabelle and Hiiraan. Mr Kay added that other priorities included agreement between the executive and parliament, and action on a legislative timetable. Mr Kay said his meetings had indicated a determination across the country to respect the deadline, but there is general agreement that much still needs to be done. The international community and Somalia’s partners feel a real need to try to push things along and in particular the efforts to complete state formation, finish the review of the federal constitution and carry out the essential preparatory work for the elections. The United Nations will be sending a technical mission to review progress towards elections shortly. A High-Level Partnership Forum will be held in June in Mogadishu to review the political and security progress being made under the New Deal Somali Compact. Both would like to see real progress.

There is certainly a lot to be done: completion of the Vision 2016 framework to conduct a constitutional review and implement it; completing the federal system, and preparing for National Elections by 2016; providing local government and security for local development, for private-sector growth, expanding industry and employment; and implementing a national poverty reduction strategy providing for access to health care, education and employment, as well as developing a public infrastructure. Mr Kay showed concern over the election in particular when he said firmly that it would not be acceptable if Somali leaders tried to extend their term of office: “There can be no term extension for Somali leaders after their term expires, in August, 2016; the international community won’t accept that.”

In fact, progress in many areas remains a long way behind schedule and a note of desperation is creeping into the repeated statements of the international community calling on the need for action. Mr Kay said at the beginning of the year that this must be “the Year of Delivery for the New Deal Somali Compact,” and that the necessary programs for peace, democracy and federalism must now be coordinated, funded, launched and delivered without further delay. Somalis will certainly judge the President and the Federal Government in September 2016 according to whether it has delivered, including whether it has improved government, security, justice, schools, healthcare or jobs. Priority areas include the passage of key legislation to establish the National Independent Electoral Commission, make continued progress toward the establishment and strengthening of interim regional administrations, to stabilize areas recovered from Al-Shabaab by the provision of local government and services, and the resumption of the review of the provisional constitution, “without further delay.” A joint statement released by the United Nations, the African Union, the European

Union, IGAD, the UK and the US reiterated their call for Somalia's leaders and institutions to work together to accelerate delivery of the milestones of the Federal Government's 'Vision 2016'. The statement, referring to problems between President and Prime Minister last year, said it was important to preserve the unity and stability of the Federal Government.

The obvious problems still include security, despite AMISOM and Somali National Army successes as the recent high-profile atrocities in both Kenya and in Mogadishu have shown. Al-Shabaab retains significant capacity to hit targets in Mogadishu and other liberated towns, as well as carry out raids against AMISOM and Somali National Army forces. For elections, the government will need to ensure that all areas are under its control. Somalia's Defense Minister, General Abdulkadir Sheikh Ali "Diini", has said his main priority will be rebuilding Somalia's army, a process he says that will include re-equipment and new barracks and facilities. Progress is being made, and payment for the troops and police has become more efficient - in 2014, 17,000 national army and police registered for a new biometrical payment system.

Equally, security depends upon effective governance and this underlines the need for delivery of governance by the Federal Government and the regional governments. It also needs the Federal Government to prioritize efforts to acquire legitimacy on a local level, to deal with local grievances, provide food, education, health, and build up a social consensus in the regions, to provide effective development in the 'liberated' areas along with improved security and governance and the rule of law. Last month, the Somali Development and Reconstruction Facility-Steering Committee met to review projects to be funded under the New Deal Compact. Present were federal ministers and representatives from Puntland, the Interim Jubba Administration and the Interim South West Administration, as well as officials from the Banadir Regional Administration and Galmudug as well as the UN, World Bank, UK, US, Sweden, Turkey, Norway and the EU. The meeting endorsed 11 priority programs ranging from support for the constitutional review, state formation and the electoral process, to programs to help build the rule of law, youth employment, ICT and institutional capacity.

