

A Week in the Horn

17th June 2016

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News in brief

Africa and the African Union

The Ministerial-level Preparatory Meeting of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD-VI), commenced on Thursday (June 16) in Banjul, Gambia.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), in collaboration with the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and its partners, commemorates the 16th Day of the African Child (DAC) on the theme "Conflict and crisis in Africa: Protecting all children's Rights".

The African Union (AU) is prepared to launch the electronic passport (e-Passport) at the next AU Summit tabled to take place in Kigali, Rwanda, in July 2016. This flagship project, first agreed upon in 2014, falls squarely within the framework of Africa's Agenda 2063 and has the specific aim of facilitating free movement of persons, goods and services around the continent - in order to foster intra-Africa trade, integration and socio-economic development.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia and the European Union signed a joint declaration, a reflection of the EU's strong relations with Ethiopia. Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn and President of the European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, signed the declaration, earmarked, "Towards an EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement", in Brussels, Belgium (June 15) hours ahead of the 10th anniversary of European Development Days (EDD 2016).

Prime Minister Hailemariam addressed the 10th edition of European Development Days (EDD) on Wednesday (June 15). While addressing the EDD, Europe's leading forum on international cooperation and development, the premier expressed confidence about the country's ability to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (See article)

Prime Minister Hailemariam also held constructive talks with Ms Federica Mogherini on the Strategic Engagement Agreement, and discussed the migration challenges shared in common by the EU and Ethiopia. (June 15)

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn held discussions with the ambassador of the UAE to Ethiopia, Ghazi Abdullah Salem Al Mahri (June 13). The two sides have agreed to expand bilateral trade and investment ties.

Prime Minister Hailemariam inaugurated Ethiopia's new chancery, built in Brussels Belgium, on Friday (June 17) in the presence of senior EU and Ethiopian officials, including Teshome Toga, Ethiopian Ambassador to the European Union and the Benelux countries.

An Ethiopian delegation led by Foreign Affairs Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom is taking part in the Ministerial-level Preparatory Meeting of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD-VI), which commenced on Thursday (June 16) in Banjul, Gambia.

Dr Tedros made an official visit to Cuba at the end of last week. The visit was aimed at promoting and further strengthening bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Cuba, and Dr Tedros held talks with Cuba's Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodriguez, discussing ways of further strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries. (See article)

Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom paid an official visit to Jamaica on Monday and Tuesday this week (June 13-14), aiming to further strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. His visit was the first high-level Ethiopian government visit to Jamaica since the visit of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1966. (See article)

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-selassie received Li Junhua, the Director-General of the Department of International Organizations and Conferences of the Foreign Ministry of China (June 15). The Director General commended the remarkable contribution Ethiopia has been making towards building a strong, stable and secured region on the continent.

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-selassie held talks with the Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, Mr Kobsak Chutikul (June 17). The Special Envoy reaffirmed his country's readiness and commitment to expand cooperation in areas of business, people to people relations, medical tourism and culture.

State Minister for Business and Diaspora Affairs, Mr Regasa Kefale, on Thursday (June 16) briefed the Ethiopian media corps on the upcoming Second Ethiopian Diaspora Day celebration, due to be held from July 28-31 2016 in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

Getachew Reda, Minister for the Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) gave a press conference on (June 14) in connection with Ethiopia's retaliatory response to Eritrea's attempted attack at the Tsorena front last weekend. According to the minister, following Ethiopia's retaliatory measures, the Eritrean army has suffered a heavy loss, one that should make the Eritrean government stop and reassess all its mistakes.

AMISOM, in a statement issued last Saturday, commended Ethiopian troops for defeating al-Shabaab. The AMISOM Acting Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Nakibus Lakara, hailed Ethiopian troops for thwarting an al-Shabaab attempted attack and inflicting heavy casualties on the al Qaeda-linked militants. (See article)

Ethiopia and the World Bank signed an 18 billion birr loan agreement for the expansion of infrastructure. Abdulaziz Mohammed, Minister of Finance and Economic Cooperation of Ethiopia, and Carolyn Turk, World Bank Country Director for Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan, signed the loan agreement on (June 15). The loan will be used to improve road safety, boost energy supplies and strengthen small and medium enterprises.

An Ethio-Canadian Business Forum jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ethiopian embassy in Canada and the Canadian Embassy in Addis, was held at the Intercontinental Addis Hotel in Addis Ababa on Thursday (June 16). (See article)

The Ethiopian Embassy in Beijing staged a reception marking the 46th anniversary of the establishment of Ethio-China diplomatic relations on Monday (June 13).

Eritrea

Ethiopian defense forces took proportional retaliatory action against Eritrean forces after the latter's attempted attack at the Tsorena front on Sunday (June 12). Government Communication Affairs on Monday (June 13) also said that the retaliatory measure has seriously weakened the attacking capacity of the Eritrean army.

The Eritrean government on Friday (June 17) accused UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of failing to distinguish between what it sees as the aggressor and the victim. The Eritrean government added that Ban's statement destroys "the moral authority of the secretary-general's office."

