

A Week in the Horn of Africa 11th March 2016

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News in Brief

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn presented his government's six-month performance report for members of the House of Peoples' Representatives today (March 10). The Prime Minister also responded to questions from MPs on current developments in the country. **(See article)**

Dr Tedros briefed Executive MBA Students from Watson School of Business, Pennsylvania University on the developments and democratization efforts ongoing in Ethiopia (March 10).

Dr Mulatu Teshome, the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, held talks with King Salman of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia at Al-Yamama Palace in Riyadh on March 9. The discussions focused on bilateral and regional matters of common interest.

A high-level Brazilian delegation, made a two-day official visit to Ethiopia this week (March 7-8). **(See article)**

The 4th World Coffee Conference was held in Addis Ababa this week (March 6-8) under the theme: "Nurturing coffee culture and diversity" at the Conference Hall of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). **(See article)**

A Panel Discussion under the theme: "Towards a Diverse and Sustainable Coffee Culture" was held on (March 7) following the official opening session of the 4th World Coffee Conference. **(See article)**

A two-day consultative forum aimed at appraising the achievements and shortcomings of the Ethiopian broadcast media, ensuring responsiveness, accountability and pluralism, and thereby promoting national consensus, opened on March 7 at the Hilton Addis. **(See article)**

Ambassador Tebeje Belay, the Director General for American Affairs at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a U.S. Delegation from Air War (March 10). He briefed the delegation on a number of issues, ranging from Ethio-U.S. relations to efforts for ensuring food security and economic growth.

The 5th Ethio-Canada bilateral consultation was successfully held in Ottawa, Canada (March 4-5). The consultation included strengthening political, economic and other bilateral relations.

Djibouti

The UK High Court (March 10) rejected accusations against a millionaire Djibouti businessman that the contract to renovate the country's high capacity Doraleh Container Terminal (DCT) by DP World had been subject to bribery. Mr Justice Flaux at London's High Court cleared Abdourahman Boreh of three charges of bribery and fraud and said none of the payments made to his company by DP World constituted a bribe.

Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh on (March 7) held talks in Djibouti with the new UN Special Envoy in Somalia, Michael Keating. The two sides discussed the elections set to be held in Somalia before the end of this year, and the formulation of new strategies to reinforce the efficiency of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) on the ground.

Eritrea

Following a discussion on the human rights situation in Eritrea during the European Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg over the week, the Socialists and Democrats Group (S&D) Members of the European Parliament expressed their concerns (March 10) about ongoing human-rights violations in the country.

The UK-based All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Eritrea was launched (March 9). The Group in a statement said the purpose of forming such a platform at Parliamentary level on Eritrea, within the UK House of Lords, is in a response to the lack of awareness and high-level debates on the worsening situation in the country.

Kenya

The construction of a 510-kilometer electricity transmission line connecting Kenya and Tanzania national grids is expected to begin in May. Kenya Electricity Transmission Company Acting CEO Fernandes Barasa (March 11) said, "The funding has already been secured and so actual construction should begin in May and is expected to be completed in 24 months."

Kenya and Japan on (March 9) signed a 46 billion yen (\$408 million) loan agreement to go towards building a 140 megawatt (MW) geothermal power plant that is expected to be operational within the next two years.

Somalia

Somalia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (March 11) signed an air transport deal. The two sides discussed ways and prospects of improving cooperation between the two countries in the field of air transport.

U.S. special operations forces and Somali troops (March 10) carried out another raid at an al-Shabab training camp in Somalia, killing 19 militants. This comes only days after U.S. airstrikes in Somalia killed more than 150 people identified as militants at an al-Shabab training camp.

At least one civilian was killed and two others injured in a hand bomb attack at a restaurant in a town in southern Somalia's Gedo region (March 11).

South Sudan

SPLM-IO has warned (March 10) that the disagreement between the government and the opposition over cantonment areas of troops in Equatorial and Bahr el Ghazal regions may "derail" the implementation of the peace agreement.

Presidential advisor for security affairs, Tut Gatluak, (March 10) has claimed that several splits within the leadership SPLM-IO were the cause for recent ceasefire violations in Nasir county of Latjor (Upper Nile) and Unity states.

Festus Mogae, Head of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) (March 9) has called on South Sudan's rival parties to undertake radical economic measures to reform the economy of the country instead of placing too many hopes on foreign intervention to alleviate suffering and the deteriorating economic situation in the country.

