

A WEEK IN THE HORN

13th January 2017

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News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

The 12th AU-EU Human Rights Dialogue concluded on Tuesday (January 10) in Brussels, Belgium. AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Dr Aisha L. Abdullahi led the AU Delegation. **(See article)**

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn attended the inaugural ceremony of President Nana Akufo-Addo, held at Independence Square in Ghana's capital, Accra, on Saturday January 7. While there, Prime Minister Hailemariam also met and held talks with the President of the Council of Algeria, Abdelkader Besalah. **(See article)**

Prime Minister Hailemariam attended the formal inauguration of the Djiboutian section of the Ethio-Djibouti railway with President Ismail Omar Guelleh this week at the ceremony at the Nagad Railway Station in Djibouti. **(See article)**

Prime Minister Hailemariam answered questions from the local press on Monday this week (January 9) on the government's "deep reform", the launch of the "Democratic Centers", the establishment of the new Federal Police Investigation Office and the fight against corruption and rent seekers within the government, the impact of the State of Emergency on the economy, as well as Ethiopia's relations with Egypt and Eritrea. **(See article)**

Prime Minister Hailemariam also responded to parliamentary questions on Thursday this week (January 12) on current socio-economic and political issues. **(See article)**

Dr Workneh Gebeyehu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, addressed the Ministerial-level Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council on "Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace" on Tuesday this week (January 10), in New York. The meeting, chaired by Sweden, (President of the Security Council for January), was attended by the new United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Antonio Guterres, foreign ministers, state ministers of foreign affairs and permanent representatives of members of the UNSC. **(See article)**

Ahmed Shide, Minister of Transport and Dr Girma Amante, Minister of Public Enterprises, led a delegation to Djibouti this week, looking at the Multi-purpose Port Construction, the Ethiopian commercial ship Gibe and its crew, as well as the Port of Tadjura and the Tadjura- Balheo-Alidar Road currently under construction.

The Chinese firm, Poly-GCL, began drilling the 6th petroleum and natural gas well at the Hilal-7 gas field in the Somali Regional State this week. The Minister of Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Motuma Mekassa, who was present on the occasion, said that Ethiopia would begin extracting natural gas after three years. He noted that Hilal-7 was special as it involved exploration of both petroleum and natural gas.

Djibouti

Djibouti's Minister of Labour and Administrative Reform, Hassan Idriss Samrieh, has been on a visit to Qatar to discuss ways to improve trade ties, particularly investment opportunities in Djibouti ports. Meeting the Qatar Chamber of Commerce, the Minister invited Qatari businessmen also to explore other investment opportunities available. Djibouti offered plenty of incentives and was a gateway to African markets.

Eritrea

President Isaias met and held talks with Dr Amina Mohamed, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for the Foreign Minister and a candidate for the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, on Tuesday (January 10). They discussed bilateral relations and the President underlined the need for revitalization of the AU.

UNICEF published a report this week, "Eritrea: Humanitarian Action for Children", which said since 2015 Eritrea had experienced serious El Niño drought conditions which had undermined household food and livelihood security, particularly for women and children, and contributed to a cholera outbreak across three of the country's regions. The report concludes that half of all children in Eritrea are stunted, and vulnerable to malnutrition and disease outbreaks. **(See article)**

Somalia

Professor Mohamed Sheikh Osman 'Jawari' was re-elected as the Speaker of the new Lower House of the Somali Parliament, the House of the People, on Wednesday (January 11). He obtained 141 votes to defeat former state minister Abdirashid Mohamed Hidig (89) in the first round of voting. The two Deputy Speakers were chosen the next day. **(See article)**

The UNHCR's Special Envoy to the Somali refugee situation, Mohamed Abdi Affey, said this week in Geneva that Somali refugees, displaced from their homes for decades, are becoming despondent as they continue to be unable to return home. The UNHCR also fears donor support is growing fatigued. **(See article)**

Somali-born Canadian, Ahmed Hussen, has been sworn in as Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship in the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Mr. Hussen became Canada's first Somali-born MP only two years ago. He previously worked as a lawyer.

The US Department of State issued a renewed travel advisory for Somalia on Wednesday (January 11) this week, citing al-Shabaab attacks on government facilities and commercial establishments. It said there had been 14 documented attacks directed at hotels, restaurants, and the international airport in Mogadishu last year. The advice repeats the Federal Aviation Administration ban on all US airlines flying over Somali airspace and advises U.S. citizens to avoid sailing near the coast of Somalia. The warning covers all parts of Somalia and Somaliland.

The Puntland Government has displayed a huge cache of weapons and bomb-making materials, seized from Islamic State fighters after government forces recaptured Qandala last month. Puntland President Abdiwali Mohamed Ali "Gaas" visited the port last week and urged the community to collaborate with the military forces to ensure security. Some ISIS fighters are reported to have fled to nearby mountain areas following their defeat.

The Galmudug Parliament this week delivered a no confidence vote to oust President Abdikarim Guled, citing "incompetent leadership". The President, who returned to Adabo on Wednesday (January 11), said the (vote

was) illegal. A day earlier he had declared a State of Emergency. Federal President Mohamud issued a warning against potential unrest and called on regional lawmakers to respect the current situation of the region.

Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a, which refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Interim Galmudug Administration, and runs its own administration controlling Dhusa Mareeb, the capital of Galmudug, this week announced it had formed its own 65-member regional parliament.

South Sudan

President Salva Kiir, leading a high-level delegation, left for the Egyptian capital, Cairo, for a two-day visit to Egypt at the invitation of Egypt's President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi on Monday (January 9). A Presidential spokesman told reporters the two leaders and their cabinet ministers would hold discussions on bilateral ties. His visit follows a recent visit last month by President El-Sisi to Uganda and by President Museveni to Juba.

Sudan

The Belarusian-Sudan Joint Ministerial Committee announced this week that that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko would visit Khartoum on Monday next week (January 16) at the invitation of President Al-Bashir. Sudan's Oil Minister and head of the joint committee, Mohamed Awad Zaid, said President Lukashenko would be accompanied by a senior economic delegation and the visit aimed to promote bilateral cooperation between the two countries. The two countries signed a number of MoUs in 2015 covering higher education, scientific research, pharmaceuticals, medical training, industrial cooperation and auto imports. They also signed a military cooperation protocol covering training, exchange of experiences, and military science in 2006.

Prime Minister Hailemariam emphasizes the importance of "deep reform"

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn met with the local press on Monday this week (January 9) speaking and answering questions about the government's "deep reform", the launch of the "Democratic Centers", the establishment of the new Federal Police Investigation Office and the fight against corruption and rent seekers within the government, the impact of the State of Emergency on the economy, as well as Ethiopia's relations with Egypt and Eritrea.

Speaking on the "deep reform" the Federal Government is currently undertaking, Prime Minister Hailemariam noted this was fashioned on the basis of the traditions of both the Government and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front Party for self-criticism and the ability to respond to the necessity for change. He underlined that abuse of government position and power through theft and corruption was at the forefront of the issues tabled for reform. He stressed that any leaders singled out as corrupt by the public would face tough investigation and the Government would take all necessary measures if the allegations were supported by evidence. He emphasized the need to facilitate the options for the public to fight what he called "ever-growing and muddling corruption", and reiterated the importance of the launch of "Democratic Centers", as well as the importance of transparency over the wealth of government officials. He also noted the need to ensure the revitalization of the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission. He repeated his call for active public participation to ensure that the ongoing "deep reform" process would be properly and fully effective.

The Prime Minister has also announced the establishment of a new office responsible for investigating special corruption cases. This investigation office, which is operating under the Federal Police Commission, has the mandate to investigate individuals and organizations suspected of engaging in grand corruption cases. The Prime Minister noted this Investigation Office had already established information technology mechanisms that will allow participation of in whistle blowing and provide information in tipping off investigators about possible corruption. He pointed out that the guiding principle behind the establishment of the Investigation Office was to root out corruption while also deepening transparency throughout the government bureaucracy while conducting public business.

Referring to the overall effect of the State of Emergency, declared three months ago, on the country's economic performance, the Prime Minister said this had been minimal, amounting essentially to zero. The harvest

expected from the main *meher* crop season is showing 12% growth in comparison to the previous year's gross agro-production. This would, in fact, be a record increase. The economy is, of course, as he pointed out, dominated by the agriculture and services sectors, with each accounting for about 45% of gross domestic product leaving only about 10% for industry, of which manufacturing accounts for about 6-7%. Equally, with regard to the industrial sector, there was no decline of productivity to be seen. Indeed, the Prime Minister added, some industries had even registered a higher productivity rate in comparison with previous years. New foreign as well as local investors were joining the industrial sector this year. In addition, the twenty-six factories and flower farms that had been damaged were already operational again following government's efforts over the past two months. The unrest in some parts of Amhara and Oromia Regional States did cause damage that amounted to about USD 20 million. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister said, although deeply regrettable, the destruction did not have a significant impact on the Gross Domestic Production of the country. With respect to foreign currency earnings, exports during the period remained essentially unchanged over the past year. Negative elements in exports were the effect of structural issues rather than the State of Emergency, the Prime Minister emphasized, underlining the continued need to boost exports.

The Prime Minister agreed that tourism and the service sectors were the two areas which were affected to some extent by the short-lived unrest in some areas of the country. Yet, he pointed out, the performance of the service sector was rising as the number of tourists visiting the country has been returning to a reassuring level over the past four months. The Prime Minister also reminded his listeners that the Government has allotted 10 billion birr for a revolving fund for the creation of jobs, mainly for youths. He said the Federal and Regional State Governments had now finalized the implementation of the package, which was launched last week. He called on the youth to actively participate, not only in the economic sector, but also in building democracy and in enjoying the political space.