Following the press conference held last week by the UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights violations in Eritrea and the Commission's unequivocally damning report, the Eritrean government has been making every effort to mobilize support against the detailed condemnation of the government and the way Eritrean officials have been tagged with "crimes against humanity." (See article)

Kenya

President Kenyatta gave a keynote address at the 10th edition of the European Development Days forum this week. He also met with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to press for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to be upgraded to a UN Mission.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, told a press conference in Nairobi on Monday (June 13) that President Kenyatta had asked him for a plan to repatriate Somalis from Dadaab camp. He said the plan would be presented to the foreign ministers of Kenya and Somalia at a meeting in Nairobi at the end of next week.

Foreign Affairs Cabinet Secretary, Amina Mohamed, said that President Kenyatta and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon agreed at a meeting in Brussels on Wednesday (June 15) to ensure the refugees from Dadaab should be treated with dignity. She said "The UN secretary-general said he understands Kenya's decision to close the refugee camp."

Kenya will get a World Bank loan of \$1.1 billion for infrastructure projects in the country's northern regions. The Bank's vice-president for Africa said the funds would be used to build roads, improve water and energy supplies and support livestock keeping.

Somalia

On Wednesday (June 15) the Federal Parliament passed amendments to articles 60 and 136 of the provisional constitution. Article 60 of the current constitution says that the term of office of the Federal Parliament is 4 years from the day of the announcement of the election results. This was amended to say that the term of the office of the Federal Parliament ends from the day that the new parliament takes the oath. The effect of these amendments will be to allow the Federal Parliament to continue to function should the country's leaders fail to meet the deadline set for the election of government institutions that is in August and September. (See article)

Somalia's prime minister has said, closing the Dadaab refugee complex this year "would be very tough," suggesting it would be more realistic to set a 2019 deadline for emptying the camps.

AMISOM on a statement issued last Saturday commended Ethiopian troops for defeating Al-Shabaab. The AMISOM Acting Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Nakibus Lakara, hailed Ethiopian troops for thwarting an Al-Shabaab attempted attack and inflicting heavy casualties on the Al Qaeda-linked militants. (See article)

South Sudan

South Sudanese president, Salva Kiir, has issued a provisional order appointing all state governors as interim leaders of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement in their respective states.

The head of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Herve Ladsous, visiting Juba, said on Tuesday (June 14) that South Sudan had opened a new page with the coming into force of the newly-established Transitional

Government of National Unity. He said the government should now focus on stability and security, the situation of internally displaced persons, building an institutional framework, the economy and humanitarian situation, especially food insecurity.

The United Nations Human Right Council has selected a three-member committee to monitor human rights violations in South Sudan and aid the process of transitional justice, healing and reconciliation. The Commission will be chaired by Yasmin Sooka, a human rights' lawyer who served on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 1994 to 2001.

Sudan

Sudanese President Omer al-Bashir Thursday (June 16) arrived in Doha where he held talks on bilateral relations with the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Prime Minister Hailemariam addresses the European Development Days in Brussels

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn addressed the 10th edition of the European Development Days in Brussels on Wednesday (June 15). The European Development Days are Europe's leading forum on international cooperation and development, and Prime Minister Hailemariam firmly expressed his confidence in Ethiopia's ability to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. He said the goals were achievable as they were "on the same wave length" as the country's own aspirations and policies. Referring to the fact that Ethiopia dedicated 70% of its total expenditure to sectors related to poverty reduction, the Prime Minister noted that Ethiopia had already begun putting major efforts into implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He emphasized the need for development partners to increase their assistance, since financing was the major challenge for the implementation of the SDGs. He also underlined that support towards realizing these meant helping Ethiopia achieve its vision of joining middle income countries by 2025.

In her opening speech to the session, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Ms Federica Mogherini, underlined the need for more investment and closer partnership for the realization of the agenda. She noted, in general, the improved partnerships witnessed over recent years between governments, civil society and the private sector. UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon told the Forum that there was need for what he called a "paradigm shift" on how countries realized development. The meeting deliberated on fifteen topics structured around five main themes: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership.

Earlier, on Tuesday (June 14), Prime Minister Hailemariam and Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, signed an Ethio-EU Strategic Engagement Agreement in Brussels aimed at structuring strengthened cooperation between the two partners. The Strategic Engagement acknowledges the crucial role played by Ethiopia in Africa and the international community, as well as its significant economic growth, estimated at an average of 10.6% by the World Bank over the decade 2004-14, and its progress towards Millennium Development Goals, on track to reach 6 of the 8. The Agreement notes that the EU and Ethiopia are willing to jointly address a number of regional and global issues of common interest and enhance their partnership on bilateral issues to a more strategic level. It underlines that "The strategic engagement should become a comprehensive process of dialogue and cooperation, in different areas and on different levels, based on common interests. It should be guided by ownership, equity, partnership and joint responsibility".