According to the secretary general of the SPLM-IO, Dhieu Mathok Diing Wol (March 7) a joint force from SPLM-IO may arrive in the South Sudanese capital, Juba, next week.

Sudan

Unidentified gunmen killed a South African soldier in an ambush on a patrol of the hybrid peacekeeping mission in North Darfur (UNAMID), said a joint statement released by the United Nations and African Union on (March 10).

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on (March 9) removed a private cement factory from a blacklist of Sudanese firms and individuals subjected to economic sanctions.

Prime Minister Hailemariam: “Ethiopia’s economy continues to be on a healthy course.”

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn presented his government's six-month performance report to the House of Peoples' Representatives on Thursday (March 10). The Prime Minister, in his report, said sectors which include construction, service and manufacturing have witnessed growth over the past six months, where investment has shown a threefold growth in comparative terms to the same period last fiscal year. The Premier however noted efforts would intensify to sustain the growth ahead in the remaining half of the budget year. Noting that the export sector has generated 5.3 billion USD, the Prime Minister, however said the performance on the part of the import-export sector was lower as viewed against the plan, to which he ascribed the impacts of the global financial crisis and the limitations in the country's manufacturing sector.

He explained that inflation over the past six months had remained at 10 percent on average, which is the lowest over 14 months. According to the Prime Minister, the government managed to collect 65 billion birr in taxes, a 10.7 percent rise compared to the previous fiscal year. While

on the import side, Prime Minister Hailemariam noted that the country had imported 8.3 billion US dollar worth of goods, the gap between import and export trade has widened. The government, with a view to easing forex crunch, had to resort to utilizing its deposits and the money from transfers and foreign direct investment. The target to raise the gross domestic savings to more than 22 percent, the Prime Minister said, is set to be achieved, following the expansion of banking services and improvements in savings due for the housing program and the sale of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam bonds. Overall, he said, the country's economy has continued to be on a healthy course.

The Premier, however, said the El Nino-induced drought is likely to affect the country's agricultural productivity. In all these, the Prime Minister underlined that his government is working towards minimizing the impact and compensating the loss of crops through a number of interventions, including irrigation and natural resource conservation works, distribution of improved seeds and fertilizers, along with major works of watershed management.

Mindful of the necessity of addressing unemployment, the Premier said the government would further strengthen ongoing efforts for expanding small-scale and medium-level industries in urban areas. PM Hailemariam said the government has been engaged in the construction of industrial parks across the country in a bid to boost the export sector and enhance foreign currency earnings. In this regard, he said significant progress has been achieved, noting that the Bole Lemi Phase I project has already gone operational, and so had the Hawassa industrial park. He also noted that the construction of agro-processing industrial parks will soon be launched in four regional states.

He said negotiation on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has been progressing well and the studies on the impact of the dam, as per the recommendations of the IPOE, are due to start soon. He added that the Gibe-III hydropower plant has begun generating 540 MW, projected to operate with its full capacity in due course. He said, the Gibe-III hydropower plant was compensating the current power shortage, induced by the recent drought, which left some of the country's major dams generating only 10 per cent of their capacity. He also said negotiations were progressing with investors who are beginning to engage in geothermal, wind and solar energy development.

The Prime Minister also responded to questions raised by members of the House of Peoples' Representatives on current developments in the country, including government responses to the El-Nino-induced drought and the recent unrest in some parts of the country, among others. He said the government has so far allocated 8 billion Ethiopian Birr to efforts to mitigate the impact of the El Nino phenomenon. On the ongoing efforts of addressing issues of good governance, he underscored that his government is committed to ensuring transparency and accountability. He added that the response from the international community has been very slow. Asked whether there was any policy change with regards to dealing with Eritrea, Prime Minister Hailemariam said his country has no new policy towards Eritrea, while noting that Ethiopia will keep on working to restore the people-to-people relations between the two countries. The Prime Minister, however, said his country upholds the right to respond to any form of attack from the regime in Asmara in a manner that conforms to international law.