Regarding Ethiopia's current relations with neighboring countries and beyond, the Premier said Ethiopia continued to work extremely hard to further bolster the relationship it has with neighboring countries in all fields and through all possible ways. He said Ethiopia was working in particular to strengthen its bilateral relationship with Egypt in every way including extensive people-to-people diplomacy. Some institutions in Egypt have been collaborating with groups categorized as terrorists set on destabilizing Ethiopia, he noted, but after the Government of Ethiopia had raised questions about the nature of those institutions and their intention, the Egyptian Ambassador to Ethiopia explained that these elements did not in any way represent the position of the Egyptian Government. The Prime Minister said he has also discussed the issue with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. They had reached an agreement to deliberate further on the matter. He emphasized that the peace, tranquility and stability of Egypt contributed to the strength of Ethiopia and Ethiopia provided support for the peace and stability of Egypt.

The Prime Minister said it remained clear that the front-runner in trying to create disturbance and chaos in Ethiopia was the Government in Asmara. It was the Eritrean Government that had been arming anti-peace elements and the terrorist groups that had been supported by some Egyptian institutions. Recalling the recent failed attempt by the Government of Asmara to infiltrate a group of terrorists into northern Ethiopia, the Prime Minister once again reiterated Ethiopia's position that the government would take proportional action in response to any attacks directed towards the country.

.... and calls for diversified exports to offset declining commodity prices

Prime Minister Hailemariam also responded to parliamentary questions on Thursday this week (January 12) on current socio-economic and political issues. In responding to questions raised by Members of Parliament on the macro-economic performance of the country, he noted the remarkable 12% increase in production of this *Meher* harvest season. He also emphasized the need to raise the volume of agricultural export products in response to the declining commodity price in the global market. The government has lately begun to purchase agricultural products from local markets, setting a floor price to help manage any price fall-back that might occur.

The Prime Minister also responded to questions on the reform program. Noting that the public were the main driving force behind this, he said the reforms were already bringing about changes in people's mindset after detailed discussions at all levels of the leadership and the public in different fora, changes that were vital for bringing about improvements in the way government operated. He underlined the main factors for the proliferation of maladministration at different levels - inadequate capacity, misperception and poor discipline and work ethics. New leadership, he said, had to be evaluated on the basis on its performance in each

sector. The whole process was being supported by transparency and accountability. This was why the wealth and properties of the leadership would be publicized and he urged MPs to play their part to provide a follow-up role.

Concerning youth and women, the Prime Minister said comprehensive work was needed to respond, not only to the problems of unemployment for both sectors, but also to encourage their active and equal participation in politics. The government, he said, was therefore undergoing reform to enhance the capacity of administration both at federal and regional levels.

The Prime Minister assured MPs that Ethiopia would maintain its vigorous and friendly relationships with its neighbors. He said the nation has been working to further invigorate its relationships and engagement with countries especially in cases where regional mechanisms like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development provided one among many platforms for better peace, sustainable stability and mutual growth. He said, "We will work relentlessly to further cement our relations with our neighbors." He reiterated the country's unreserved role in helping to bring about peace in the region and beyond. The country had, he said, very good relations with Sudan and Kenya and he identified ties with Djibouti as one step ahead of other countries.

The Prime Minister said the country's planned agenda for regional economic integration goes hand-in-hand with its peace-making role in the region. He said Ethiopia would certainly maintain its peace-making role in Somalia in partnership with the AU, the EU and IGAD member countries through AMISOM. He also stressed that it was important not to despair of bringing peace and stability to South Sudan. He said the situation there, and possible responses by the international community, would be discussed during the upcoming AU Summit in Ethiopia.

Prime Minister Hailemariam at inauguration of Ghana's new President

Prime Minister Hailemariam attended the inauguration ceremony for the President-elect of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, held at Independence Square in the capital of Ghana, Accra, on Saturday (January 7). The Prime Minister's delegation arrived in Accra on Friday and was received by senior officials at the airport.

The swearing-in ceremony of for President Nana Akufo-Addo, as 5th president of the Fourth Republic of Ghana and his Vice-President, Alhaji Dr Muhamadu Bawumia, was held in the presence of the country's 275 members of parliament and 6,000 invited guests, including 12 Heads of State and Government, two Vice-Presidents, and a dozen representatives of government and five representatives of multilateral organizations.

President Akufo-Addo, aged 72, won the presidential election held in December last year, beating the incumbent President, John Mahama. President Mahama accepted defeat and congratulated his successor. Ghanaians, political commentators and the international community at large welcomed the peaceful succession of power as an exemplary decision of the way to hand over power.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn congratulated the new President along with other Heads of State and Government attending the ceremony. Ethiopia and Ghana have longstanding relations and Ghana was the first African country to open an embassy in Addis Ababa in 1959. The two countries signed General Cooperation Agreements in 2014 and an Agreement on Establishing a Joint Ministerial Commission on Communications, Information and Media, Culture and Tourism in 2015. The Prime Minister paid a three-day official visit to the Republic of Ghana in April last year. During that visit, he signed the Memorandum of Understanding twinning the new Ethiopian Peace Keeping Center with the Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Center in Ghana.

