

A Week in the Horn 13th May 2016

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News in brief

Ethiopia

President Mulatu Teshome received the newly appointed Ambassadors of Hungary, Democratic Republic of Congo, Bangladesh, South Sudan, Chad and Fiji to Ethiopia on Thursday (May 12). He called on their countries to support Ethiopia's bid for a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn attended the inauguration of President Ismail Omar Guelleh in Djibouti on Sunday (May 8). The Prime Minister also attended the inauguration of President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda in Kampala on Thursday (May 12) in an event attended by the Presidents of Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, South Africa, Sudan and Zimbabwe, as well as Mali, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

Prime Minister Hailemariam participated in the "**Grow Africa**" panel on the side-lines of the **World Economic Forum** on Thursday (May 12), underlining the due attention Ethiopia is giving to improve productivity of small-scale farmers as part of its policy of modernizing the agriculture sector. The World Economic Forum for Africa opened in Kigali, Rwanda on Wednesday this week (May 11). It lasts until the end of the week. (See article)

Prime Minister Hailemariam met with former British Prime Minister **Tony Blair** on Monday this week (May 9) and discussed industrial parks, infrastructure and various development activities. Mr Blair, in Ethiopia to visit the activities of his charity, also visited the Bole Lemi industrial park. He said the coming of leading companies would play a key role for the economic transformation of the country.

The **Sudan** Public Diplomacy Delegation arrived in Addis Ababa for a week-long visit on Sunday (May 8). They were welcomed by the Speaker of House of People's Representatives, Abadula Gameda; State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie and Ethiopia's Public Diplomacy Team. During their visit, the Sudanese delegation have been visiting sights in Addis Ababa as well as travelling to the Al-Nejash mosque in Tigray Regional State. (See article)

Dr Yinager Dessie, Minister of the Planning Commission, led a high-level Ethiopian delegation to Germany this week to attend two **Ethio-German Business Fora**, one in Hamburg on Wednesday and Thursday (May 11-12) concentrating on agro-business

opportunities as well as other areas. The second was held in Munich on Friday (May 13) covering manufacturing opportunities and other options available in Ethiopia. Members of the Ethiopian business community attended both meetings.

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie met with Ambassador **Zhong Jianhua, Special Representative on African affairs of the Chinese Government**, on Saturday (May 7). They discussed ways of building on South Sudan's political process and supporting its economic recovery. Ambassador Zhong thanked Ethiopia, IGAD and the international community for their efforts to bring peace and stability to South Sudan.

State Minister Ambassador Taye attended the **Europe Day** celebration on Monday (May 9) at the Africa Hall of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (See article)

State Minister Ambassador Taye received a UK trade and investment delegation, headed by the **UK Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Ethiopia, Richard Benyon**, that arrived in Addis Ababa on Tuesday (May 10). The delegation, which is looking at possible business and investment opportunities, will be visiting key industrial and manufacturing locations as well as meeting representatives of Ethiopia's private sector.

Ten more of the 125 children abducted by heavily armed Murle gunmen from South Sudan last month were reunited with their families on Wednesday (May 11). This brings the number so far reunited with their communities in Gambella to 29.

The National Intelligence and Security Service and Federal Police Joint Anti-Terrorism Taskforce said on Wednesday (May 11) that it had captured and killed a group of Eritrean-backed terrorists near the border in the south of the country on Friday last week (May 6). The group, trained in Eritrea, had travelled to Uganda and then into Kenya before crossing the border at Moyale carrying travel documents prepared in Eritrea.

Government and international humanitarian agencies said on Wednesday (May 11) that flash floods had displaced nearly 120,000 people in Ethiopia over the previous month and a total of almost half a million people might be affected during the year. The International Organization for Migration said 119,711 people in six areas had been displaced by last month's "exceptional" flooding. The floods, that are part of the El Nino phenomenon that earlier caused the severe drought, have been hampering the deliveries of food aid to drought affected areas.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) said on Friday (May 13) that it was providing nearly US\$128 million in additional humanitarian assistance to help the people of Ethiopia face the impact of the worst drought in fifty years.

Ethiopia's participation in the 8th day-long festival, "Passport DC, Around the World Embassy Tour", in Washington attracted more than seven thousand Washington residents to the Ethiopian Embassy on Saturday (May 7). The festival included the traditional coffee ceremony and authentic cuisine, accompanied by traditional songs and displays to showcase Ethiopia's wealth of music, art, culture, flora and fauna.

Djibouti

President Ismail Omar Guelleh was sworn in as President for his fourth term in office on Sunday (May 8) at the Presidential Palace in Djibouti City. The ceremony was attended by a

number of regional leaders including Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn of Ethiopia, President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of Somalia. President Ismail Omar Guelleh won the election in April with 87% of the vote.

President Ismail Omar Guelleh on Wednesday received the resignation of Prime Minister Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed. The President thanked the Prime Minister for his loyalty and his skills and immediately reappointed him as Prime Minister. Mr Kamil Mohamed welcomed the honor and said he would "redouble efforts to show he was worthy of the President's confidence." He would announce members of his new government soon.

Eritrea

The Ministry of Information, in a statement on Friday (May 6), claimed the UN Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea had "overstepped its remit." It said the Commission intends to publicly release its forthcoming report in advance of its presentation to the Human Rights Council in June. The Ministry alleges this is intended to be part of a "vitriolic press campaign "against Eritrea as happened last year. It says the Commission of Inquiry is "essentially involved in a politically motivated witch-hunting campaign against Eritrea to literally regurgitate innuendos and unsubstantiated allegations that stem from certain quarters."

Mario Gattiker, the head of Switzerland's State Secretariat for Migration, told journalists on Monday (May 9) that Swiss authorities, following a fact-finding mission to Eritrea, have determined that the human rights situation in Eritrea "has not improved". He also said the promises that Eritrea would lower its required military service to a term of 18 months turned out "not to be true". (See article)

Kenya

President Uhuru Kenyatta attended the inauguration of President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda in Kampala on Thursday. (May 12)

The AU Executive Council of Foreign Ministers held its fourth retreat, Thursday to Saturday last week in Nairobi (May 5-7). The occasion was organized by the African Union Commission and hosted by the Government of Kenya in advance of the 27th Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government, due in July. (See article)

Kenya announced on Friday last week that it was going **to close down its two major refugee camp complexes at Dadaab and Kakuma** which together house more than 600,000 refugees, a majority from Somalia but 190,000 or so from South Sudan. Despite widespread criticisms, Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary Amina Mohamed said on Thursday this week (May 12) "We are now serious about this and we do not want anyone to have doubts." (See article)

Kenyan authorities said on Tuesday (May 10) that the security operation launched last year to flush out al-Shabaab militants in the Boni Forest in the coastal region of Kwale was still underway. 36 insurgents had been arrested so far. The authorities have established nine security stations in the area. Security has been increased along the border after intelligence reports indicated that Islamic State had established links with sections of al-Shabaab.