The 4th World Coffee Conference in Addis Ababa

The 4th World Coffee Conference was held in Addis Ababa this week (March 6-8) under the theme: "Nurturing Coffee Culture and Diversity." The conference was attended by more than

1,500 participants from over 80 countries. Participants represented Governments, the African Development Bank, the International Coffee Organization, the African Union, the United Nations, Global Coffee Council, Inter-African Coffee Organization and the EU constituted the global gathering.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn, in his keynote address, said, "Welcome to Ethiopia, the birthplace of coffee," and underlined that the conference had much significance for Ethiopia and other attending coffee producers and consuming countries. The Prime Minister said, "Coffee is part and parcel of Ethiopia's social fabric," adding that the coffee culture is deeply embedded in the identity of the Ethiopian People. The Premier said coffee, in many aspects, reflects "our tradition and culture" and its economic value to small-holder farmers and coffee producing countries is of great significance for development.

Indeed, coffee is an integral part of the country's socio-economic fabric; coffee and the coffee culture play such a heavily ingrained role in the Ethiopian tradition that it appears in many expressions dealing with life, food and interpersonal relationships. Ethiopian homage to coffee is often uniquely ceremonial. An invitation to attend a coffee ceremony is considered a mark of amity and respect and is an excellent display of Ethiopian hospitality. In fact, the Ethiopian coffee ceremony takes us back to a time when value was given to conversation and human relations.

Ethiopia is the home and cradle of biodiversity of Arabica coffee seeds, identified by their distinct and characteristic flavor, aroma or taste. More genetically diverse strains of coffee Arabica exist in Ethiopia than anywhere else in the world; a country which botanists and scientists believe was the centre of origin, diversification and dissemination of the coffee plant. Ethiopia is the world's fifth largest coffee producer and Africa's top producer and exporter. Ethiopia, with a per capita consumption of 2.40kg, leads the African continent in domestic consumption and up to 20% of the population, one way or the other, depends on coffee production and trading for a living.

Coffee primarily cultivated by small-scale farmers is often exposed to price fluctuations and environmental impacts. Emphasizing the need to make sure that small-holder farmers benefit much from the multi-billion industry, the PM stressed that the conference remained vital in exploring ways to ensure that growers receive a fair financial return so that their hard work amounts to a decent and stable life. The Prime Minister underlined the need to address economic inequality as the volatility of the global coffee price is a major challenge and the scenario is worse for small coffee growers whose profit margins are already very thin. He also underlined the need to ensure that women are better advantaged in the coffee industry.

The Prime Minister said the poverty of small coffee growers is also exacerbated by the effects of climate change as rising temperatures, declining rainfall, resilient pests and plant disease have already begun their toll on the coffee industry. Climate change is a serious threat to the industry, and its impact is most felt by small-holder growers, farmers and their families. Ethiopia, the Prime Minister said, had embarked on building a climate resilient green economy, which he said was initiated in 2011. He said, "We needed this strategy, since Ethiopia is working relentlessly to make sure coffee, which amounts to 24% of our exports, is well protected from the effects of climate change." Ethiopia has also taken the initiative to encourage major greenhouse emitters to commit to responsible action. The task of mitigating the challenge, he said, should not be left to governments, adding that all other stakeholders in the value chain need to support the global efforts of protecting coffee growers from the effects of

climate change. In this regard, he noted the the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals and the recent Paris Climate Deal, "to which we all subscribe", were key milestones to addressing the challenges in the industry.

Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Erastus Mwencha, saluted the Government and people of Ethiopia for hosting such a global event and noted that coffee is one of the most important industrial commodities on the African continent, contributing a substantial share of the economy, noting that today Africa makes up 12% of global coffee production. Reflecting on the trends, opportunities and challenges in the industry, he stressed the pressing need to improve the quality of coffee produced across the continent and improve the supply chain by value addition. He pointed out that capacity and technology limitations and poor infrastructure across the continent were the key drawbacks which reduce earnings in the industry. As the effect of climate change is hugely impacting the coffee industry, Mwencha called for concerted global action. On the way forward, he underscored the need for establishing partnership and cooperation to maximize productivity and ensure that farmers and growers benefit most. On such a score, the Deputy Chairperson said other African countries should take lessons from Ethiopia and Uganda which, he said, were able to boost coffee productivity and support their farmers and coffee growers.

Executive Director of the International Coffee Organization (ICO), Mr Oliver Silva, also presented the global, African and Ethiopian outlook for the coffee market. He said the conference would help connect actors in the coffee sectors and attain targets set at a global level. ICO's current estimate for global coffee production in crop year 2015/16 stood at 143.4 million 60-kg bags, 1.4% higher than the previous year, and the lower production in Brazil, where 43.2 million bags were compensated by increased productions in Vietnam, Colombia and Indonesia, among others. In Africa, production is rising by 6.1%, reaching 17.1 million bags, and representing nearly 12% of the world's total. Mr Tefera Deribew, Ethiopia's Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources, said Ethiopia has attached much weight to the development of the coffee sector, explaining that the government and coffee growers have long been exerting concerted efforts to improve productivity and maximize the quality of coffee. He noted the prospect of maintaining the high quality of Ethiopia's organic coffee is in line with the country's climate resilient strategy.