During his visit to Ghana, Prime Minister Hailemariam also met and held talks with the President of the Council of the Nation of Algeria, Abdelkader Besalah. The Prime Minister noted that Ethiopia valued its age-old friendship and strategic partnership with Algeria, a partnership guided by the spirit of Pan Africanism to promote peace and harmony across Africa. The two sides agreed to expedite their cooperation and coordination to forge ahead with the objective of speeding up the building of a stable and tranquil community of Africa, reaffirming the importance of strengthening the institutions of the AU and making the AU summit at the end of the month a complete success.

Both sides also agreed to make efforts to inject new vigor into the realm of Ethio-Algerian ties, using economic diplomacy to expand the depth and substance of business-to-business relations between two friendly

countries. They underlined the urgency of strengthening relations between the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectorial Association and the Algerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry with a view to tapping into the comparative advantages of the two countries. Mr Besalah underlined the importance of holding regular Joint Ministerial Commission meetings in order to translate agreements signed by both nations into fruitful results for the benefit of all.

Dr Workneh at the UNSC debate on "Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace"

Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Workneh Gebeyehu addressed the Ministerial-level Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council on "Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace" on Tuesday this week (January 10), at the United Nations Security Council in New York. The meeting, chaired by Sweden, (President of the Security Council for January) was attended by the new United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Antonio Guterres, foreign ministers, state ministers of foreign affairs and permanent representatives of members of the UNSC.

Opening the meeting, the UN Secretary-General said the international community could avoid conflicts by restoring trust between governments and their citizens on the one hand, and amongst member states on the other. Addressing his first Security Council open debate, Mr Guterres said the international focus had for decades largely been to respond to conflict, but, he said, more must be done to prevent war and sustain peace. "People are paying too high a price," he said. "You, the member states, are paying too high a price. We need a whole new approach." The Secretary-General emphasized that it was "very difficult" to persuade decision makers to make prevention their priority, although the rule-based international order under which the United Nations had been established was under grave threat. "We must rebalance our approach to peace and security," he stressed. As "the cost of inaction was simply too high," he added, "let's make 2017 a Year of Peace." He referred to the reforms he intended to set in motion to achieve that aim. "I have started with the decision-making processes in the Secretariat," he said, drawing attention to the newly established Executive Committee and to the appointment of a Special Adviser on Policy.

The Secretary-General warned that it took very little to trigger a crisis that could engulf a country or a region, and while the causes of crisis were deeply interlinked, the United Nations response remained fragmented. Crises, he said, required the international community to connect global efforts for peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. He reiterated that the primary work of conflict prevention lay with member states. "Too many prevention opportunities have been lost because member states mistrusted each other's motives, and because of concerns over national sovereignty," he said. He pledged he was ready to foster a more trusting relationship and to improve communications with the Council, with consistency, candour and transparency. He said he would launch an initiative to enhance United Nations mediation capacity and support regional and national efforts to that end. He also noted there was a need to avoid double standards.

He also underlined that prevention must be seen as a value in itself and an essential means of reducing human suffering and enabling people to reach their full potential. Preventive action, he said, was essential to avert mass atrocities or grave abuses of human rights. Disagreements about the past could not be allowed to prevent action. It was necessary to collectively demonstrate leadership and strengthen the authority and credibility of the United Nations by putting peace first. War was never inevitable, but was always a matter of choice to exclude, discriminate, marginalize or resort to violence. Nor was peace inevitable, it came from difficult decisions, hard work and compromise, and "We should prize and nurture it in every country, at every time." In the debate, in which representatives of more than 90 member states welcomed the new Secretary-General and expressed gratitude to Ban Ki-moon for his service over the last decade, a number of speakers emphasized the need for an open and mutually reinforcing relationship between the Secretary-General and the Security Council, based on trust and mutual respect.

Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Workneh Gebeyehu, emphasized that the timing of such a high-level United Nations Security Council debate on "Conflict Prevention & Sustaining Peace", could hardly be more appropriate given the unprecedented challenges facing the world in the maintenance of peace and security. He said, "in view of the enormous peace and security challenges we're facing today, prioritizing conflict prevention is not really an option." It was a necessity. While expressing his appreciation to Mr Ban Ki-moon

for his tireless efforts and key achievements during his tenure, Minister Workneh said the leadership role of the new UN Secretary-General, Mr Antonio Guterres would surely be imperative in bringing fresh impetus to the pursuit of solutions to the many conflicts and crisis situations around the world.

Foreign Minister Dr Workneh said the Secretary-General's active engagement in preventative diplomacy, mediation and peaceful resolution of disputes through judicious exercise of his good offices would be critical. His efforts would need to be supported by all available tools, including early warning and rigorous analysis of emerging crisis situations, to enable him to draw the Council's attention to emerging issues. However, Foreign Minister Dr Workneh said, these efforts would be in vain if they lacked the Council's full support. He said the credibility of the United Nations and the Security Council was on the line and there was room for a lot of improvement in the working relationship between the Secretary-General and the Council. It was also essential to address institutional fragmentation and to ensure coherence across the United Nations system. Dr Workneh emphasized the need to enhance strategic partnerships with regional and sub-regional organizations, including the African Union, in regard to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, special political missions, conflict resolution and peace building.

