

## A Week in the Horn 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016

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### News in brief

#### **Africa and the African Union**

The first ever World Humanitarian Summit took place this week in Istanbul with UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, joining 55 Heads of State and Government, representatives from 173 Member States, 350 private sector representatives, and over 2,000 people from civil society and non-governmental organizations, to discuss the strains on global humanitarian action and the rising humanitarian needs around the world. (See article)

The UN Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement on Tuesday (May 24) commending the increased contribution of the African Union to the maintenance of peace and security, and acknowledging the progress made in cooperation between the UN and the African Union. (See article)

#### **Ethiopia**

The President of the Republic of Korea, President Park Geun-hye, is on a State Visit to Ethiopia this week (May 25-28). She has held talks with President Dr Mulatu Teshome and met Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn and African Union Commission Chairperson, Dr Dlamini-Zuma. President Park also attended the Ethio-Korean Business Summit on Friday (May 27). After her four-day visit to Ethiopia she is also visiting Kenya and Uganda. (See article)

Ethiopia is celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **National Day**, the anniversary of the downfall, in 1991, of the oppressive military dictatorship of the Derg, on Saturday (May 28, ‘Ginbot 20’). As part of the celebrations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a panel discussion on **Ethiopia’s Foreign Policy Journey of the Past 25 Years** at the Sheraton Addis Hotel on Wednesday (May 25), attended by members of the diplomatic community in Addis Ababa, high officials, academics, scholars and others. (See article)

Ethiopia officially celebrated “Africa Day” on May 25 for the first time, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia organizing a panel discussion on "**Pan-Africanism and its significance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**” at Addis Ababa’s Hilton Hotel. (See article)

Ethiopia's delegation to the World Humanitarian Summit was led by Demeke Mekonnen, Deputy PM and Coordinator of the Economic Cluster, and included Getachew Reda, Head of the Government Communications Agency Office with the rank of Minister, and Sufian Ahmed, Adviser to the Prime Minister and former Minister of Finance and Economic Development. (See article)

Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Former Minister of Health, Dr Tedros Adhanom, formally announced his candidacy for Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) at a press conference at the United Nations in Geneva on Tuesday (May 24). (See article)

State Minister Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie met Professor Petteri Taalas, Secretary General of the World Metrological Organization (WMO), on Tuesday (May 24). The meeting discussed the issue of **relocating the World Metrological Organization Regional Office for Africa from Geneva to Ethiopia** and the ongoing cooperation between WMO and Ethiopia.

State Minister Ambassador Taye briefed a 19-person delegation of senior military officials and academics from the UK **Royal College of Defence Studies** on peace, security, geopolitical and environmental issues of the Horn of Africa on Tuesday (May 23).

Ethiopia's Ambassador to South Sudan, Ambassador Fesseha Shawel, said on Tuesday that Ethiopian troops had crossed into South Sudan with the approval of the South Sudan government to facilitate the work of the Governor of Gambella Regional State and the Governor of South Sudan's Boma state, Baba Bedan, in recovering the children abducted by Murle tribesmen last month. 56 children have been rescued and returned to Ethiopia so far.

### **Eritrea**

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *de facto* independence of Eritrea on May 24 1991 was celebrated on Tuesday in Asmara and across Eritrea. President Isaias told the people Eritrea was "now poised to embark on greater and more expansive development programs", and promised "all legal, diplomatic, informational and political campaigns will be carried out with greater pace and better organization". (See article)

A medical team from Sudan conducted eye surgery on over 400 Eritreans in Massawa last week as well as ophthalmological diagnosis for more than 1,000 Eritreans who had been suffering from sight disabilities. The team provided medicines and eyeglasses to the patients. Earlier in the month they had also conducted eye surgery on patients in Asmara.

### **Kenya**

President Kenyatta told members of the UN Security Council on a visit to Nairobi that Kenya might withdraw its troops from Somalia if the international community failed to resolve the shortage of funding for AMISOM forces. He said funding cuts to AMISOM could not be filled by participating countries.

President Uhuru Kenyatta concluded a three-day working visit to the three counties of Mandera, Wajir and Garissa in Kenya's North Eastern region at the end of last week with a call for peace

and unity. He said the number of security officers has been increased and modern equipment provided to help them cope with security challenges and urged residents to be vigilant and to cooperate with security agencies.

Deputy President William Ruto told the World Humanitarian Summit on Monday (May 23) that the Dadaab camp complex had become a burden to Kenya. It was a security threat, a haven for terrorism and a conduit for contraband goods as well as a danger to the environment. (See article)

Kenya's Lamu County Commissioner Joseph Kanyiri said on Sunday (May 22) that the security forces which had been conducting Operation Linda Boni for the last nine months in and around the Boni Forest, had successfully flushed out al-Shabaab militants from the area. The operation has been a huge success and Lamu County was now stable and secure. Security forces remained to man the area and carry out infrastructural improvements.

### **Somalia**

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud issued a presidential decree with immediate effect on Sunday to announce that the elections would be held as scheduled in line with the recent agreement by the National Leadership Forum's 'guiding principles'. His announcement came after the Somali Federal Parliament again delayed a vote to approve the election process. (See article)

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud told a World Humanitarian Summit plenary session in Istanbul that resolving the humanitarian situation in Somalia would be difficult without first addressing security challenges. He stressed security was his country's number one priority and the "mother of all solutions", adding "We will not fix our humanitarian situation without tackling security first."

President Mohamud told the BBC's Somali Service on Wednesday (May 25) that closing Dadaab and sending back refugees en masse would worsen the security situation in Somalia. He said: "Returning refugees by force will only pose enormous challenges and will not solve anything at all." He hoped Kenya would not go ahead with its plans.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Mohammed Ahmed Al Othman, UAE Ambassador to Somalia, laid the foundation stone for the second phase of the Sheikh Sayed Hospital in Mogadishu, on Saturday (May 21). The ceremony was attended by heads of diplomatic missions and Somali government officials.

Interpol warned on Wednesday (May 25) that al-Shabaab was making efforts to control trade in wildlife products after losing control over the key charcoal trafficking routes in Somalia to AMISOM. It also suggested al-Shabaab had created links with Nigeria's Boko Haram in order to control the trade routes.

The Humanitarian Unit of AMISOM concluded a weeklong civil-military coordination workshop on Tuesday (May 23) in Kismayo. The workshop, attended by representatives from the Burundi, Ethiopian and Kenya contingents with AMISOM, and the Somali National Army, as well as

police officers from AMISOM and the Somali Police Force, discussed how to enhance civil-military relations and disseminate the Somalia Country Specific Humanitarian Guidelines.

A two-day meeting of AMISOM Sector Commanders took place in Mogadishu at the beginning of the week. AU Special Representative for Somalia, Ambassador Madeira, told the forum al-Shabaab's effectiveness came from its capacity to split into small groups which were difficult to detect, its mobility and its capacity to surprise. He said the people need to be "harnessed and converted to our side as a method of winning the war against al-Shabaab."