Somalia

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud attended the inauguration of President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti on Sunday (May 8). He also attended the inauguration of President Museveni of Uganda on Thursday (May 12).

A US delegation, led by the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Bruce Wharton, arrived in Mogadishu on Monday (May 9) to hold talks on the forthcoming elections. The delegation met with President Mohamud, Prime Minister Omar Sharmarke, and a number of ministers. Discussions covered political progress, election preparedness, security, efforts to fight terrorism and bilateral relations. Mr Wharton welcomed the government's progress, and underlined the importance of the elections for both Somalia and regional stability.

US special operations forces working with AMISOM called in an airstrike when the troops they were with clashed with al-Shabaab militants on Thursday (May 12), killing five, a US defense official said. The official said the US forces were advising and assisting Ugandan troops from AMISOM.

Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui, chaired a meeting of the **AU Military Operations Coordination Committee** for peace support operations, in Addis Ababa on Monday (May 9). The Chiefs of Defense Staff of AMISOM Troop Contributing Countries (Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) and representatives of partner countries agreed to revise AMISOM's Concept of Operations for the next phase of operations against al-Shabaab. It underlined the urgency of obtaining air assets for AMISOM and called for enhanced and coordinated support to the mission. The AU Peace and Security Council renewed AMISOM's mandate to May 2017 at its recent meeting on April 28.

Somaliland President Ahmed Mohammed Mohamud 'Silanyo' attended the inauguration of President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti for his fourth term of office on Sunday (May 8).

South Sudan

The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) Partners' Group, met to discuss implementation of all aspects of the **Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan** on Tuesday (May 10) in Addis Ababa. (See article)

South Sudan's First Vice President, Riek Machar, called on the people of South Sudan to forgive one another and reconcile in order to unite the people of the young nation and leave behind the bitter past. Speaking to a church congregation in Juba on Sunday (May 8), he underlined the importance of the Government of National Unity coming up with a program for resettlement of the internally displaced persons. According to the UN, there are 1.69 million people internally displaced as well as another 712,000 who have fled to neighboring countries.

The World Food Program said on Monday (May 9) that up to 5.3 million people in South Sudan may face severe food shortages during the March to September lean season. This is nearly double the 2.8 million classified as being in "crisis" or "emergency" food situations, with about 40,000 suffering from outright famine during the first three months of this year. A WFP report says "Internal food security analysis shows that South Sudan will face the most severe lean season in 2016 since its independence, driven by insecurity, poor harvests, and displacement in some areas of the country." The UN humanitarian plan for South Sudan has received less than a third of the \$1.29 billion needed.

Sudan

Sudanese President Omer Al-Bashir started a two-day visit to Kampala, Uganda, on Thursday (May 12), to discuss bilateral ties and the situation in South Sudan with Uganda President Yoweri Museveni. President Museveni visited Khartoum last September and he and President Al-Bashir agreed to work together to bring stability in South Sudan and the region, and to end tensions between the two countries over the issue of rebel groups. Discussions between the two leaders will include security and a number of other issues.

The International Follow-up Committee for the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) is coordinating with the Joint AU-UN Special Representative and joint chief mediator, Martinn Uhomoibhi, to convince more rebel groups to sign the document. Qatari Deputy Prime Minister, Ahmed bin Abdullah al-Mahmoud, said on Monday (May 9) at the 11th meeting of the Committee that it would meet in Doha in late May with the head of the Justice and Equality Movement, Gibril Ibrahim, and the head of the Sudan Liberation Movement, Minni Minnawi. The Deputy Prime Minister said "we welcome all rebel groups willing to join the peace process."

The Sudanese Public Diplomacy Delegation makes a visit to Ethiopia

The Sudanese Public Diplomacy Delegation, headed by Dr Omer Suleiman Adam, President of the Sudanese Council of States and Deputy Head of the National Assembly, arrived in Addis Ababa on Sunday morning (May 8). The delegation, of more than seventy prominent Sudanese citizens, has come for a week's visit to Ethiopia. On arrival, members of the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Team and other senior government officials, including the Honorable Abadula Gameda, Speaker of the House of People's Representatives, and Ambassador Taye-Atske-Selassie, State Minister of Foreign Affairs, welcomed the delegation warmly. Speaker Abadula, on behalf of the people and Government of Ethiopia, expressed his pleasure in welcoming the Sudanese delegation, emphasizing that the visit would further strengthen the longstanding brotherhood and solidarity between the two countries. "Though Ethiopia will perhaps be new to you", he said, "during your stay, we are hopeful that you will explore further opportunities of partnership in order for the two countries to grow further together". The delegation was also welcomed at the airport with one of the central and best features of Ethiopian hospitality, a full coffee ceremony, organized by the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Team. Extending a courteous coffee ceremony to a guest of honor demonstrates friendship and respect and underlines how welcome is the visit of the Sudanese delegation.

The head of the Sudanese Delegation, Dr Omer Suleiman Adam, thanked the Public Diplomacy Team for their welcome. He explained that the Sudanese delegation included Parliamentarians, members of academia, representatives of Sudan's youth and women, and of its artists. The aim of the public diplomacy team, he said, was to strengthen people-to-people ties, leading to stronger government-to-government bonds, and to nurture peace and prosperity between the two brotherly countries. Dr Suleiman added: "we believe that are one people living in two countries."

During this first day of their visit, the delegation was able to see and ride on the Addis Ababa Light Railway as well as pay a visit to the **Addis Ababa-Adama Expressway** and see other

transport infrastructure and other developments in the city. They also met with the Minister of Transport of Ethiopia, Dr Workneh Gebeyehu who firmly told the delegation: "You are not considered guests here, but brothers and sisters who have come back to your home". Dr Workneh reminded the visitors of the thousand years of ties between Ethiopia and Sudan, and stressed this was "a relationship based on blood ties, brotherhood, mutual trust and confidence". He said the visit of the Sudanese Public Diplomacy Delegation further strengthened the historic relationship and provided more opportunities to enhance the excellent ties between the two countries. The excellent bilateral relations, he said, had enabled the two countries to embark on the signing of many agreements of mutual cooperation, adding that it was agreeable that much remains to be done. Indeed, the Minister stressed, "We need to look for ways of efficiently exploiting the immense potential of sustainable cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, agriculture and other related areas between us."

Minister Workneh also underlined that that **the Nile** had contributed to defining the nature of the relationship of the two countries for centuries. He said, "Our two countries may not have been very active in nurturing the positive aspects of this relationship in the past, but recently our relations have seen some notable achievements toward cooperation in the utilization of the Nile River." The Minister welcomed the support from the Sudanese side for Ethiopia's endeavors to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. It was beyond praise, he said. Dr Workneh noted that Ethiopia and Sudan had now established multiple platforms for working together, and he emphasized that visits like this one greatly helped in improving people-to-people relations and enhancing the already rock-solid trust and confidence between the two nations.