The Minister however noted that the efforts of the Secretary-General would not be fruitful without the full support and cooperation of all member states. Equally important was the need to address institutional fragmentation and ensure coherence across the entire UN system. Dr Workneh pledged Ethiopia's strong commitment to extending full support to Mr Guterres in this regard. Ethiopia, the Minister said, had been playing active role in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. It would continue to do so.

Since the UN could not address the myriad of global peace and security challenges alone, Dr Workneh underlined the critical need to enhance strategic partnerships with regional and sub-regional organizations across the whole spectrum of conflict cycles, including prevention, peacekeeping and special political missions, conflict resolution and peace building. He said: "In this regard, we appreciate the strong commitment the Secretary-General has shown to the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union."

Ms Margot Wallstrom, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, on her part emphasized that a close and proactive working relationship between the Secretary-General and the Security Council was the cornerstone of the UN's ability to deliver lasting peace and security. She touched upon some areas for priority actions, including the need to make prevention a priority for the whole UN system, improve the capacity of the UN to address the root causes of conflicts, make use of system-wide analysis and accommodate independent, authoritative advice from the Secretary-General, harness the agency of women to create sustainable peace through inclusive processes and recognize that humanitarian action can never be a substitute for political dialogue and mediation. She asked if the world could "afford an ever-growing list of crises slipping into violent conflict and needless human misery?" Investing in prevention was not only morally right, but also the smart, economically sound and sustainable thing to do, she said. The international community had sufficient tools, she added, but needed a new political consensus in support of prevention. The United Kingdom's Minister of State for Europe and the Americas agreed, pointing out that the United Nations response to global challenges had evolved significantly over the last seven decades. The challenge was how to use modern tools more effectively.

Other speakers included Japan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs who emphasized that effectively sustaining peace would require reform of the United Nations. This, he said, would involve "taking down institutional silos while reinforcing coordination in order to create a seamless and holistic approach to sustaining peace." Italy's Minister for Foreign Affairs suggested that reform could entail revising the Secretariat's structure and a new distribution of roles and responsibilities. Several welcomed the Council's comprehensive peace reviews, saying they provided clear support for conceptual change, including the abandonment of conflict management in favour of prevention and tackling the root efforts of conflict. Kazakhstan's Minister for Foreign Affairs emphasized the need to develop a systemic approach to identifying and preventing emerging crises. The Council, he said, should have direct oversight of peace building, including through greater cooperation with the Secretary-General, who should play a crucial role as an "honest broker" and "bridge-builder" at the earliest stages of conflict prevention. A number of other delegates also raised the question of cooperation, with Bolivia emphasizing the need to establish dynamic alliances while ensuring that regional efforts received sufficient attention. Rwanda's representative emphasized that experience in conflict prevention had shown that the African Union was better positioned in terms of knowledge, proximity and the ability to mobilize and respond quickly.

The Ethio-Djibouti railway: a major step towards regional economic growth

This week marked the final completion of the Ethio-Djibouti electrified railway line-linking Addis Ababa to Djibouti's Red Sea port city, with a ceremony at the Nagad Railway Station in Djibouti. It offered an example of the synergy that can be developed between the people and geography of the Eastern part of Africa with other peoples and continents for their greater progress. This synergy, building upon this transnational electrified railway line, and international exchanges, and ongoing development undertakings, provides a future vision for development with the formation of a network of enhanced cooperation.

The formal completion of this major project represents the cardinal importance given to the social, political, environmental and economic dimension of infrastructure development by the planners and strategists of Ethiopia and of Djibouti. They provided an example of the way to fast-track the movement of ideas, goods, peoples as well as services to create mutual understanding and mutual learning as well as inject fresh vitality into the aims of the transformation of the region's economy and of the integration of the region to the global economy. Nor did their concept neglect paving the way for the improvement of regional and international peace and security.

The inauguration ceremony, attended by President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti and Prime Minister Hailemariam of Ethiopia, also underlined that the completion of the Chinese-built transnational railway was emblematic of the continued growth of Africa-China friendship for the benefit of all. Prime Minister Hailemariam, inaugurating the electrified Djiboutian section of the line, pronounced that the railway would significantly expand the development of the two countries and enhance their contribution in the global market. The Prime Minister added that the project would play an indispensable role in helping achieve the full-scale economic growth of the region in addition to improving and upgrading the quality of the socio-economic development of the two countries. The Prime Minister, who recalled that the old railway had not been functioning for nearly two decades, noted that the newly built electrified railway would reactivate and enhance the normal functioning of the Ethio-Djiboutian business corridor.

President Ismail Omar Guelleh emphasized that the electrified railway line would contribute to the overall economic transformation of the two countries. He also noted that the completion of the project presaged a positive brighter trajectory in the overall relationship of the two countries. Aboubaker Omar Hadi, Chairman of the Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority, said that this marked a new dawn for Africa's integration into the global economy, adding that "From today, millions more Africans are now linked to Djibouti's world-class port facilities. Connecting Africa, Asia and Europe, Djibouti is at the heart of the world's trade routes, and we are proud to play a vital role in developing the region and wider continent."

