

A Week in the Horn 25th January 2013

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The 20th Assembly of the African Union....

All this week, a series of African Union statutory meetings and parallel events have been taking place in Addis Ababa prior to the 20th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, the Summit of the Heads of State and Government which will be held on Sunday and Monday 27th and 28th January. More than 37 Heads of State and Government are expected to attend the Assembly, and some 40 ministers and more than 20 first ladies will also be present; others attending will include UN Secretary General, Ban ki-Moon, and President Mahmud Abbas of Palestine and a number of leaders of international organizations and other dignitaries are also expected.

The Assembly of the Union is being held under the theme of "Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance", chosen to reflect the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the OAU. The Assembly will open on Sunday with a Minute of Silence in Memory of the late President John Atta Mills of Ghana and the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia. During the opening ceremony, the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the OAU/AU in Ethiopia will also be launched. The Assembly will consider the Recommendations of the Executive Council on the Report of the Commission on the Implementation of Previous Decisions of the Council and the Assembly and a number of other reports including: the Report of the Peace and Security Council on the State of Peace and Security in Africa, including the activities of the Panel of the Wise; the Report of the Chairperson of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committees (HSGOC); the Report of President Koroma of Sierra Leone, chairperson of the Committee of Ten, on the UN Reforms; the Report of the Co-ordinator of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change at COP 18; the Report of the High-Level African Trade Committee on "boosting Intra-African Trade and the Establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area"; the Progress Report of the Commission on the Transformation of the African Union

Commission into the African Union Authority; and the Progress Report on the Preparations for the 50th Anniversary of the OUA/AU. It will also hear briefings from President Sirleaf, Co-Chair of the United Nations High-Level Panel on the Post 2015 Development Agenda consultative process, and from President Zuma of South Africa on the BRICS Summit to be hosted by South Africa in March.

As usual during the African Union Summits, ministers and leaders have been holding a series of additional meetings. The 7th African Union Gender pre-Summit meeting was held last week. The NEPAD Steering Committee met earlier in the week as did the 10th Coordination meeting of the AU Regional Economic Councils, the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank. A number of meetings of the African Peer Review Mechanism are being held during the week as are meetings of the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS (OAFILA). IGAD and SADC ministers are holding meetings as is the Core Group on Somalia. The Peace and Security Council is also meeting to discuss the situation between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan at the level of Heads of State and Government. There will be a NEPAD Summit (on Saturday 26th January), of the High-Level African Trade Committee, of the Ten Heads of State on United Nations reform, and of the SADC Heads of State and Government. The Permanent Representatives Committee also met earlier in the week to draft the agenda and recommendations for the Executive Council.

...The 22nd Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the Assembly...

The Assembly is always preceded by the Executive Council meeting and the 22nd Ordinary Session of the Council opened on Thursday [24th Jan]. In her opening remarks, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, referring to the theme of the Assembly (“Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance”) which was chosen to reflect the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the OAU, said the anniversary activities should be used “to stimulate a continent-wide debate on the importance of the concepts and praxis of Pan Africanism and of the African Renaissance - past, present and future – so as to inform and mobilise the African citizenry and the Diaspora behind the AU vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent.” She pointed out that the commemoration activities should enable Africa to tell the story of the continent’s “rich pre-colonial history of great civilisations, its struggles against slavery and colonialism and its process of nation-formation and state-building over the last fifty years.” She added: “We must demystify, appropriate and popularise our own history, our own narrative, in honour of the generations that went before us and to inspire current and future generations..... [and] during 2013 we must also look to the future and debate, strategise and develop an accelerated African Agenda 2063 for action on integration and the development of the continent for the next fifty years.” Reminding people of the accomplishments of the founders of the OAU in liberating the continent from colonialism, the Commissioner urged people to apply this same single-mindedness and strength to achieving the mission of social and economic liberation of the continent. She pointed out that as Africa has a young, vibrant and large population it needs to reap the human face of this demographic dividend. At this time of the anniversary, Dr. Zuma said, Africa must ensure that it gives the young women and men of the continent hope and a stake in the future.

The Chairperson of the Commission also noted that the Commission proposed that in preparations for the Third AUC Strategic Plan (2014-2017), key priorities should be identified to accelerate the agenda for an integrated, people-centred and prosperous continent. She said the Commission hoped to have this ready by March and that the Commission, the Regional Economic Communities, member states and other continental institutions should focus on key areas: human capacity development; agriculture and agro-processing; inclusive economic development through industrialisation, infrastructure development, agriculture and trade and investment; peace, stability and good governance; mainstreaming women and youth into all activities;

resource mobilisation; building a people-centred Union through active communication; and strengthening the institutional capacity of the Union and all its organs.

Concerning the Peace and Security Architecture of Africa, the Commissioner noted it provided a critical instrument to manage conflicts. The result was that progress had been registered in many of the conflicts, including Somalia, Sudan/South Sudan and Madagascar. Equally, there had been re-emergence of conflict in the eastern DRC, Guinea Bissau and the Central African Republic, in the Sahel and in Mali where she acknowledged the contribution by the international community to the urgent need to restore the territorial integrity of the country.

