

August 14, 2015

Ethiopia

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom opened the Annual Conference of Ambassadors, Consuls General, and Directors General at Ghion Hotel in Addis Ababa on Tuesday (August 11, 2015). The Foreign Minister, speaking on the occasion, briefed the participants on the performance of the Ministry over the previous year ranging from remarkable gains in the areas of peace and security to trade and investment. **(See article)**

Opening the first National Diaspora Day, President Dr. Mulatu Teshome said that the Diaspora community was expected to participate in the overall growth and development activities of the country and facilitate the realization of the country's renaissance. In the past decade the Diaspora has invested over US\$24.4 billion in 3,000 projects, including US\$600 million in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). More than 5,000 people from the Diaspora are expected to attend the various discussions, exhibitions and visits during the week. **(See article)**

Germany's Ambassador to Ethiopia Mr. Joachim Schmidt regarding Ethiopia as a key partner in areas ranging from security to economic cooperation said that Ethiopia "acts as a stabilizing factor in a highly-volatile region" and it is the "main supplier of troops for UN and African Union missions on the continent."

A high-level Ethiopian delegation led by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn attended the inaugural ceremony of the new Suez Canal on Friday last week (August 7). The 72 km project will speed up traffic along the canal and reduce waiting time for ships passing from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean.

The Gilgel Gibe III hydropower project started trial production of electric power on Tuesday (August 11). Three of the 10 turbines are ready for power production. If the trial is successful, Gibe III will start generating 500mw of electricity. When complete, it will produce 1,870 megawatts of power and be the largest hydropower plant in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopia International Mining Conference 2015 and Exhibition (EIMC 2015) is scheduled to take place at the United Nations Conference Centre from 23-24 September, 2015. It is being organized by AME Trade Limited United Kingdom in association with the Ministry of Mines of Ethiopia. The event will feature a two-day conference and an associated trade exhibition.

Eritrea

The former US ambassador to Eritrea, Ambassador Ronald McMullen disclosed for the first time last week that between 2001 and 2010 the Eritrean authorities arrested dozens of Eritrean employees of the US embassy in Asmara. **(See article)**

A new report by the Jesuit Refugee Service Organization says that more than 130,000 Eritrean refugees have crossed the border into Ethiopia to escape forced labor, indefinite military conscription and other human rights abuse. The report says 80% of these refugees are under the age of 24 and many flee from Eritrea before they reach the age of recruitment at 18. **(See article)**

Kenya

The Ministry of Defense appointed the first female Brigadier of the Kenya Defense Forces on Tuesday (August 11). Brigadier Fatumah Ahmed who joined the Kenyan Defense Forces in 1983 is a graduate of

the National Defense College.

Somalia

Since the launch of the new operations a few weeks ago, AMISOM and the SNA have gained a number of major strategic victories. Most recently, a joint Ethiopian and Djibouti contingent of AMISOM also dislodged Al-Shabaab militants from the town of Algen on August 12. Algen has been held by Al-Shabaab since 2005. **(See article)**

The Somali Federal Government is pushing ahead with the formation of another Federal State comprising the regions of Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud presided over a meeting in Mogadishu, attended by ministers from the two regions and the regional governors as well as the UN Special Representative, Nicolas Kay, on Saturday (August 8). Political and community leaders representing local communities have now agreed to come together in September for a state formation convention.

The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of AMISOM, Ambassador Maman Sidikou, speaking on International Youth Day (Tuesday, August 11) called on Somali youth to be more proactive by contributing to the realization of Vision 2016. He appealed to the Federal Government to put in place mechanisms that support youth employment and participation in the country's development. The youth in Somalia are estimated to make up 80% of the country's estimated 12 million people.

A meeting between the chairman of the Parliamentary defense committee, chaired by Hussein Arab Isse, and the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Head of AMISOM, Maman Sidikou, agreed that a committee should be set up to conducting an inquiry into recent allegations of civilian killings by AMISOM. Ambassador Sidikou said that AMISOM would continue to take every precaution to prevent civilian casualties in the conduct of operation

South Sudan

Despite the resumption of peace talks in Addis Ababa, the South Sudan warring parties continued to trade accusations this week over responsibility for an outbreak of fresh fighting in Unity State last Saturday (August 8). The two parties have been given till Monday (August 17) to sign a final peace agreement or risk imposition of sanctions against any party that refuses to sign. **(See article)**

Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and representatives from Sudan arrived in Uganda for regional talks on the current situation in South Sudan and developments on the ongoing peace negotiations with President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda (August 10, 2015). The summit comes one week before the 17 August deadline set by mediators for South Sudan warring factions to ink a final peace agreement. Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the leaders would discuss a whole range of regional issues, including talks on the political crisis in Burundi and the security situation in Somalia.

