

A Week in the Horn

26th December 2014

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News in Brief

Ethiopia

At his latest press conference, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn answered questions on domestic and foreign policy issues, ranging from shortage of commodities, to fuel, election 2015, the country's sovereign bond sale and Ethiopia's relations with Djibouti, Somalia and on the recent visit of an Ethiopian public diplomacy team [to Egypt]. (See article)

On Tuesday (December 16) a farewell program for the Ethiopian Ebola response mission to West Africa was held at the Hilton Hotel in the presence of senior government officials, representatives of the African Union, Ambassadors, and invited guests. (See article)

The Ethiopian Defense Ministry has announced that on 22 December 2014, a traitor pilot, flying a helicopter, forced the co-pilot and the technician to land in Eritrea, after going missing for a few days. The Ministry noted that while Ethiopians are making poverty history and our defense forces are gaining fame and glory for their gallantry at home and internationally, anti-Ethiopian forces are making a futile attempt to derail Ethiopia's progress. The press release noted that Ethiopian Defense Forces are committed to ensuring that agents of Eritrea will not stand in the way of our development.

A 47-year-old British tourist was killed in a church in Bahir Dar after a man accidentally fired a gun. Shimeles Kemal, Deputy Head of Government Communications Affairs Office, said "It appears that a resident of Bahir Dar, who was licensed to carry a gun, accidentally discharged his gun while changing the gun position from one shoulder to the other" adding that the suspect has been arrested for further investigation. The body of the deceased was flown to Addis.

Eritrea

The rebel groups - the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO) and the Democratic Front for Eritrean Unity (DFEU) said they killed seven Eritrean intelligence agents in an attack they jointly carried out on a military camp in the southern part of the country in a unit based at Adi-Kala zone of Maigini locality.

Switzerland's oldest and most famous monastery, Einsiedeln Abbey, has taken in around 30 asylum seekers from Eritrea.

Djibouti

The Department of State warned U.S. citizens of the risks of travel to Djibouti replacing the Travel Warning it issued on June 8, 2014. The Advisory said, U.S. citizens in Djibouti should evaluate their personal security situation in light of specific threats from terrorism.

Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh recently welcomed the interest of China in Djibouti and the Horn of Africa (see Article)

Somalia

Somalia's lawmakers on Wednesday approved the appointment of new Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke. Sharmarke said "I assure you that there will be no political conflict, everything will be solved through consultation and discussion," he added.

Five Al-Shabaab militants are dead after they attacked an African Union military base in Somalia on Thursday, AU officials said. The militants attacked the Halane military base in Mogadishu, Somalia's largest base for African Union troops, according to the African Union Mission in Somalia.

Sudan

The Sudanese government has announced that 17 political parties have confirmed participation in the general elections, which are set to be held in April 2015.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn met on Thursday with Sudanese Information Minister Yassir Yusouf, during which he reiterated his commitment to promoting bilateral cooperation with neighboring Sudan.

South Sudan

The White House announced on Tuesday that South Sudan has been removed from the list of sub-Saharan African countries enjoying special trade status with the United States. According to an act signed by US President Barack Obama, South Sudan along with Gambia have been removed from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

China said 700 troops are ready to be deployed to South Sudan to bolster a UN force in the country, China's official Xinhua news agency reports.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn speaks to journalists

At his latest press conference this week, on Monday (December 22) Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn answered questions on domestic and foreign policy issues, ranging from shortage of commodities, to fuel, next year's election [2015], the country's sovereign bond and Ethio-Djibouti relations.

In relation to the upcoming general election, the Prime Minister underlined that ensuring a peaceful, free, fair and credible election required concerted action by the government and the political parties running in the election. He said "all parties are capable of contributing to the success of the election and they should work towards to the success of this goal." He reiterated his call to all parties to join in the **Joint Forum** of political parties and work with the ruling party in enforcing the election **code of conduct**. He stressed that the ruling party was ready to discuss any and all problems with all parties that were willing to abide by the election code of conduct and operate in accordance with the laws of the nation. He said that in his discussions with those parties who were not members of the Joint Forum of political parties, the government had gone the extra mile to engage with them. Unfortunately, despite reaching agreement with those leaders with whom he had met, they had been unable to join the Forum because of opposition within their own leadership. "This", the Prime Minister said, "only shows that the problem is with the opposition camp not with the ruling party."

In reply to a question as to whether the European Union would send an observer mission to the election, Prime Minister Hailemariam said that the Union had notified the Ethiopian government it would not be able to attend the election due to budget and financial constraints. This was partly due to the fact that the EU had carried out

several election missions this year. Asked if the absence of EU might impact on the credibility of the election, the Prime Minister said that what mattered most was “what the political parties, the general public and the government, who are the owners of the election, can do together to make the election, credible, free, fair and peaceful.” He did, however, note that the African Union would be observing the election.