Another major area of concern remains federalism. Before the elections in September 2016 the Federal Constitution must be revised and voted upon, and a functional, federal system of government with a properly worked out relationship between the Federal and state governments put in place. Critics claim that federalism is intended to break Somalia apart, but most Somalis appear to support the concept of a federal system of governance as the best way to achieve effective power-sharing mechanisms, though there is still uncertainty over details of implementation. President Mohamud said in April 2013 "I was against the Federal Constitution process in the past, but now I was elected with it". At the same time, there is a real need to define the relationship between the Presidency and the states and proto-states and clarify the amount of Federal Government influence and control. Concerns also remain over the division of resources and aid, as well as authority. These are issues in part for the constitutional review. They will also be raised at the Garowe conference due to take place this month with Federal Government and Parliament, the Interim Regional Administrations and Puntland all expected to participate. The conference is expected to endorse a detailed political timetable for necessary developments including the creation of a regional state for the Central region, whose organizational conference begins this weekend in Adaabo, as well as to consider the process for Hiiraan and Middle Shebelle, and the future status of Mogadishu and Benadir.

The other major area of concern is the election and delays in the timetable are beginning to cause real worry among Somalia's friends and partners. The purpose of the elections is to provide legitimacy for the Federal Government in Mogadishu and for that reason alone postponement should be out of the question. Certainly, the process needs the constitutional review; an independent electoral commission and relevant legislation; political parties; security for polling booths and for voting; a constitutional court; and public knowledge of policies. The delays have led to suggestions for postponement but in fact, although time is running out, it is still possible for an election to be held in September [2016], but it does need those involved to make a real effort. Legislation has to be implemented on political parties, citizenship, the electoral law and the constitutional court, as well as the constitutional review process completed.

Postponement would erode trust in government, and President Mohamud himself has said firmly: "There shall be no attempts for extension of mandate whatever the excuse. No one can bring to the nation the excuse that government assignments were never completed in time, prompting a call for extension of the leadership's term." He told an AU delegation this week that he has directed all government institutions to

implement and speed up the process of realizing Vision 2016. The President's critics, including the emerging political parties who include a number of prominent politicians and intellectuals, will welcome his statement. They have argued forcefully that any extension would be unconstitutional and would cause security and political problems. Somalia's partners agree.

Ethiopia's national election debates continue on TV and radio

The election campaign televised debates started on March 13. They have so far covered the Multi-Party System and Building Democracy; Federalism; Agricultural and Rural Policy; and Urban Development and Industrial Policy. There will be further debates on Good Governance and the Rule of Law; National Security; Foreign Policy; Infrastructure; and Education and Health. The debates have been a testimony to the upsurge of interest in competitive politics and have provided political parties with access to the democratic level playing field, to shape the outcome of the National Elections.

The parties participating in the discussion on Federalism were the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJP), the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), the All Ethiopian Unity Organization (AEUO), and the All Ethiopian National Movement (AENM).

Ato [Mr] Behailu Shimekit, representing UDJP, reiterating the centrality of the federal system, stressed the importance of equal and fair distribution of power at national, regional and local levels. The political architecture is needed, he said, to stress promotion of cooperation and mutual co-existence among the various ethnic groups and communities. Ato Behailu said the current system was effectively a single-party system significantly eroding the powers of regional states and it had therefore become a source of conflict and polarization rather than of cooperation. Ato Teshome Wolde-Hawariyat, (AENM) said the current federal system only attempted to address the issue of "the nations, nationalities and peoples" and it side-lined other outstanding problems. In fact, it had even failed to resolve the question of the nations, nationalities and peoples, merely perpetuating a system which had led to a single party's centralization of power under a guise of shared rule. He said it had also failed to display a reservoir of diverse development possibilities and democratic ideas, he said the AENM suggestions for a state structure would provide a true essence and the real principles of federalism. Ato Ermias Balkewu, representing EDP, said the current federal system, with the granting of an unconditional right to secession for every nation, nationality and people, had left the sovereignty of the country in question. The system was inimical to the unity of the country and threatened diversity and fragmentation. He said that the country's problem was not only a question of nations, nationalities and people, but the ruling party had left a myriad of questions unanswered in the areas of democratization, poverty, and good governance.