Sudan

Sudan Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour on Monday (August 10) gave President Museveni of Uganda a message from President Al-Bashir detailing the Sudan's Government's ongoing efforts to hold a national dialogue process. It asked President Museveni to assist in persuading rebel Sudanese groups to participate and outlined the guarantees for participants. Sudanese forces that are participating in the national dialogue have agreed to launch the process in October.

The steady progress of Ethiopia's diplomatic stature on the global stage

The Annual Conference of Ambassadors, Consuls General, and Directors General, opened this week in Addis Ababa, underlining the successes of foreign policy in the just-ended 2007 fiscal year, which had allowed Ethiopia to gain regional, continental and international status of growing importance. While the conference noted the diplomatic primacy acquired through the practical application of carefully calibrated foreign policy and strategies, it also defined the challenges that still remained in the creation of significant external opportunities for Ethiopia's national development vision, and of becoming a carbon-neutral middle-income manufacturing-hub by 2025. In this context, the conference held detailed discussions on the economic development of the country and of the region as well as on issues of peace and stability affecting Ethiopia and its neighbors. It took note of the performance report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and evaluated the performance of Ethiopian Embassies and Consulate Offices overseas.

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom, opening the conference at the Ghion Hotel in Addis Ababa on Tuesday (August 11) presented an executive summary of the report of the activities of the Ministry during the current Ethiopian year, 2007, which ends on September 11. The report covered a series of remarkable gains ranging from the areas of peace and security to trade and investment. Detailing progress, Dr Tedros noted that strategic partnerships with immediate neighbors, IGAD regional and Nile Basin states, Africa countries and the outside world had yielded fruitful results creating significant opportunities for Ethiopia's economic growth and democratization process.

Dr Tedros, who emphasized that the cooperative partnership between Ethiopia and Djibouti is on the rise reaching a new height, expressed his hope that this positive momentum would further augment the two countries' efforts to work in tandem for the realization of fully-fledged economic integration. He said both countries had entered a new era of an action-oriented economic partnership that would provide a breakthrough in the IGAD region. Dr. Tedros also underlined that the important progress being made in both countries would help IGAD capitalize on economic partnership as a core function in addition to the facilitation of peaceful resolution of conflict.

In relation to Somalia, the Foreign Minister noted that the implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement signed between the Jubaland administration and the Federal Government of Somalia two years ago, had brought peace and reconciliation to Jubaland. The Agreement, facilitated by Ethiopia, was a noteworthy achievement, he said, which was progressing on the right track and also paving the way for the creation of regional state formation in Somalia. The Foreign Minister said the holding of the 53rd Meeting of the Council of Ministers of IGAD in Mogadishu this year was indicative of the positive changes in the political and security situation in Somalia. He added that the IGAD Ministerial meeting could be regarded as a very real achievement in as much as it testified to the fact that Somalia was open for business to the world.

Dr Tedros said that nothing typified the strategic partnership of Ethiopia and Sudan better than the continued growth of investment and trade between the two countries ties. He pointed out that Sudan was one of the largest investors in Ethiopia. He noted the recent Public Diplomacy Delegation's visit to Khartoum specifically underlined Ethiopia's commitment for the acceleration of a people-driven economic and political integration within the framework of IGAD and the African Union. The all-round

links between the two countries and the bold moves taken by their respective leaderships are now set to give way to regional integration, producing a model for IGAD and the African Union to follow.

Referring to the Nile, Dr Tedros said the signing of the Declaration of Principles between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt was another important achievement heralding a new era of cooperation over the use of the waters of the Nile. It was a testimony to the way Ethiopia's win-win approach and its commitment to the principles of mutual benefit were being subscribed to by the Eastern Nile Basin countries in the management of the waters of the Nile.

Dr Tedros also mentioned that the Public Diplomacy Delegation visit to Egypt, as it had in the Sudan, had conveyed the objective of building trust and fraternal ties as well as Ethiopia's desire for mutual growth and strong bonds. This people-to-people dimension has, he said, made fresh and important contribution to the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Eastern Nile Basin countries. As a result of these demonstrations of its value, the Public Diplomacy team would now be set up on an institutional footing with full autonomy to complement Ethiopia's foreign relations with the outside world.

Another important feature of Ethiopia's success story in the diplomatic field, the Minister stressed, was the historic visit of President Barack Obama to Ethiopia. He said that President Obama's Ethiopia visit was a reflection of the consistent and principled engagement of the leadership of the two countries, and he underlined that it would open a new dawn for more progress in areas of common interest.

The Foreign Minister also highlighted the fact that Ethiopia's relations with a significant number of countries including Italy, France, United Kingdom, China, Germany, Japan, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Russia, Canada, and Kuwait, among others, all pointed to the fact that the creation of stronger, all-rounded and continued bilateral partnership for more progress was in process.