On the second day of their visit, the Sudanese delegation met with Addis Ababa Mayor, Diriba Kuma, who welcomed the delegation to the city. The Mayor noted that Ethiopia and Sudan shared a common history, culture, resources and ways of life. He pointed out that Addis Ababa and Khartoum had signed a number of agreements and they were working closely to forge cooperation in social and economic areas in order to benefit the residents of both cities. He emphasized that the exchange of such public diplomacy visits were instrumental in cementing existing cordial relations among the peoples of both countries. Addis Ababa, he said, was currently host to a number of Sudanese investors, traders, researchers, scholars and businessmen, and he called on all public, government, businesses, individuals to work to strengthen the Ethio-Sudan friendship.

In response to the Mayor, the Chairman of the Legislative Assembly of Khartoum, Siddig Mohamed Alshikh, thanked the people and Government of Ethiopia for the warm welcome accorded to the Delegation. He underlined the excellent and multi-fold relations Ethiopia and Sudan enjoyed, and said it was high time for both countries to further enhance their bilateral cooperation. During the morning, the delegation paid a visit to Yekabado Condominium Project site, where they appreciated the Government's efforts to benefit citizens at grassroots through various pro-poor projects and programs.

Later, the Sudanese Public Diplomacy Delegation visited the House of People's Representatives and met with members of the House. They were welcomed by the Speaker of the House of People's Representatives of Ethiopia, Abadula Gameda who said, "It is with great honor and a true sense of brotherhood that we welcome you to Ethiopia, your second home." Speaker Abadula added, "Indeed, when we talk about the peoples of Ethiopia and Sudan, we are referring to one people who live in two countries." Mentioning the Nile as one

of the key bonds between Sudan and Ethiopia, the Speaker also noted that this bond was a reminder of four fundamental messages: **"Mutual trust is the basis! Mutual benefit is the objective! Equality is the guarantee! and Coordination is the means!"**

The Speaker also reminded the delegation that, apart from natural resources, the two countries shared strong and long-standing ties in culture, language, history and religion. He recalled how the two nations managed to crush colonial powers at Omdurman and Adwa in 1898 and 1896 respectively. Referring to the importance of such exchanges of visits, Speaker Abadula said it would have the effect of "cultivating long-term relationships, and increasing mutual understanding through dialogue as well as encouraging professional networking mechanisms, and promoting the shared interests of the respective populations." It would, he also added, also motivate both peoples and encourage a common vision and a common interest in getting rid of poverty, hunger and instability. Indeed, "the exchange of visits by the Public Diplomacy teams of both nations are already beginning to build a new tomorrow, improving personal and institutional ties to harness opportunities for the shared prosperity, peace and tranquility of the peoples of Sudan and Ethiopia." As part of this process of enhancing the people-to-people relationship and further cementing socio-economic and political ties, the Public Diplomacy Delegation of Ethiopia, of course, had a highly successful week-long visit to Sudan last year.

... sees the Al-Nejash mosque and the Abraha Atsbeha church in Tigray...

The visitors also made another trip outside Addis Ababa on Friday this week to the famous Al-Nejash Mosque in Tigray Regional State. They also visited the rock church of Abraha Atsbeha near Mekele. During their visit, the Sudanese Public Diplomacy Delegation are having meetings with other senior officials including President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Dr Mulatu Teshome; Prime Minister, Hailemariam Dessalegn; and the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Abune Mathias, as well as a wide variety of other people from various areas. The Sudan Public Diplomacy Group was also able to relax by attending a musical show at the National Theater on Wednesday. Minister of Culture and Tourism, Engineer Aisha Mohammed, said economic cooperation between the two countries would make the age-long cultural ties lasting. She also noted that the group's visit would help make the present generation aware of Ethio-Sudan socio-cultural bonds.

The delegation's schedule included a visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia on Wednesday (May 11) to meet with State Minister, Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie. Welcoming the delegation, Ambassador Taye said he was quite surprised to find from the archives of the Foreign Ministry that Ethiopia and Sudan had signed more than fifty agreements since the 1980s, "of which almost all were turned into reality." Ambassador Taye stressed that exchanges of visits like those of Public Diplomacy teams have the effect of cultivating and sustaining long-term relationships, and increasing mutual understanding through dialogue as well as professional networking mechanisms and promoting the shared interest of the two peoples. Dr Omar Suleiman, on behalf of the delegation, reiterated the historical commonalities between Sudan and Ethiopia and underlined how inspiring their stay in Ethiopia had been. He took the opportunity to announce that the Government of the Sudan was proposing to grant scholarships to twenty Ethiopian students to study in Sudan. Dr Suleiman said that two prominent universities, the International University of Africa and the Afhad University for Women, were offering the scholarships. State Minister, Ambassador Taye, welcomed the offer and said it would "renew and revitalize our relationship in the fields of education and technology."

... and participates in an Ethio-Sudan Business Forum

On Thursday (May 12) the delegation attended an Ethio-Sudan Business Forum at the Hilton Hotel. The Forum, aimed at boosting economic ties between the two countries, brought together senior government officials, members of the two business communities, diplomats, invited guests and members of the Sudanese Public Diplomacy Delegation. The Deputy Commissioner of the Ethiopian Investment Commission, Teka Gebreyes, briefed the participants on Ethiopia's stability, its **economic growth, investment incentives and the development of industrial parks** that were now attracting significant foreign direct investment. He detailed the investment and business potential in Ethiopia and the contribution of such a Forum to increasing bilateral economic and investment ties between the two countries. Sudanese investors, he said, could be engaged in Ethiopia's priority sectors including manufacturing, construction, tourism, mining, energy and service sectors, and [could] take advantage of the opportunities available as well as contribute to the mutual growth of the two countries.

Sudanese business people are currently requesting licenses in Ethiopia for more than 700 projects to engage in various investment sectors. Of these, 200 are now at the implementation phase, according to Teka Biniyam Misgana from the Chamber of Commerce, who presented a paper on the role of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations in promoting trade and investment. He said the Chamber of Commerce offered trade facilitation services, prepared trade fairs and B2B events, and worked on market access and linking suppliers. He also stressed the importance of working closely with potential neighboring countries like Sudan to boost trade and investment. Wagdi Magur, Team Leader of the Sudanese Chamber of Commerce, said that with their geographical location providing such good opportunities, the two countries should increase their trade volume by taking advantage of their geographical location. Port Sudan, he said, could play its part in facilitating trade. He noted **the building of the road links between Ethiopia and Sudan had significantly increased trade and economic relations between the two neighborhood countries**. Speaking about the opportunities in the Sudan, Mr Magur said Ethiopian investors would be very welcome to get involved in processing of cotton, vegetables and fruit as well as metal production. There was agreement that there was room to increase trade volumes. Business transactions between the two countries have grown from US\$3 million to US\$300 million within a decade, but there is certainly room for further expansion.