Dr. Zuma cautioned that Africa is facing new and multi-faceted challenges, with broader regional and continental implications. It required urgent and focused attention as well as understanding and addressing root causes of the conflicts. She underlined the need to accelerate the operationalization of the Africa Standby Force to provide a capacity for rapid response. Dr. Zuma noted a healthy balance must be maintained between achieving peace and advancing development as peace cannot be sustained without development, nor development without peace.

Africans should take charge of their own development, she stressed, especially their economic development, referring to the international financial crisis, which has turned many so-called truths about development and economic growth on their head. Africa now has a unique opportunity to chart its own path, learning from others and from its programmes of the last fifty years, but basing its development on its own current realities, the Commissioner stated.

The UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Mr. Carlos Lopez, also addressed the Executive Council. He noted that the world had changed significantly in the last two decades and witnessed the emergence of a new phase of globalization, accelerated by an ICT revolution. This had facilitated an open international financial market and the rise of cross-border capital flows. There had been a reconfiguration of economic power taking place, with countries such as Brazil, China, and India emerging as key global players. Change in Africa, he said, had been largely positive. The continent had moved from the recent unflattering description of a few years ago as an open sore on the conscience of humanity to being one of the world's economic poles of growth. There were, however, still important challenges which need urgent and effective action. These related to the quality and sustainability of growth as well as to state and institutional capacities. Unemployment, particularly of youth, contributed to inequality and persistent poverty.

Growth for Africa must be primarily anchored in its own interests and concerns, and in this regard Africa should deepen its capacity for comprehensive, integrated development planning and long-term scenario analysis. These, he said, need careful collection and deployment of statistical information and data-driven evidence. He said an agenda of transformative development will mean new approaches to macro-economic policy-making and management, based on a better interface of macro-economic and social policies. Mr. Lopez quoted the late Prime Minister Meles: **“Social development is not only an essential element of development but also a critical instrument of accelerated economic growth.”**

Mr. Lopez said addressing the large infrastructure gaps that Africa faces must rank as a key priority for the years ahead; also important were the broad range of environmental and social sustainability issues integral to the theory and practice of development. However, Mr. Lopez concluded, the continent was now on the threshold of achieving the noble objectives and vision of the founding fathers of the Organization of African Unity for the transformation of Africa into an integrated, prosperous, peaceful continent.

During its two days of discussions, the Executive Council considers the reports of other meetings of AU Ministers including the Conferences on the Environments in Tanzania in September, on Drug Control in Addis Ababa in October, on Science and Technology in Brazzaville in November and on Energy in Addis Ababa in November. Other items on the Council's agenda included reports on Conferences on Communications and Information (Khartoum in September), Civil Registration (Durban, September) and Agriculture and Trade (Addis Ababa, November). The Council has also been considering reports from the Commission on the Situation in the Middle East and the Commission on the Implementation of Preparations for the 50th Anniversary of the OAU.

The Executive Council agenda also covers items proposed by Member States, and the report of the ministerial committee on candidatures for the AU Commission (for the election of the Commissioner of Human Resources, Science and Technology, and the Commissioner for Economic Affairs) and for five members of the Peace and Security Council who will be elected by the Executive Council. The Council will also consider the draft decisions and declarations of the 20th Ordinary Session of the Assembly and the draft agenda for the Assembly, before concluding this evening (Friday 25th January).

.....the Extra-ordinary session of IGAD's Council of Ministers

The 46th Extra-ordinary meeting of IGAD's' Council of Ministers convened on Wednesday (23rd January) on the margins of the AU Executive Council meeting to discuss the political situation in the Federal Republic of Somalia and the peace process between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan as well as other agenda items. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Tedros Adhanom, Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and current chair of the IGAD Council of Ministers. Also present were Mme. Fowzia Yusuf Haji Adan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Somalia, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Djibouti, Ambassador Professor Sam Onger, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kenya, Ali Ahmed Karti, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, Sam Kutesa Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uganda, Luka Biong Deng, Co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee of South Sudan and Engineer Mahboub Maalim, Executive Secretary of IGAD. Also attending were Ambassador Yahamat Saleh Annadi, the head of AMISOM and Ambassador Mahiga, head of the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS). The meeting was also addressed by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Commissioner Ramtane Lamamra, and Staffan de Mistura, Italy's State Minister for Foreign Affairs and Co-Chair of the IGAD Partners' Forum.

In his opening statement Dr. Tedros noted that Somalia is poised to turn away from the dark chapter of its past as a result of the significant progress made on both the political and security fronts. The Minister emphasized that this unprecedented opportunity should be seized in order to ensure lasting peace and stability in Somalia. The Federal Government of Somalia should be given all necessary support to consolidate the gains made so far and to implement its priorities. Referring to the Sudan and South Sudan peace negotiations, the Minister recalled that both the African Union and the United Nations Security Council had mandated the Chair of IGAD to assist the AU High-level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) in its efforts to facilitate the ongoing negotiations on outstanding issues. The Prime Minister of Ethiopia, in his capacity as current Chairperson of IGAD, had therefore been engaged in shuttle diplomacy to encourage the leadership of both countries to implement the agreements they have signed and make progress in the negotiations. Dr. Tedros noted that peace and development in the region were closely intertwined and this gave the IGAD states compelling reasons to work together for sustainable peace and development. He expressed his confidence that IGAD, as one of the building blocks of the African Union, would be an important vehicle in advancing this objective.