Yuan Li, President of China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation, pledged to scale up the CCECC's investment in Ethiopia and Djibouti and do everything relevant to expand the economies of the two countries. Mr Li, who said that the government of China was promoting "the construction of 'Belt and Road' with great effort and Djibouti and Ethiopia are both important stakeholders in this vision", noted that China's economy was highly complementary with those of Djibouti and Ethiopia, and, he added, "the space for cooperation is immense."

This first-ever electrified railway line for Africa is designed to operate at 120 km per hour and will cut the journey time from Djibouti port to Addis Ababa from the three days by road transport to less than 12 hours. It is an indication of the growing expansion of connectivity in Africa and beyond and it will also encourage efforts to develop the Trans-African railway line.

The project, built by China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC) and China Civil Engineering Construction (CCECC), cost \$ 3.4 billion. The Ethiopian government financed 30% of the total cost of the project, while the Exim Bank of China, the China Development Bank and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China covered the remaining 70% of the costs. The Ethiopian section of the railway was previously inaugurated in October last year.

The new line is also seen as the start of a possible Trans-African railway project, in which a 2,000km track will be expected to connect Djibouti with Ethiopia to South Sudan, and which will one day cross the continent from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. It offers an important example of China's support for African development and is likely to open the door to more Chinese investment in the region, serving as an example for future railway projects in Africa and facilitating Chinese exports of rail equipment and machinery as well as encouraging Chinese firms to build housing projects along the line. China is already a major investor in

Djibouti, with many Chinese state-owned companies involved in infrastructure projects, including a US\$590 million multi-purpose port, a cross-border pipeline that channels drinking water from Ethiopia, a US\$4 billion natural gas project, featuring a natural gas pipeline from Ethiopia, a liquefaction plant and an export terminal in Djibouti.

While the Speaker's Election opens the way for Somalia's Presidential vote....

Professor Mohamed Sheikh Osman 'Jawari' was re-elected as the Speaker of the new Lower House of the Somali Parliament, the House of the People on Wednesday (January 11). The Interim Speaker of the Federal Parliament, Osman Elmi Boqore, announced the results. Up to 251 legislators voted with Professor 'Jawari' getting 141 votes and former state minister Abdirashid Mohamed Hidig getting 89 votes. The other two candidates, Abdifatah Ibrahim Geseey, a former regional governor and Idris Abdi Daqtar, received 21 votes between them. The winner was required to gain at least 139 votes, 50% plus one of the total number of MPs in parliament. The voting would have proceeded to a second round for the leading candidates if Speaker 'Jawari' had failed to get the required majority in the first round. The local media broadcast the vote live. Mogadishu was locked down ahead of the election with hundreds of police and intelligence forces deployed on the main roads of the capital and the surrounding areas.

The victory of Professor 'Jawari' in the vote for the Speaker was particularly important as he comes from the Rahenweyne, the Digil and Mirifle clans. This means that one of the leading candidates for the federal presidency, the President of Somalia's South West state, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, also from the Rahenweyne, might have to withdraw from the presidential vote. Under the 4.5 clan system, the election of the Speaker is crucial as it is the deciding factor on which clans can run for the positions of President and Prime Minister.

On Thursday, the MPs voted for the first and second Deputy Speakers of the Lower House with candidates including former Justice Minister and Presidential ally, Farah Abdulkadir as well as former Minister of Labor, Abdiwali Sheikh Ibrahim Mudey, and Mahad Abdalla Awad, former Second Deputy Speaker of the previous Parliament.

Mudey won the election for First Deputy Speaker, obtaining more than 160 votes against Abdiqadir who received 93 votes in the second round of voting. The voting for the second Deputy Speaker, which was carried out simultaneously saw the election of Mahad Abdalla Awad, defeating Abdulqadir Baghdadi in the second round of polling.

... the UNHCR is concerned by donor fatigue over Somali refugees

Meanwhile, the UNHCR says that more than a million Somali refugees, displaced from their homes for decades, are becoming despondent as they continue to be unable to return home. The UNHCR also fears that donor support is growing fatigued. Mohamed Abdi Affey, the UNHCR Special Envoy to the Somali refugee situation said this week: "There is a growing sense of helplessness in the camps because people are feeling forgotten." Mr Affey acknowledged that there had been some real progress in Somalia over the past few months, including the successful organization of elections inside the country, but he stressed "What's needed now is to build up infrastructures across the country so refugees do not suffer when they go back." The Somali refugee crisis is one of the longest running in the world, with people who have been displaced for more than 20 years. Some one million live in camps throughout the Horn of Africa, while more than a million others are displaced within Somalia.

Mr Affey was speaking in Geneva after visiting Somalia and refugee camps in Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda, where 905,060 Somalis live – some since the 1990s. He also visited Yemen last month, where refugees face increasingly desperate conditions. He noted that because of emergencies elsewhere, particularly in Syria and South Sudan, donors have been unable to continue their support. At the same time: "hunger is growing; frustration is growing; desperation is setting in and people are becoming angry." The Special Envoy pointed out that in addition to dwindling food rations, the on-going drought in East Africa had led to further complications, including limited access to education and skills training, especially for young people. He said: "Refugees should be skilled enough, trained to prepare for an eventual return, so that they can participate in the reconstruction of their country. They should not go back after 30 years without skills. Within the camps we must create these conditions and possibilities."