...and series of panel discussions at the 4th World Coffee Conference

A series of panel discussions were held at the 4th World Coffee Conference. One such conference was held under the theme: "Towards a Diverse and Sustainable Coffee Culture." Mr Fred Kawuma, Secretary General, Inter Africa Coffee organization, stressed the need for public-private partnership to make sure that the coffee industry remains more sustainable, adding that encouraging domestic consumption was needed to create a more diverse coffee culture. Mr Roberto Velez, CEO of the National Federation of Coffee Growers, explained the important role coffee plays in Columbian society and the role of coffee growers in the peace building process, adding that more than 20 million Colombians in 15 states depend on the coffee industry. On globalizing the coffee culture, Ms Jingya Fu, Secretary, General, Chinese coffee Association, talked about making coffee more affordable in consumer countries which will lead to a more diverse coffee culture. Noting that the Chinese tea ceremony helped to promote the image of China, she pointed out the need to promote a coffee ceremony across different cultures. Mr Carlos Brando, Independent Coffee Expert from Brazil, advised more development work which will bring sustainability, adding that small-holder farmers and growers should be concerned about sustainability as much as profitability and branding. Mr

Abdullah Bagersh, Board Chairman, African Fine Coffee Association (AFCA), explained the diverse coffee culture in Ethiopia and the growing Coffee Consumption which, he said, was creating a new urban Coffee Culture.

A panel on Trends in Specialty Coffee was moderated by Dr Abera Tola, Regional Director, Synergos, where participants underscored the need for adopting specialty coffee characteristics. Mr Ric Rhinehart, CEO, Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), noted the importance of ensuring equitable value chain in the specialty segment of the coffee industry. He pointed out that specialty coffee used to be defined by the taste of the consumer rather than the totality of all the process. Mr Samuel Kamau, Executive Director, AFCA, noted that defining the characteristics of the African Coffee often used to be based on the demand from the consumers afar. He emphasized Africa has comparative advantage in specialty coffee, adding that strengthening the relationship between growers and retailers was needed for the specialty coffee market.

Mr. Mick Wheeler, Former Executive Director, Specialty Coffee Association of Europe (SCAE), gave detailed accounts on the current trends, explaining how specialty coffee helped gain consumers lost in the 80's. He added consumption in some countries of Europe is linked to affordability than specialty as compared to the trend in the U.S. The U.S. specialty coffee he said had significant influence in the coffee industry and helped improve the quality coffee use and production. The panelists also dealt at length on the advantages of specialty segment to coffee growers and producers.

A brief Panel discussion on the effect of climate change on the coffee industry was also held on the final day of the conference, under which participants shared views on the effect of climate change on coffee production and alternatives of addressing the challenge in a sustainable way. The panelists raised the need for research on coffee production and the importance of changing coping strategies, and updating methods of production and improving technologies to strengthen resilience. The role of innovation and the need for viable public policy was also highlighted for enhanced coffee production and improved quality. Ensuring coffee varieties was needed to cope with the effects of climate change.

A panel discussion was also held on promoting gender equality, with a view to maximizing sustainability in the coffee sector. Mrs Roman Tesfaye, Ethiopia's First Lady, said coffee has been an integral part of societies around the world. She added that coffee is central to the socio-cultural makeup has long involved women, with no sound economic benefits. In this regard the First Lady called for the adoption of sustainable and inclusive intervention.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil visits Ethiopia

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, H.E Ambassador Mauro Vieira, at the head of a high-level Brazilian delegation, made a two-day official visit to Ethiopia this week (March 7-8). The delegation held discussions with Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn on ways to promote economic ties. The Premier underlined the need to strengthen the relationship between the two nations. He emphasized that cooperation in agriculture research fields, which had already started, was a priority. He also said Ethiopia's investment environment was conducive for Brazilian investors. The delegation agreed to enhance economic ties in all fields. The Brazilian Foreign Minister mentioned that the Brazilian Aircraft Company, construction companies and others are keen to invest in Ethiopia.