Ato Kassa Tekleberhan, Speaker of the House of Federation, representing the EPRDF, pointed out that the creation of the current federal system had in fact saved the country from fragmentation. Removing the negative images of indignity and famine, it had produced a resurgent Ethiopia, at peace with itself and with the outside world. It had enabled Ethiopia to see electrifying double-digit economic growth and made it one of the epicenters of international foreign direct investment and trade inflows in Africa. Ato Kassa said Ethiopia had succumbed to recurrent civil wars, famine, and migration as a result of failure of the management of diversity and the absence of democracy in the past. The overthrow of the Derg regime opened the way to institutionalize a federal system that embraced and celebrated "unity in diversity" and heralded a united Ethiopia on the basis of the free will of the peoples, based on equality. He said the federal system, nipping a rent-seeking political economy in the bud and drying up breeding grounds of extremism and terrorism, had laid the foundation for the Ethiopian Renaissance and turned Ethiopia into an oasis of sustainable peace and stability. Its developmental agenda, capitalizing on human labor and land, has removed socio-economic deficits and imbalances across the country. The Speaker said commendable progress had been made over the last 20 years and he questioned how a federal system built on equality and shared interest of the various nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia, could possibly be detrimental to the unity and sovereignty of the country.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), the All Ethiopian National Movement (AENM), the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Movement (EDUM), and the All Ethiopian Unity Organization (AEUO) took part in the debate on Urban Development and Industrial Policy. The opposition parties claimed the EPRDF's policies and strategies had made people in urban areas poorer,

escalated the unemployment rate, prevented people from owning land and housing, and in sum had failed to improve their human security. The Ministers of Urban Development, Housing and Construction, and of Industry, representing the EPRDF, on the contrary argued that implementation of urban and industry development policies had brought about remarkable improvements in development of micro-and small-scale enterprises, laying down a base for the manufacturing sector, as well as generating substantial employment. The country's industrial policies had meant the emergence of the structural transformation of the economy. The Minister of Industry emphasized that the Government regarded the private sector as a major engine of growth and pointed out **the private sector's participation in the industrial development stood at 70%, the Government's involvement was 20% and international investors no more than 10%**. He pointed out the country's sustainable economic growth was encouraging international investment and foreign capital inflow was increasing. The Government was engaged in development of major projects, including sugar plants, fertilizer factories, hydroelectric projects and railways to provide the base for the manufacturing sector.

The debate on Agricultural and Rural Policy brought together the EPRDF, the UDJP, the EDUM and the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (MEDREK). Ato Tefera Deribew, Minister of Agriculture, for the EPRDF, argued that Ethiopia's Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) policy has changed the development context. It had turned the agriculture sector into an engine of remarkable economic performance. Agriculture policies, coupled with increased investment in the agriculture sector, had made growth sustainable and equitable. He reiterated that the country had seen rapid reduction in rural poverty, significantly increased the productivity of smallholder farmers and the incomes of rural households, improved infrastructure development, and ensured food security. These results were attributable to improved technology and training for farmers. The right to ownership of land had also played a part in positively improving livelihoods in rural areas. Ato Tigistu Awolu, Chairperson of the UDJP, said that in fact the land tenure system of the country had stifled the rights of the peasant, undercut the incentive of farmers, and crippled agricultural productivity. He said his party remained committed to private and public as well as public-private (common property) ownership of land. This would enhance agricultural productivity and improve the lot of farmers. He added that any farmer should have the right to bequeath, sell, and exchange land and use any rural land for agricultural purposes. Ato Tilahun Endeshaw, (MEDREK), said land ownership should be assigned to the peasant rather than be provided for public ownership. He said the current land tenure system remained confusing as it left ownership of land with the state and people of Ethiopia.