On the question of the country’s sovereign bond, the Prime Minister emphasized that Ethiopia’s entry into the international bond market was a result of its rapid recent economic development. He said that only five years ago Ethiopia and other developing countries would not have been eligible for commercial loans. Now, however, with their economic changes, Ethiopia and other emerging economies were able to begin to obtain commercial loans and enter the sovereign bond market after passing through rigorous credit rating processes. He emphasized that Ethiopia’s low debt level, increasing tax base, peace and political stability, had been rated before the issue of the sovereign bond. He also noted that the 20% range of GDP-external debt ratio demonstrated a sound debt level for entry into the bond market. Ethiopia, he said, would continue to use the private capital market to obtain finance, to the degree that the country’s debt repayment capacity allowed. The one billion dollar sovereign fund, he said, would be used to finance sugar development and expand the manufacturing sector. He ruled out the possibility of using the fund for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), saying that there was enough other funding available for GERD, and “I assure you we won’t use the money to finance GERD.” In general, the Prime Minister emphasized, the sovereign bond would not create any extra debt burden as the issue was based on a thorough analysis of the country’s debt repayment capacity. He reiterated that concessional loans would continue to be the primary source of development finance.

Asked about the criticisms made by Human Rights Watch and other international human right advocacy organizations, the Prime Minister noted that the Government of Ethiopia had been attacked on a number of occasions. Some of these groups had spent the last decade with no other aim than trying to make the Ethiopian government weak and easy to manipulate to serve western interests, but, he emphasized that the Ethiopian government would never be a government that served foreign interests. He said “the accusations continue to be hurled against us because we chose the democratic developmental line and have said no to their attempt to impose their preferred neo-liberal ideology.” He said “we have seen a lot of African countries collapsing because of western neo-liberal policies and we refuse to adopt these because we do not want the same thing to happen to us.” He added: “the government will continue fighting back against these groups’ subversive agenda as the matter goes to the core of our sovereign right to choose our own development path.”

In relation to the allegation of land grabbing, he said Ethiopia’s policy was quite clear. No land given to commercial investors would cause eviction of farmers. Equally, before any land was allocated for commercial farming, it had to meet the criteria that it would not cause deforestation or environmental harm. The Prime Minister said that “as a result there has never been any eviction of farmers and this has been proven by international organizations and embassies in Ethiopia.” He pointed out that Human Rights Watch and other such groups continued to make accusations on the basis of dubious testimonies from refugees in neighboring countries and from politically minded exiles, to try to twist the arm of the Ethiopian government, despite the fact that the people from the places concerned provided repeated testimony that they had not been evicted or suffered from abuse.

The Prime Minister noted that Ethiopia was working towards greater regional economic integration. “Ethiopia”, he said, “is now connected with Kenya, Sudan and Djibouti through road networks and the Ethiopian part of the road connecting to South Sudan is also complete, in pursuit of regional integration.” He mentioned the Ethiopian public diplomacy delegation that went to Cairo last week to enhance people-to-people relations between the two countries. The delegation had met with senior government officials and religious leaders in Egypt and the Prime Minister emphasized that the visit would have a major role in further strengthening positive government-to-government relations. He said the response from the Egyptian side conformed Ethiopia’s intent to work for mutual benefit. He said that Egyptians’ recognition of Ethiopia’s development and Ethiopia’s recognition of their situation “bodes well with our policy of working for mutual benefits”.

In Somalia, Prime Minister Hailemariam said, Ethiopia, in collaboration with Somali forces, had helped in removing Al-Shabaab from 65% of Somalia. He noted that Ethiopia was building up the capacity of Somali forces to enable them to fight back against Al-Shabaab on their own. Referring to the departure of the Sierra Leone force from Somali, the Prime Minister said that “if there is any request from the African Union, Ethiopia is ready to replace any contingent that leaves Somalia”.

In respect to relations with Djibouti, the Prime Minister noted that the right given to Djiboutian to hold

immovable property in Ethiopia was to further strengthen people-to-people relations. He said the economic relations between the two countries was showing marked growth. Asked about the possibility of any possible political union between the two countries, Prime Minister Hailemariam, reminding the audience that that political integration was a continental vision that would come about through strong economic integration, said “this is a matter to be decided by the people of the two countries.”

Prime Minister Hailemariam also discussed the challenge posed by human trafficking. He said the main cause of the problem was poverty and unemployment, and in this context, he noted the Government had reduced the unemployment rate from 30-40% to 17% through a number of activities over several years. He stressed the Government would continue to expand these activities, paying special attention to creation of employment for youths. In response to questions on the major projects in the fertilizer and sugar industries, he said there had been delays in project completion because of weaknesses in national capacity in implementing projects. There had been insufficient capacity to prepare the land for the sugar plantation on time, though he added that the delay also allowed for METEC to build capacity in production for the sugar mills. He also emphasized that the Government was doing its level best to finish the projects within the current Growth and Transformation Plan, which ends next year. He said Tendaho I has started production and the Kesem Sugar mills would be operational soon.

Oakland Institute’s efforts to damage Ethiopia’s development policies: a comment

In the 1980s, Ethiopia, with images of starving Ethiopian children filling the Western media, became a symbol of humanitarian need. Subsequently, this was twisted into a representation of an incompetent African government dependent upon wasteful foreign aid and disinterested in the suffering of its people. These conveniently simplistic journalistic images were never very accurate. Today, they are totally wrong.