The 26th World Economic Forum on Africa 2016 in Kigale, Rwanda

Rwanda was hosting the 26th World Economic Forum on Africa 2016 this week (May 11-13.) The World Economic Forum, working as an international institution for public-private cooperation, is "committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas". With a GDP growth rate hovering around 7.6 per cent - one of the fastest growth rates in Sub-Saharan Africa - Rwanda had the opportunity to host this forum for the first time. This year's theme of WEF was '**Connecting Africa's Resources through Digital Transformation.**'

The theme was chosen in consideration of the emerging global challenges and prospects and their impact on the continent. As many countries in the region have improved their investment climate and undertaken microeconomic policy reforms, Foreign Direct Investment

flows are expected to grow. However, the current low global prices for major commodity exports has raised fears of debt sustainability as well as possible geo-security threats that could be impediments to growth. It has raised the prospect that African countries should look at the possibilities through a different light: digital transformation. Given the rapid technological changes that have the potential to create new industries and reduce inequality, this was the issue that was chosen as a theme for the 26th World Economic Forum.

Before the start of the forum, Ambassador Claver Gatete, the Rwanda Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, said in a press statement, "The World Economic Forum on Africa allows us to take this conversation further and identify opportunities for public-private partnership that will generate more jobs and higher living standards in Africa as a whole." On the first day of the Forum, there were sessions on "How can Africa rethink education and foster the next generation of industry and society leaders?", "How can business support efforts to build political and societal resilience to conflict and violence?", "How can we combat cybercrime?" and a conversation on "Partnership in Africa". On rethinking education, it was stressed that since Africa would host a major element of the world's workforce by 2030, "this should translate to a demographic dividend, feeding the continent's growth". Equally, there was the caution that "without certain investments in policy and education, this will remain elusive." It was in this light that the African Leadership University, and experts from the private sector and academia, shared their insights on pioneering education for Africa's future leaders. Inclusive growth was a hot topic at the meetings, with Oxfam's Winnie Byanyima launching a strong attack on rich Africans who keep their wealth offshore, depriving the continent of \$14 billion in lost tax revenues. "African leaders have to wake up and tax those who have the money," she said.

The Forum sessions on the second day, co-chaired with the former President of the African Development Bank, Donald Kaberuka and other luminaries, included such areas as "Africa's fourth Industrial Revolution", "How can we foster digital literacy as a basic skill for African youth" and "What if all educations were digital? Important and forward-looking ideas were raised when discussing **Africa's Fourth Industrial Revolution**, where fostering transparency and accountability, promoting civic participation and rights and understanding barriers to adoption and usage were pinpointed as major factors in achieving Africa's Industrial Revolution.

On the closing day of the Forum, the issues raised included "**a new energy future**", "**managing migration**" and "**Africa's pathways to transformation**". "A new energy future" looked at ways for Africa to leapfrog towards developing a smart energy system, leveraging renewable, digital and energy-efficient technologies and also scaling investment into large power infrastructures.

Prime Minister Hailemariam, who attended the Forum, and was one of the panelists at the 'Grow Africa' panel at the World Economic Forum, told participants that the Ethiopian government fully understood the need to modernize the agriculture sector, as the country's economy depended up on it. **The government, he said, had been supporting small scale farmers by supplying modern technologies and select seed, and would continue to do so. Deployment of agricultural extension workers, who assist and advise the farmers, was among the initiative taken by the government to increase productivity. In addition to supporting small scale farmers, he stressed, the government was promoting private companies to engage in the sector.**

The AU Executive Council holds a retreat in Nairobi

The AU Executive Council of Foreign Ministers held its fourth retreat, Thursday to Saturday last week in Nairobi (May 5-7). The occasion was organized by the African Union Commission and hosted by the Government of Kenya in advance of the 27th Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government, due in July. The retreat focused on the implementation of Agenda 2063, examining the paradox of the way a continent rich in natural resources is stuck in a cycle of underdevelopment, making only marginal contributions to global production.

In her opening remarks, Dr Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, highlighted the concrete actions that must be taken in order to resolve the African paradox, of "a continent rich in human, natural and other resources, yet its people are poor". Dr Dlamini Zuma called on the Ministers to situate this paradox in its historical context and to understand its economic, social, cultural and political dimensions so as to better address the issue of why a rich continent like Africa should have poor citizens. She stressed the importance to understand local and global circumstances that continue to shape this paradox, saying, there is a need for changing mind-sets to reverse this situation and make Africans become rich by benefitting from their rich resources. She defined the paradox as manifesting itself, for example, in the thousands of ships, which Africa didn't own, that each year leave the continent loaded with raw materials and oil that the world needs in its manufacturing, to power itself, and yet "we are unable to provide jobs and economic opportunities for the millions of young men and women that each year join our labor markets". Africa had lakes, fertile land, forests, wildlife, livestock and oceans, and yet children were stunted by malnutrition, and the continent continues to import 83% of the processed food that we consume. Africa had over twenty-three oil producing countries, countless more with natural gas, mined and exported all the precious minerals and metals, and yet included thirty-three of the world's forty-eight least developed countries.

Dr Zuma noted that Agenda 2063 would help address the paradox given that the Agenda advocates for an African skills revolution and the need "to re-orientate our education systems towards sciences, mathematics, technology and engineering, to enable youth [to] drive transformation and innovation across the continent". She emphasized the expectations of Africans that African institutions should lead the way in creating a better life for all Africans. She acknowledged that, while there are advances in infrastructure, education and health and in building inclusive, democratic and peaceful societies, much more needs to be done in order to transform the continent. She concluded by noting that the ministerial retreats were used to reflect on the strategic interventions that are necessary to move Agenda 2063 forward and consequently encourage critical discussions to spur action for the transformation of the continent.

She said the retreat should focus on the African skills revolution, re-orientating education systems towards sciences, mathematics, technology and engineering as well as considering other Agenda 2063 priorities. These included infrastructure development to power and connect countries, cities and rural areas through roads, aviation, rail, ICT and power lines; manufacturing to add value to raw materials; and agriculture and agro-processing so that Africa can feed itself and the world. She underlined that Agenda 2063 recognized that people are Africa's most important resources, and that women and young people must be empowered and engaged to drive the transformation.

Ambassador Amina Mohamed, Kenya Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs and International Trade, in her opening remarks said Kenya was delighted to host an event, aimed at shaping the future of Africa. She said "Africa is rich with natural resources, land and people but its people are among the poorest in the world. This forum gives us an opportunity to chart ways of how available natural resources can be used to improve well-being of our people." She said the retreat offered a unique opportunity to discuss at length and in depth topical issues to advance the union. She underlined the necessity of translating the dreams of Africa's development into concrete programs and actions. "The important question we must ask and answer is: how is it that our natural resources have created wealth for others, while we on the continent remain poor? In answering that question we should also discuss what it is that we need to do differently."