Dr. Tedros said that Ethiopia's success in hosting of the Third Conference on Financing for Development had brought it into the limelight of international diplomacy. The Conference, which had provided an important platform to display to the world the changes taking place in Ethiopia and demonstrate its future political and economic trajectory, had also produced an outcome document, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which put Addis Ababa firmly in place as a capital of future development cooperation.

The Minister said that successes in re-branding Ethiopia's image through the use of public diplomacy tools had produced significant benefits for the economic and social development of Ethiopia. These included the creation of the Public Diplomacy Delegation, co-operation with think tanks, media institutions and advocacy groups, the weekly newsletter A Week in the Horn, and the production of *ጤጥሎችን* (Our Diplomacy) broadcast by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation. This new type of diplomacy, buttressed by the country's remarkable economic growth, peace and stability, had resulted in the emergence of a new face for Ethiopia, slowly but surely replacing the past image of famine and disaster. Ethiopia's public diplomacy practices now signified the country's shared commitment to the creation of a community of a shared African destiny in the region and the continent. People-to-people ties within this framework enabled Africans to work in concert for the enrichment of the "Renaissance Capital of Africa", to outpace the challenges facing development, cooperation and stability.

Looking to economic diplomacy, Dr. Tedros said that the Ministry had planned to bring some 1227 companies for pre-investment visits to Ethiopia during the past year. It had actually managed to exceed the target with a total of 1349 firms visiting the country. Of these, 50 are international brand names. Dr. Tedros said leaders and high-level government officials who visited Ethiopia during the year had brought more than 485 business delegations with them. Business forums, held jointly with countries like Canada, USA, Turkey, South Africa, Finland, France, Norway, and Egypt, had paved the way for 535

companies to see the business opportunities available in Ethiopia and of these 535 companies, 26 had shown specific interest to bring their enterprises and invest in Ethiopia.

Dr. Tedros expressed his appreciation of the way the country's diplomats were so quickly catching up with new era diplomacy tools and using digital diplomacy. He urged all diplomats and missions abroad to adopt digital diplomacy to engage with the public in their areas and communicate Ethiopia's vision to the outside world.

The Annual Conference of Ambassadors, Consuls General, and Directors General will also deliberate on ways to elevate the country's trade, investment, tourism, and finance for development to new levels in conjunction with other ministries and the private sector. In addition, Djibouti's Foreign Minister Ali Youssouf will give a presentation on thematic issues including Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa and Regional Integration Using the Strategic Partnership between Ethiopia and Djibouti as a Model. The presentation will be followed by discussions. Another presentation for the Ambassadors will cover the Ministry's part in the 5 year Growth and Transformation Plan 2 and its own plans. This will be followed by discussion and endorsement of the Ministry's own result-oriented plan for the new Ethiopian year (2008) Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn will also provide guidelines and directives to the heads of Ethiopian missions for further action during the coming year.

The first National Diaspora Conference in Addis Ababa

The first Ethiopian National Diaspora Conference opened on Wednesday this week (August 12) in Addis Ababa. The five day conference which has the aim of establishing stronger ties between all Ethiopians and Ethiopians by birth living abroad and their own country, also includes a variety of celebrations among them the laying of the foundation stone for Diaspora Square, the opening ceremonies, and forum on the implementation of the first Growth and Transformations Plan (GTPI) and on the upcoming second Growth and Transformations Plan (GTPII). There will be a whole series of discussions on the Ethiopian Diaspora and its engagement in national development and on the way forward as well as visits to various developments taking place and expositions of the investment opportunities available in the country. The closing ceremony will take place on Sunday (August 16).

Taking into account the fact that the Diaspora should be part and parcel of the ongoing socio-economic and political transformations of the country, Ethiopia has been putting in place a whole series of multi-dimensional efforts to involve the Diaspora residing across the world in the overall national development process for a number of years. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is in charge of protecting the rights and interests of the Diaspora, together with other stakeholders and partners has been engaging in activities to ensure greater Diaspora participation in development. A Diaspora that is properly engaged can be of immense benefit in numerous ways: building the image of the country, strengthening people-to-people relations, building stronger relations and encouraging cooperation between the home and host countries. Equally, the Diaspora can also provide benefits in various vital areas: capital inflow, technology, knowledge and skills transfer, business and trade facilitation, inflow of remittances and creation of job opportunities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been organizing fora and panels at home and abroad to consider these areas. It is in order to keep up the momentum of Diaspora interest and involvement that the first nationwide Diaspora Day is being celebrated this week.

The Opening Ceremony on Wednesday (August 12) took place in Millennium Hall in Addis Ababa, attended by senior government leaders, invited guests and by more than 6000 participants from different parts of the world. Among those present were President Dr. Mulatu Teshome, Deputy-Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen, Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom, and the State Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos, Dewano Kedir, and Dr. Yinager Dessie, as well as other ministers, Ethiopian Ambassador and other officials.