The UNHCR is hoping for serious progress to be made at the regional summit that IGAD is organizing in March to determine lasting solutions for Somali refugees. A proposed regional response would provide continued protection to the 262,000 Somali refugees who remain in the Dadaab camp in Kenya, their home for more than 20 years. When a decision was made last year to close the camp, UNHCR lobbied the government with a new plan of action and successfully delayed its closure. UNHCR began supporting voluntary return of Somali refugees from Kenya in 2014. Since then, a total of 39,316 have returned. Mr Affey said: "Nobody wants to be a refugee forever. A regional solution is the most viable solution for the Somali situation." However, he noted that security and other conditions in many parts of Somalia are still not capable of supporting large-scale return of refugees. He appealed to the international community to strengthen their efforts to build stability in the country.

In fact, the UN Office for Coordinating of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is planning to formally launch the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia next week. This will outline the humanitarian situation and the priorities for international responses throughout the country. OCHA said the humanitarian situation in Somalia remains among the most complex in the world: "Worsening drought conditions across the country have left hundreds of thousands of Somalis facing severe food and water shortages." The plan for Somalia for 2017 reflects a commitment by aid agencies to better support Somalis in addressing humanitarian needs throughout the country. Developed within the framework of the three-year humanitarian strategy for Somalia for 2016-2018, it aims to save lives, ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, strengthen resilience, support the provision of basic services and enable durable solutions through a coordinated, comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach.

The conclusion of the 12th AU-EU Human Rights Dialogue

The 12th AU-EU Human Rights Dialogue concluded on Tuesday (January 10) in Brussels, Belgium. The AU Delegation, led by the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Dr Aisha L. Abdullahi, included the President of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the AU Commissioner on Human and Peoples' Rights, and other AU staff working on human rights-related issues. EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Mr Stavros Lambrinidis, headed the EU side supported by the Managing Director for Africa, the Managing Director for Human Rights, the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender Issues, and other EU staff. The AU-EU Human Rights Dialogue is held annually to provide a platform for regular sharing of experience on issues related to Human Rights, Democratic Principles and the Rule of Law in Africa and in Europe, to enhance coordination on Human Rights issues in multilateral fora, such as the Human Rights Council.

Discussions covered recent developments in human rights in Africa and Europe, notably the work of the AU organs with a human rights mandate and the implementation of Project 2016, celebrating 2016 as the year of human rights in Africa with particular focus on the rights of women. Both sides welcomed the Declaration of the Human and Peoples' Decade in Africa and the launch of the drafting of the African Human Rights Action Plan 2017-26. They agreed this was a unique opportunity for concrete and tangible improvements in the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. The EU agreed to support the AU to help ensure ratification and implementation of international and continental human rights instruments at the national level. The AU appreciated the EU 10 million Euros support to the African Human Rights system under the EU Panafrican Programme. Both sides welcomed the High-Level Dialogue on Democratic Governance focusing on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Africa, held in November 2016 in Arusha, Tanzania.

Dr Aisha Abdullahi, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs told the Dialogue "the AU-EU Partnership on Democratic Governance and Human Rights has been getting stronger over the years as can be seen from the numerous AU and EU resolutions as well as policy decisions adopted within the broader framework of this partnership". He welcomed the decision by the AU Heads of State and Government declaring the next 10 years as the Human and Peoples' Decade in Africa. This, he said, provided a golden opportunity for the entire continent to take stock of the human rights situation in Africa and collectively work together to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights. The declaration, he added, aimed "to enhance public awareness about human rights; expedite the ratification and implementation of the human rights instruments, encourage Member States to develop policies, plans of actions and programmes on the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights, and encourage Member States to recommit to the promotion and protection of human rights."

The AU and the EU commended the work of Civil Society Steering Committees in organizing the 6th AU-EU Civil Society Seminar on Democratic Governance and Human Rights on January 9, 2017 in Brussels. The seminar focussed on counter-terrorism and human rights. The parties took note of the recommendations, including an initiative on human rights and counter-terrorism in Africa. They welcomed the adoption of the Mandate and Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee of the AU-EU Civil Society Seminar on Human Rights and Democratic Governance. They also jointly reaffirmed the need for greater space for civil society within the partnership, in order to fulfil their obligations without undue interference, and called on civil society to inclusively and meaningfully contribute to the implementation of activities and programmes of the AU-EU Partnership on Democratic Governance and Human Rights, including preparation of the Africa-EU Summit.

UNICEF appeals for urgent support for Eritrea's drought-affected children

Just a year ago, President Isaias Aferwerki dismissed concern about food shortages in Eritrea, in effect, suggesting that the El Niño drought had not had any serious impact on Eritrea. Indeed, Eritrea, he said, would not face any crisis because of the Government of Eritrea's "judicious policy and its approach to bolstering its strategic food reserves" even though he did admit to some, unspecified, reduction in agricultural output. The President was speaking on January 23 last year, and his remarks met with some skepticism at the time. A number of reports rapidly surfaced suggesting that far from El Niño having little impact, it had indeed been at least as serious in Eritrea as elsewhere across the Horn of Africa. In Ethiopia, it was seen as producing the most serious drought for fifty years, and led to an unprecedented government response both at Federal and Regional State levels. Journalist Martin Plaut, for example, published detailed evidence smuggled out of Eritrea showing just how serious the effect of the drought was in the country despite the government's dismissal of the impact.