Ambassador Amina said Agenda 2063, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recently adopted by the United Nations, give hope for a better world. The onus was henceforth upon Africans determining their own destiny. In particular, they should overturn the paradox of a continent rich with natural resources and a vast and youthful human resource, but whose citizens struggle to make ends meet, with a majority of the population still living below the poverty line. It must become a continent that is prosperous and peaceful. She emphasized that the African paradox was a reality that must be confronted if Agenda 2063 was to be achieved. She said "We must find a way to free our resources and direct them towards achieving our development goals. We owe it to ourselves and posterity to break the vicious cycle of poverty, diseases, illiteracy and underdevelopment." The important question to be asked and answered, she said, was "how is it that our natural resources have created wealth for others, while we on the continent remain poor?" She called for the need to institute strong follow-up mechanisms. She said: "we have already taken that decisive first step. With our collective knowledge, wisdom and political will, we should be able to achieve what is envisaged in the Agenda 2063 Blueprint."

The Chairperson of the Executive Council, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chad, noted that the AU Ministerial Retreats have become an important platform for reflection and discussions on important issues aimed at developing the continent, notably Agenda 2063 and its Ten-Year Implementation Plan. He congratulated the countries that have incorporated Agenda 2063 into their national development plans and called on the countries that have not yet done so to do so as soon as possible.

Rwanda's Foreign Minister, Louise Mushikiwabo, chairing a session on Innovative Strategies for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and its Flagship Programs, said for Africa to have its place among other prosperous continents, it required members to be serious, focused and organized.

She reminded participants that Africa's 50-year vision, Agenda 2063, provided an opportunity for both short- and long-term planning by focusing more on priority projects. "We have to look into our planning pattern in both short- and long-term vis-à-vis how we implement so as to arrive [at] durable solutions [for] problems affecting our people," she said.

Professor Juma Calestous, Faculty Chair of the Innovation for Economic Development Executive Program at Harvard Kennedy School, observed that Africa must build science, research, technology and innovation capacities by using and expanding existing capacities in research institutes and universities." Education", he said, "is critical to transformation. Countries that educate and skill their population begin to see an impact within one

generation. He picked Rwanda as an example of leveraging its economic needs for education and commended it for introducing entrepreneurial reforms in the education sector that "have played a key role in its social economic-transformation, lifting a good number of people out of poverty". Other African countries, he said, needed to try this model since it had proven to be an important pillar of development.

In conclusion, the Ministers adopted a report to be submitted to the 27th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State which will be held July 10-18, in Kigale, Rwanda. The theme of the Summit will be: **"2016: African Year of Human Rights with particular focus on the Rights of Women."** The retreat resolved to raise awareness of the African Paradox at different levels, mobilize domestic resources to increase taxes to raise revenues for infrastructure and education, and advance the industrialization agenda. The first Ministerial Retreat of the Executive Council was held in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, in January 2014, with its major focus on the development of Agenda 2063.

High-Level Meeting of the JMEC Partners' Group on South Sudan

The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) Partners' Group, met to discuss implementation of all aspects of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan on Tuesday (May 10) in Addis Ababa. The meeting included representatives of Canada, China, Ethiopia, Kenya, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uganda, the African Union Commission, the European Union, the IGAD Partners Forum and the United Nations.

After the meeting, the Partners' Group issued a statement welcoming the swearing-in, on April 26, of Dr Riek Machar, as the First Vice President, and the appointment, two days later, by President Salva Kiir of the Ministers of the Transitional Government of National Unity, in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) of August last year. The Partners Group congratulated the people of South Sudan on the initiation of the transition and commended the Chair of JMEC, former [Botswana] President Festus Mogae, for the leadership he had shown, as well as the facilitation role being played by the AU High Representative for South Sudan, former [Mali] President Alpha Oumar Konare. They expressed their hope that they would remain actively involved in full implementation of the Agreement.

The Partners welcomed the statements by President Salva Kiir and First Vice-President Riek Machar calling for cooperation, reconciliation, and peaceful coexistence. They hoped that "this positive spirit would mean the swift establishment of all transition institutions and the full implementation of the ARCSS." They also noted the importance of continuing this spirit of cooperation and consultation as the country begins the most critical phase in the implementation of the Agreement. The formation of the Transitional Government marks the beginning of a 30-month transition period during which time the parties undertake "institutional and structural reforms to ensure effective governance in the Republic of South Sudan." In this regard the Partners underlined "the importance of the participation of other political parties in the Transitional Government and other transitional institutions in accordance with the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict."

The Partners' Group said it looked forward to "rapid progress within the early months of the transition including the incorporation of the ARCSS into the Transitional Constitution of

2011, the drafting and ratification of a permanent constitution; the completion of the Strategic Defense and Security Review process; the creation of an enabling environment for unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection; the enhancing of transparency and accountability of public finances; and the establishment of the necessary institutions to advance justice and reconciliation." It emphasized that all these were indispensable measures for building up the confidence of the South Sudanese people and its partners.

The Partners' Group drew attention to a number of areas in which they had concerns. They reiterated their support for the January 31 Communiqué of the IGAD Council of Ministers, endorsed by JMEC on February 2, which, "in the absence of agreement on the creation of new states, urged the suspension of further action on implementing the operationalization of new states until an inclusive, participatory Boundary Commission comprising all parties to the ARCSS reviews proposed states and their boundaries."

They expressed their concern over recent reports of ceasefire violations and called on all parties "to honor their commitment to a permanent ceasefire and to ensure freedom of movement for Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) monitors." They emphasized the importance of establishing the National Security Architecture. They said they were alarmed by the massive humanitarian needs of South Sudan, and were concerned by the obstacles put up by some parties on the movement of humanitarian assistance. They called on all parties "to facilitate the full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to ensure timely delivery of humanitarian assistance, to all those in need". They said they would like to see speedy establishment of the Reconstruction Board in line with the Agreement.

The Partners called on all officials and parties to refrain from making obstructive public statements. They wanted to see the positive momentum towards the full implementation of the Agreement continue and any reversal of the achievements made avoided. They noted, once again, that the ultimate responsibility for peace and reconciliation rested with the South Sudanese leaders, adding: "It is time for the country's leaders to work together and give the people of South Sudan what they want and deserve - peace."

The Partners' statement said they recognized that the conflict had significantly affected the country's economy and caused serious difficulty in the daily life of the South Sudanese people. It said the primary responsibility for improving the economic conditions lay with the South Sudanese Government's judicious use of revenues. It, therefore, urged the Transitional Government of National Unity to engage urgently with International Financial Institutions and the international donor community to develop and share "an accurate analysis of the economic situation and chart new policies to address the needs of the South Sudanese people." It said international donors would continue their support, but further assistance would be dependent on significant economic reform and transparency by the Transitional Government.