Engineer Mahboub Maalim commended the establishment of the regional mechanism to engage IGAD partners' forums and emphasized the need to promote a drought-resilient agenda for the region. Commissioner Lamamra, focusing on Somalia, indicated that the main challenge for the country still remained security, and stressed that enabling and assisting the Government of Somalia to build up its security and military institutions was still paramount. Italy's State Minister for Foreign Affairs noted that even though many challenges lie ahead for Somalia, there was now a real wind of hope. He indicated Italy's readiness, as a co-chair of the IGAD Partners, to assist the country in capacity building and police training as well as building up the different institutions of Somalia.

Following their discussions, the IGAD Council of Ministers issued a communiqué. With reference to Somalia, the Council congratulated the people and the Government of Somalia for the unprecedented successful conclusion of the transition period and the establishment of the Federal Government - an important milestone for the stabilization of Somalia. It congratulated Mme. Fowzia Yusuf on her appointment, and commended the recent milestones achieved by the Government of Somalia within the framework of the Six Pillars' Plan of Action. It acknowledged the security and political stabilization plan of the government and committed "to ensure all other efforts are complimentary to the Somali plan". It deliberated on the need for the components of the grand stabilization plan to be integrated into the six pillar framework, and called on the Somali government to prepare a detailed proposal (for the Council to consider within the next six weeks) and to prepare a proposal on the government's request to lift the UN arms embargo.

The Council also noted the continued commitment and the enormous sacrifices made by the Somali National Security Forces, by AMISOM and by the Ethiopian National Defence Forces, and their international partners. It underscored the urgency and importance of building legitimate and representative local governments and security structures in all areas recovered from Al-Shabaab, especially in south-central Somalia. It also noted the apparent gap between the successful military strategy and the much needed political strategy to realize the establishment of legitimate governance structures within the liberated areas. Any vacuum risked being a fertile ground for regrouping of insurgency and insecurity.

The communiqué stressed the urgent need to build a peace support operation with an enhanced AMISOM mandate, as an interim step, and for AMISOM to be provided with a comprehensive support package similar and equal to the support provided to UN missions. It welcomed the AU and UN reviews of the AMISOM mission and urged international support for an AMISOM mandate, aligned to the need for reconstruction and stabilization of Somalia and able to ensure guaranteed and sustainable resources for humanitarian peace-building and development. It called on all stakeholders to work together for the formation of a cohesive national security force under one national command structure based on the agreement with the National Security and Stabilization plan. It reaffirmed the central role of IGAD in bringing sustainable peace and stability in the reconstruction process in Somalia based on the needs and priorities of the six pillars policy formulated by Somalia, urging all IGAD partners to support this. It also reiterated and strongly condemned all spoilers against what it called the historic Somalia reconstruction process and stressed that all stakeholders must send a clear message that there was no place for war-lords or extremism in Somalia.

On the peace process between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, the Council commended both parties for the signing of agreements on most of the outstanding post-secession issues and urged them to maintain the same spirit in following through the peace process. It congratulated the two principals for their personal commitment to the peace process, noting with appreciation the successful signing of the nine agreements. It called on the parties to extend the same commitment to the full and unconditional implementation of the signed agreements of last September in a coordinated manner. The Council commended and thanked

the AU High-Level Implementation Panel for its commitment and effort in reaching the agreements on the AU roadmap. It urged it to continue its efforts so as to reach an amicable settlement of pending issues within the specific timelines agreed by the two parties. The Council expressed confidence that the two member states would implement all the agreements. It pledged to continue support to ensure success. It saluted the contribution of Ethiopia and AUHIP in facilitating dialogue between the two member states and for Ethiopia in offering to host this meeting.

The Council also declared its support for the candidature of Ambassador Amina Mohamed from Kenya for the position of Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the candidature of Ambassador Farah Rachad from Djibouti for the position of Director General of UNESCO, and the candidature of Sam Kutesa, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda for the Presidency of the 69th General Assembly of the United Nations.

Bilateral meetings:

Dr. Tedros meets China's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs.....

On the sidelines of the Executive Council meeting, Ethiopia's Foreign Minister, Dr. Tedros held discussions with Mr. Zhai Jun, China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Special Envoy to the AU. Their discussions covered bilateral, regional and multilateral issues. Minister Tedros, who noted that "the growing partnership between the two countries is going from strength to strength", emphasized the need to build on this to further deepen relations in various sectors of cooperation. He said the fact that the invitation to Prime Minister Hailemariam to visit China was the first official invitation under its new leadership showed the depth of the relationship. Mr. Zhai Jun, underlining Ethiopia's role in the sub-region, on the continent and in multilateral issues like climate change, said Ethiopia was one of the most important countries in Africa and added that China enjoyed "cooperative partnership and mutual trust in its relationship with Ethiopia". He expressed his hope that this would be further boosted through the current leadership of the two countries. He expressed his appreciation of Ethiopia's peace efforts in Somalia and its mediating role in the dispute between Sudan and South Sudan. He noted China's interest to work closely with Ethiopia on international issues.