The US Department of State issued a travel warning on Tuesday (May 24) that Americans should avoid traveling to Somalia because of the continued threat of the al-Qaeda-linked militant group al-Shabaab and the risks of kidnapping in the country.

198 Somali police graduated in Kismayo on Monday (May 23) after an intensive three-month course organized by the police component of AMISOM covering basic principles of policing, arrest of suspects and public order management as well as human rights law. They are the first of 600 officers from Jubaland being trained.

### **South Sudan**

Cabinet Affairs Minister, Martin Elia Lomuro, said in an interview on Sunday (May 22) that the Transitional Government of National Unity Council of Ministers has agreed to set up a technical committee to review boundaries and make recommendations as a basis for discussions on how to move forward and harmonize opinions and views about the number of states. The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation [Commission] said earlier that it was not going to include the 28 states in the implementation of the peace process.

South Sudan and Sudan have agreed to resume the meetings of their Joint Political and Security Committee (JPSC) on June 6 in Khartoum. In March 2013, the two countries signed an implementation matrix for cooperation agreements covering oil, citizenship rights, security issues, banking and border trade that had been agreed six months earlier. A December 2015 meeting of the JPSC was postponed due to South Sudan security reasons.

### **Sudan**

The Egyptian-Sudanese Higher Committee started a two-day meeting at the level of under-secretaries of ministries and experts in Khartoum on Wednesday (May 25) to discuss a number of joint issues including the disputed Halayeb triangle. The Ministerial and Presidential meetings will be held in Cairo at a later date.

Sudan and China signed a framework agreement on Monday (May 23) to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy in Sudan, following the first meeting of the China-Sudan Joint Energy Cooperation Commission in Khartoum. Sudan and China reached an agreement to build a research nuclear reactor with the approval of the International Atomic Energy Agency four years ago. The first nuclear plant is expected to be built in 2020.

A tripartite committee of Sudan, the African Union and the United Nations resumed discussions over an exit strategy for the Darfur joint UN/AU peacekeeping operation (UNAMID) in

Khartoum on Monday (May 23). The meeting discussed and adopted a report on the security and humanitarian situations by the tripartite work team. Last week, the Sudanese government renewed its call for the withdrawal of UNAMID from Darfur, saying that the security situation there was now stable after defeating the rebels and curbing tribal violence.

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### **President Park Geun-hye of Korea on a State Visit to Ethiopia this week**

The President of the Republic of Korea, President Park Geun-hye, is on a State Visit to Ethiopia this week (May 25-28). The visit has the aim of strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties with both Ethiopia and the African Union. President Park Geun-hye arrived in Addis Ababa on Wednesday (May 26). During her four-day State Visit to Ethiopia, President Park held talks with President Dr Mulatu Teshome and met with Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn. She also met with African Union Commission Chairperson, Dr Dlamini-Zuma and discussed ways to strengthen cooperation between the AU and South Korea. On Friday, President Park also attended the Ethio-Korean Business Summit.

High-level bilateral discussions between Ethiopia and Korea were held on Thursday (May 27) to discuss current relations, cooperation agreements and the way forward. During the meeting Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn underlined that the long-standing and excellent relationship between the two countries demonstrated the depth of the ties between them. He said the relationship was not only historic but was also continuing to grow. The Prime Minister noted that Korea was one of the leading countries for the **developmental state model** and Ethiopia, he said, considered it a specific model for its own development.

President Park Geun-hye praised the warm welcome extended to the Korean delegation and said that she was pleased that her visit coincided with the celebration of Africa Day. She noted that Ethiopia had been the only African nation that had sent troops to Korea during the Korean War. President Park congratulated Ethiopia on the successes of the First Growth and Transformation [Plan] and noted that the relationship between Korea and Ethiopia was excellent, but she also added that there was great potential to be tapped further. She said the wide range of cooperation agreements signed between the two countries would boost their bilateral and multilateral ties and that establishing linkages between the institutions of the two countries would further enhance bilateral cooperation.

Ethiopia and Korea signed fourteen cooperation agreements and memoranda of understanding to boost their partnership in a wide range of areas on Thursday (May 27). The ceremony was attended by President Park Geun-hye and Prime Hailemariam Dessalegn. One Memorandum of Understanding was to boost cooperation in the field of information and communication technology and was signed by Dr Debretsion Gebremichael, Minister for Finance and Economic cluster and Minister of Communication and Information Technology with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister, and Yun Byung-se, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Korea. Other agreements covered a 500-million dollar loan framework agreement for the years 2016-2018, a 127-million dollar loan agreement for the Gore-Tepi road construction, and loans from the Economic Development Cooperation Fund for the Year 2016 through 2018; an agreement for air services

between the respective territories; MOUs on cooperation in the field of transport; on cooperation in Saemoul Undong; on cooperation and policy consultation; on textile technology; concerning defense; cooperation in the field of forestry and climate change cooperation in agriculture and rural development; on grant aid programs; and on health care and medical sciences.

After the signing ceremony, the Special Envoy to the Prime Minister, Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos, told reporters that President Park's visit would play a big role in transforming the historic relation of the two countries in the economic sector. The Special Envoy said the President's visit was aimed at strengthening the multifaceted relations of the two countries, and the agreements would also play a pivotal role in paving ways to knowledge, technology transfer and the building of Ethiopia's capacity.

On Friday (May 27) another Memorandum of Understanding to promote cooperation in urban development was signed by the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, and South Korea's Land and Housing Corporation. Urban Development and Housing Minister, Mekuria Haile, said the agreement is vital for the provision of practical and technical support in areas of urban development such as smart cities, land management, housing development, and other pertinent areas. The Executive Director of South Korea's Land and Housing Corporation, Hyun Do Kwan, said his country wanted to contribute to the urban development of Ethiopia and share experiences on new cities and housing provision as well as industrial complexes. He said South Korea will offer financial support and technical assistance to help Ethiopia use suitable technology.

During her visit, President Park, accompanied by Prime Haile Mariam Dessalegn, also spoke at the African Union Commission Hall on Korea-Africa relations. She underlined the historic relations between Korea and Africa as well as the role of Agenda 2063 in bringing about a peaceful and prosperous Africa. President Park emphasized that the African Union, as an institution, and Africa, as a continent, needed trustworthy partners like the Republic of Korea to effectively accomplish the goals of Agenda 2063. She reiterated her assurances of the sustainability of Korea's commitment to providing support and assistance for mutual cooperation and development of Korea as well as Africa and announced the official launch of **A Blueprint for Cooperation between Africa and Korea**, to assist the realization of Agenda 2063. The President declared that "Africa's problems are Korea's problems and Korea's are Africa's problems." She emphasized that "Africa's greatest potential lies in its people, especially, the youth and women," and announced that **Korea would train 10,000 youths from Africa in the field of ICT to help in the production of a skilled workforce in Africa**. The President also announced Korea's continuing support in combatting infectious diseases in Africa. President Park reiterated Korea's enthusiasm to work with the international community in general and Africa in particular to help bring about peace in Africa as well as in the Korean peninsula through continued provision of funds to African Peacekeeping forces, as well as through enhancement of the current cooperation for mutual development.