The Partners underlined that they fully supported former President Mogae's work, his mandate, the integrity of the JMEC, and the decisions taken so far in furtherance of the Peace Agreement. They agreed on the need to strengthen JMEC's capacity for it to play its critical role at this stage in the implementation of the Agreement. They fully supported the JMEC Chairperson's efforts to resolve the issue of political party participation in the transitional government and other transitional institutions. The Partners said they had resolved to support

the JMEC in the performance of all its important functions with financial and technical resources.

The Partners' Group concluded by noting that they would remain in close contact with their representatives in Juba and "together remain vigilant in supporting the JMEC and the South Sudanese parties to ensure all elements of the Agreement continue to be implemented in good faith". They agreed to convene again in July in Khartoum to further support South Sudan and the implementation of the ARCSS.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos, Special Envoy of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn, said on Tuesday this week (May 10) that Ethiopia remained committed to continuing the all-round support it offered during the negotiation of South Sudanese warring parties. It saw the progress in forming a unity government in South Sudan as positive and the return of Riek Machar to Juba and his subsequent appointment as First Vice-President of South Sudan were positive moves. Ambassador Berhane told journalists after the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission meeting that Ethiopia would continue to help the Transitional Unity Government of South Sudan to set up parliament and other public institutions. He said, "As a sisterly country and as a chair of IGAD, Ethiopia will continue its support for the negotiation and implementation of the peace agreement." He called upon the newly appointed cabinet ministers of South Sudan to seize the opportunity to serve the people of South Sudan.

Kenya is once again planning to close down its refugee camps

The Kenyan government has decided to close down its two major refugee camp complexes at Dadaab and Kakuma which together house more than 600,000 refugees, a majority from Somalia but 190,000 or so from South Sudan. The government has also announced that it is disbanding the Department of Refugee Affairs, which worked with humanitarian organizations for the welfare of the refugees. A spokesman for the Interior Ministry said on Friday last week (May 6): "The message is clear; we are closing the camps and we will not accept more refugees in the country." The government said the camps were a drain on the economy and a threat to its national security. It is not the first time the government has threatened to shut down the camps. It has done so twice before: after al-Shabaab's Westgate Mall attack in 2013, and after the Garissa University College attack a year ago when al-Shabaab terrorists murdered 147 Christian students. It then delayed its decision in the face of massive pressure from international human rights organizations and the United Nations. This time, it appears more determined to carry out its decision despite calls by human rights bodies that Kenya should integrate its refugees rather than keep them holed up in camps.

A statement released by the Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Interior, Karanja Kibicho, said, "The government of the Republic of Kenya, having taken into consideration its national security interests, has decided that hosting of refugees has to come to an end." The voluntary repatriation process of sending Somali refugees back to Somalia had been very slow, and "the Kenyan government's most pressing constitutional and moral responsibility is to ensure the security of its citizens from the risk of violent attack. Our intelligence and security forces have known for a long time that these camps are a dire threat to our people's security". Indeed, he added, the government's action followed "the slower-than-a-crawl implementation of a Tripartite mechanism, between Kenya, Somalia and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to repatriate the refugees; ultimately that pace was detrimental to our security."

The statement said the Dadaab refugee camp complex was home to almost half a million Somali refugees who fled their country due to decades of civil war. Since its inception in the 1990s, it had been "clouded in controversy ranging from smuggling of goods and weapons from neighboring Somalia, to harboring terrorists today." Mr Kibicho said, "Some of the largest terrorist attacks, like the 2013 Westgate atrocity, were planned and operationalized from Dadaab. The al-Shabaab terrorist group has been able to take advantage of the camps' overcrowded and under-resourced conditions, and most importantly the limits to policing United Nations run sites, to operate with an alarming degree of freedom." The statement pointed out that terrorism had also seriously affected the country tourist trade, with frequent Western country travel warnings whose "broad, and inaccurate, generalizations have ruined the livelihoods of thousands of families".

Mr Kibicho said this was not a decision taken without controversy and pain. Kenya was a proud contributor to regional peace and security. In the Good Country Index it was ranked 26th. "We are proud of that status, and will continue to sustain it in the broad spectrum of peace, security and trade arrangements that have led to it." However, Mr Kibicho continued: "as a country with limited resources, facing an existential terrorist threat, we can no longer allow our people to bear the brunt of **the International Community's weakening obligations to the refugees.**"

He also noted that the camps, built for a fraction of their population, had caused significant environmental damage, seriously affecting the host communities. He noted that **voluntary international funding for the camps in Kenya was falling off in favor of raising budgets in the northern hemisphere for refugees headed to the West.** He said: "**International obligations in Africa should not be done on the cheap; the world continues to learn the ruinous effect of these persistent double standards.**"

Mr Kibicho said that at great cost Kenyan troops had liberated large areas of Somalia from al-Shabaab, yet it was persistently presented "with a picture of a country to which none of its refugee diaspora can resettle", despite the fact that UN workers travel over this liberated territory with relative safety. He pointed out that the African Union's Peace and Security Council acknowledged, last month, the "legitimate security concern of Kenya that the Dadaab Refugee Camps, in existence for more than 25 years, have been infiltrated and have become hideouts of the al-Shabaab terrorist group, which exploits the camps to plan and carry out attacks against Kenyan institutions, installations and civilians." The Council said "the Dadaab Refugee Camps have been deprived of their humanitarian character and function by the al-Shabaab terrorist group", and stressed that the "burden of refugees is the responsibility of the international community as a whole and not individual countries alone."

On Wednesday (May 11), Interior Cabinet Secretary, Joseph Nkaissery, said Kenya was drawing up the timetable for closure and had set up a task force to handle the closure plan. This, he said would present a timetable based on all the resources. He added that the state had allocated \$10 million to kick-start the process. There have been reports that the deadline for completion of the program will be 2017. Mr Nkaissery stressed that said Kenya also faced a potential threat from the Islamic State group. He said, "Kenya cannot look aside and allow this threat to escalate any further," adding "this decision has been made by government reflecting the fact that the camps have become hosting grounds for al-Shabaab as well as centers of smuggling and contraband trade besides being enablers of illicit weapons proliferation."

On Thursday, Kenya's Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary, Ambassador Amina Mohamed, underlined the decision, making it clear the relocation was necessary to protect Kenya's national interests. She said: "It became an issue of balancing nation[al] security interests and international obligations; I've been doing what I am doing for over 30 years. I've never come across a country that puts its international obligations above its national interests." She added that while it was important for Kenya's concerns to be taken into account, the welfare of the 300,000 plus refugees was also paramount. She said the "refugees need to live in dignity; we need to worry about their security safety, nutrition, and education." Ambassador Mohamed said "The camps are now completely overcrowded. They were built for far less numbers and the International Community has never moved to address this. The environmental impact has been disastrous for host communities." She said firmly: "We are now serious about this and we do not want anyone to have doubts. We have time to do this and want the international community to partner with us to enable us construct villages on the other side of the border to ensure the refugees are comfortable."