In his opening remarks, the Chair of the Organizing Committee, State Minister of Foreign Affairs Dewano Kedir warmly welcomed the members of the Diaspora community that had come from across the world to attend the Diaspora conference. He reviewed the recent efforts to mobilize the recently as well as the policies and regulations that had been promulgated for the benefit of the Diaspora. He also spoke of the wide range of activities that is being undertaken to encourage the Diaspora as an active participant in national development and the people-to-people relations between their country and the country of their residence.

Dewano Kedir then invited Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom to address the Conference. The Minister who started his speech with a quotation from the poem 'Hagre' by poet and painter Gebrekristos Desta praising the Diaspora, welcomed the Diaspora's presence and their will to contribute to national development. He briefed participants on the aim of the National Diaspora Day, on developments taking place in the country, international best experiences of Diaspora engagement, and encouraged the Diaspora to return back home and support the growth of themselves and of their country. He reviewed the sectors that have been achieving phenomenal growth including the increases in Foreign Direct Investment and the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam as well as other areas of impressive development. He reminded his listeners that Ethiopia was being referred to as an "African Tiger" or as one of the "African Lions". He encouraged the Diaspora to look closely and understand the reality of Ethiopia's development. Members should not be misled by false propaganda. Dr. Tedros emphasized that the aim of the Diaspora day was "to strengthen the tie between Ethiopians and their country". In conclusion he repeated the verses of Gebrekristos Desta's poem and reiterated the slogan of the National Diaspora Day: "Together for the renaissance of Ethiopia".

In his keynote speech, President Dr. Mulatu Teshome noted that Diaspora participation was pivotal for realization of the renaissance of the country. Stressing that the Diaspora community was expected to participate in the overall growth and development activities of the country, the President urged the Diaspora community to participate in all affairs of their country: including social and economic issues, technology transfer, image building and charity activities. In the past decade, the President said, the Diaspora community had invested over US\$24.3 billion in 3116 investment projects, including buying 600 million worth of bonds for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). This was a concrete example of Diaspora participation, the President said, but there still more to do to tap the tremendous potential of the Diaspora. The Government was, he said, providing an enabling environment for the Diaspora by promoting duty free import opportunities and other benefits.

The Mayor of the Addis Ababa City Administration, Diriba Kuma said that Addis Ababa was becoming one of the busiest cities for hosting international conferences successfully. This underlined the Diaspora's pivotal role in providing the necessary knowledge and skill transfer to strengthen the country's growth in in conference tourism, he said. The Diaspora Association Vice President, Dr. Alebachew Beyene, said that celebrating Diaspora day nationally was an excellent opportunity for the Diaspora to understand the realities of the country's current growth and development.

Earlier on Wednesday (August 12), Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros laid the foundation stone for the Diaspora Square and Fountain at the launch of the week's celebrations. The Mayor of Addis Ababa City Administration, Diriba Kuma, and State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dewano Kedir also attended the ceremony.

On Thursday, members of the Diaspora and various government leaders discussed the implementation of the first Growth and Transformations Plan and the prospects and projections for the upcoming second Growth and Transformations Plan and on ways to integrate and the input of the Diaspora and place it in the best way to contribute towards greater implementation of the five year Growth and Transformation Plan.

Meanwhile, on Sunday (August 9), the Oromia Diaspora Festival which had been held over the previous week, held its closing ceremony in Adama city. Addressing the final session, President Dr. Mulatu Teshome spoke of the very important impact of the Diaspora for the country's development. He said that the visit of the members of the Diaspora would have enabled them to look at the different business opportunities that existed in the country". He mentioned his belief that it was a real opportunity for people to get to know "the realities of the country on the ground and to positively tell others across the world about the progress taking place in the country". President Dr. Mulatu called on his listeners to encourage others to come to Ethiopia and "contribute their level best for the country's journey of renaissance". He also called on the Diaspora to discharge their national responsibility by involving themselves in priority areas such as investment, education and technology transfer. He guaranteed that "the government is committed to the implementation of the Diaspora Policy and to the support to be given to [members of the Diaspora] while they are investing in their country" He said the Government wants the knowledge and experience of its citizens residing across the world to be used, to help speed up the country's economic growth and benefit their fellow citizens as well as benefiting themselves. He reminded the Diaspora of their ability to play a role in attracting foreign direct investment. The Diaspora, the President said, could be taken as a diplomat and have a similar impact in building the country's image by providing a true and accurate account of the reality of Ethiopia's development.