The Agreement underlines that Ethiopia is one of the EU's most important partners on the African continent. It notes that the EU fully supports Ethiopia's constructive role in peace and security in the Horn of Africa, not least in Somalia and South Sudan and as chair of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development. It also acknowledges its role as the number one contributor to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, as well as its contributions to thematic international debates such as climate change. The Strategic Engagement Agreement focuses on six sectoral dialogues, which include issues of regional peace and security; countering terrorism and violent radicalization; social and economic development, investment and trade; migration; governance and

human rights; and climate change and environmental cooperation. It will be regularly reviewed during annual high-level meetings and meetings of senior officials.

In fact, the EU and Ethiopia can look back on 40 years of constructive bilateral relations in areas as diverse as development cooperation, trade and economic development, consolidation of democratic institutions, and regional peace and security. The importance of the relationship has been underlined in a number of agreements including the Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa in 2011, and more recently in the **Horn of Africa Action Plan** last year. Ethiopia is also an increasingly important partner in terms of migration, as demonstrated by its signature to the **Declaration on a Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility** (CAMP) in Valletta on November 11 last year.

Prime Minister Hailemariam also held constructive talks with Ms Federica Mogherini on the Strategic Engagement Agreement, and discussed the migration challenges shared in common by the EU and Ethiopia. Ms Mogherini, reminded that Ethiopia currently hosted the largest refugee community in Africa, welcomed its ongoing cooperation under the Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility. The two sides discussed the recent proposal of the EU Commission to work towards **Migration Compacts** with priority partner countries, including Ethiopia. They agreed on the need for implementation of the commitments made in Valletta, notably to protect people's lives, ensuring effective return where appropriate and in helping tackling the root causes of irregular migration.

In this context, Ms Mogherini confirmed that implementation of three actions under the **EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa**, amounting to €97 million, would start shortly. The focus would be on support for refugees and host communities; job creation for potential migrants and returnees; and building the resilience of the most vulnerable communities. Ms Mogherini, who recognized Ethiopia's crucial role in regional peace and security, also exchanged views with the Prime Minister on the recent military action on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border. They also discussed the upcoming **EU-Ethiopia Business Forum** which is intended to be held in Brussels before the end of the year, and the importance of increasing private sector involvement in Ethiopia.

Dr Tedros visits the Republic of Cuba

Dr Tedros made an official visit to Cuba on Friday (June 10). The visit was aimed at promoting and further strengthening bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Cuba, and Dr Tedros held talks with Cuba's Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodriguez, discussing ways of further strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries. Dr Tedros thanked Mr Rodriguez for the fraternal relations that united Cuba and Africa, and especially Cuba and Ethiopia. He also thanked Cuba for its cooperation in the fight against the Ebola virus in several West African countries, and the collaboration with Ethiopia in health, education, science, technology, and the sugar industry. Mr Rodriguez underlined that Cubans were proud of their relations with Africa, in particular with Ethiopia. These, he said, had solid foundations, satisfactory results and great potential. Rodriguez also recognized the progress noted by the African Union and throughout Africa. Ethiopia, he said, showed encouraging progress and he welcomed the efforts of the Ethiopian people and government to boost the national economy despite difficult international conditions.

During his visit, Dr Tedros met with the Vice-President of the Council of State of Cuba, Salvador Valdés Meza. They exchanged views over the bilateral relations of Cuba and Ethiopia, as well as regional and international issues. The meeting also allowed both officials to express their satisfaction over the fruitful state of bilateral relations. During the meeting, Dr Tedros expressed his appreciation over the fraternal nature of the relations that unite Cuba and Ethiopia. Those ties, he said, were written in blood, the blood of Cubans who died in the wars of liberation on the African continent. The Minister also attended a wreath-laying ceremony at Jose Marti Memorial in the Revolution Square of Havana, and visited Cuba's leading public health institute, the Tropical Medicine Institute "Pedro Kouri".

... Dr Tedros visits Jamaica and calls for support for Ethiopia's Security Council bid.....

On his visit to Jamaica, Dr Tedros Adhanom, Minister of Foreign Affairs, expressed confidence in the support of Jamaica and Caribbean countries for Ethiopia's bid for a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security

Council for 2017-2018. The Minister was addressing a reception hosted for the diplomatic corps in Kingston by the Office of the Honorary Consulate of Ethiopia in Jamaica. Among those present were representatives of the Jamaican Government including Mike Henry, Minister of Transport and Mining, Christopher Tufton, Minister of Health and Mrs Sheila Sealy Monteith, Acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, as well as members of the opposition and of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps including Ambassador Luis Moreno, US Ambassador to Jamaica; David Fritton, British High Commissioner to Jamaica; and Luis Martínez Prada Charge d'Affaires of the European Union. The Ethiopian and the Rastafarian communities were well represented.