Mr. Zhai Jun expressed his hope that new progress in the negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan would be made during the expected meeting of President Omar Al-Bashir and President Salva Kiir on the sidelines of the Summit. He reassured Dr Tedros that China as a country maintaining good relations with both states was committed to work with the AU, AUHIP and Ethiopia to bring about lasting peace. Referring to the complexity of issues under negotiation, he stressed the importance of exercising patience and the need to build trust between the leaders. Reiterating China's readiness to assist the peace efforts he said "China believes that the most important thing is to implement the agreements signed in Addis Ababa in September 2012".

Dr. Tedros briefed the Vice-Minister and his delegation on the progress made and on some of the sticking points hindering full implementation of the agreements. These included the eligibility issue of voters in determining the final status of Abyei, the difference over the East-West length of the 14-mile border zone and problems relating to the conflicts in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile region. Dr. Tedros noted that Prime Minister Hailemariam's shuttle diplomacy had been a successful venture that had broken the stalemate, and had "brought the two sides to the table ending the hiatus that prevailed after the signing of the Addis Ababa agreements in September 2012".

Overall, with reference to the regional security situation, Dr. Tedros described the relative peace and security being enjoyed within the sub-region as unprecedented. Nevertheless, the negative role played by Eritrea in destabilizing the region remained worrisome. He said “Eritrea is the spoiler in the sub-region and even on the other side of the Red Sea, threatening to reverse the relative peace and stability prevailing within the region”. Dr. Tedros noted that the ineffective application of the sanctions was a factor that encouraged the regime in Asmara to continue with its destabilization activities. He underlined the importance of punishing the negative role of Eritrea in order to help keep the sub-region peaceful and stable. Mr. Zhai Jun said China’s position towards the issue of Eritrea was predicated on the importance it could play in regional peace and stability. He said in recent discussions with Eritrean officials, they had promised to improve relations with all its neighbors. Mr. Zhai Jun expressed his hope that this would materialize. Dr. Tedros emphasized that on past experience any promises made by Eritrean officials were empty and the regime had continued with its destabilizing behaviour. He said that any such comments or promises were “just tactical moves aimed at getting sanctions lifted.”

On bilateral issues, Dr Tedros commended the growth in trade and investment, noting that Chinese investments were the biggest in Ethiopia. As economic diplomacy is at the core of Ethiopia’s foreign policy, he welcomed the instrumental role of Chinese investment for Ethiopia’s economic development. He thanked the government and people of China for the development cooperation Ethiopia is receiving to help finance its massive infrastructure programmes. Dr. Tedros mentioned the need to speed up the facilitation of finance for the Adama II road project, the Mekelle-Hara Gebeya and Hara Gebeya-Asaita railway projects and the Aisha wind farm. He raised Ethiopia’s interest in forging links with the China Association of Development Zones (CADZ). The Vice-Minister said that discussions were underway with Chinese financiers over these projects and he promised to facilitate and speed these up.

Dr. Tedros noted that Ethiopia would use every opportunity to bring Africa and China closer; and he assured the Vice Minister that, in the tradition of the African Union, Ethiopia would work towards defining the common African position on the restructuring of the UN Security Council.

.....Denmark’s Foreign Minister, Villy Sovndal....

Dr. Tedros met and held discussions with Danish Foreign Minister, Villy Sovndal, on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues on Thursday this week [24th Jan]. Mr. Sovndal started the meeting thanking Ethiopia for its positive role in regional and international relations. He said Ethiopia was playing a pivotal role in mediating between Sudan and South Sudan and bringing peace and stability in Somalia. He affirmed Denmark’s firm belief that African initiatives are best suited to solve African problems and on its position of supporting such initiatives with finance and logistics. He noted that in the current crisis in Mali, Denmark was supporting the logistics and transport for the French troops. Denmark was also resolved in its support of the African troops to be deployed within the auspices of AFISMA. These were cases reflecting Denmark’s policy of support and financing as an alternative to direct involvement.

On bilateral matters, the Danish Foreign Minister described relations between the two countries as excellent. He expressed his hopes that the signing of a partnership agreement later this year would bring the relationship to an even higher level. He also raised the case of commonality of position over the ‘green agenda’ as an opportunity to work more closely on similar international issues. He raised Denmark’s interest in assisting and engaging in the transport and agriculture sectors and other areas in which Denmark enjoyed comparative advantages. He also mentioned Denmark’s desire to hold political consultations in the area of democratization and human rights observance.