The delegation also held bilateral meetings with Dr Tedros Adhanom. During the discussions, Dr Tedros explained the historic relationship between Ethiopia and Brazil and underlined that this relationship would be strengthened in the future. He added that the two countries should cooperate more on areas of trade and investment, particularly in the fields of aircraft and pharmaceutical cooperation and automobile manufacturing.

Dr Tedros also briefed the delegation on Ethiopia's efforts in the region and its role as Chair of IGAD in the process of promoting regional peace and stability. He mainly emphasized Ethiopia's peace-keeping role in Somalia and South Sudan. The Minister also spoke about Ethiopia's efforts to mitigate the refugee crises which, he said, was a global concern, noting that his country is currently hosting over 800,000 refugees from neighboring countries, the largest number in Africa. Expressing the country's long-standing commitment and active role in the UN and African peace keeping operations, Dr Tedros also related Ethiopia's bid for non-permanent membership at the UNSC and called for Brazil's endorsement.

Ambassador Mauro Vieira thanked the Minister for his welcome and stated that both countries have significant roles to play in their respective regions. Ambassador Vieira said the two countries should continue working on areas of trade and investment, noting that the Ethio-Brazil business seminar should be seen as the first step towards a higher level of business and investment partnership. He further commended Ethiopia's immense role in the peace-keeping process and its peace and development efforts in the region, and said Brazil would endorse Ethiopia's bid for non-permanent membership at the UNSC. The two sides also signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote trade and investment, whose implementation, it is hoped, will strengthen the bilateral business relations.

An Ethio-Brazil Business Meeting was also held on Tuesday (March 8) at the Sheraton Hotel in Addis Ababa. The event was attended by Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Tedros Adhanom, and his Brazilian counterpart, Ambassador Viera Mauro, and members of the business community drawn from the two countries. Dr Tedros, in his opening remarks, stated "I believe that strengthening the relations of the business communities of the two countries will serve as a strong foundation for the sustained relations of the two countries and organizing a business seminar like this will play a crucial role and I hope it will continue in the future." Dr Tedros said the visit of the Brazilian delegation provided an opportunity to scale up and re-energize the longstanding relationship between "our governments and the peoples of the two countries." He further said the Ethio-Brazil Business Meeting offers the opportunity for Brazilian companies to invest in Ethiopia. He also noted the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for the promotion of trade and investment between the two countries and its implementation will create a good opportunity to further strengthen the business relations.

The Foreign Minister of Brazil, Ambassador Mauro Viera, pointed out that the two countries should increase their economic ties and continue working on areas of trade and investment. He emphasized that the Ethio-Brazil Business Meeting is the first step towards achieving a higher level of business and investment partnership between the two countries. Taking note of the fact that Brazil is among the top ten economies in the world and one of the players in the BRICS, Dr Arkebe Oqubay, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister with a ministerial portfolio, presented some key points on why Brazilian companies should invest in Ethiopia. He explained how Ethiopia has ushered in a new democratic path since 1991 and how significant changes have been witnessed in the last two decades. He noted that life expectancy has increased from 45 to 64 and that the poverty rate declined from 54% in 1991 to 22% in 2015.

Emphasizing that his country's 10-year plan focused on making Ethiopia the leading manufacturing hub in Africa, Dr Arkebe highlighted the country's investment potentials, Ethiopia's large population size, the country's focus on infrastructure and energy, the huge workforce and human resource development in the country, among other things. He said the country has been an ideal place for labor intensive industries. With the highest federal budget being allocated to the infrastructure sector, he also highlighted that investing in this area is beneficial for investors. He described how the country has been working on human resource development, with over 1,300 training schools for 1,000,000 trainees and more than 40 universities.

Dr Arkebe also encouraged Brazilian investors to focus on the manufacturing sector, aircraft, vehicles and machinery and the leather production industry and livestock sectors. Dr Arkebe assured investors that Ethiopia is both politically and economically stable. Noting that the diplomatic ties between the two countries began way back in 1960, he recalled the signing of the MOU on promotion of trade and investment and the avoidance of double taxation agreement that had been in force. Dr Arkebe noted that it was time to scale up the economic ties between the two countries. The Ethio-Brazil Business Meeting also included a couple more presentation sessions from the Department of Trade Promotion and Investment of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by Minister Rodrigo de Azerdo Santos and members of the Ethiopian and Brazilian business communities.