During the reception, Dr Tedros called for the support of Jamaica and the Caribbean region for Ethiopia's bid for candidacy to the United Nations Security Council 2017-2018. He highlighted the country's track record of continued contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security, noting "Ethiopia is a leading troop contributor to the UN Peacekeeping operations, having deployed over 80,000 military and police personnel in more than 10 UN peacekeeping missions worldwide. Indeed, we in Ethiopia do not see the peace and stability of our neighbors and countries beyond as different from our own." In addition, Ethiopia is the leading contributor of women peacekeepers to UN missions worldwide and hosts the largest population of refugees in Africa. The country is also home to the 4th largest GDP in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the largest non-oil producing economy on the continent.

In recent times, Ethiopia has moved to strengthen its diplomatic presence in Jamaica with the appointment of the first (non-resident) Ambassador to Jamaica, Ambassador Girma Birru, Ethiopian Ambassador to the US, and the appointment of the first Ethiopian Honorary Consul to Jamaica, Mrs Yodit Getachew Hylton. In discussing these developments Dr Tedros said "the [appointments] are intended to signal Ethiopia's strong interest in updating our relations with Jamaica and the Caribbean region for mutual cultural, political and economic benefits". He added: "our mutual history and cultural affinity is not enough, we must now seek to build on this foundation for the benefit of both countries - critical to this is a focus on boosting the trade and investment relationship between Jamaica and Ethiopia".

During his two-day visit to Jamaica, Dr Tedros also met with Prime Minister, Andrew Holness, for discussions on bilateral and international relations. He told the Prime Minister there were ample opportunities for the two countries to cooperate and develop strategies in various areas, including tourism, trade and sporting sectors. In addition to these areas, Dr Tedros also noted that Ethiopia would like to further strengthen ties with Jamaica in education, culture and air transport. Prime Minister Holness welcomed the possibility of working together with Ethiopia on enhancing people-to-people relations, as well as strengthening cooperation in tourism, investment, trade, education, air transport and sport. The two sides also emphasized the importance of nurturing the historic relations between Ethiopia and Jamaica.

Eritrea tries to distract attention from the UN Commission of Inquiry report

Following the press conference held last week by the UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights violations in Eritrea and the Commission's unequivocally damning report, the Eritrean government has been making every effort to mobilize support against the detailed condemnation of the government and the way Eritrean officials have been tagged with "crimes against humanity." Presidential Adviser, Yemane Gebreab, travelled to Geneva to issue immediate and lengthy criticisms of the report at the press conference, accused the Commission of failing to meet principles of impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity and lacking "minimum standards of rigor and professionalism," being "entirely one-sided" and only talking "to people who agreed with its predetermined conclusions". It had based its "sweeping and extreme allegations on the testimony of 500 refugees and asylum-seekers with unknown identity, while disregarding the testimonies of 42,000 Diaspora Eritreans living in over 20 countries who contested its well-known biases." In fact, the Commission did consider these testimonies but concluded from those it contacted that they were overwhelmingly produced "by a well-organized government campaign." It concluded that "next to none of those contacted had actually read the report, and many had been provided with sensationalized information about the Commission's findings." It noted significant misinformation in the testimonies, forging of signatures and cases where Eritrean officials coerced the writers.

One of the points raised by Ato Yemane was the usual allegation that Eritrea finds itself in a "continuing state of

war with Ethiopia, the illegal occupation of Eritrean territory which constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights, repeated armed aggression, sanctions and mistaken policies". Ato Yemane, of course, made no mention of the fact that the war in 1998 was a result of Eritrean aggression, that Eritrea has continuously supported armed Ethiopian opposition movements in cross-border attacks, that it has been involved in aggression against all its neighbors, which is why it is the subject of UN sanctions, nor that Ethiopia had fully accepted the Border Commission's delimitation in 2004 and has persistently called for a dialogue with Eritrea to allow for demarcation and restoration of normal relations. Eritrea has just as persistently refused, for the very simple reason that any agreement with Ethiopia would mean an end to the system of indefinite national conscription and forced labor which allows the regime to keep much of the population under military discipline and control.

Ato Yemane also claimed "massive demobilization took place from 2001 to 2005 in partnership with the World Bank". He was very careful not to give any figures for this "massive" demobilization which actually only involved those who had been wounded in the 1998-2000 war, and some women fighters, in total amounting to a few thousand. Similarly, he dismissed the claim of forced labor, referring to the "attractive salary packages" given to (some) national service conscripts in 2015. He makes no mention of the wages the conscripts were provided with between 1998 and 2015 – no more than 10 dollars a month, nor explain the unending conscription or offer any rationale for extending 18 month's service to up to 18, even 20 years in some cases.

Ato Yemane's allegations for a while appeared to receive timely, if surprisingly coincidental, support last weekend following Eritrea's attempted attack along the border around Tserona. In fact, in a statement issued on Monday (June 13), Ethiopian Government Communication Affairs noted that the recent U.N. rights investigators' report which had accused Eritrean leaders of crimes against humanity including torture, rape and murder and called on the Security Council to impose sanctions and refer the case to court, put Eritrea under pressure. The statement added that Eritrea's attempted attack was targeted at diverting the attention of Eritrean people and the international community.