Now UNICEF has published a report - "Eritrea: Humanitarian Action for Children" - stating unequivocally that in Eritrea, most of whose population depend upon subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, 80% of the population is vulnerable to recurrent drought. It says firmly that since 2015 "Eritrea has experienced drought conditions caused by El Niño that further undermined household food and livelihood security, particularly for women and children, and contributed to a cholera outbreak across three of the country's six regions." It says this has "led to high levels of malnutrition among children under 5, pregnant women and lactating [breast-feeding] mothers, particularly in the lowland areas." It goes on to note that the Nutrition Sentinel Site Surveillance System in Eritrea says that malnutrition rates have increased over the past three years in four of the country's six regions, where malnutrition rates already exceeded emergency levels. A total of 22,700 children under 5 are projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition in 2017. The report also says that nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene practices are sub-optimal, with less than half of the rural population accessing safe drinking water and only 11% of the overall population accessing improved sanitation. It concludes that half of all children in Eritrea are stunted and, as a result, they are even more vulnerable to malnutrition and disease outbreaks.

The report says UNICEF and partners will continue to mainstream humanitarian response within regular development programs targeting the most vulnerable children. They will continue to apply an integrated multi-sectoral approach to life-saving interventions in Eritrea, building on linkages between the humanitarian and development programs. It details proposed activity. In 2017, UNICEF emphasizes support of the Government in implementing blanket supplementary feeding to prevent the further deterioration of the nutritional status of children under 5, pregnant women and lactating mothers. This will involve the procurement of routine medicine for the management of severe acute malnutrition and moderate acute malnutrition. UNICEF will also apply a multi-sectoral approach in drought-prone rural communities which are facing heightened risk of diarrhoea and cholera and high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. It says it aims to build up local capacities in these communities through outreach and training programs to support the provision of safe water and access to appropriate hygiene practices. It will also work to strengthen health systems to support service delivery and prioritize routine immunization coverage and community case management of childhood illnesses especially measles. Schools in the most-affected areas will offer programs designed to raise children's awareness of explosive remnants of war. UNICEF will support the enrolment of 15,000 (currently out-of-school) nomadic children from drought-prone areas, working with the Ministry of Education, via advocacy campaigns, outreach and enrolment programs to support their return to school.

UNICEF said that, as of the end of October, it had received only US\$7.8 million against its US\$16 million appeal, not quite 50% of required funding for 2016. This allowed it during the last year to treat 13,000 children under 5 who were suffering from severe acute malnutrition as well as 34,000 children under 5 affected by moderate

acute malnutrition. It also gave vitamin A supplements to 376,000 children. Approximately 97,000 children were immunized against measles and 70,000 children affected by acute watery diarrhoea received life-saving curative intervention. UNICEF was able to surpass its targets for vitamin A and acute watery diarrhoea support by reprogramming regular program funds and liaising with the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO). Other elements of UNICEF's efforts included blanket supplementary feeding for 30,000 pregnant women and lactating mothers and children under 5 living in hard-to-reach areas. Another 31,000 people benefited from improved access to safe water, including 10,500 people in seven communities with new solar-powered water supply schemes, and 20,500 people in cholera-affected regions through the provision of water treatment supplies. The report also notes that key preventative messages on protection, education, health and nutrition reached more than 1 million people in high-risk areas.

UNICEF is now calling for another US\$11 million to meet the humanitarian needs of children in Eritrea for 2017. Without additional funding, it says it will be unable to support the national response to the ongoing nutritional and food insecurity crisis and respond to the need for health, child protection, WASH and the education needs of the most vulnerable children and communities in Eritrea.

It identifies the total population currently at need at 2 million in the most drought-affected regions that are accessible: Northern Red Sea, Anseba and Gash-Barka zobas. The report gives population figures as 465,240 for the Northern Red Sea, 616,564 for Anseba, and 912,026 for Gash-Barke. It says approximately 60% are children under 18. The UNICEF report says 1.2 million of those in need are children. It hopes to reach these during this year and provide 15,000 under 5 with severe acute malnutrition with therapeutic feeding programs and another 40,000 children under 5 with targeted supplementary feeding. Overall, UNICEF aims to provide 450,000 children under 5 with vitamin A supplements. Its targets include life-saving curative interventions for 50,000 children affected by acute watery diarrhoea; 45,000 people accessing 15 litres of water per person per day for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene; 45,000 people reached with appropriate hygiene messages; 30,000 children and young people in and out of school provided with integrated mine risk education programs on injury prevention in high-risk communities; and 5,000 vulnerable children reached and supported with basic social services during emergencies; 15,000 out-of-school children from nomadic communities provided with access to basic education.