Ethiopia’s policies over the last decade or more have been specifically based on pro-poor and pro-development strategies, implemented through integrated planning, coordination, management and cooperation of government at federal, regional and local levels, aid agencies and the people. Over 70% of the federal budget is dedicated to pro-poor policies, and progress to “develop a comprehensive and structured mechanism to advance the respect, protection and fulfilment of human and democratic rights guaranteed by the Constitution” can be clearly seen in the country’s overall economic and social development. Ethiopia is not dependent upon development aid but it has benefitted significantly from it in the implementation of its **"Agricultural Development Led Industrialization"** strategy and in a series of other pro-poor development programs, covering the country. These have included the Sustainable Development Program to Reduce Poverty (SDPRP); the Program for Accelerated and Sustained Development to end Poverty (PASDEP); the Sustainable Land Management Program (SLMP II), aimed at reducing land degradation and increasing land productivity of smallholder farmers; the Purchase for Progress (P4P) program to provide training for smallholder farmers in key techniques such as post-harvest handling, group marketing, agricultural finance and contracting; and the Promotion of Basic Services (PBS) program, now in its third phase, which covers education, health, water, sanitation, rural roads and agricultural extension.

The PBS, for example, includes continued decentralization of basic services, increasing completion of primary levels of education, lowering maternal mortality rates, increasing agricultural productivity, lowering the average time to reach all-weather roads, increasing access to potable water, increasing local government budget controls and audit controls, and increasing information flows to people in the *woredas* (districts). It has an explicit focus on gender, the socially excluded and areas previously neglected, and covers most of the country. All elements are subject to stringent verified performance indicators. The view of all who have studied or been involved in the PBS is that it is “an excellent example of harmonized support by donors to improve basic services in a low income country;” and it has been described by those who know as “the most successful project of its kind in the world.”

All these pro-poor programs operate at local and regional state as well as national levels, placing special emphasis on enhancing the productivity of smallholder farmers and pastoralists, strengthening market systems, improving the participation of the private sector in agriculture, expanding the amount of land under irrigation and reducing the number of chronically food insecure households. They have achieved some impressive progress - an 8% or more growth rate for agriculture, the reduction of safety net program beneficiaries from 7.8 million to 1.8 million households, doubling production of major crops, and raising the emergency food reserve to 3 million tonnes. As the Prime Minister noted recently, the country has achieved food security at national, if not yet household, level. The delivery of public services across the country has

allowed *woredas* (districts), *inter alia*, to hire 100,000 additional primary school teachers, 38,000 health extension workers and 45,000 agricultural extension workers. It has helped people gain access to public budget information and given 120,000 citizens basic budget literacy training. The proportion of people living below the poverty line has fallen steadily in the last few years; the target is to reduce this to 22% by 2015. Overall, the growth of the Ethiopian economy has been both broad-based and pro-poor. It has, with the aid of carefully placed aid and support, lifted millions out of poverty and brought them healthcare and other social benefits, improving their lives. This is the result of making poverty reduction and sustainability the central focus of the country's development. It has all been remarkably successful and certainly gives the lie to claims, in defiance of all the available evidence both from Ethiopia and from development partners, that Ethiopia's development strategy is 'non-inclusive'.

Not surprisingly, with the country poised to surpass almost all the Millennium Development Goals before the 2015 deadline, Ethiopia's development efforts have been widely endorsed. None of this has prevented one or two international advocacy organizations and individuals, trying to question these results, claiming these developments to be non-existent and when the evidence has become impossible to deny, claiming they were driven by abuse and violence. Organizations such as the Oakland Institute and Human Rights Watch continue to propagate an outdated image based on flawed methodology, built up from unverified and unverifiable information, with inaccurate and exaggerated accounts drawn from externally-based politically-motivated sources and seldom, if ever, checked on the ground.

Characteristically, and depressingly, most of the criticisms and accusations against these projects and programs consistently fail to provide sufficient details for them to be checked by independent investigation or even for the Government to investigate the allegations either. This appears to be deliberate policy by the advocacy organizations as they persistently refuse to provide the Government, Ethiopian Human Rights organizations or other bodies with any of the necessary details and, indeed, deliberately obfuscate the details to avoid any checking. This is a central flaw in their methodology and is due to the fact that much of their information is based on allegation rather than on actual fact, and is largely, if not entirely, sourced externally and drawn from politically motivated sources. Not only do these advocacy organizations fail to look at the way the Government's pro-poor policies and strategies actually operate on the ground, they also employ methodology entirely unacceptable by any normal evidential research standards.

It's no surprise that a couple of years ago, the UK's Secretary of State for International Development felt it necessary to describe the methodology as "unsound". The most obvious flaws relate to the collection of material and presentation: the deliberate lack of detail to make it impossible for the Government, or indeed any independent bodies, to investigate, verify or check claims, or discover whether the sample is random or representative; the total reliance on external, and non-random, sources and the failure to investigate on the ground; and the failure to question the political affiliation or interest of informants. Indeed, Oakland Institute and HRW either never bother to investigate the motivation or political links of informants, or they just accept the political attitudes involved. They simply accept unquestioningly any and all allegations that fit their pre-conceived view, even when sources are identified leaders of anti-government groups, in some cases devoted to armed struggle to remove the present government. Above all, there is a continued refusal to accept any other reports, sources or information, however reliable, if it contradicts their own reports. They have a standard response to any criticism, any detail which contradicts their own reports: these are "inconsistent" with our "field research" and therefore they must be wrong: "We are right; you are wrong."