Dr. Tedros expressed Ethiopia's desire to forge a 'green agenda' partnership with Denmark and learn from the latter's experience. Referring to Denmark's decision to end the use of fossil fuel by 2025 as an exemplary commitment, he outlined Ethiopia's similar efforts of going green as demonstrated in its commitment to hydropower construction, wind farms and even solar power. He appreciated Denmark's support of the Safety Net Programmes and to the Addis Ababa University Peace and Security Programme.

Dr. Tedros also briefed the Minister on Ethiopia's interest and role in bringing peace and stability in the region, noting that "we do it because of our firm belief that fighting our main enemy poverty will not be successful without peace and stability". He added that this was why economic diplomacy was now the core element of Ethiopia's foreign policy and in the struggle to alleviate poverty through increased trade and investment. He said Ethiopia had repeatedly told its partners that maintaining peace within a sub-region that had been plagued with war, conflict and all sorts of hostilities was indispensable to address the people of the region's long overdue quest for development. He outlined Ethiopia's efforts in building infrastructure and hydropower connections as positive efforts in realizing regional integration. He stressed his optimism on the attainability of political integration if the consensus within the IGAD sub-region, on the problems of Sudan and South Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia, and the relative peace and stability currently prevailing, continued.

Dr. Tedros also mentioned Eritrea's continuing destabilization as regrettable, deplorable and irresponsible behaviour. He described Asmara as a negative force engaged in all kinds of provocative adventures and continual meddling in the internal affairs of its neighbours, adding that its "resolve as a destabilizing factor is manifest in its adamant refusal to [be involved in] any peace talks with Ethiopia, and Djibouti".

...and Australia's Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Dr. Tedros also met with Richard Marles Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the AUC conference centre. Mr. Marles welcomed Ethiopia's role in the peace and security of the region and of the continent. Dr Tedros expressed his appreciation of the excellent relations between the two countries and for Australia's assistance to Ethiopia especially in the areas of health and the scholarships provided. He particularly welcomed Australia's impressive role in the Millennium Development Goal's pool fund, which was in full compliance with the Paris Declaration. Defining the relationship between the two countries as exemplary, Dr Tedros said Ethiopia's huge diaspora in Australia would serve as a bridge for the growing relationship between the two countries. He stressed further consolidation of these through investment and trade. The two sides exchanged views on various regional and international issues. At the end of the discussion, State Minister Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos and Mr. [Marles] signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide a framework for economic cooperation between Ethiopia and Australia.

State Minister Berhane meets Deputy Foreign Ministers of Serbia and Georgia

Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos held discussions with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia and the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia on the sidelines of the Executive Council meeting. Meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia, Ambassador Berhane welcomed the opening of a Georgian embassy in Addis Ababa as an important step towards bringing the warm relations between the two countries to a higher level. He emphasized the importance of broadening the relationship to include economic elements to further strengthen the ties between the two countries. He noted that the changing economic and investment situation in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular provided an opportune moment for Georgian investment. Ethiopia, he said, has registered double digit growth for nearly a decade,

adding that “the two countries can benefit a lot if they strengthen cooperation in different areas and sectors including agriculture and technology transfer.” Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister, David Jalagania said the frequent, almost annual, meetings of officials of the two countries marked their growing relationship. He proposed discussions should be held on a regular basis and at an expert level to further boost relations, adding that as this year marked the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations, the opening of a Georgian embassy would further help strengthening ties. He thanked the Ethiopian government for its firm stand over the territorial integrity of Georgia.

State Minister Berhane met with Serbia’s Assistant Minister, Ambassador Goran Aleksic, the same afternoon. The two ministers held a thorough discussion on ways to further boost relations between their two countries. Ambassador Aleksic expressed Serbia’s interest in extending scholarships to Ethiopian students and to adding to the current six students who are studying in Belgrade. The two sides also discussed the Serbian suggestion for Ethiopia to re-open the former embassy it had had when Marshal Tito was alive.

Ethiopia hosts African Ministers of Health Conference on child survival

Last week, Ethiopia hosted a conference in Addis Ababa (16th -18th January) on child survival under the theme 'African Leadership for Child Survival--A Promise Renewed'. Ministers of Health from 54 African countries were invited, including both Kesetebirhan Admasu, currently Ethiopian Minister of Health and Dr. Tedros Adhanom, his immediate predecessor until a few months ago, along with analysts and global experts. The central aim of the conference was to ensure that child survival is placed at the forefront of social development agendas across the continent and to renew the focus of African leaders on heading their own country's efforts and on sustaining the gains made over the last two decades.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom, now Ethiopia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, welcomed participants to the Conference. He noted that “It was back in June of 2012, that the Government of Ethiopia accepted to co-host the Washington summit of ‘A Call to Action for Child Survival, a promise kept’, with the Government of India, the United States and UNICEF.” Last week’s meeting was a sequel to that conference when more than 160 governments signed a pledge to renew their commitment to child survival and to eliminate all preventable child mortality within two decades. In his opening address of welcome last week, Dr. Tedros also reminded those present that the main aim of the June meeting had been to “to propose to the leaders of all countries of the world that they renew their commitment to child survival and to the elimination of all preventable deaths within two decades.” It was, he said, a great achievement that 169 countries of the world, including 47 African countries out of 54, within a few weeks had signed a pledge committing themselves to develop and implement actionable plans.