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was quick to call on the Kenyan government to reconsider its decision and to avoid actions that might "be at odds with its international obligations towards people needing sanctuary from danger and persecution." The UNHCR said in a statement it viewed with "profound concern" the latest Kenyan government comments. The UNHCR has been involved in the tripartite agreement [between] Kenya and Somalia and the UN for the voluntary return of refugees to Somalia. According to the UNHCR, the numbers at Dadaab fell by about 70,000 in 2013-2015, from 426,000 to 356,000, but it is not clear if all those who left voluntarily repatriated themselves to Somalia. A recent report notes that the number of births in the camp in the last quarter of 2015 for example, outnumbered the number of refugees returning to Somalia. It said in January this year that it was planning for as many as 50,000 to return to Somalia this year, though it also expressed some doubt as to whether this figure could be met, given the challenges that returnees could still meet. Despite the progress made in Somalia, many basic services are still lacking, especially in areas liberated from al-Shabaab, and there are continued security problems. Similarly, although South Sudan's political leaders have now set up a Transitional Government of National Unity, the peace process remains fragile and the World Food Program said on Monday this week (May 9) that 5.3 million people in South Sudan may face severe food shortages during this year's lean season, between March and September.

Others also criticized the decision. Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) said: "The closure [of Dadaab] would risk some 330,000 Somali lives and have extreme humanitarian consequences, forcing people to return to a war-torn country with minimal access to vital medical and humanitarian assistance." Amnesty International said it acknowledged that the resettlement of refugees to third countries had been slow, but urged Kenya to consider fully integrating refugees into society. **Kenya hosts the second largest number of refugees on the African continent after Ethiopia**, and some of them arrived as long as 25 years ago. Legally, all refugees must live in camps and they cannot work. Refugees International claimed the announcement would lead to extortion and abuse for refugees at the hands of Kenyan police and other security forces. It said "Refugees in Kenya were already struggling for survival ... this statement only worsens the situation, leaving their lives in limbo." U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, also issued a statement voicing deep concern about the decision and urging Kenya "to maintain its longstanding leadership role in protecting and sheltering victims of violence and trauma ... and not forcibly repatriate refugees."

Ethiopia celebrates Europe Day and close relations with the European Union

Europe Day was celebrated on Monday (May 9) at the Africa Hall of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The day is the landmark for celebrating peace and unity in Europe. In 1950, French foreign minister Robert Schuman, proposing the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community whose members would pool coal and steel production, presented the Schuman Declaration. The Community was the first in a series of supranational European institutions that eventually became today's European Union. It was an initiative to form a new policy of co-operation in Europe, meant to make the idea of a war between European nations implausible if not impossible. The dream of the founders of the EU has mostly been realized; today war between EU countries is highly unlikely. The European continent is largely at peace and 28 democratic countries have been unified in one single market representing the world's largest economic block. Certainly, in recent years the European Union has been, and still is, facing a number of serious challenges; equally, it has so far shown the necessary resilience and capacity to find common solutions to common problems.

Europe Day, here in Ethiopia, was not only a celebration of Europe; it was also an opportunity to take stock of the relationship between the EU and Ethiopia. In many respects, the EU and Ethiopia are bound together by a shared history as well as by common goals and shared values. The EU is a vitally important partner of Ethiopia in terms of peace, prosperity and development. It is a strong supporter of Ethiopia's efforts to achieve middle-income status and continue its impressive economic growth and development. Indeed, **Ethiopia is one of the largest beneficiaries of EU development cooperation support. Europe is the largest market for Ethiopian exports and trade relations are a significant element in the relationship.** The EU also provides important humanitarian assistance to the country. Overall, the EU and Ethiopia has been successfully building a strategic partnership for peace and development.

The EU provides funding to support Ethiopia through the European Development Fund (EDF) which finances the majority of EU development funding to Ethiopia aiming to increase resilience, accompanying reforms and promote sustained economic growth. The cycle of aid for the period 2014-2020 will amount to €745 million with a focus on sustainable agriculture and food security, mainly targeting vulnerable population groups, improvements to the national health system, road infrastructure, and energy, aiming to increase access and diversify the energy mix. The EDF also finances actions in favor of civil society and strengthening democratic governance. Under the previous cycle (2009-2013) the EU provided **€674 million to programs in Ethiopia, focusing particularly on transport and regional integration, rural development and food security, basic social services and democratic governance.** One multi-donor program, with an EU contribution of €100 million, is the highly impressive Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) the largest program of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa **assisting 7.5 million vulnerable people with reliable assistance each year (in the form of cash or food), in return for participation in public works.**

Ethiopia also benefits from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, which assists in building the resilience of vulnerable communities and stemming irregular migration. In addition, additional support is channeled through various other EU initiatives such as the Global Climate Change Alliance, the Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, and EU

humanitarian assistance. In April, the European commission announced a grant of €122.5 million for Ethiopia to address the immediate needs of people affected by the worsening humanitarian situation caused by one of the most severe extreme El Niño weather phenomenon on record.

Speaking at the celebration in Africa Hall on Monday, Ambassador Chantal [Hebberecht], head of the EU Delegation to Ethiopia and to the Africa Union, said the EU's partnership with Ethiopia and Africa was based on shared values for common concerns and aspirations. The Ambassador noted that: "In Africa we are an important trading partner, a reliable investor, a generous donor of humanitarian and development aid, and a loyal ally in a fight against mutual concerns". She emphasized that EU-Ethiopia relations had made strong progress in several areas, including economics, politics, and cultural exchanges. She also stressed, however, that peace and prosperity, based on a deep commitment to fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law, could never be taken for granted. It was, she said, a work in constant progress, something that must be nurtured and protected.

The State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie congratulated the EU Delegation Office and all EU Member States on this occasion, stressing that it was a special day marking inception of EU integration. He noted: "we have recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of cooperation between the EU and Ethiopia here in Addis Ababa – and very successfully. The numerous high-level visits which have taken place over the last few months have also encouraged the cooperation between EU and Ethiopia to grow to a more comprehensive and strategic partnership level." Taking this and other significant contributions into account, the State Minister extended his gratitude to the EU delegation and representatives of the Member States of the European Union for their continuous efforts to build up cooperation between EU-Ethiopia and EU Member States and Ethiopia. Ambassador Taye said he was very pleased that "our existing strong partnership with the EU is underpinned by equally strong bilateral relations with its member states."

Ambassador Taye underlined that "the European Union has also made its own substantial contributions to the progress so far registered in Ethiopia. Indeed, Ethiopia is one of the largest beneficiaries of the European Development Fund and the EU remains also by far Ethiopia's most important trading partner." He pointed out that Ethiopia's exports to the EU represent 43% of the country's worldwide exports. According to the State Minister, the number of jobs generated by the 300 or so EU companies active in Ethiopia is estimated at over 100,000. This he said was a very successful, generous, indeed unique cooperation. Ambassador Taye expressed his hope that the EU-Ethiopia partnership would continue to be bolstered further. Ethiopia, and Africa as a whole, he said, can learn a lot from the successful experience of the European Union's integration process and from observing how the EU has tackled the many challenges it has faced at different stages of its development.