On Friday (May 27), an Ethio-Korea Business Forum was organized by the Korean International Trade Association and the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations with the attendance of business delegations and government officials and others. The Forum heard from the Director General of the Ethiopian Investment Corporation, Fitsum Arega, on the **Economic outlook and opportunities of Ethiopia** and from the Director of the Korea Expressway

Corporation, Mr Hye-Ok Lee on Cooperation of Infrastructure Development, as well as being briefed on cooperation in the textile industry. The Forum was also addressed by Prime Minister Hailemariam and President Park. It was attended by over 250 people including the representatives of over 40 Korean companies. During the forum, the two sides signed four MoUs on business cooperation, investment promotion and capacity building, and the trade and textile industry.

### **The first ever World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul**

At the opening of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul on Monday (May 23), United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, joined the President of Turkey, relief activists and international celebrities to urge the global community to shape a different future for the world. In total, the Summit brought together 173 Member States, 55 Heads of State and Government, 350 private sector representatives, and over 2,000 people from civil society and non-governmental organizations. Mr Ban told participants: “We are all here because global humanitarian action is unprecedentedly strained.” Mr Ban said, “I proposed this Summit four years ago, out of concern for rising humanitarian needs and declining political will. Today, the urgency has only grown.” The United Nations currently estimates that a record number of people, 130 million, need aid to survive, and more people have been forced to flee their homes than at any time since the end of the Second World War. The Secretary-General said the **Agenda for Humanity**, the document recently issued to guide discussions and action, is based on three years of consultations with 23,000 people in more than 150 countries. He said the Summit should be looking to offer commitments on five core responsibilities: Prevent and end conflict; respect the rules of war; leave no one behind; working differently to end need; and invest in humanity. Mr Ban said: “We are here to shape a different future, today we declare: We are one humanity, with a shared responsibility.”

UN General Assembly president, Mogens Lykketoft, said that expectations were high for the Summit. “People around the world are demanding that we move beyond fine words; that we build on the generosity we already see; and live up to our core responsibilities.” He went on: “Now is the time to end the conflicts at the root of the current crisis; to ensure adherence to international humanitarian law and accountability for violations; to make the humanitarian system more efficient and more effective; [and] to stand up for those we are leaving behind.”

The General Assembly president also underlined **the need to secure the extra \$15 billion required annually to meet humanitarian needs**, just one cent out of every \$50 of today’s global economy. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed hope that the Summit would lead to “auspicious outcomes” for hundreds of millions of people struggling to sustain their lives under great distress. “Pain knows no color, race, language or religion.” Mr Erdogan said, “We as leaders and responsible individuals of the international community can only succeed if we work under common principles and goals.”

Altogether, some 1,500 commitments were made, including the **Education Cannot Wait Fund**, to help provide quality education to children and youth in crisis situations; a **Grand Bargain** that that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of investment in emergency response; the **Global Preparedness Partnership** to better prepare twenty of the countries that are most at risk

of crisis; and the **One Billion Coalition for Resilience** which aims to mobilize a billion people to build safer and more stable communities worldwide. The “Grand Bargain” is the name for a package of reforms to humanitarian funding, with thirty representatives of donors and aid agencies producing 51 “commitments” to make emergency aid finance more efficient and effective. It aims to produce annual savings of \$1 billion within five years, reducing bureaucracy and paperwork, providing transparency and funding of local and national aid agencies as well as better planning, more local participation, harmonized reporting and even enhanced engagement between humanitarian and development actors. The Education Cannot Wait fund was announced by U.N. special envoy **Gordon Brown** who said the fund will aim to help more than 13 million children and young people over the next five years, and 75 million by 2030. Research published in March said nearly 75 million children living in areas affected by war or natural disaster had their education disrupted last year, leaving them prey to child labor, trafficking and extremism.

The Summit held a number of Special Sessions to cover specific areas raised during the pre-Summit consultation process. Their titles give a strong indication of people’s interests and aims, and what the discussions were all about. They included: People at the Center; Inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action; Islamic social finance; Migrants and humanitarian action; Education in emergencies and protracted crises; Global health; Global alliance for urban crisis; Global alliance for humanitarian innovation; Humanitarian principles; Transforming humanitarian action with and for young people; Religious engagement; Connecting business; Regional action for global challenges; Protecting journalists and promoting independent reporting in crisis situations; and Risk and vulnerability analysis.

In addition, a series of High-Level Leaders’ Roundtables provided opportunities for Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives to make commitments and announce bold actions in support of the five core responsibilities of the Agenda for Humanity. These roundtables dealt with political leadership to prevent and end conflicts; upholding the norms that safeguard humanity; leaving no one behind, a commitment to addressing forced displacement; Women and girls, catalyzing action to achieve gender equality; Natural disasters and climate change, managing risks and crises differently; Changing people’s lives, from delivering to ending need; and Financing, investing in humanity.

At the Round-table on “Natural Disasters and Climate Change — Managing Risks and Crises Differently”, the discussion was opened by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon who noted that the previous week he had appointed Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland, and Macharia Kamou as his Envoys to address El Niño. Both William Ruto, Deputy President of Kenya and Demeke Mekonnen, Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia spoke on national challenges. Mr Ruto explained Kenya’s decision to close the Dadaab refugee camp. He said Kenya had seen its Dadaab refugee camp grow steadily, and especially since 2011 when 160,000 Somali refugees had arrived. Since the arrival of the first group of Somali refugees in 1991, he said, a systematic destruction of vegetation and decimation of wildlife through poaching had led to environmental degradation, costing \$140 million annually to address damages. This had led to the Government’s decision to close the camp.

Deputy Prime Minister Demeke said national challenges had demonstrated a need to scale up efforts in early action and to build resilience at the local level. National efforts, he pointed out,

had reduced the impact of the current drought in Ethiopia. He noted the importance of the country's **Productive Safety-Net Program** in enhancing the resilience capacity of communities and critical households and defining the complementary role of regional and international frameworks for cooperation in support of the national effort. In the future, going forward the private sector should work with all stakeholders on further disaster risk reduction action. The priority now, he said, should be to redouble efforts to implement the Sendai Framework by States and other relevant actors. In the Special Session on "People at the Centre, Deputy President Ruto of Kenya was one of the panelists and underlined that action must match people's need. He called for a shared responsibility for humanity and urged all Summit participants to commit to putting people at the center.

In his statement to the Summit, Deputy Prime Minister Demeke underlined four major issues that required renewed and total commitment: addressing the root causes of humanitarian crises and finding solutions; the protection of affected people; provision of the necessary humanitarian assistance; and the addressing of the related systemic issues. He also welcomed the identification of financing as one of the major areas for further action. Ato [Mr] Demeke emphasized the importance, indeed the absolute necessity, of providing the fullest international support to the investment of states in the implementation of the commitments made to the 2030 agenda, the Sendai Framework, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. He added that **the urgency of increasing support to vulnerable countries to reduce disaster risks, to adapt to the negative consequence of climate change and prevent humanitarian crises, could not be overestimated.**

The Summit concluded on Tuesday with leaders endorsing five responsibilities to improve aid delivery, support refugees, uphold international law, increase financing and prevent the crises generating the largest migration flows in 70 years. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in closing remarks: "This unique Summit has set us on a new course," adding "It is not an end point, but a turning point". He told reporters that the Summit had been unique in form as well as substance, but also underlined: "We have the wealth, knowledge and awareness to take better care of one another. But we need action, based on the five core principles of the Agenda for Humanity.