Dr. Tedros emphasized that Africa had made tremendous strides in advancing health status and health care in the past decades, though this progress was still uneven. Since 1990, according to UNICEF, the number of child deaths in sub-Saharan Africa has dropped by 39%. Many African countries are now within reach of the 2015 Millennium Development Goal of reducing the under-five mortality rate by two-thirds. Nevertheless, even with availability of proven, inexpensive, high-impact intervention for maternal, newborn, and child health, problems remain. Countries affected by conflict and chronic emergencies face additional challenges, and delays to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Dr. Tedros, whose leadership as Minister of Health was a prominent factor in raising Ethiopia's profile on child survival in Africa, underlined Ethiopia’s continuing commitment: “I can assure

you of Ethiopia's commitment to the provision of the necessary leadership to significantly decrease maternal and infant mortalities. Through determined efforts - an investment in financial and human resources, as well as progressive policies and unique community mobilization efforts - Ethiopia has and will continue to expand [its] health care system to reach under-served communities, especially women, children, and young people in rural areas." He stressed that Ethiopia's determination to achieve the country's Millennium Development Goals and the efforts and resources that it has invested in the Millennium Development Goals would be continued and be reflected in an increased rate in child survival.

Dr. Tedros went on: "As we look beyond 2015, the effort and resources that we have invested in the Millennium Development Goals must be continued. We need new vision, new targets and new frontiers to concur. Our global and national achievements have collectively been remarkable, however perhaps uneven within our own boundaries. We have to be cognizant that we still face pockets of child mortality higher than the national average and MDG targets. Therefore, beyond 2015, we should consider and develop strategies to ensure equity for children's survival."

Dr. Tedros said that eliminating preventable deaths among children shouldn't be just a dream. It was a duty and a reality to work for, to be carried out with "full conviction". It was, he underlined, achievable, and he therefore called on all countries to honour "with a firm local commitment, national plans and budgets, but most importantly with action". He also called upon all development partners to support country-led initiatives to end preventable deaths among women, the newborn and children, and evoked the image of leaders, partners and participants eagerly involved in rescuing children, women, and the newborn: "Let us join hands to make Africa a continent fit for children not only to survive but to also thrive, and to become members of a productive society".

A "small incident" in Asmara

Reports from Asmara this week indicated that a small contingent of Eritrean troops took over the State Television Station at 10am on Monday [21st Jan]. They rounded up the staff, all employees of the Ministry of Information and forced the Director of Eritrea TV to read a statement calling for the freeing of all prisoners of conscience and the implementation of the Eritrean constitution. The statement also stated that the Ministry of Information was under their control. Almost immediately, the TV broadcast was interrupted. The TV station then remained off air for several hours but then came back again using pre-recorded material.

Western news outlets including Reuters, the New York Times and Associated Press reported that up to 200 mutinous soldiers had stormed the Ministry of Information and forced the Director to deliver a statement on air calling for the release of political prisoners whose numbers are estimated at up to 10,000, as well as the enforcement of the constitution. The constitution, of course, was given approval by the Eritrean National Assembly in 1997 but President Isaias has never allowed it to be implemented. Among other things the constitution sets a two-term limit for presidents, ensures the right to a fair trial and lays out guidelines for a free media.

There was immediate speculation that there had been a coup attempt. And at least one foreign embassy said it had detected "unusual military movements in and around Asmara" and instructed its nationals to "exercise extreme caution". However, the Eritrean government dismissed any speculation and rumours, and described the events as a "small incident". Yemane Gebremeskel, the director of President Isaias' office said the next day that "All is calm today, as it was indeed yesterday."

There have been only a few reports of this “small incident”. This is hardly surprising as there is no independent press of any kind in Eritrea, which is widely considered one of the most isolated and repressive states in the world. A report last year ranked the country as the worst in the world for media censorship, beating even North Korea with which Eritrea is often associated. One of the opposition websites said members of the Ministry staff had described the group of about one hundred young soldiers and officers as young and friendly, but frustrated and with a grudge against senior officers who had failed to deliver change. There was no indication at any stage that the group were demanding a change in government or the removal of the President. Later in the same day there were reports that the mutinous troops had voluntarily left the Ministry and quietly returned to their barracks outside Asmara.

There has been no further word on what happened or why, nor on any further developments, but this is not the first time there has been this sort of incident. In May 1993, embarrassingly a mere four days before the country’s official declaration of independence, soldiers who had received no pay following the country’s *de facto* independence two years earlier, launched a major protest in Asmara, demanding a meeting with the President and to be paid. When the President finally agreed to meet them and hear their grievances, he quickly promised to improve conditions and provide pay. The troops returned to the barracks but within a matter of days, with the protests over, hundreds were arrested. Some were discharged from the army, but many were held in detention, handed out sentences ranging from three to 12 years or even more without trial.