Whether or not the fighting was intended as a distraction, it is hardly surprising that the Eritrean Government is making every effort to try to discredit the Commission's findings in advance. Leaks from documents in Asmara show that it has been trying to organize a 300,000 strong petition attacking the Commission's report, using the same techniques of pressure on members of the Diaspora that the Commission's criticizes in its report. A letter from the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave details. Every Eritrean foreign embassy is required to fulfil a quota of signatures against the Commission's report. Thousands of Eritreans across the diaspora are being officially encouraged to travel to Geneva for "spontaneous" protests; those that do not have been told they will be refused any visas for Eritrea, any government support, or ability to visit their own country. The documents clearly show "the line of control from President Isaias Afewerki and his closest circle of advisers, through the embassies and into the ruling party's network in each country, to members of the Eritrean exile community." The government has also been calling for demonstrations in Geneva and elsewhere against the Commission next week when the Commission formally presents its report to the Human Rights Council. Last year, the Eritrean embassies and PFDJ offices in Europe mobilized their supporters to bus thousands to Geneva to protest against the COI. The members of the Commission and of the UN Human Rights Council were forced to seek police protection from threats and intimidation in their hotel and in the street in Geneva. The government plans to do the same this year.

Earlier this year the European Parliament noted with grave concern the activities that the PFDJ's youth organization carried out in the Netherlands with the support of the political leadership in Asmara. In March, the European Parliament in a resolution urged "EU Member States to investigate the role of the PFDJ and its various wings, including the youth wing, and to prohibit all forms of association and activity that directly support control and surveillance exercises in Europe, undermine democratic principles and the rule of law, and create patterns of intimidation and extortion ..."

The quick reaction of the international community to the fighting last weekend, may have sparked a false signal that Eritrea calculated correctly, and that clashes on the border might draw some attention away from the Commission's report. A UN spokesperson said the UN Secretary-General was deeply concerned by reports of fighting on the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. He discussed this with Prime Minister Hailemariam in Brussels. The Deputy Secretary-General called the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea. They urged both Governments to exercise maximum restraint and called on them to resolve their differences through peaceful

means, including full implementation of the peace agreement they signed in 2000. The African Union also urged Eritrea and Ethiopia to exercise restraint and avoid any actions that could further endanger regional stability.

In fact, this is not likely to distract attention for long, unless Eritrea tries another attack. The government has, therefore, also been wheeling out its international supporters in the academic community and elsewhere to try to build up criticism of the Commission. One of the more surprising areas of criticism of the Commission is apparently coming from the EU. There has been concern that the EU's determination to try and stop the flow of refugees from Eritrea might cause officials to try to downplay the Commission's findings. An article last week in the UK *News Statesman* said collaboration with President Isaias regime "would be difficult, if not impossible, if it was officially designated as a regime that commits "crimes against humanity" as the EU's development principles are founded on respect for human rights. The Cotonou agreement, it says, spells out "respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, and good governance is part and parcel of long term development". Despite this, according to the article, "senior EU officials spent the last week preparing to quietly suggest that since the UN Commissioners were not allowed to visit Eritrea (despite repeated requests) their work was unfortunately "anecdotal" and cannot be relied on."

Another vocal supporter of the regime is apparently the Deputy Director of the Africa Center at the Atlantic Council, Bronwyn Bruton, who says she has visited Eritrea five times in the last year and who condemned the report in almost identical terms to Ato Yemane, attacking its methodology and its failure to pay enough attention to academic and journalists who had failed to see the problems that the Commission had identified.

Ms Bruton was also quick to claim that Ethiopia was responsible for starting the clashes last weekend despite the fact that all the evidence is to the contrary. Nor, despite Ms Bruton's allegations, has Ethiopia threatened to "punish Eritrea militarily." All it has said is that it will respond "proportionally" to Eritrean attacks, and that is hardly the same thing. There is, in fact, no reason "to point the finger of blame firmly at Ethiopia," particularly since, as Ms Bruton actually admits, it isn't clear what happened at the weekend. Her version of events comes from Eritrean officials. Other reports, including some from Eritrea, are very different. In fact, whatever Ms Bruton thinks or Eritrea believes, Ethiopia doesn't want a war and has no intention of either provoking one or being dragged into one. Nor are its problems such as to suggest any reasons for conflict, rather indeed the reverse. Indeed, Ethiopia has consistently made every effort to avoid conflict.

There seems little doubt that Eritrea hopes the fighting at Tserona will re-focus attention on what Eritrea has repeatedly claimed to be the cause of its indefinite national service: Ethiopia's alleged refusal to demarcate the border after the EEBC's delimitation. This might be taken more seriously if it wasn't for the fact that Ethiopia has accepted the Boundary Commission's delimitation and has repeatedly called for a dialogue to launch demarcation and restore normal relations. Equally, with the Commission of Inquiry formally presenting its report to the UN Human Rights Council, the details of the report with its list of "crimes of enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape, murder and other inhumane acts" that were all "part of a campaign to instill fear in, deter opposition from and ultimately to control the Eritrean civilian population since 1991", will, once again, be in the forefront of the news.