The Secretary-General expressed his disappointment that some world leaders, especially from G7 countries did not attend. He said, "They are some of the most generous donors of funding for humanitarian action, but I urge their greater engagement, particularly in the search for political solutions." He added that he was making "a special appeal to leaders of the nations that are permanent Members of [the Security Council] to take important steps at the highest level. Their absence from this meeting does not provide an excuse for inaction." Mr Ban also noted that "In September, I will report to the United Nations General Assembly on the Summit's achievements, and I will propose ways to take our commitments forward through inter-governmental processes, inter-agency forums and other mechanisms." The hope is that the Summit will lead to a better collective response to the troubles faced on different continents by bringing together governments, charities and the private sector, and ensuring the world is "more resilient to shocks, by preparing and responding better to crises and conflict". What matters most, of course, is implementation of the commitments made in Istanbul, though these are non-binding.

Ethiopia's delegation to the Summit was led by Demeke Mekonnen, Deputy Prime Minister, and included Getachew Reda, Head of the Government Communications Affairs Office with the rank of Minister, and Sufian Ahmed, Adviser to the Prime Minister and former Minister of Finance and Economic Development.

### **Dr Tedros Adhanom announces his candidacy for WHO Director-General**

Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Former Minister of Health, Dr Tedros Adhanom, formally announced his candidacy for Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) at a press conference at the United Nations in Geneva on Tuesday (May 24). Also present on the occasion were Ethiopia's current Minister of Health Dr Kesetebirhan Admasu, African Union Commission Chairperson, Dr Dlamini-Zuma, and Algeria's Health Minister, Mr Abdelmalek Boudiaf. Dr Tedros, who has received the unanimous endorsement of the African Union to be the next Director-General of WHO, is recognized worldwide as an experienced, collaborative and diplomatic figure whose reform programs within Ethiopia and at the head of global health organizations, had achieved significant impact.

In announcing his candidature, Dr Tedros said this was an "amazing time" in global health, emphasizing that huge progress had been made in improving health outcomes and making significant health advances in people's lives. In part this was certainly to be attributed to the diligent work of those at WHO and of health officials across the globe. Equally, there were also health challenges and some of these extended to WHO. But, he added, "I am here to tell you these are not challenges. These are opportunities for us to work together for a healthier world. Leveraging opportunities to create impactful change is what I have always been about, and what I have achieved throughout my career. And this is what I will bring with me as Director-General of WHO."

Dr Tedros outlined the key steps he had taken as Ethiopia's Health Minister including taking a pragmatic look at the state of the country's health care system, putting together a realistic plan rooted in research and data, building the partnerships needed to carry out a series of ambitious goals, and prioritizing the areas that would have the most substantial impact on people. He said, "The reform agenda we had was very comprehensive, including service delivery, workforce, the health information system, access to drugs, health financing and health insurance. Almost all of the blocks of the health system were touched." As a result, Dr Tedros said the country was able to slash maternal mortality rate by 69 percent, infant mortality by two-thirds, and produce significant reduction in the prevalence of HIV, malaria, and Tuberculosis.

Dr Tedros underlined that his experience was not merely national but also global. He had led the Global Fund during its transition when it was reformed to address the challenges it faces. He had also chaired the UNAIDS Board, the Roll Back Malaria Board, and the Board of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, as well as playing a leadership role in other global health institutions. He said: "I believe my national and international experience will be an advantage in implementing reform, especially at the WHO level."

He said that the fresh view from Africa and from the perspective of a developing country that he could bring, would help to improve the global health situation. It would allow the world to

understand the causes of many global health problems fully, and provide serious contributions for Africa and developing countries and for the rest of the world by focusing on the root causes of many of the challenges that humanity faces today. Dr Tedros further spelt out the key priorities he would focus on as WHO Director-General: achieving universal access to basic health care; strengthening emergency preparedness and response; emphasizing policies to improve the lives and health of women and girls; and improving funding structures and forging strong partnerships with organizations that share a common goal.

Primarily, he said, he would work to ensure that “everyone in the world, regardless of who they are, or where they live, has access to basic health care.” He stressed that health issues were a human rights issue and an end in itself. They were also a means to development and prosperity, the “basic twin goals.” This aim could be made possible in part through working with regions to create blueprints to meet the **Sustainable Development Goals**, which, he stressed, provided a global mandate to achieve universal health coverage and access to safe and effective medicines and vaccines for all.

Dr Tedros maintained that he would focus on strengthening emergency preparedness and response. He said, “shutting down airports, canceling flights, and holding people hostage in quarantine, is not an effective way of addressing epidemics. We cannot truly be prepared for emergencies without building up the underlying health systems to detect, and prevent, these crises before they spread, and to implement the International Health regulation in its totality, in a comprehensive way.” He emphasized that he would prioritize policies that improve the lives and health of women and girls. “Women are the backbone of society yet, in too many cases, they remain the most under-served by our policies. If we’re going to improve the lives of all people, we have a clear responsibility to champion the rights of girls and women, and put them at the center of all the programs.”

Dr Tedros said that all this would require concerted efforts, viable partnerships and multilayered participation of everyone in the value chain. He said, “WHO cannot be everywhere, at every moment. It does not have the financial resources to enact all the programs necessary to address our world’s most pressing issues. We can no longer afford to see impactful global organizations with a common cause as competitors; nor can we afford to continue taking funds that are earmarked for projects that do not achieve our broader goals. So WHO, in order to address all these health issues, should lead from the center and the front by building genuine and effective partnerships.” He would, therefore, focus on improving the funding structure and forging strong partnerships with organizations that share a common goal. “This is about people. It’s time for change. It’s time for a Director-General who has lived some of the most pressing challenges facing our world today, as I have lived in Africa. It’s time to make the next leap forward to ensure that no matter who you are, or where you are, or what you look like, you have the right to lead a healthy life. And that’s what I am determined to achieve. And”, he added, “that is why I’m running for Director-General.”

Dr Tedros is currently serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. He served as Ethiopia's Minister of Health, from October 2005 to November 2013 and previously held a number of expert and leadership positions in both federal and regional government, including the post of State Minister in the Ministry of Health and Head of Tigray

Regional Health Bureau. He has had extensive experience in global health initiatives and diplomacy. During his tenure as Minister of Health of Ethiopia, he chaired the Boards of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Coordinating Board of UNAIDS and Co-Chaired the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. He also served on the Boards of GAVI, the Vaccination Alliance and the Stop TB Partnership. In Ethiopia, his health sector reforms and the introduction of the Health Extension Program led the country to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goal health targets.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Tedros led the Third Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa, in July last year, to finance the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in which health plays an integral part. The conference ended with the successful adoption of the **Addis Ababa Action Agenda**. He has also served as Chair of the Council of Ministers of IGAD, the regional economic community for the Horn of Africa and, as Chair of the Executive Council of the African Union in 2014, he oversaw the successful adoption of the first 10-year plan for the AU's Agenda 2063 for the African Union, a plan that has put health at its center. Under his leadership, Ethiopia successfully hosted the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference of the OAU/AU.