A Consultative Forum aimed at enhancing the role of Ethiopia's broadcast media

A two-day consultative forum aimed at enhancing the role of the Broadcast Media in Ethiopia was held this week (March 7-8) at Hilton Hotels in Addis Ababa, under the theme: "Broadcast media, rule of law and national consensus." Co-organized by the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority and Government Communication Affairs Office, the forum brought together policy makers, representatives of government and private broadcasters, media experts, journalists and other stakeholders.

Opening the forum, Deputy Prime Minister Ato Demeke Mekonnen emphasized that the broadcast media have got enormous potential which usually influences public opinion. Accordingly, it remained imperative that the broadcast media should abide by the rule of law and work towards promoting national consensus in the country. He noted that media makes up a considerable share in the efforts of achieving the country's rapid economic growth. In this regard, the Deputy Prime Minister commended both the government and private media for the role they had played in the process of democratization for over two decades. The Deputy Prime Minister, however, said media should continue their efforts in building democracy, ensuring good governance and forging economic development which, he said, are the primary concerns of the peoples of Ethiopia. He also called for both the government and private media to uphold the commitment and will to accommodate national agendas in a bid to promote national consensus and work towards the building up of one political and economic community. To this effect, the Deputy Prime Minister said the Government of Ethiopia has been working towards establishing a national steering committee with a view to embarking on successful digital transformation. He added that the government of Ethiopia has also been engaged in the process of designing appropriate and workable legal and regulatory frameworks which, it is hoped, will lay the enabling platform for the conduct of credible and responsible media broadcasting.

Mr Zerai Asgedom, General Manager of the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority, also underlined that the consultative forum aims to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the broadcast media

and spot the way forward. He said the forum was targeted at reviewing and evaluating the achievements and shortcomings of the Ethiopian broadcast media, and thereby enhancing its role in the efforts of maximizing responsiveness and accountability, and promoting pluralism, and building national consensus in the country.

The consultative forum included a series of panel discussions, wherein stakeholders in the country's broadcast media were able to explore the strengths, challenges, opportunities and prospects of the industry. Key issues included "agenda setting," "freedom of the media vis-a-vis observing the rule of law and creating the culture of a responsible media, and ultimately working towards the promotion of national consensus. Indeed, media provides the means by which people participate in their country's socio-economic and political developments. Media thus has the potential to foster a civic forum or a public sphere, a network for communicating information and points of view in which matters of public concern can be explored openly and rigorously.

Ethiopian Tourism widely promoted at the ITB 2016

Ethiopian Minister of Tourism and Culture H.E, Engineer Aisha Mohammed, opened the Ethiopian Pavilion [in Berlin] at the ITB 2016 (March 9). The Exhibition will stay until March 13. Ethiopian Tourism Organization, Ethiopian Airlines and 24 Tour Operators participated, to showcase the huge potential of Ethiopia's tourism to more than 50,000 private visitors and more than 120,000 trade visitors. Around 185 countries and more than ten thousand exhibitors participated in the show.

Minister Aisha, during the opening hour, visited the Ethiopian exhibitors' stand together with Mrs Fetiha Yusuf Mammed, Chairperson of the Culture, Tourism and Mass Media Standing Committee at the House of Peoples Representatives, Ethiopian Ambassador Kuma Demeksa, Ato [Mr] Solomon Tadesse, Director of Ethiopian Tourism Organizatio, and embassy staff. She also met Mrs Iris Gleicke, Parliamentary Secretary of State at the German Federal Ministry of Economy and Energy, and discussed the future relationship of their tourism sectors.

Minister of Culture and Tourism, Engineer Aisha Mohammed, gave a press conference (March 10) to the German media on Ethiopia's tourism potential, the new tourism brand and the future strategies designed to increase tourism flow to Ethiopia.

The Minister highlighted the fact that Ethiopia is the origin of human beings, the home of Lucy, the 3.2 million year-old mother of human kind. She said, Ethiopia is "the root where the human race originated and spread to every corner of the globe."

As Ethiopia is a very ancient country, it has a robust history of art and culture, with ancient cave paintings and tools; with state-of-the-art buildings, rock-hewn churches and obelisks; and with tolerance and coexistence between indigenous African beliefs and the three major Abrahamic religions, she said. She also stressed the fact that Ethiopia is home to more than 70 nations and nationalities that have their own distinct language, culture and art, with a combination of natural, historical, archaeological and cultural attractions.

"These all give Ethiopian tourism uniqueness and diversity and made it the most special tourism destination in Africa," the Minister noted.