AMISOM thwarts al-Shabaab attack on Ethiopian forces at Halgan

The al-Shabaab attack in the early hours of Thursday (June 9) at Halgan in Hiiraan region, aimed to overrun the forward military post there, manned by Ethiopian forces under AMISOM together with Somali Army units. Halgan is on the road between Belet Weyne and Buulo Burde, some 300 kilometers from Mogadishu. Hiiraan is an area in which troops from both Ethiopia and Djibouti operate for AMISOM but the troops at Halgan were from AMISOM's Ethiopian contingent.

Al-Shabaab's claim of a major victory despite clear evidence to the contrary throws doubt on some of its other claims which have been impossible to verify. On this occasion, it is clear that al-Shabaab fighters did not overrun the base, even briefly, nor did they kill the number of Ethiopian troops they claim to have done after a car bomb destroyed the front gate. In a statement, AMISON said: "Attacks such as this further demonstrate the despicable nature of al-Shabaab, whose sole purpose is to spread terror and continue the destabilization of Somalia. Our resolve can only be rejuvenated, to fight on until Somalia is freed of all elements of terror."

The attack was similar to those made against other forward military posts over the last few months and followed the same pattern. Al-Shabaab tried to concentrate a sizeable force, outnumbering the AMISOM forces at the post, normally up to 200 troops at such a position. In each case, the attack opened with a suicide car-bomb attack at the base entrance, followed up by large numbers of fighters trying to storm the base. However, the attempted attack failed. Halgan was certainly an example of the ability of Ethiopian troops to acquire the trust of local communities.

African Union officials who toured the base shortly afterwards told reporters later that for al-Shabaab the occasion has been one of its most costly operations.

Al-Shabaab, itself, as usual, claimed a major victory, saying it had killed 43 Ethiopian troops, losing only 16 of its own fighters. The Head of Ethiopia's Government Communications Affairs Office, Ato [Mr] Getachew Reda ridiculed al-Shabaab's initial claim that it had killed 43 Ethiopian soldiers as "entirely fabricated." In fact, on this occasion it is quite clear the attack was comprehensively defeated and al-Shabaab suffered significant losses, both during the attack and in the subsequent pursuit of fleeing fighters. African Union officials who visited Halgan later in the day saw dozens of dead bodies of al-Shabaab fighters in and around the base entrance. The Ethiopian forces were able to deploy attack helicopters to assist in tracking down al-Shabaab fighters as they tried to escape, adding significantly to the numbers killed outside the base in the surrounding area. Overall, in the attack and its aftermath, AMISOM forces and Somali Army units killed five senior al-Shabaab commanders and counted over 245 bodies. A significant quantity of weapons were captured, among them machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and dozens of rifles and small arms.

On Friday, after the attack was defeated, AMISOM's acting force commander, Major-General Nakibus Lakara, visited the Halgan Forward Operation Base where he commended the troops for repulsing the attack and vowed to step up security to defeat al-Shabaab militants. Major-General Lakara said, "Al-Shabaab has been exploiting AMISOM weaknesses, but over time we have been able to learn lessons and share experiences and this is evidence of the troops being able to pick those lessons from previous experiences." IGAD and other regional and international bodies also commended the efforts of the Ethiopian troops in AMISOM who repulsed the latest attack as part of their support for the people of Somalia to live in peace and stability. An AMISOM statement said a cache of arms seized from the militants was displayed during Lakara's visit and the battlefield was still strewn with bodies of al-Shabaab fighters.

The attack was the fourth such attack on the forces of troop contributing countries to AMISOM and if, as some observers have claimed, al-Shabaab has been deliberately moving against each of the troop-contributing nations in turn, to try to pass a message that no one is safe, the tactic misfired at Halgan. Certainly, if the latest attack was part of a deliberate effort by al-Shabaab to try to weaken the resolve of AMISOM contributing countries, it has been a failure. AMISOM has now been in Somalia for almost 10 years to support Somalia's National Army units in the fight against al-Shabaab and, despite losses, no country has failed to continue to support the Somali government and AMISOM. The peacekeeping mission is currently made up of 22,000 soldiers from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.

Ato Getachew described al-Shabaab as an organization which is on the brink of death. He called the attack on Halgan a pretentious act. Two years ago, al-Shabaab was making a serious effort to hold control of key cities and economic connection lines. Today, AMISOM and Somali National Army units have taken control of many, indeed most, of the key towns in southern Somalia. Al-Shabaab is in retreat. Equally, it remains capable of making attacks on isolated bases and retains the capacity to be able to try to disrupt development as the country moves towards the proposed elections in August. Regional organizations and the international community remain confident that Somalia is on the right path to a more secured and stable nation. The 2016 elections will be a part of the transition towards a fully-fledged electoral process of one-person-one-vote by 2020.

It is to be expected that Al-Shabaab will try to disrupt the elections. Only a few days ago, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, Ambassador Francisco Madeira, revealed that AMISOM was gearing up to provide security to ensure a peaceful vote during the electoral process.