Dr Tedros holds a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in Community Health from the University of Nottingham and a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Immunology of Infectious Diseases from the University of London (UK). He has co-authored numerous articles on prominent scientific journals including *Nature*, *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*. He has also received several awards and recognitions including being the first non-American recipient of the "Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award" in 2011. Dr Tedros was listed among "50 people who will change the world" by the UK's *Wired Magazine* in January 2012; and the leading African magazine, *New African*, chose him as one of the 100 most influential Africans for the year 2015. The election for the WHO Director General post is scheduled for May 2017 during the 70<sup>th</sup> Session of the WHO Assembly.

### **Ethiopia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs celebrate “Africa Day 2016”...**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia officially celebrated “Africa Day” on May 25, 2016 with a panel discussion, at the Hilton Hotel, Addis Ababa. The panel focused on "Pan-Africanism and its significance in the 21<sup>s</sup> century”, and the role Ethiopia has played in realizing the objectives of Pan-Africanism. Africa Day commemorates the founding of the Organization of African Unity, the precursor to the African Union, on May 25, 1963. Participants on the occasion of “Africa Day 2016” celebrations sang both the national anthem of Ethiopia and the African Union anthem during the event.

This year’s “Africa Day” marked 53 years since the formation of the Organization of African Unity on 25 May 1963 and 24 since the creation of the African Union in 2002. “Africa Day” is an opportunity to celebrate African identity and heritage and the commemoration also celebrates the continent’s advancement on many fronts, especially its strengthening democracy, peace, stability and socio-economic development. It was the first time that Ethiopia has celebrated the occasion.

Ambassador Wahide Belay, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the African Union and the UN Economic Community for Africa (UNECA), told the audience at the panel discussion of the importance of celebrating “Africa Day”, and shared his feelings that commemorating the day in Ethiopia was long overdue, especially since Ethiopia had always stood as a beacon of freedom and unity on the continent. He added that Ethiopia had now begun the legal process for a national celebration of the day and to arrange to fly the AU flag across the country and in its embassies abroad. Furthermore, the Permanent Representative added, Ethiopia appreciated its national interests were intrinsically linked to the entire continent’s stability, unity and prosperity. This understanding was indeed the basis for its continental engagement. Ethiopia, he said, always had a passionate commitment to the unity of the continent, and it would continue to be at the forefront of efforts to champion Africa's integration and peace agenda.

Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, gave an opening statement on the significance of celebrating Africa Day. He emphasized that May 25 symbolized Africa’s gallant struggle against Colonialism, Apartheid, and all forms of racism. The State Minister stressed that "Africa Day provides an opportunity for us to celebrate our African identity.” He noted that the day commemorated the hard-fought liberation and freedom of African communities, and pointed out that the celebration also looked forward to the collaboration and empowerment of the people of Africa in communion with one another.

Ambassador Taye also emphasized that Ethiopia proudly stood at the forefront in realizing the continental agenda and had been doing everything possible to ensure that this was achieved. He said he had no doubt that the pillars of Pan-Africanism, dedication to the unity, prosperity and independence of Africa, will continue to lead the whole continent through its arduous journey to the future. Ambassador Taye concluded his remarks by quoting the speech made by Emperor Haile Selassie I at the establishment of the OAU in 1963: “We cannot leave here without having created a single African organization possessed of the attributes we have described. If we fail in this, we will have shirked our responsibility to Africa and to the peoples we lead. If we succeed, then, and only then, will we have justified our presence here.”

Panelists, Mr Abdul Mohamed and Dr Solomon Derso, underscored the importance of harnessing the **demographic opportunities** offered in Africa as over 60% of the continent’s population is from younger generations. They emphasized that the opportunities for Africa and the continent’s potential are very great. This, they underlined, meant that we should all strive hard to overcome the challenges by working closely together in collaboration. Discussants emphasized that opportunities that Africa offered today were far from being effectively utilized and stressed the need for concerted action in order to effectively utilize the continent’s resources for the betterment of its people. The range of questions and comments from those attending made for a lively commemorative occasion.

### **...and a Panel Discussion on 25 years of Ethiopia’s Foreign Policy**

A panel discussion on Ethiopia’s Foreign Policy Journey of the Past 25 Years was held at Sheraton Addis Hotel on Wednesday (May 25). The occasion was part of celebrations surrounding the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ethiopia’s National Day, on Saturday (May 28, ‘Ginbot 20’),

celebrating the downfall of the oppressive military dictatorship of the Derg. More than 250 people attended the panel including members of the diplomatic community in Addis Ababa, high officials and government authorities, researchers and members of research institutions, academics, scholars and others. The panel was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the theme was **Respect for diversity is Ethiopia's strength for its renaissance!**

The speakers were State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie, who spoke on the changes and achievements in foreign policy since 1991 and the current Foreign Relation and National Security Policy and Strategy's role in foreign affairs; Professor Costantinos Berhe, on "A Diplomatic Supremo in Africa: Priming International Policy and Practice on Regional Integration, Peace and Security for a Quarter of a Century"; and a presentation by Mr Feki Ahmed on "Ethiopia's Achievements in Trans-boundary Water Resources Management Particularly with Nile-riparian Countries".

Ambassador Taye said the fall of the Derg regime had given new impetus to peace and democracy in Ethiopia, as well as laying the foundation for its economic growth and democratization. He pointed out that "the victory of the Ethiopian people over the Derg was not just a mere change of government; it was a victory which opened the way to democracy and good governance," as well as to extensive changes in other areas including foreign affairs and international relations. Ethiopia's international relations and connections were not accidental, he said. They are rather the result of carefully crafted and carried out foreign policy activities over the past twenty-five years. Historically, the foreign policy of Ethiopia had been concentrated most on providing defense against foreign pressures and threats. It had little to do with trying to improve the lives of the people, nor did it show any interest in the people of the country. It was aimed at serving the imperial personalities of the day and was dominated by feudal elites for their own benefit and reputation.

After May 28, 1991, however, the foreign policy orientation of Ethiopia shifted dramatically and completely. Ambassador Taye emphasized that the core elements of the Foreign and National Security were then characterized "by the determination to improve people's lives by deploying everything for economic development and democratization with an inward looking foreign policy approach." Indeed, since 1991, Ethiopia's national interests have been completely redefined, to focus on the country's internal vulnerabilities and problems, political and economic. The result, systematically laid out in the Foreign Policy and National Security Strategy, identified the major threats to Ethiopia and indeed to its survival: economic backwardness and the desperate poverty of a large part of the population, together with an understanding of the critical need for democracy and good governance and for the establishment of a democratic structure and government at all levels throughout the country. Ambassador Taye emphasized again that a central and basic element of Ethiopia's foreign relations today was, therefore, economic diplomacy.