The President of Oromia Regional State, Muktar Kedir said the Oromia Diaspora Festival, the first of its kind, had enabled the Diaspora to witness the facts of development on the ground. He said the visits of members of the Diaspora to various projects across the regional state had "enabled them to witness the ongoing development endeavors and sustainable peace and security and the respect that the people of Oromo have for the Diaspora. He said: "I hope you will contribute your share to the country's development and build strong linkages among you to speed up the growth already taking place." The members of the Diaspora who welcomed the occasion of the Festival, in addition to participating in various visits, also participated in a panel discussion focusing of the issues of development and good governance.

Prospects for a peace deal in South Sudan enter a critical phase

It was just a month ago that the peoples of South Sudan celebrated the 4th anniversary of the country's independence when South Sudan was declared the 193rd Member State of the United Nations amid short-lived euphoria for its future. Ever since the war between the two rival factions in South Sudan broke out in December 2013, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) mediation, supported by the international community, has been making every effort to encourage dialogue between the two warring sides and provide the basis for lasting peace and stability in the country. Following the 23rd Extra-Ordinary Summit of the IGAD Heads of State and Government in Nairobi on December 27, 2013, the IGAD-Led Mediation Process was set up by IGAD member states and given the mandate of assisting South Sudan to launch and implement a viable political dispensation based on principles of good governance and broad based inclusivity of the interests of the people of South Sudan.

As the intransigence of the two sides became more and more obvious, IGAD's Chair, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam, initiated a proposal earlier this year to expand the IGAD-Mediation into IGAD-Plus with the aim of forging an initiative that would present the warring parties with a united international front behind IGAD. The mediation now involves the IGAD member states, the five members of the African Union High-Level Ad Hoc Committee (South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria, Chad and Rwanda), the Troika of the US, UK and Norway, China, the African Union Commission, the European Union, the United Nations and the IGAD Partners Forum.

The IGAD-mediation presented its "Proposed Compromise Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan" to the two sides and made it clear that agreement must be reached by the warring parties on Monday (August 17). The peace process is now entering a final and critical stage as the deadline for sealing a final peace agreement comes close. Representatives of the two conflicting sides have been engaged in discussions in Addis Ababa. Both claim they are committed to this round of peace talks. South Sudan's information minister, Michael Makuei Lueth, said that the two sides had agreed on power sharing, on the powers of the president and of a first vice president but they had not agreed "on the percentages whether at the national and states levels." The rival parties also continued to trade accusations over responsibility for the latest violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Unity State on Sunday (August 9). Military officers from both sides made statements accusing the other side of carrying out attacks.

Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, IGAD's Chief Mediator, said that the latest round of peace talks is unfolding at a critical moment for the participants to make decisions that would impact on the destiny of South Sudan and which could bring to an end the continued suffering of the peoples of South Sudan. The IGAD-Plus mediation said: "the IGAD-Plus are united in their determination to see that the Compromise Agreement is signed by August 17, which will go a long way to ease the suffering of the people of South Sudan."

IGAD-Plus agreed at its first meeting on the document entitled "Proposed Compromise Peace Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan" and resolved to share it with the warring parties and other stakeholders as the basis for the next round of peace talks. IGAD Plus also produced a timetable for the talks to be concluded with a peace agreement signed on August 17. Neither party has rejected the Proposed Compromise Agreement though both have raised a number of concerns. The proposed agreement was substantially based on the earlier discussions of the IGAD-mediation and on the subsequent series of consultations conducted by IGAD with various stakeholders including the warring parties. The result is a very positive document with significant attention to the necessary institutional and policy reforms particularly in the economic, security, justice, humanitarian and governance sectors. This hasn't prevented both sides from raising issues reflecting the high level of distrust between them.

Despite their respective concerns, the Proposed Compromise Agreement also provides a good basis for achieving positive peace. It addresses the root causes of the current conflict with detailed policy and institutional reforms, and there is overwhelming support in South Sudan, and everywhere else, to bring the conflict to an end. The proposed agreement, as the IGAD mediation has made clear, was developed on the basis of continuing and extensive discussions held with South Sudanese stakeholders ever since the IGAD mediated negotiations began in January 2014. The proposal reflects the ideas, concerns, and interests of the South Sudanese parties and stakeholders. It therefore responds to the demands of the South Sudanese people for an inclusive Transitional Government of National Unity to reform the security sector as well as issues of economic governance and reform, justice, accountability and national reconciliation, and also finalize a permanent constitution before leading the country to elections. It also reflects consultations made by the respective leadership of the warring parties among their constituencies.