Ambassador Madeira noted AMISOM had already begun working with the Somali Government and its security forces to establish a technical security committee to oversee security arrangements for the August ballot.

The Somali Parliament amends the draft constitution

On Wednesday (June 15) the Federal Parliament passed amendments to articles 60 and 136 of the provisional constitution. Article 60 of the current constitution says that the term of office of the Federal Parliament is 4 years from the day of the announcement of the election results. This was amended to say that the term of the office of Federal parliament ended from the day that the new parliament takes the oath. The other amendment delays holding a referendum on the provisional constitution until the next government has been installed. The effect of these amendments will be to allow the Federal parliament to continue to function should the country's leaders fail to meet the deadline set for the election of government institutions that is in August and September.

The President and Prime Minister have both firmly denied that the government is looking for any extension of its mandate, but there are a lot of challenging technical and logistical issues that have yet to be finalized before the elections are held. These include negotiating the composition of the 135 elders who will pick the 13,750-strong Electoral College that has the responsibility of electing the members of parliament. Arrangements have to be made for the travel plans, conference agendas and security for the Electoral College members to convene in each of the regional locations for the election of members of parliament for the Lower House. These locations include Puntland, Jubaland, Central and South West states. They also include Hiiraan and Middle Shebelle which has yet to finalize its state procedures and structures. Similarly, the responsibilities of the regional election commissions and the federal election commission have yet to be organized to allow the regional presidents to handpick their respective members for the Upper House. Both Houses are responsible for electing the next president. In this context, still unsettled is the issue of whether Benadir region, including Mogadishu, will have representation in the Upper House.

The Somali National Leaders Forum is already well behind schedule on these details. It is still possible for the Government and the regional state leaders to hold the elections on time but this will depend upon the political will of the various actors concerned." The President, the Prime Minister and the leaders of the federal member states have firmly and publicly committed themselves to taking the electoral process forward; and delaying the elections or trying to extend the current government will meet with strong opposition from the international community and Somalia's partners. Some leaders have indicated they believe there might have to be delays due to technicalities and slipped deadlines. Somalia's partners, however, believe missing any deadline would be dangerous, and any extension could trigger a political, even a constitutional, crisis.

Earlier this year the leaders of the federal government and the heads of regional administrations, agreed that direct elections were not feasible this year, as promised four years ago. Direct elections will take place in 2020 by which time a one-person, one-vote system will have been introduced. For now, the indirect elections will be held with 13,750 delegates electing the 275-member lower House of Parliament and the regional administrations nominating the 54-member Upper House.

An Ethio-Canada Business Forum held in Addis Ababa

An Ethio-Canadian Business Forum, jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ethiopian embassy in Canada and the Canadian Embassy in Addis, was held at the Intercontinental Addis Hotel in Addis Ababa on Thursday (June 16).

Mr Regasa Kefale, State Minister for Business and Diaspora Affairs at Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave a keynote speech in which he noted that Ethiopia and Canada enjoyed more than half a century of historic relations. Their "golden jubilee" was colorfully celebrated in 2015, in Ethiopia as well as in Canada. Ato Ragasa further emphasized the "need to translate these links to foster Ethio-Canadian all-round cooperation and further enhance economic and business ties" between the businesses and the governments of both countries. He underlined the importance of Ethiopia and Addis Ababa to Canadian business interests as it is "the gateway to Africa, a political capital of the continent and a member of important regional trade groupings such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)." In other words, he emphasized, "Ethiopia presents

strong internal market opportunities to Canadian investors and businesses”, in part emanating from the potential offered by the fact that Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa. This spectacular opportunity, he added, is constantly bolstered by the various regional interconnection projects currently being undertaken.

Ambassador Philip Baker, Canadian Ambassador to Ethiopia, reiterated the importance of the event which, he said, “underscores the growing relationship between Ethiopia and Canada, through a growing partnership and cooperation on development, trade and investment.” In his remarks, the Ambassador reiterated the importance of the role of trade and commerce in boosting relations between the two countries and emphasized the way trade could be an important agent of change in empowering people. He stated that Ethiopia was one of the largest recipients of Canada’s global development assistance in various fields of cooperative intervention, among which was included maternal and child health. The Ambassador underlined his appreciation of the growing and multifaceted commercial relations between Canada and Ethiopia.

Ato Abebe Ababayehu, Deputy Commissioner and Mr Aschalew Tadesse, Promotion Clusters Team Leader at the Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC) gave a briefing on investment opportunities in Ethiopia. This was followed by a panel discussion on the investment opportunities available in Ethiopia for foreign investors in general and Canadian investors in particular. Mr Jean J. Gauthier, President and CEO of the Canadian Council on Africa, warmly welcomed the participants of the Forum that was being held in the “land of Sheba, the capital of Africa and in one of those African countries that has maintained a very high level of economic growth in recent years”. It was also a Forum that was successfully bringing Canadian and Ethiopian businesses together, and Mr Gauthier noted the “various opportunities and economic sectors [that] are of interest to Canadian investors: from infrastructure to transport, mining and energy, from agro-food to the traditional ICT sector.”