Ambassador Taye also underlined the importance of Ethiopia's handling of neighborly relations being "deeply rooted in the principles of promoting peace, cooperation and economic diplomacy". Despite the challenges of unruly neighbors or ideological crusaders of different varieties, Ethiopia today in fact enjoys largely cordial, indeed beneficial, relations with almost all its neighbors, in part because of its emphasis on the importance of infrastructure development of

IGAD and the Regional Economic Community, and of developing road, rail and power links with neighboring states. Equally, it has worked to develop close relations with dozens of partners around the world. The Foreign Relation and National Security Policy and Strategy, based as it is on the constitution of the country, has provided the basis for Ethiopia's political, economic and public diplomacy, and as a result in the last twenty-five years the country has managed to have much stronger diplomatic relations and increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation with many countries and multilateral institutions than it had before.

State Minister Ambassador Taye also underlined that even in the face of high-handed tactics and at times violence, Ethiopia has taken care to avoid conflict at any level, despite the costs that such a policy has incurred from time to time. It has the clear understanding that only more progress in both poverty reduction and good governance can create the real answer of effective development to such 'spoilers' in the region. Ambassador Taye noted it had achieved excellent relations with all its neighbors on the basis of policies designed to encourage the highest levels of economic cooperation, as well as close and friendly political and security relations based on mutual trust and confidence. There has, unfortunately, been one exception to this. The Eritrean regime has persistently and consistently refused all Ethiopia's repeated efforts to open a dialogue to resolve the demarcation of the border and normalize relations.

Professor Costantinos Berhe underlined the way Ethiopia's foreign policy had enabled the country to play a vital role in the regional integration agenda. He noted that regional integration had been on the African agenda for a long time and identified criminal negligence and corruption as major challenges to regional integration in Africa. He underlined the creative new efforts needed [for] these and other challenges posed by poor security infrastructure in the region.

Mr Feki Ahmed from the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity, gave a presentation on Ethiopia's Water and Energy Sector Policy and its relation to other countries. He noted that the achievements in trans-boundary water resources management, particularly with Nile riparian countries, was one of the major developments of the last twenty-five years. Prior to 1991, there was no clear policy or institutional framework covering Ethiopia's trans-boundary water resources and no attempt to produce any inclusive Nile basin-wide agreement. Things were now very different as the country had also moved into an era of a sustainable green economy. Mr Feki also noted Ethiopia's achievement in other areas of sustainable energy, including solar, wind, geothermal power and hydropower. He underlined the importance of energy links and local cross-border power interconnection, a major result of the well-designed and vibrant foreign policy of recent years.

State Minister Ambassador Taye chaired the panel and the discussion and, in conclusion, noted that the event had provided a "substantial perspective on Ethiopia's foreign policy journey over the last twenty-five years and its achievements." In his closing remarks, the State Minister expressed his gratitude towards all those who had participated and said their contributions would contribute significantly to the resolution of future tasks.

**The African Union is the UN's "most important peacekeeping partner"**

The UN Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement on Tuesday (May 24) commending the increased contribution of the African Union to the maintenance of peace and security, and acknowledging the progress made in cooperation between the UN and the African Union. The Council also stressed the importance of strengthening the existing cooperation between the United Nations and the AU, which Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, described as “the most important partner of the UN in peacekeeping.” The open Security Council debate on the subject came the day after the Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council held their tenth annual consultation. Among the speakers were Mr Ladsous, Haile Menkerios, Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union, Tete Antonio, Permanent Representative of the African Union to the UN and Macharia Kamau, Chief of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The Security Council was holding an open debate on the subject and it welcomed the development of the new roadmap for 2016-2020 to make the African peace and security architecture fully operational. It also noted that the recent reviews of the UN’s own peacebuilding architecture, peace operations and the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on ‘women, peace and security’ provided an opportunity to build a stronger, forward-looking partnership between the two organizations. The Security Council, however, also recognized that one major constraint facing the AU in effectively carrying out the mandate of maintaining regional peace and security was **the difficulty in obtaining is predictable, sustainable and flexible resources**. It, therefore, welcomed the appointment of an African Union High Representative for the Peace Fund.

The UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, told the Council that nine out of 16 current UN peacekeeping operations were in Africa, and almost 50 per cent of all uniformed peacekeepers came from African Union member states, and more than 80 per cent of all uniformed peacekeepers were deployed in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. He pointed out that the day marked the tenth anniversary of annual consultations on peace and security between the UN and the AU, and underlined the progress that had been made, as exemplified by the development of the African Standby Force. He said the African peace and security architecture roadmap 2016-2020 signaled a move away from the previous ad hoc activity-based responses, towards a more strategic position and organized approach.

Mr Ladsous emphasized that the UN’s role had changed from support and capacity-building to a partnership based on unity of purpose and effort, with the United Nations-African Union Joint Task Force as a key coordination mechanism. This had increasingly encouraged coordinated messaging, shared information, joint analysis and monitoring of upcoming elections and crisis situations in Africa. Even more important, however, had been how active the area of cooperation has been on the ground, including the development of strategic concepts of operations for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and joint planning for operations in Mali and the Central African Republic. Mr Ladsous noted that the UN and the AU would be launching a joint review on financing and support for AU peace operations later this week, following the Secretary-General’s call for more predictable and sustainable financing and support for African peace operations authorized by the Security Council.

Haile Menkerios, Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the African Union and Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, noted that, despite the progress made, “real and numerous” threats to international peace and security were still apparent in Africa. He noted that the recent reviews of the international security architecture recommended strengthening the UN partnership with the African Union. His own office, he added, could play a major role in that respect, he added, with consultations and situations addressed across the continent, from the Lake Chad Basin to Somalia, Burundi and the Sahel. He said recent joint efforts to de-escalate political tensions in the Comoros had demonstrated the value of having the international community speak with one voice.

Mr Menkerios commended the growing relationship between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council, and noted the UN Secretariat was working with the African Union Commission to systematize working-level consultations, share information, support joint training and carry out joint early warning and conflict-prevention exercises through a new framework. Referring to the recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and the related report of the Secretary-General, he said the collective challenge was to support and strengthen their mutual security architecture, through the African Standby Force and the African Union’s capabilities in preventive diplomacy and mediation. Mr Menkerios concluded by saying he was “more hopeful than ever that efforts to strengthen the partnership between the African Union and the United Nations will remain critical to the continued quest for security and stability in Africa.”

Ethiopia, which is firmly committed to peace and security, is a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations with the deployment of peacekeeping troops for the UN operations under the UN/AU Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), UN Mission in Liberia (UNML), UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), and UN Operations in Cote d’Ivoire (UNOCI) as well as the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), in which Ethiopia is providing all of the 4,400 troops deployed. Ethiopia is the largest African contributor to UN peacekeeping forces and the second largest contributor in the world with 12,968 peacekeepers. A year ago, on the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, the UN awarded Ethiopia a medal in honor of its peace keepers who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty in different peacekeeping missions. With the contributions to the AU added in, for AMISOM, Ethiopia is the largest contributor of peace-keeping troops in the world. It is also an active participant in the establishment of the East African Standby Force, to which it is contributing one of the five contributions to the 5,000 strong unit. Ethiopia, in fact, as Africa’s leading contributor to international peacekeeping, underlines Africa’s growing strength and ability to establish peace and stability on the continent and more widely.