Foreign analysts have been quoted as suggesting that Monday’s incident must be seen as a reflection of a deteriorating economy. J. Peter Pham, director of the Michael S. Ansari Africa Centre at the Atlantic Council in the United States said that “there are few prospects of any amelioration of the economic crisis which, as it worsens, cannot but affect the relationship between the dictatorship and the forces that keep it in power.” Despite expectations for a gold mining boom that helped fuel economic growth of nearly 8 percent last year, the overall economy has remained extremely low. The growth came largely from gold production in the Bisha mine which is 40% government owned but has not had any general impact. Shares in gold companies with mines or projects in Eritrea fell sharply on Monday, with the Canadian company Nevsun Resources Ltd, which owns 60 % of the Bisha Gold mine which produced over \$600 million worth of ore last year, fell 9%. Nevsun is currently facing heavy criticism over allegations of the use of forced labour at the Bisha project.

The Eritrean government has suffered a number of other similar embarrassments in recent years with a majority of members of its soccer teams twice refusing to go home after international matches abroad. Last year, two military pilots made a spectacular escape to Saudi Arabia in the Presidential aircraft. Escape from the country is so frequent that it has become a profitable operation for officials who can make thousands of dollars by assisting and charging escapees thousands of dollars, and according to a UN report last year “people smuggling is so pervasive that it could not be possible without the complicity of government and party officials, especially military officers.” Two to three thousand cross the borders into Sudan or Ethiopia every month despite a shoot to kill policy along the border and heavy fines for members of families whose members have left.

News and Views:

Widespread condemnation of last Friday's killing of Somali journalist

Ambassador Abdulaziz A. Aden, Ethiopia's Ambassador to Somalia, sent a condolence message to the family and colleagues of Abdihared Osman Adan who was killed while he was walking to work in the Wadajir district of Mogadishu the capital on Friday last week (18th January). Abdihared Osman Aden, a well known journalist of Shebelle Media Network was shot at least three times and died in hospital. In his message Ambassador Abdulaziz A. Aden condemned "the murder of Abdihared Osman Adan and send my deepest condolences to his family, Shabelle Media Network, and the people of Somalia in general". He said it was "deplorable that the perpetrators of such heinous crimes continue to enjoy impunity, while the Somali media community continues to be targeted. I urge the Somali Authorities to ensure those responsible are brought to justice; it is important to end impunity for the murder of any individual let alone those specifically targeting journalists." Ambassador Abdulaziz, noting that the work of journalists was crucial to the future of Somalia, paid tribute to their bravery and professionalism and said they should be able to operate without fear for their lives. Over the weekend, Somali Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon visited the Shebelle Media Network to pay tribute to the late Abdihared Osman Adan and the work of Shebelle Media. He was accompanied by members of the cabinet and Chief of Police and of the intelligence agency. The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) for Somalia, Ambassador Annadif, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, Ambassador Mahiga also both condemned the murder of Abdihared Osman Adan. Eighteen journalists were killed in Somalia last year.

Somalia's Defence Minister attends Somalia Core Group meeting in Ankara

Somalia's Defence Minister, Abdikarin Hajji Mohamud Fiqi, returned to Mogadishu on Sunday (20th January) after attending a meeting of the Somalia Core Group in the Turkish capital of Ankara. The meeting, on Friday last week [18th Jan], discussed the rebuilding of the Somali army and the needs of the Somali government. It was attended by representatives of the US, EU countries, the African Union, participants from Gulf countries and from the troop-contributing countries of AMISOM. The Minister said after the meeting that participants had agreed to support the new government in Somalia and take part in rebuilding and strengthening the Somali army. Somali Core Group meetings take place every three or four months and bring together countries undertaking projects in Somalia. Turkey recently signed an agreement with Somalia on training, technical and scientific cooperation in the military field.

The European Union extends its military training mission for Somalia

The European Union has extended the EU's Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM Somalia) for two years. The mission will continue to contribute to the strengthening of the Somali armed forces so that they can achieve the aim of taking over all security responsibilities. However, given the changing situation in Somalia, the EUTM will now refocus its activities to provide political and strategic advice to the Somali Ministry of Defence and the Chief of Defence Forces, and to advise on security sector development as well as give specialized military training and lay the foundation of a Somali-owned military training system, with the training taking place in Somalia not outside the country. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton said: "EUTM Somalia has provided great assistance to the Somali armed forces. All those who have been trained by EU military experts make a real difference on the ground." Depending on security conditions, the mission will now begin to move its training activities from Uganda to Somalia. EUTM Somalia, first launched in February 2010, has trained around 3,000 Somali troops so far as part of the EU's "comprehensive approach for a stable, democratic and

prosperous Somalia” and as part of the EU’s Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa. The costs of the operation up until 31st March 2015, are estimated at Euros 11.6 million.