If agreement is not reached, then IGAD-Plus, representing both the AU and the international community, will act collectively against those obstructing the conclusion of peace agreement. As President Obama put it in Addis Ababa last month: "If they [leaders of the warring parties] miss that target (17th August) then I think it is going to be necessary for us to move forward with a different plan, and recognize that those leaders are incapable of creating the peace that is required". During his visit to Kenya and Ethiopia last month, President Obama warned of grave consequences if South Sudan President Kiir and rebel leader Machar failed to sign a final peace agreement by Monday next week." He said if the two warring sides miss the deadline, "the international community must raise the costs of intransigence." President Obama

gave no public indications of what he thought the international community should do, but there has been no shortage of advice on offer. The US-based Enough project this week suggested that Obama's 'Plan B strategy' should involve high-level asset freezes and travel bans, a global arms embargo, and the prosecution of grand corruption and atrocity crimes, including natural resource pillage as a war crime. Akshaya Kumar from the Enough project said "More sanctions are part of the story, but the real game changer in South Sudan will be a transnational commitment to trace, seize and ideally return the billions that have been stolen from the South Sudanese people by their own leaders."

Regional leaders meet in Uganda at the beginning of the week to emphasize their determination that the warring parties and all other political stakeholders should come to terms on the "Proposed Compromise Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan" by next Monday. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, President Uhuru Kenyatta, Sudan's Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Ghandour and Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni discussed ways to deal with some of the disagreements still being raised by the warring parties at the talks in Addis Ababa and consider possibilities if agreement is not reached. . Despite suggestions for an extension of the deadline of August 17, the IGAD leaders concluded the deadline should remain in place. Another meeting of the IGAD Heads of State and Government is expected to take place on Saturday (August 15) in Addis Ababa two days ahead of the deadline for the signing of the peace agreement.

People encouraged to support major gains by AMISOM and the Somali National Army

The Ethiopian and Kenyan units of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), together with Somalia Government Forces, are currently involved in a major joint military offensive that has freed many stronghold areas held for several years by Al-Shabaab. Since the launch of the new operations a few weeks ago, AMISOM and the SNA have gained a number of major strategic victories.

In the "Juba Corridor" Operation, involving AMISOM troops drawn particularly from the Ethiopian National Defence Force and Kenya Defence Force contingents as well as supporting units of the Somalia National Army, in collaboration with some of Somalia's strategic partners, the allies have recovered a series of major towns and villages. In a statement, AMISOM said the liberated places included Taraka, Jungal, Duraned, Eel-elaan, Habakhaluul, Meyon, Magalay, Duraned and the major town of Bardhere in the Gedo region; in Bakool region, the operation has resulted in the recovery of Buur-dhuhunle, Kulunjareer, Moragabey, Legaly and Gelewoyni , and in Bay region Ufurow, Eesow, Hasanow-Mumin, Llidaale, Makoon, Dhargo and Manaas as well as Diinsoor have been liberated.

Operation "Juba Corridor" was launched as a response to the Al-Shabaab attack on the Leego base on June 26 when dozens of Burundi troops in AMISOM were killed and the base was briefly overrun. A month later, AMISOM released details of its new active military offensive against Al-Shabaab which was, it said, aimed at further degrading al-Shabaab by removing them from their strongholds in the Gedo, Bakool and Bay regions of Somalia. AMISOM has also underlined that it is aiming to destroy Al-Shabaab assets rather than just push Al-Shabaab out of towns and villages that it had controlled. Operation Juba Corridor has benefitted from both Ethiopian and Kenyan air support.

There have been claims of civilian casualties during the recent fighting, and AMISOM has pledged to investigate claims that AMISOM forces, for example, killed civilians in Merka after supply convoys had come under recurrent attacks by Al-Shabaab. In a statement, AMISOM said that during those attacks, AMISOM troops had "proportionately responded to such attacks in self-defense." It stressed, however, that AMISOM regarded any loss of innocent lives as tragic and it took all reports of such incidents seriously. It has conducted meetings with local elders.

Most recently, a joint Ethiopian and Djibouti contingent of AMISOM also dislodged Al-Shabaab militants from the town of Algen on August 12. Algen has been held by Al-Shabaab since 2005 and residents were

quoted as saying that Al-Shabaab fighters had consistently treated them 'inhumanly'. They said that during Al-Shabaab's control of the town, innocent people were arbitrarily killed and murdered, excessive and unnecessary taxes were imposed on the people. In addition, said residents, Al-Shabaab treated people in a completely arbitrary way as well as trying to enforce their own wrong religious interpretations on the people. The residents welcomed the arrival of AMISOM forces and promised their support to their AMISOM liberators to strengthen the campaign to defeat the militants. "Ethiopian and Djibouti forces are now liberating us", they said, adding, "We are taking this opportunity to declare support for the joint forces to destroy Shabaab completely."

The Deputy Commander of AMISOM's Sector 4 units, based at Belet Weyne, Colonel Hayelom Mesfin said that capturing Algen which is linked by road to Mogadishu and other cities will have a substantial political and economic impact for large numbers of people. He said the area had been under the control of Al-Shabaab for a long time and its loss would have a considerable impact, weakening Al-Shabaab's position significantly. Colonel Hayelom said AMISOM now controlled Algen "following the military offensive against the fundamentalists", adding that the attack had captured a number of armoured vehicles. AMISOM Sector 4 officials also said that in addition to driving Al-Shabaab out of Algen and other key areas including Buq-aqable, and Moqokori, aerial raids had killed up to 98 members of Al-Shabaab in an offensive in Hiiraan region, officials have confirmed.