### **Somalia’s President Mohamud issues a decree to legalize election modalities**

Somalia’s President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, issued a presidential decree on Sunday (May 22) to legalize the 2016 electoral process for Somalia, after the parliament failed to hold a vote to endorse the election modalities the previous day. On Saturday, the parliament delayed taking a vote to endorse the electoral processes, despite warnings from the Prime Minister and others, including the international community, that a failure to act quickly would “jeopardize” the political process and set the country back several years.

In his statement, the President announced that the election would take place in August as scheduled and in line with the agreement on the electoral modalities agreed by national and regional leaders last month. The President told a press conference: “After seeing that the parliament can’t decide, after seeing that the time is running out, I have issued a presidential decree to legalize the electoral model”, adding “There is no dispute, there is no division, we will not allow division in this critical time.” The President said Somalia would hold the election in line with the recent proposals submitted by the National Leadership Forum last month, proposing “guiding principles” to enable the transfer of power when the government’s mandate expires in 2016. The President said the presidential decree would take immediate effect, and the elections would take place as scheduled and in all venues as agreed. Under the Provisional Federal Constitution, adopted in 2012, the mandates of the Somali Federal Parliament and of the government come to an end in August and September 2016, respectively.

The country’s major donors including the European Union and the United States had warned that failure to act quickly would ‘jeopardize’ the Somali political process; and during its visit to Mogadishu on Thursday last week (May 19), the UN Security Council also warned that political wrangling could derail the process intended to signal the country’s growing stability. It urged an end to the deadlock. This month’s President of the Security Council, Egypt’s Permanent Representative, Ambassador Abdellatif Aboulatta, said, “We understand there are challenges but the most important thing is to move forward.” Somalia’s President Mohamud assured the Security Council that the elections would be held in August.

A statement by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Somalia, Michael Keating, said the United Nations, the AU, IGAD, the European Union, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States welcomed the presidential decree on the modalities for the electoral process as a decisive move in the right direction and a key step to enhancing technical preparations. It noted this would enable the technical preparation and implementation of the electoral process without further delay. Mr Keating said, “Somalia’s international partners welcome and fully support the step that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the Federal Government have taken.” He added: “The challenge now is to prepare and implement the elections. We call on all Somali stakeholders to work constructively to that end.” There are still many technical and procedural issues to be resolved, including the National Leadership Forum’s commitment to reserve 30 per cent of seats in both Houses of Parliament for women and the formation of an Electoral Dispute Resolution body. The International partners stressed their commitment to continuing to support a timely, transparent and inclusive electoral process. Ambassador Keating said: “This decree is a decisive move in the right direction. Political progress is critical to the millions of Somalis who want stability and greater accountability. It is also essential for both regional and international peace and security.” He told VOA’s Somali Service that he was relieved because the decree meant the electoral process would take place on time. He said it would also enable the technical preparation and implementation of the electoral process to take place without further delay. He described the issuing of the presidential decree as a responsible act as the consequences of not holding the election would be very, very, negative.

In a statement at the beginning of the week, the Security Council also welcomed President Mohamud’s decree, noting that it should enable the necessary technical preparation and

implementation for the process to proceed without further delay. The statement, in the context of SC resolution 2232 (2015), which laid down that there should be no extension of the electoral process timelines, acknowledged that Somali leaders had worked hard to achieve agreement on the modalities of the electoral model. It commended President Mohamud and the Government for ensuring that the electoral process timelines were upheld. The Security Council said the challenge was now to prepare and implement the elections. It renewed its call to all Somali stakeholders to work constructively to that end without delay. The Council called it “an historic opportunity” to deliver more representative governance to the people of Somalia.

The statement, issued after the Security Council visit to Mogadishu last week, also welcomed the overall political and security progress in Somalia. It underlined the advances made since the transition ended in 2012, while underscoring the need to accelerate the country's peace- and state-building process, saying: “Holding a peaceful, transparent electoral process in 2016 will mark a historic step forward for all Somalis, and will be fundamental for the country's continued progress towards democracy and stability.” It commended the Government's commitment to reserve 30 per cent of seats in both the upper and lower houses of parliament for women and emphasized the importance of adhering to the political road map to 2020, and in particular to reach one-person, one-vote elections by 2020. The Security Council members, who met President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, regional leaders, Somali civil society and women's groups during their visit, also underlined their determination to play a constructive and active role in the months ahead.

### **Eritrea’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence**

This month Eritrea has been celebrating the Silver Jubilee of its *de facto* independence, May 24, 1991; *de jure* independence came a month after the successful referendum in April 1993. Government websites, accompanied by massive official media hype and fanfare about the development achievements of the past twenty-five years, have been filled with accounts of the celebrations in various parts of the country, under the theme “Quarter century of Resilience and Development”. The occasion is being celebrated with exhibitions, songs, concerts, firework displays and carnivals. Officials have underlined that the celebrations are an occasion on which the Eritrean people can renew their pledges to safeguard the sovereignty of the country and build a prosperous nation, and to renew pledges to the martyrs who paid with their lives for the Eritrean people to live in peace, harmony and prosperity. They have also called on people to reinforce participation in development programs aimed at ensuring food security.

When Eritrea achieved its *de facto* independence in May 1991, after a long and bitter struggle, there were high hopes, both in Eritrea and outside, that the country would finally find peace, security and development. The new government was hailed as ‘the Future of Africa that Works’ and ‘a symbol of African renaissance’; President Clinton praised President Isaias as one of a new type of African leader. The contrast with today is striking. Eritrea is more usually described as ‘one of the world’s most closed dictatorships’ or ‘the North Korea of Africa’. It is widely seen as a country where all promises of social justice, democracy and freedom have been destroyed.

The euphoria of the independence of twenty-five years ago has been steadily and consistently eroded. It has become the fourth largest per capita refugee-originating country in the world, and

was recently described as one of the world's "fastest-emptying nations." The most generally quoted population figures (there has been no census since 1994) is 5 to 6 million, but the official government website recently estimated the population at 3.7 million; a minister earlier in the year even put the figure as low as between 2.5 and 3 million. Whatever the real figure, for the population to have fallen so far in 25 years is scarcely a vote of confidence in the government. The numbers of those fleeing the country have continued to rise. In the first ten months of 2013, for example, the number of Eritreans fleeing to Europe reached 13,000. In the same period in 2014, the number was nearly 37,000. A fifth of all the refugees arriving by boat in Italy in 2014 were from Eritrea. There were similarly large numbers arriving in Sudan and Ethiopia, with up to 5,000 a month crossing the borders out of Eritrea. In the first eight months of 2015, another 30,708 Eritreans arrived in Italy according to the Internal Office of Migration.