According to the Minister, this year's Tourism Show was organized at the right time, when Ethiopia has finalized the Second Growth and Transformation Plan, in that Culture and Tourism would play a prominent role in achieving its Renaissance.

Ethiopia's vision in the next Growth and Transformation Plan (2016-2020) is to make the country one of the top five tourist destinations in Africa through developing its attractions and promoting culture and tourism products. The Minister also highlighted the five main focus areas which were identified: natural and cultural heritage conservation and development; culture and tourism products marketing; service excellence; improved culture and tourism research and information systems; and enhanced cooperation and collaboration with development partners.

At a press conference, the new tourism brand name "Land of Origins" was unveiled. The Minister said the logo cultivates the identity of Ethiopia in its most natural form as the origin of humanity, the source of the Nile, the origin of coffee, as well as how Ethiopia and its culture are original in many ways.

According to the Ethiopian Tourism Organization, the inspiration behind the new logo typeface comes from Ethiopia's own Ge'ez alphabet, as it reflects the originality of the cultivation of language in Ethiopia. In the icon, the blue circle represents the blue skies and pleasant weather that can be enjoyed in Ethiopia most of the year. The tree – depicting the colors of the national flag – is a symbol of growth rooted in our origins: our people, our history, and our land.

The Minister noted that the first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I), which had spanned 2011-2015, gave the country a very focused but a very determined view of where it should be over the next five, ten, fifteen years. According to her, GTP I had created an environment that set a faster growth pace and showed that the country can achieve big. Noting that Ethiopia became one of the fastest-growing non-oil economies, and was among the ten fastest in the world, the Minister emphasized it has, in many dimensions, achieved huge results of halving poverty level; of reducing under-five mortality rate; of achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals ended in 2015 and is on the right track to becoming a lower middle income country by 2025.

When asked what strategies Ethiopia has, other than the new brand, that enables the country to increase the number of tourist flows, the Minister highlighted Ethiopia's vision to place itself among the top five tourism destinations in Africa by 2020. Home to uniquely diverse tourism potentials in the world, and among the most highly recommended countries yet "overlooked and under-visited," the Ministry of Culture and Tourism designed clear policy and strategy to achieve this vision, she said. She added that the Ministry identified five intervention areas: natural and cultural heritage conservation and development; culture and tourism products marketing; service excellence; improve culture and tourism research and information systems; and enhance cooperation and collaboration with development partners.

In order to successfully implement these strategies and achieve "our goal," institutional reorganizations were made, such as the establishment of the Ethiopian Tourism Organization, focusing mainly on destination marketing and promotion as well as destination development in terms of service, quality and access, she said. The Ethiopia Tourism Transformation Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, is another establishment set to enhance the transformation endeavor, the Minister noted, and explained its mission as: providing leadership and setting directions for the country's tourist destinations development and marketing initiatives, giving

decisions to remove impediments as well as dealing with challenges to the development of the industry.

The Minister was also asked why she believed people should visit Ethiopia. In her response, she said Ethiopia is the only country that a human being can proudly say "it is my origin." That is why CNN once said it is a "place to see before you die," she noted, and made a call for everyone to visit Ethiopia, the "land of origin."

On the economic role tourism plays and of the vision for the next five years, she said, its economic role is growing and is contributing to the overall development in the country. According to her, the sector generated \$2.9 billion in 2015 and created about 700,000 jobs. With its vision of becoming one of the five top destinations in Africa, the country aims to triple the number of foreign visitors and increase it by more than 2.02 million by 2020. With the ambitious plan designed and with the government's commitment, Ethiopia's tourism will witness its golden age in the next five to ten years, she emphasized.

As Germany and Ethiopia have enjoyed close relations for more than 100 years, the Minister was asked what was required to motivate the young generation of the two nations. She recognized the people-to-people relationship between Ethiopia and Germany is not as strong as the long close ties of the two governments. It is indeed one of the areas the two governments should look into, she noted. "Globalization, especially Information Communication Technology, gives us the best opportunity to engage the younger generation, encouraging them to know and share what the two countries have in common. We have to utilize this opportunity, utilize the technology, feed in as much diverse information about the two countries and enable this part of the society to communicate with each other," she said. Also, "we have to enhance other means such as cultural and education exchange programs, music and cultural performance programs, exhibitions and other soft areas of engagement, in order for the public to know each other better apart from the formal government-to-government relations," she emphasized.