According to AMISOM, operations have not been confined to large-scale military activities. A recent joint cordon and search operation by the Somali National Intelligence Agency, backed by AMISOM and Police in Hodan District of Mogadishu, seized a sophisticated military arsenal as well as arresting Al-Shabaab elements operating in the city. The operation included raiding the residence of an Al-Shabaab 'prime operative', identified as Abduladif Osman Mohamed. A cache of weaponry was found there including an assortment of guns and ammunition, a vehicle, mobile phones, key documents, and a pile of Somali currency as well as five people identified as Al-Shabaab operatives.

In another recent incident, Somalia military officials claimed to have killed at least 10 Al-Shabaab fighters in a battle that erupted in the newly liberated town of Diinsoor in the south of Bay region. The clash broke out after Al-Shabaab attacked AMISOM military bases. Diinsoor's District Commissioner, Ibrahim Mohamed Nur, said, "Number of armed gunmen from Al-Shabaab attacked our army bases but we succeeded in repulsing them. We killed ten members of Al-Shabaab during the skirmishes."

These combined operations are notable not just for their military success and territorial gains. The troops involved are also organizing society in the freed zones to sustain the victories that have been achieved. In every case, the populations of the freed towns and villages have warmly welcomed the joint forces. They are cooperating closely to clean out any Al-Shabaab elements that have tried to spread out and disappear into society. The people have, for example, welcomed the Ethiopian units with respect and trust, naming the forces as "a brother-in-need". Overall, the people of Somalia now give great credit to the Ethiopian forces for being the first country to come to their rescue while most of the country fell under Al-Shabaab rule, forcing a large percentage of the country to face hunger and displacement.

At a recent public conference gathered to discuss ways to consolidate peace in recently freed areas, the President of the Interim Southwest State Administration, Shariff Hassan Sheikh Adan, said the operation of clearing Al-Shabaab from the region was being successful. Al-Shabaab, he said, had suffered big losses; it had been forced to abandon key positions and strongholds and in addition, differences were emerging between the leaders of the extremists. The President said the support of the people for AMISOM and for the Ethiopian forces in Mission was growing. In most of the regions in which Al Shabaab lost its control, the public participation in sustaining peace has increased, youth awareness of the heinous activities of Al Shabaab grew and women are enjoying the freedom of equally contributing their share to the society.

These victories by AMISOM and the revival of society to support the further consolidation of the struggle against Al-Shabaab are important developments. They limit Al-Shabaab's control of large parts of the Middle Juba region, in central and southern Somalia, with its capital at Buale. This is a significant step forward on promoting security. The liberation of Diinsoor and Bardhere also signifies that all districts in the Bay-Bakool and Gedo Regions are now free from the grip of Al-Shabaab. This underlines the importance of developing the political development track along with the recent gains on the ground. Most important, perhaps, it allows the Juba Interim and the South Western Somalia Interim Administrations the chance to expand governance structures into newly liberated areas.

AMISOM has also intensified operations in other areas as part of the more general offensive being conducted across South Central Somalia. Mahaas District Commissioner, Mohamed Ma'ow Halane said AMISOM forces had advanced from Elbuur town in Galgaduud region and headed to Mahaas district in Hiiraan region. The Commissioner said Somalia troops backed by AMISOM had launched an operation that was intended to open roads that had remained blocked by Al-Shabaab.

AMISOM has now reiterated its appeal to all Somalis to continue to support AMISOM and the Somali authorities as well as security institutions and expose those Al-Shabaab elements that have disguised themselves as civilians in their communities. For its part, AMISON has promised to continue to take precautions to prevent civilian casualties in the conduct of its operations against the Al Shabaab.

In a statement at the beginning of the week, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said Somalia was now close to ending Al-Shabaab's insurgency. Al-Shabaab, he said, was being degraded to its lowest capacity yet, raising hopes of ending the prolonged conflict. The President told reporters that the offensive had moved into a phase that could bring the militants' insurgency to an end. He said the offensive was progressing in accordance with a military plan that could end Al-Shabaab, "which now stares at military collapse." The President paid specific tribute to the Ethiopian forces under AMISOM, which, he said, had made the biggest military advances, and quickly overrun strategic rebel strongholds. On Wednesday, the President also called for the National Army to scale up its attacks on Al-Shabaab. He commended "the latest offensives by our army and AMISOM forces to liberate key towns in the country from the anti-peace militias," he said, and called on " my fellow Somalis to stand shoulder by shoulder with our forces so they can be motivated in defeating Al-Shabaab."