Somali Interior and National Security Ministry plans to relocate IDPs

Somalia’s Interior and National Security Ministry has announced plans to relocate thousands of displaced families living in camps all across Mogadishu. Interior and National Security Minister, Abdikarim Hussein Guled, made the announcement after meeting representatives of both local and international aid agencies. Mogadishu municipality has already started the work of rehabilitation of the capital and the government has begun the process of renovating badly ruined state buildings and offices. Muslim countries, among them Turkey and Iran, have started returning displaced people to their homes since the United Nations declared an end to famine in the South and Central regions of the country. The Iranian Red Crescent has resettled hundreds of families and equipped them with sufficient aid to last them for several months. Those displaced people remaining in and around Mogadishu have welcomed the government’s decision and called for their immediate resettlement from the congested camps. The government plans on providing food rations, clean drinking water as well as free education and healthcare to the returning families.

An Ethiopian ministerial delegation in Djibouti

On Friday last week (18th Jan), the Minister of Finance, Ato Sufian Ahmed, headed a delegation to Djibouti on a working visit. Minister Sufian met and held talks with President Ismail Omar Guelleh and with Djibouti’s Minister of Economy and Finance, Mr. Ilyas Moussa Dawaleh and other ministers. The talks covered the major projects that Ethiopia and Djibouti are developing. In an interview after the discussions, Minister Sufian welcomed the excellent relations between Djibouti and Ethiopia and said the aim of his visit was to enable both parties to consult on various aspects of economic projects being developed. Mr. Dawaleh said that these were important for both countries and for the region, mentioning the second power transmission line via Galafi, the project for a cross-border water supply and the monitoring and management of the two railway lines. He added that they had discussed a common strategy to complete the pipeline project between Juba, Addis Ababa and Djibouti, the fibre optic cable project and extension of the railway to the town of Juba. Mr. Dawaleh also said it had just been confirmed that the construction of the road between Dire Dawa and Djibouti would begin in the coming months. This would be a highway to serve Dire Dawa and the large industrial area that Ethiopia was now planning in that area, he said. The minister stressed that these projects would help to curb the spectre of unemployment and job insecurity.

President Girma confers with South Korean parliamentary delegation

President Girma Woldegiorgis met and held talks on Wednesday (23rd Jan) with a South Korean parliamentary delegation led by the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Park Byeong Seug. President Girma noted Ethiopia had sent its troops to support South Korea during the Korean War in the 1950s and this had laid firm foundations for the excellent relations between Ethiopia and the Republic of South Korea. He also affirmed the government's commitment to provide support to South Korean investors. The Deputy Speaker told the President that Samsung and LG, South Korea’s largest electronic companies, were interested in investing in Ethiopia and were ready to work in Ethiopia as soon as they received permission and support from the Ethiopian government. He praised the government’s support for the industrial village being built in Ethiopia by South Korea. The South Korean delegation also met with the Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives, Abadula Gemedo; Speaker Abadula accepted an invitation from the Deputy Speaker to visit South Korea.

Ethiopia and South Sudan sign agreement for border peace and security

Senior army officers of Ethiopia and South Sudan signed an agreement to collaborate over issues relating to peace and security along the common border earlier this week. Brigadier-General Zewdu Belay, head of the Ethiopian delegation, Major-General Gebriel Jock, South Sudan's delegation leader, signed the agreement in Gambella. Speaking on the occasion, Gambella Regional State President, Omod Obong, stressed the importance of the security forces of Ethiopia and South Sudan working jointly to increase the benefits of peace and security for the peoples of both countries. President Umod said maintaining reliable peace and security along the common border meant encouragement of people-to-people ties and economic relations between the two countries. He said activities have been carried out successfully to extradite wanted criminals and 'anti-peace elements', and he emphasized the need to intensify such activities as well as enhance current efforts towards expanding benefits of the links for the people of both states. Brigadier-General Zewdu noted that both countries were carrying out integrated activities to ensure sustainable peace and security along their common border. Major-General Jock said that Ethiopia and South Sudan not only had close people-to-people ties but also extensive economic and cultural relations. South Sudan, he said, was desirous to further boost existing overall relations, adding that this agreement would help to strengthen peace and security in the area.

A Somaliland delegation in the U.A.E

Somaliland's Foreign Minister, Dr. Mohamad Abdilahi Omar, led a Somaliland delegation to the United Arab Emirates last weekend. The delegation also included the Minister of the Presidency, Hirsi Haji Ali, and the managing director of Berbera port, Engineer Ali Omar Mohamed. It was briefly joined by Energy Minister, Hussein Abdi Duale, following the conclusion of the 4th Gulf Intelligence U.A.E Energy Forum in Abu Dhabi which he attended. The delegation met with the U.A.E Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Anwar Mohammed Gargash, and among topics discussed were United Arab Emirates investment in Somaliland and development cooperation as well as the forthcoming talks between Somaliland and Somalia. In June last year, the UAE government brought together the presidents of Somaliland and Somalia to ratify a framework for dialogue aimed at clarifying future relations between their two countries. The Somaliland delegation also discussed how the U.A.E might be able to help in improving services at Berbera. Discussions with Dubai Ports World-DPW over possible operational management of Berbera and infrastructural and human resource development have been going on for some months.