This arrogance means that Oakland Institute, HRW and others deny the results of numerous investigations and reports by many different bodies, looking into the way aid is distributed and used. The Oakland Institute says the 'facts' are ignored by the international community. It even claims, "Donors are well aware of the situation on the ground and have chosen to turn a blind eye to gross human rights [violations] by their closest ally in Africa." Oakland and HRW in effect say that the Federal Government, regional and local authorities, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, all UN agencies, European Union agencies, the African Development Bank, all donor ambassadors and embassies in Ethiopia, all NGOs, whether local or international, working on the ground, and virtually all other visitors to these areas, either repeatedly and consistently lie, or they consistently and deliberately refuse to see all the "numerous atrocities" that the Oakland Institute and HRW manage to see. They dismiss the whole series of World Bank investigations and assessment missions to BeniShangul Gumuz on resettlement that found no evidence that relocation was "involuntary". They dismiss Donor Advisory Group (DAG) field visits to Gambella that found "no evidence of forced relocation or systematic abuse". The 2012 Donor Advisory Group report, based, for example, on interviews with hundreds of people with no officials present and visits randomly selected by members of the mission, even noted that "those

communities that objected to moving have been allowed to stay". Between 2006 and 2012 there were 34 investigations/evaluations of the PSB program in various areas carried out by officials and experts of the WB, DfID, CIDA, Irish Aid, EC, IMF, AfDB, SIDA, and Italian Co-operation, as well as representatives of the Governments of Austria, Spain, the Netherlands and others, and Ethiopian federal, regional and local officials. Curiously, none of these bodies manage to see any of the "atrocities" despite visiting the areas concerned quite regularly. The Oakland Institute and HRW, however, manage to see these without actually visiting any of the areas concerned.

In fact, where the claims of the Oakland Institute and others can be checked, it is clear they are seriously inaccurate. In its latest report the Oakland Institute begins by repeating a statistic that both it and HRW have used repeatedly: "in recent years, the Ethiopian government has leased over 3 million hectares to corporations for the development of large-scale agricultural plantations and is making available a total of 11.5 million hectares to investors." In another recent paper, "Understanding Land Investment Deals in Africa," the Oakland Institute states "since early 2008, the Ethiopian Government has embarked on a process to award millions of hectares (ha) of land to foreign and national agricultural investors. Our research shows that at least 3,619,509 ha of land have been transferred, though the actual number may be higher." These figures are simply plucked out of the air. They bear no resemblance to reality. The latest figures from a genuinely independent source, a report from the Gates Foundation, says the actual figure for leased land from the *federal* land bank in 2014 is 380,000 hectares; another 335,000 hectares have been allocated by *regional governments*; and a further 335,000 hectares for state run sugar plantations. These figures give no indication of how much is actually being currently developed. The disparity raises serious questions about the quality of Oakland Institute 'research' and its sources.

The Gates Foundation report is based on a qualitatively and quantitatively different style of methodology. It collected data on all land deals over 5,000 hectares between 2005 and 2012, checking investment identification, location, timeline, investor details, land details, agricultural activity, job creation, fiscal regime and infrastructure, and social and environmental impact. It did field-work in all relevant regional states, and carried out a wide range of interviews with government officials, technical experts, NGOs, investors and others, as well as carrying out seven case studies of farm-level investments. The authors acknowledge that more research at farm and community level is needed; they also said it was difficult on occasion to separate fact-based statements from opinions, but they "tried to indicate when evidence in support of a particular statement is limited." They examined relevant material in secondary literature in both English and Amharic, and noted the difficulty in commenting "with great rigor" on the social and environmental impact of land deals because "there is no satisfactory baseline available" in many areas. The research was carried out over a three month period in 2012, and the authors describe their results as "best viewed as a rapid appraisal rather than as an in-depth study." This is hardly a view that will commend itself to Oakland Institute or HRW whose simplistic reports are simply based on allegations of people outside Ethiopia, or quoted from each other's earlier allegations.

It is not just the Oakland Institute's "research" that fails so spectacularly at the most basic level. All the evidence for its other allegations remains minimal. One central element in the latest Oakland Institute's paper is that the Government is "Engineering Ethnic Conflict". The 'evidence' for this is that there was a clash, or more accurately two clashes at Maji, between members of the Dizi and the Suri, two peoples who, as indeed the Oakland Institute somewhat reluctantly admits, have a long history of conflict over cattle and pasture. The Oakland Institute alleges there was a massacre, a couple of years ago, which it claims was organized by the government, and that 30, 50, 68 or more people were killed. It says it was unable to confirm the precise numbers killed because no police report was filed. In fact, police reports were filed on both incidents and a dozen or so people died. According to actual eyewitnesses, there is no indication that this was anything more than a brief and unfortunate, if tragic, resurgence of traditional enmity between two peoples over a specific problem. The local authorities and local elders played a central role in resolving the situation. All the evidence on the ground is that local and government authorities tried to resolve the problem. There is absolutely no evidence that the government encouraged these clashes or that they had anything to do with resettlement projects in the South Omo. It is, however, certainly true that resettlement is having a positive impact in the region, being welcomed largely by the peoples of the South Omo as well as by those in other regions where substantial resettlement projects have also been carried out.