The refugees, many young men and women in their twenties or late teens, make no secret of why they flee the country. Faced with unending national service conscription and harsh work conditions that pay no more than \$10 a month, widespread shortages, and the dangers of disproportionate punishment for minor infractions of military rules and regulations, most youngsters see little opportunity for the future in Eritrea. Most of the workforce is "employed indefinitely, unproductively and against their will." It is hardly surprising they try to leave.

President Isaias has different reasons to explain their flight: it is caused by the machinations of the United States, as indeed have been all the other pressures and problems faced by Eritrea. In his Independence Day Speech on Tuesday, the President, as usual, started by giving an account of the failures of the US and then the Soviet Union to suppress the efforts of the Eritrea people to achieve independence in 1991. Despite this, Eritreans by virtue of their culture and their value system of resistance, had achieved their independence.

After independence, he said, the people and government of Eritrea had embarked on constructive engagement and friendly ties of cooperation first and foremost with the people of Ethiopia but also in a wider framework with the peoples of the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and the Middle East. What had gone wrong? Well, a major reason was the "fateful decision of the US-led bloc to pursue policies of hegemony" This, he said, meant that the US had to deter "the emergence of any rival military power, contain potential competitors, control centers of knowledge and culture and information, trampling on legality and the rule of law." The President insisted that all Eritrea's problems since then, including the conflicts with Yemen, Ethiopia and Djibouti, had arisen as a result of what he called "policies and measures [stemming] from a reckless ideology bordering on insanity".

It was as a result of this that the Hanish island dispute with Yemen "was concocted and instigated" in 1996; two years later the Badme border dispute, which the President described as having "no legal or political rationale", was also "instigated and declared through the blessing and direct meddling of Washington." Another "border dispute" was provoked in 2008 with Djibouti in order to entangle Eritrea in yet another conflict and further crisis, including UN sanctions. Then there was what he called the "fictitious" association with al-Shabaab which led to UN sanctions following "a dramatically orchestrated campaign of deceit, disinformation and pressure." The President said the main aim of all this was to deter the growth of Eritrea's military capabilities for self-defense and widen its political and diplomatic isolation. In addition, human

trafficking, a campaign with the official blessing of President Obama, was employed to disperse and weaken Eritrea's human capital, and this was also utilized as another tool for accusations of violation of human rights against Eritrea. Eritrea also faced efforts by Washington to paralyze and destroy the mining industry and discourage foreign investment and development assistance.

Despite this long "narrative of incisive hostility against the sovereignty and independence of Eritrea", the President insisted Eritrea's resistance, legal, political, informational, diplomatic and National Security, had become enhanced and more potent. Development efforts, he said, had scaled new heights. He said, "We are now poised to embark on greater and more expansive development programs". However, he gave no more than an outline of what the prospects might be: "In order to chart a clear vision and road-map for the future, I wish to underline that a complete and detailed documentation, sector by sector, of the past quarter century of resilience and development must be undertaken", adding that this was still a work in progress. He said, "From now on all legal, diplomatic, informational, and political campaigns will be carried out with greater pace and better organization... big and expansive programs will as usual be implemented with the full participation of our people."

His remarks provide a version of recent history, and of Eritrea's activities and developments since 1991, that few if any of Eritrea's neighbors would recognize, nor indeed would many Eritreans. The insistence of constant external threats against Eritrea, buoyed up by Eritrea's own policies of destabilization in the region and of a foreign policy based on aggression rather than dialogue, has consistently been used to legitimize the government's restrictions on freedom of speech, association, movement and the press. The regime has made the concept of 'struggle' the central aspect of its existence. It has continuously invented enemies to ensure this continues, going to war with Yemen, Djibouti and Ethiopia to underline the claim. It says the 'no war, no peace' with Ethiopia is the reason why the President refused to implement the constitution, though, of course, this also avoids any possibility of an electoral process which might threaten his authority or his power. The draft constitution, which the President formally declared dead last year, was in fact accepted by the National Assembly in 1997, but then effectively nullified by the President.

On the eve of Independence Day, Sheila Keetharuth, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, and one of the members of the Commission of Inquiry, issued a statement urging the Eritrean Government to implement the 1997 Constitution. She said: "The 25<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary celebration provides Eritreans with an opportunity to reflect on the aspirations and dreams of those who fought for independence. The 1997 Constitution sets out the vision of what Eritrea wanted to be as a country and yet it remains unimplemented to date. As the country reaches 25 years, this constitutional vacuum provides room for arbitrariness in managing the affairs of the State and engaging with its citizens." The Special Rapporteur said: "the independence of the country, national independence, should match individual independence and freedoms: freedom of conscience, thought, mind and expression; freedom to engage in employment and education of one's own choice."

The Special Rapporteur said "Eritrea needs to take decisive steps to embed democracy and the rule of law in the country. Such a move would advance respect for human rights, further empower people and bridge the gaps between aspiration and reality. I call upon the Government

to do more to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and to establish the rule of law.” She also saluted “the heroism and courage of all those women and men who struggled for their freedom and fought for their country’s independence” and acknowledged “the determination of those who are still engaged in preserving such hard-won freedom.”

The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva is due to hear the second report of the Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights in Eritrea next month. The Commission was mandated to produce a follow-up report after its report last year, which described in detail a state that rules through fear with a vast security network that reaches into every level of society. That report provided a litany of systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations carried out with impunity by the government. The Chairman of the Commission, Michael Smith, told the Human Rights Council that Eritrea was marked by repression and fear. He said “Since independence, ultimate power in Eritrea has remained largely in the hands of one man and one party. Those in control often rule arbitrarily and act with impunity... The Eritrean people have no say in governance and little control over many aspects of their own lives.” Under the pretext of defending “the integrity of the state and ensuring national self-sufficiency”, the government subjected much of the population to open-ended national service, either in the army or through the civil service. All Eritreans are conscripted by age 18, and while national service is supposed to last 18 months, in reality conscripts end up serving for an indefinite period, often for years in harsh and inhumane conditions. He said forced labor was so prevalent that all sectors of the economy rely on it, and all Eritreans are likely to be subject to it at some point in their lives.

The Human Rights Council asked the Commission to continue its investigations and tasked it to “investigate systematic, widespread and gross violations of human rights in Eritrea with a view to ensuring full accountability, including where these violations may amount to crimes against humanity.” The Commission is due to present its report next month and as we noted last week the Government of Eritrea apparently believes the report will again provide massively convincing accounts of human rights’ abuse in Eritrea. It is also concerned that the Commission will have found enough evidence to support the suggestion that the UN Security Council should refer the issue to the International Criminal Court to open a case over crimes against humanity. It has, therefore, launched an extensive campaign to try and discredit the report before publication, trying to mobilize the Eritrean Diaspora and international allies of President Isaias to try to undermine the findings of the Commission. As part of the process, the Government is calling on a number of international figures as “friends selected to work with members of the diaspora youth”. The names quoted in the leaked documents included Ambassador Herman J Cohen, United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs from 1989 to 1993; other academics in the US and Europe who have shown interest in “bringing Eritrea in from the cold” are reported to have also been approached for help to mitigate the expected impact of the UN Human Rights’ Commission of Inquiry report.