In conclusion Ambassador Taye quoted Robert Schuman: "Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create *de facto* solidarities". Whether intended or not, said Ambassador Taye, this provides us with a model which has much to offer to the African Union.

Swiss authorities say no improvement in human rights in Eritrea

The head of Switzerland's State Secretariat for Migration, Mario Gattiker, told journalists on Monday (May 9) that the Swiss authorities have determined that the human rights situation

has not improved in Eritrea. Mr Gattiker said firmly that while there had been promises that Eritrea would lower the required length of military service to a term of 18 months: "those hopes did not turn out to be true". He said Eritrea had "officially gone back on its promise of shortening the national military service, requirement." He also added that any "proof of improved human rights conditions is still missing."

He said the asylum experts who went on the two-week "reconnaissance trip" to Eritrea in March had a brief to investigate whether it was possible to improve cooperation on migration with Eritrea. Mr Gattiker made it clear the visit had not been a success. Dialogue had not reached a point where a change could be envisaged and he said there was still "no evidence for an improved human rights situation." Despite Eritrea's signature to the UN Anti-Torture Convention last year, the team was unable to take any steps to verify whether this was being applied as they were denied access to military facilities and prisons. In addition, the asylum team was accompanied at every step by representatives of the Eritrean Government. They had visited cities, towns and schools during the two-week trip to try to gather information that could help them better understand the situation in the country and verify asylum seekers' stories.

Mr Gattiker did indicate that the team's findings on the state of the economy and on education provided a useful addition to the overall picture of Eritrea. These, he suggested might lead to adjustments in Switzerland's asylum regulations. However, he stressed, it was clear that nothing had changed with reference to National Service, and it remained clear that returnees who had left the country illegally still risked severe penalties. Mr Gattiker did also say that he hoped Eritrea would send an ambassador to Geneva as this, he said, might allow for improved dialogue with the Eritrean authorities. Any decision of whether Switzerland would send an ambassador to Eritrea, of course, lay with the Foreign Ministry.

About 28,500 Eritreans live in Switzerland and they make up the largest national group of asylum seekers to Switzerland. A quarter of them arrived as asylum seekers in 2014 and 6,640 were granted refugee status. Up to 10,000 Eritreans also applied for asylum in Switzerland last year. Only two other European countries have accepted more Eritreans: Germany, with 13,200 and Sweden, with 11,500.

The mission of the Secretariat for Migration in March followed a private visit a month earlier by four members of the Swiss National Council and a member of the Green Party at the invitation of the Swiss Honorary Consul in Eritrea. On their return from their two-week visit, the group requested a meeting with Swiss Justice Minister Simonetta Sommaruga in charge of immigration to discuss their conclusions. The group praised the openness of the people they met in Eritrea and said they had no problems travelling around. They claimed that Eritrea was "a country which has known a very tough dictatorship and the system remains authoritarian but it is opening up." They called for a Swiss mission to examine the human rights situation in Eritrea and suggested Switzerland should set up permanent diplomatic representation in Asmara, launch a special development aid project for Eritrea and discuss refugee issues.

The Secretariat for Migration pointed out that the politicians "did not discuss human rights topics linked to asylum procedures," and made no effort to discuss legal rights, national military service and prisons. The Secretariat said in a statement there was "no sufficiently strong evidence to show that the human rights situation in Eritrea had improved significantly". This was, of course, a month later confirmed by the report of the Secretariat's

own mission which concluded it would be unjustifiable to return Eritrean asylum seekers to their home considering the situation in the country. The delegation reiterated the government's stance on returning Eritrean asylum seekers following the talks it held with Eritrean authorities and the investigations it conducted regarding the cause of Eritrean emigration prior to its visit to the country.

This is not the first time the State Secretariat for Migration has sent a mission to Asmara. The Secretariat's Deputy Director, Urs von Arb, carried out a five-day exploratory mission. His report remained confidential until a news outlet forced its publication under a Freedom of Information request. The Deputy Director's six-page report said events in the second half of 2014 appeared to show a possible opening up in Eritrea. The country agreed to sign the UN Anti-Torture Convention and a presidential aide, in talks with the Swiss Ambassador in Khartoum, underlined the country's interest in cooperation over migration. Mr Von Arb wrote "Because of the isolation of the country, the economically desperate situation and the high emigration of its mainly young population, it is possible that Eritrea considers a change in its policy necessary."

The Deputy Director met with Foreign Minister Saleh Osman, Minister of Justice, Fozia Hashim and presidential adviser, Yemane Gebreab, as well as several Heads of Mission and representatives of international organizations during his visit. He reported that the government officials had said that the National Service will be limited to 18 months and he concluded that the government did want to communicate more effectively. This promise made by Presidential [aides?] was made official by the President or announced in the local media. Despite widespread concerns about the reality of the proposed policy change, this promise was a central element in the EU-Eritrea aid package discussions that led to the EU providing an aid package of €200million.

Mr von Arb said: "The situation in Eritrea is complex and not black and white; there are many shades of gray". He also noted that Eritrean officials were not prepared to talk about the situation in prisons or the human rights situation. He concluded 2015 would be a "crucial year", and would provide evidence whether the regime was willing to carry out sustainable improvements and changes, or whether it was only playing for time. His conclusion was: "The conditions are not yet available to initiate concrete bilateral co-operation in the field of migration."

In talking to the press on Monday (May 9), Mario Gattiker stressed that Switzerland's hopes for an improvement in the situation during 2015 had not been confirmed. Hoped-for changes had not taken place. He said it was still clear that Eritreans, who illegally leave their country or have fled from the National Service, upon returning could still at worst expect detention and torture.

Following the comments of the Secretariat for Migration on Monday, a Europe-based campaign group "Stop Slavery in Eritrea" organized by former recruits of Eritrea's indefinite national service, called for a review of the aid package. The group said the findings of the Swiss Mission confirmed that the Eritrean regime had no intention of "stopping the modern day slavery in the guise of national service to which it has subjected all Eritreans over the age of 18." The group said that unfortunately it was always clear that good will on behalf of the EU alone wasn't going to solve the problem inside Eritrea; "every member of the Eritrean public knew two years ago that the regime had no intentions of limiting national service to 18 months, that is why the number of refugees fleeing the national service didn't go down." It

pointed out that figures from the refugee camps in the region indicated that younger and more vulnerable children were fleeing ahead of conscription and as a result of the national service crisis. It said it is "time to look for realistic solutions to the refugee crisis and appeasing the regime isn't one. We call on the EU to revise the aid package negotiated on the back of this promise".