The Oakland Institute allegations also include claims that hundreds of Suri are in jail, that around 150 have been killed in the conflict over land in the last year, that the army is infecting the local populations with Hepatitis B, Aids and other diseases and ensuring that prostitution is on the rise, and "according to a close local contact in December 2012 and January 2013 I kept receiving more reported killings of members of the Suri tribe." Again,

none of these emotive allegations have been supported by any other sources, and no visitors have seen this 'evidence' which is simply not visible on the ground.

The Oakland Institute, like HRW, has a habit of using inaccurate and emotive titles; "Engineering Ethnic Conflict", or HRW's "Waiting here for Death: Forced Displacement and Villagization in Ethiopia's Gambella Region" (an equally inaccurate report on the Gambella Regional State) are deliberately chosen to attract media attention. In a similar fashion, the Oakland Institute also claims reports of abuse are 'widespread'. This, in fact, means that the allegations have been constantly repeated: by the Oakland Institute, quoting HRW; by Friends of Turkana quoting the Oakland Institute; and by HRW quoting Friends of Turkana; and, of course, by all three quoting their own previous reports. The 'evidence' all comes from the same sources, refugees, a small group of opposition figures based in Nairobi or Washington, and in some cases members of armed opposition groups based in Eritrea. They constantly repeat each other's allegations, just as they use each other's sources. One of these sources founded an organization in Washington devoted to overthrowing the EPRDF in Ethiopia. It claims the EPRDF is a Tigre organization running an apartheid regime in Ethiopia that has produced a situation worse than that in Rwanda before the genocide there. Oakland Institute and HRW never appear to consider these facts relevant to the quality of 'evidence' from such sources. Indeed they consistently repeat them however often they are authoritatively corrected by eyewitnesses from the regions concerned. Any effort to provide genuine on-the-ground evidence is simply dismissed out of hand: The Oakland Institute says that "donors are well aware of the situation on the ground and have chosen to turn a blind eye to gross human rights abuses by their closest ally in Africa." This blind assertion is scarcely an adequate response to the evidence of all those organizations that have repeatedly carried out investigations and found no truth in the claims of forced resettlement or systematic abuse of human rights.

The central point of the Oakland Institute reports and other similar reports appears to be part of a deliberate political agenda aiming at stopping the contributions of the World Bank and other donors to Ethiopia's pro-poor developmental programs in order to contribute to the overthrow of the government, to "implicate western funds in the coercive settlement of pastoral communities and the conditional – and coercive – distribution of good aid, which seems to be principally aimed at establishing dependency on food aid while devoting increasing amounts of land to growing crops for export and less on ensuring subsistence." The fact that absolutely no reliable evidence is provided for any of these claims - and there is a mountain of publicly available factual evidence to refute such allegations - underlines the political aims. The Oakland Institute even says "Our hope is that this report will further pressure the US Congress and State Department to renegotiate the development assistance to Ethiopia." If, as a result, some of the most effective pro-poor policies in Africa are damaged, the Oakland Institute, and its friends, will have a lot to answer for.

Ethiopia's Public Diplomacy Delegation in Egypt

Last week, an Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation, the first of its kind, paid a visit to Egypt (December 16-19) to strengthen people-to-people relations between the two sisterly countries. A central element of Ethiopia's foreign policy is that its national interest is based on the principles of democracy and development. In order to attain those goals successfully, cooperation, on the basis of mutual benefit with neighboring countries and more widely, is a priority. Ethiopia, indeed, has been working consistently to implement its foreign policy objectives through its efforts for peace and security in the region and in promoting good neighborliness.

These efforts have produced significant achievements benefitting the whole region largely, but not exclusively, through the channels of formal diplomatic relations. Public Diplomacy has also been another successful aspect of Ethiopia's foreign relations. One case in point is the provision of scholarships for students of neighboring countries to study at higher educational institutions. Ethiopia's efforts to build up the infrastructure interconnections of the region are also being extended at various levels to provide for links between the peoples of the region.

The Speaker of the House of People's Representatives led the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation to Egypt. During its visit, the Delegation met with representatives of various Egyptian government and non-government bodies as well as different sections of Egyptian Society and visited a number of institutions. The main message the Public Diplomacy team conveyed to its Egyptian interlocutors was Ethiopia's keen interest and commitment to the growth and prosperity of the whole region of northeast Africa and the Nile Basin. It transmitted the message that the Ethiopian people have absolutely no interest in harming their Egyptian brothers and sisters, but rather have every intention to work hard together for mutual growth and development. The Delegation underlined, once again, that Ethiopia has always striven consistently for equitable use of the Nile waters, use

that does not affect the just share of Egypt.