The Ethio-Canadian Business Forum concluded with a closing panel discussion on the nature and type of business and investment opportunities currently present in Ethiopia for Canadian investors with an interest to do business in Ethiopia. It also provided the opportunity for networking of Ethiopian and Canadian business representatives and investors.

Anniversary of the establishment of Ethio-China diplomatic relations

The Ethiopian Embassy in Beijing marked the 46th anniversary of the establishment of Ethiopia-China diplomatic relations this week on an occasion marked with a demonstration of the centuries-old cultural richness of Ethiopia to Chinese entrepreneurs, investors and the general public at China World Hotel in Beijing. The Embassy of Ethiopia demonstrated different aspects of public diplomacy, including culinary and cultural diplomatic aspects throughout the event. Also marking Ethiopia's National Day with the theme: Democratic Unity in Diversity for Our Renaissance as well as the 70th anniversary of Ethiopian Airlines, the occasion brought together Zhang Ming, the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Ambassadors, and representatives of various institutions, members of the Ethiopian Diasporas, and friends of Ethiopia. The event was organized by the Embassy in Beijing in association with Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Shipping Lines and MIDROC Ethiopia.

The cultural diplomatic activities focused on letting the peoples of the two countries hold a dialogue on the performance arts, as well as being able to taste Ethiopia's national cuisine. It aimed to intensify the constant growth of all-round interaction for the greater benefit of the two peoples. The strategic integration of cultural diplomacy with other pillars of statecraft, including political diplomacy and economic statecraft, essentially made the Embassy into a cultural broker to create space for Ethio-Sino culture and civilization to cooperate and “bloom together”, lending impetus to the realization of Ethiopia's renaissance and China's national rejuvenation.

Viewed from the cultural prism of the relationship of the two countries, Ethiopia's Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, spoke highly of the ancient civilization, histories and cultures of the two countries, pointing to the comprehensive strategic partnership they now enjoyed. Welcoming the gathering, Ambassador Seyoum stated that the full spectrum of diplomatic operations provided the basis for the governmental and non-governmental ties of the two countries. This comprehensive strategic partnership also involved party-to-party and people-to-people ties in the sphere of public diplomacy. In relation to governmental diplomacy, Ambassador Seyoum said the constructive cooperative partnership of the two countries was underlined by the frequent high-level government visits between the two countries.

Likewise, Ambassador Seyoum said, efforts in the sphere of public diplomacy were marked with mutual party-to-party visits. Ambassador Seyoum also went on to underline that this comprehensive strategic partnership has been guided by "sovereign equality, mutual trust and confidence, and a common interest in growth and prosperity." With impressive accomplishments since the establishment of the formal diplomatic relations of the two countries in 1970, he pointed out that Ethio-Sino relations epitomized the enhanced diplomatic vitality in all its forms and, at a faster pace of development, set out a comprehensive strategic partnership in order to unleash the potential and pool the comparative advantages for the mutual gain and greater development of the two countries.

An Ethiopian cultural troupe directed by prominent artist, Ato Abebe Balcha, presented musical dance performances from different Ethiopian peoples after Ambassador Seyoum's welcoming speech. The performances won the admiration of the distinguished guests, investors, foreign envoys, entrepreneurs and the Chinese public. This form of cultural diplomacy, aimed at promoting civilized dialogue and the sharing of cultural information between the brotherly peoples of the two countries, has the objective of placing culture at the heart of Ethiopia-China comprehensive partnership. The event also showcased Ethiopia's gift to the world: coffee, as well as various cultural exhibitions and displays. The Embassy hosted a wide variety of culinary dishes aimed at raising the reputation of Ethiopian cuisine across China as a way of introducing the country to the Chinese people. The event stimulated much discussion among the gathering about the splendid examples of cultural performance and national cuisine.

The event also underlined that cultural exchanges are key to public diplomacy development and a guarantee of the further growth and development of the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership. Reflecting on its ancient civilization, history and cultures, Ethiopia's cultural diplomacy works to employ the various different possibilities of diplomatic instruments to appreciate mutual learning, share similarities, celebrate differences, and deepen mutual understanding and trust between the two peoples. This cultural diplomatic approach charts a constructive course through which the wheels of Ethiopia-China comprehensive strategic partnership can be pushed forward for more collaboration to define a vision of a shared future. This emphasizes the fact that Ethiopia's cultural diplomacy is not Ethiopia's own exclusive self-promotion; rather, it is a tool to bring the two peoples together around shared goals, to envision a better world.

Championing cultural diplomacy at this juncture of 46 years of Ethio-Sino diplomatic relationship is important, building on past achievements and thinking of new visions for the future growth of Ethio-Sino cooperation and friendship. It is also a guarantee for laying a solid social foundation for the future growth of the economic, political, and technological relationship of the two countries. That means the celebration can be seen as an important avenue to engage people in the building of a sustainable and productive partnership between Ethiopia and China.