During its visit to Cairo, the Delegation participated in the 15th anniversary celebration of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs and met with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Prime Minister Engineer Ibrahim Mahleab, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, the Grand Sheikh of the Al Azhar Mosque Dr Ahmed Al Tayeb, and His Holiness, Pope Tawadros II of the Egyptian Coptic Church. Other meetings were held with Egyptian intellectuals and writers, members of the Egyptian Public Diplomacy Delegation, which visited Ethiopia earlier, and with Mr Ayman Essa of the Egyptian-Ethiopian Business Council. The Delegation also visited historical sites in Cairo including the Modern Arts Museum, the Opera House and Ministry of Tourism. There was general agreement from Egyptian political leaders as well as from the religious fathers and intellectuals that Ethiopia and Egypt have long standing, strong, and historic ties, and that Egypt would never stand against Ethiopia's development agenda and programs.

Dr Tedros Adhanom, Minister for Foreign Affairs, warmly welcomed the Public Diplomacy Delegation on its return to Ethiopia. He told the Delegation that it had accomplished its mission responsibly, demonstrating great commitment. He thanked the members of the Delegation and underlined that today the modern paradigm of international relations and system of diplomacy required much wider public participation in the business of foreign relations. The results of Ethiopia's Public Diplomacy Delegation visit to Egypt showed, he said, how strongly the country was working to boost its people-to-people relations with other nations across the globe.

On Tuesday this week (December 23), the members of the delegation met with Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and President Dr Mulatu Teshome. The Prime Minister thanked the delegation on behalf of the Government of Ethiopia. He emphasized that this kind of activity, enhancing people-to-people relations between countries, was very important in helping to create mutual understanding, confidence and trust. The Prime Minister added the Delegation's visit had been very fruitful and displayed the Ethiopian people's message of collective development and confidence to their Egyptian brothers and sisters very effectively. They had also brought a message of love and peace to Ethiopians from Egyptians. The Prime Minister said future activities of the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation should be institutionalized and legalized comprehensively. He called upon the Delegation members and the public at large to stand firmly on the side of Ethiopia's national interests and to support the Government's efforts in to help realize the Ethiopian renaissance in particular and the African renaissance more generally.

President Dr Mulatu Teshome also welcomed the Delegation and emphasized his deep gratitude to it on behalf of the Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and Peoples. He said the people and Government would continue to support Public Diplomacy activity in all possible areas, in order to enhance and boost people-to-people relations between Ethiopia and other nations in the world. The members of the Delegation stressed that in all their activities, irrespective of any social, economic and political differences, they would stand for Ethiopia's national interest with the Government in its struggle against poverty. They also pointed out that the formation of the Public Diplomacy team demonstrated the firm motivation and participation of Ethiopians from all areas in support of the development of the country.

Ethiopia's unwavering commitment to the affairs of Africa

Ethiopia commitment to Africa, to the development and prosperity of the continent and to the issues of peace, reconciliation and stability, strengthen every year. At one level the peacekeeping missions in which it is involved across the continent demonstrate this, but this determined commitment to African causes was also demonstrated in another field recently with the contribution of the Ethiopian Ebola response mission to West African Ebola-hit countries. It offered another example of Ethiopia's long-standing commitment to African affairs and its support for the objective of maintaining solidarity and cooperation between Ethiopia and other African countries.

On Tuesday last week (December 16) a farewell program for the Ethiopian Ebola response mission to West Africa was held at the Hilton Hotel in the presence of senior government officials, representatives of the African Union, Ambassadors, and invited guests. Health Minister Dr Kesete Birhan Admassu expressed his appreciation to the volunteer health professionals for accepting the call of the Government of Ethiopia and the African Union. He emphasized Ethiopia's contributions to African problems and underlined that Ethiopia had always been firm in its efforts to cooperate in solving these. This special mission, he said, meant the country was now contributing the largest number of volunteers in the fight against the deadly disease in West African countries. Dr Kesete drew a parallel between the health volunteers and the Ethiopian peacekeepers deployed in other areas and for

other purposes.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dewano Kedir, praised the health professionals for their readiness to help the West African countries and noted the mission showed a strong sign of African Solidarity. As part of the overall program of Ethiopia's Ebola response mission to West Africa, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the African Union and the Government of Ethiopia for future cooperation in this area. Four days later, on Saturday (December 20) Ethiopia launched a phone text message campaign to raise funds as part of African Union efforts in fighting the spread of the Ebola virus.

The national Ethiopian telecommunication company, Ethio-Telecom, also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union so that the company would hand the funds collected to the organization. The campaign has the aim of raising contributions for the fight against Ebola by encouraging people to send text messages on their cell phones with the slogan "StopEbola7979". The funds raised from the campaign will be used in training and deploying still more volunteers under the auspices of the African Union's support to Ebola-in-West Africa operations. These aim to enhance the capacity of existing national and international response mechanisms to the disease. African Union Chairperson, Dr Dlamini Zuma, praised Ethiopia for launching the campaign and said it was expected to run in a wide range of countries, including Botswana, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Rwanda, and Tanzania.

Health Minister, Dr Kesete also underlined Ethiopia's response in an article he wrote entitled "Unite to Fight Ebola, Ethiopia showing the way." This has been disseminated by a number of different media including the Ministry's website: www.moh.gov.et. In the article, the Minister noted the arrival of Ethiopian volunteers in Serra Leone and Liberia to undergo a two-week training program before they embarked on the fight against the Ebola virus. He also noted that another cohort of 20 or so health professionals would depart for West Africa next week. In his article the Minister noted there was good evidence that the virus could be stopped. However, he said if any complacency sets in or if the response efforts dwindle, we will be facing potentially a far more serious and chronic problem with the high probability of the virus spreading to the rest of the continent or even the world at large. This, he said, was why it was so critical that volunteer health workers from member states of the African Union should be deployed, and this would be timely in turning the tide against this deadly disease.

Dr Kesete also noted "the commitment of the Government and People of Ethiopia to supporting their African brothers and sisters is not new. We were the first to deploy over 12,300 soldiers for the UNMIL peacekeepers in Liberia." Their discipline and the all-round support they deliver once deployed can be seen in the way they "supported the Liberian people not only as peacekeepers but also as brothers by sharing their experience in the construction of primary schools and primary health centers." The Minister expressed his firm belief that "the Ethiopian health professionals would bring extra and unique capabilities into the African Union campaign against the Ebola outbreak in West Africa" One of these would be, he said "organizing a robust community response to stamp out the disease with the help of other health workers and community health agents on the ground." The Minister stressed the proven capacities of Ethiopian Health Extension Program workers, adding that "our health workers can tap into their rich experience of implementing the health extension program [in Ethiopia] and use it to successfully supervise and run the community treatment centers that are being set up in Sierra Leone and Liberia." The Minister, who expressed his surprise and delight that more than 1,100 volunteers had registered in just two weeks to help in West Africa, called the volunteers "heroes and heroines we need to respect and honor."

China's support for development in Djibouti

Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh recently welcomed the interest of China in Djibouti and the Horn of Africa. He told journalists that China had decided to enter the growing market strength of Africa and the Horn and this, he said, "is a wise choice that makes the People's Republic of China an equitable and dynamic partner who is fully involved in the ambitions of expansion and development of Djibouti and the region."

Djibouti's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Ali Yacoub Mahamoud, sees the economic partnership with China as a successful model both for Djibouti and for the entire region. Over the last year, China has been strengthening its position as the leading trade and economic partner of Djibouti, and equally, all major projects financed by China in Djibouti are part of a regional perspective in line with the economic health of Djibouti and of Ethiopia. "With the economic, technical and diplomatic support from China, economic integration between Djibouti and Ethiopia will take on a new dimension", he says. He was referring to the construction of a gas pipeline connecting the two countries that will be built and funded by a major Chinese company.

The agreement for the project, signed last August between the Chinese group and the Djibouti authorities, is the largest project in terms of investment, with a total cost of more than US\$ 4 billion, of which US\$ 3 billion will be invested in the Djibouti section. Being funded by Chinese GCL-Poly Petroleum Investments Limited, the project includes the construction in Djibouti of a gas liquefaction plant and a refinery and storage of crude and refined products and a bunkering center in Obock, north of Djibouti, as well as a gas pipeline to bring the gas from the gas fields in Ethiopia to Djibouti. A pre-feasibility study was presented in September and work on the project is expected to begin in the year 2015.

Other Chinese financed projects in Djibouti include the building of two ports, one for livestock and the other a multi-purpose port, at a cost of US\$ 580 million, which is being financed by the China Merchant Group (CMG). The company currently has a 30% stake in the Port of Djibouti, and the Minister of Economy and Finance, Ilyas Moussa Dawaleh, says "the partnership forged with China Merchant Holdings International will provide better coverage of the growing demand for maritime traffic" as well as providing an opportunity to enhance the economic and social development of the country in general.

The President of the Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority, Abubaker Hadi, says Djibouti has become a regional maritime hub with China as a support and model: "We are inspired by the rapid growth of China, and we see the Chinese development model as a successful example we want to follow." Another major project, of course, is the construction of the new 740kms railway from Djibouti to Addis Ababa. Budgeted at US\$ 600 million, the China Import Export Bank is financing it; the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation has been working on the project since the beginning of the year. It should be completed by 2016. Transport Minister, Ahmed Moussa, told the Chinese agency Xinhua "this railway line will further align the two peoples and consolidate the enormous trade and economic partnership between Djibouti and Ethiopia. It will also strengthen the role of Djibouti as a natural port of Ethiopia."

The Touchroad International Holdings Group have also presented the Djiboutian authorities with a whole series of major projects it would like to implement in Djibouti over the short and medium term. These include developing a number of resort islands as well as building a shopping mall, airport, hotels and a shipyard in the area of Obock, north of Djibouti's capital as well as building two medical centers.

Somalia's Federal Parliament approves the new Prime Minister

The Federal Parliament of Somalia has unanimously approved Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke as Somali Prime Minister. The Parliamentary Speaker, Mohamed Sheikh Osman Jawari, announced the results after voting was completed: "out of 224 MPs in attendance, 218 MPs voted in favor of the premier and no members rejected nor abstained." The Prime Minister now has thirty days to name a cabinet.

Prime Minister Sharmarke is widely seen as an experienced politician previously holding office as Prime Minister, February 2009 to September 2010 under President Sheikh Sharif. His appointment has been welcomed as an encouraging step, and expectations are high. There is little time left to implement the elements necessary for Vision 2016, and the Government cannot afford disputes. A stable government is vital to produce a workable plan of action and accelerate performance for the remaining 20 months of this Government and prepare for the election in 2016.

Prime Minister Sharmarke will need to focus on a number of specific areas in order to ensure that the necessary progress is made without delay. Parliament has finally begun to address the creation of the relevant committees to oversee aspects of the planning for the electoral process and the revision of the Constitution, but many deadlines have been missed already. There have been some revisions to the provisional Constitution but there is still much that needs to be considered.

At one level security has significantly improved with the expansion of the areas controlled by AMISOM and the Somali National Army. Equally, a lot still needs to be done to make the security sector more effective. At the moment, AMISOM is due to leave in 2016 and it needs to carry out a lot of work in establishing local administrations as well as in training Somali forces. It requires rebuilding the army, and while there is international assistance with salaries, weapons and training, this will not last forever. The Prime Minister will need to encourage economic strategies to allow the country to support its own armed forces. Anti-piracy measures continue to be needed as part of the security developments, but there also needs to be efforts to address local grievances such as illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping by international partners. He should

make fighting corruption a priority.

The President has noted “Somalia must act swiftly to resolve several outstanding tasks linked to security, political and development progress. There is much to do, and little time. The important process of nation-building as per Vision 2016, and ensuring the security and development initiatives of the New Deal Somali Compact are quickly implemented are crucial.” The new Prime Minister, President Mohamud’s third, will need all the help he can get.

Somalia and Somaliland Presidents hold talks in Djibouti

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of Somalia and Somaliland President, Ahmed Mohamed Mohamud ‘Silanyo’, held talks last weekend, (December 20-21) in Djibouti at the invitation of President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti. The talks were described as friendly and serious. The two parties held separate meetings with President Ismail Omar Guelleh on Saturday and also met together behind closed doors. The two leaders discussed the series of Turkey-brokered bilateral talks held last year and the implementation of agreements signed earlier in Istanbul. Turkish President Erdogan facilitated the first of the series of talks between the two sides in 2013, with direct talks between delegations led by President Mohamud and President Silanyo on October 5, 2013.

The talks also covered peace and security of the region, how to tackle the threat of piracy and terrorism, aviation and air control, toxic waste dumping and illegal fishing. They agreed to continue their talks and sign an agreement on these issues when they meet in Ankara. The dialogue between the two sides was described as amicable; the delegations of the two parties held four meetings on Saturday and Sunday and technical committees from both countries have already begun to carry out scheduled tasks.

President Ismail Omar Guelleh was quoted as saying after the talks that dialogue was the only means through which any misunderstandings between the two sides could be resolved. On his return to Mogadishu President Mohamud expressed his hopes that the talks would produce fruitful results in 2015. In a statement, he said the two sides expected to see tangible changes at the start of the New Year when the talks resume. He added that he himself hoped to see “the upcoming talks in Turkey next year restore the unity of Somali people.”

After the talks concluded on Sunday (December 21), the two sides issued a six-point communiqué. The two parties agreed to resume the Turkey-brokered bilateral talks, launched last year, at the end of February. They agreed to refrain from making comments that were inconsistent with the bilateral talks or that might affect the confidence of their two negotiating committees. They stressed the need for co-management of national airspace. They agreed not to politicize humanitarian assistance, and to collectively encourage reconstruction projects. They also agreed on the importance of human rights protection and on security cooperation, and to unite against terrorism, piracy and organized crime. The third point of the agreement noted that Djibouti, which hosted these latest talks, could participate in the future talks - if needed.

Following the publication of the communiqué, President of the Puntland Administration, Dr Abdiweli Mohamed Ali, criticised the Federal Government of Somalia for agreeing to hand air traffic control to the breakaway region of Somaliland. He welcomed the talks between President Mohamud and Ahmed Silanyo in Djibouti, but said his administration was skeptical about some crucial points, specifically on air traffic control. He said it was “unacceptable for airspace control to be handed to Somaliland.” He said it should either remain with Mogadishu, “or otherwise it should be transferred to Garowe,” the capital of Puntland. Last year at the second round of talks in Istanbul in July, the two sides agreed to establish a joint committee in Hargeisa to manage air traffic control and equitable revenue sharing. Last week, Somalia’s Minister for Land and Air Transport declared that the International Civil Aviation Organization, which has been controlling the airspace of the country since 1996, had agreed to hand over control to the government and it will be managed from the capital, Mogadishu. The Somaliland Government criticized the move which it said negated the agreement reached earlier between the two sides. Last month, Somaliland had declared that it would reconsider its position on talks with Mogadishu, accusing the Somali government of failing to honor the agreements reached in the earlier series of meetings in Turkey.