Neither regional mechanisms nor EU aid will change Eritrean policy

A number of people around the world displaced by war and conflict, forced out of their country by human rights abuse or repressive government, or in search of economic possibilities, have reached the highest levels ever recorded. The European Union has seen a sharp rise in inbound migration with over a hundred and fifty thousand migrants detected at the EU's external borders in the first five months of this year alone. That's well over double the number during the same period in 2014. The largest group of arrivals has been from Syria, fleeing the conflicts there, but the next largest group has been from Eritrea, 35,000 last year alone, according to UNHCR. These are not people fleeing from conflict and war: the cause of their flight has been repression and repression, including "unending national service conscription."

With European governments becoming more and more concerned by the numbers arriving in Europe and wanting to limit the numbers of refugees, some senior EU officials have been quoted as blaming social and economic problems for the exodus of Eritreans from Eritrea. As a result, the EU has been

considering increased aid to Eritrea “to tackle poverty and create jobs”. The figure has yet to be finalized but earlier reports suggest the EU is considering an aid package worth some US\$344 million over five years. At the same time, over the last year, the Norwegian, Danish and UK Governments have produced reports suggesting that the situation in Eritrea has improved and it would be possible to send Eritrean asylum-seekers and refugees back to Eritrea, as they would face no danger on return even if they had avoided national service.

These suggestions have met with very strong, detailed criticism from Eritrean human rights groups as well as international intellectual groups. A whole series of reports, most recently the 470 pages of the report of the UN Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry in June, have provided an extraordinary amount of detail, including the testimony of hundreds of Eritreans, about a country that suffers from “a repressive government that frequently uses extreme violence to intimidate and coerce its citizens.” It is obvious from this, and from thousands of other testimonies over many years, that the evidence that unemployment and poverty are the driving forces behind Eritrean migration is “slim”. Others would call it “non-existent.” It is, in fact, very clear: those leaving the country are fleeing a seriously repressive regime.

Another suggested option to improve Eritrea’s relationship with other countries and help it break out of its isolation was made by Annette Weber of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs last month. Ms. Weber says President Isaias sees Eritrea’s regional and international isolation since its war with Ethiopia (1998–2000) as evidence of a conspiracy between Ethiopia and influential Western states. She suggests that “reintegrating the country in regional structures could build trust and neutralize the Eritrean narrative of Ethiopian aggression and international conspiracy.” This in turn would remove the need for national service and bring an end to the monthly flight of between three and five thousand Eritreans.

It is very clear to any impartial observer that there is no conspiracy between Ethiopia and “influential Western states” usually identified by Eritrea as the US as well as various EU states, and often including most of the rest of the world. Irrespective of the issue of the border delimitation by the Boundary Commission, which, it is worth repeating, Ethiopia has repeatedly made clear that it fully accepts and of Eritrea’s stubborn refusal to hold dialogue over the actual placing of boundary pillars, Eritrea has consistently refused to hold any discussions about normalization of relations. One very obvious reason is that in the absence of this, it can continue to argue the need to carry on with indefinite national service conscription, turning it into a program for provision of cheap, indeed ‘forced’, even ‘slave’, labor, for government and party-owned businesses. Some conscripts are still serving after 18 years.

Ms. Weber notes that the numbers of Eritreans leaving the country, 36,000 according to the UNHCR last year, were not fleeing war, conflict, or terrorism, Nor, if the Government is to be believed, were they leaving because of famine, drought, food shortages or any economic reason. Ms. Weber goes on: “It

would, therefore, appear that emigration is driven by other motives." She identifies the main cause as the military service conscription, originally starting in 1997 for both men and women who are obliged to complete this "national service" between the ages of eighteen and fifty: "While the duration is supposed to be limited to eighteen months, it can in reality last ten years or more." Ms. Weber correctly notes that conscripts may be ordered to work indefinitely in agriculture, road building or mining and emphasizes that national service represents a significant economic factor for the Eritrean government. The process involves young people spending long periods far from home without contact with their families, she says, and "where they are rewarded at all, conscripts are also so poorly paid that they are unable to provide for a family or make any kind of investment in their future." The difficulties of escaping across the borders have led to a "dense network of organized traffickers, specifically serving Eritreans." Traffickers also make money out of kidnapping refugees and blackmailing their families in Eritrea. Beneficiaries of the process, she says, include members of the border police and the Eritrean and Sudanese armed forces, members of nomadic groups in eastern Sudan and the Sinai, and trans-African trafficking networks.

Ms. Weber suggests "repression spiraled in Eritrea following the war of 1998 to 2000" when President Isaias used his view of Ethiopia and the West's "complicity" to suspend civil liberties, democratic mechanisms and rule of law, and establish an autocratic one party regime under his own personal rule: the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 2001 were cancelled, and the constitution adopted in 1997 never came into force. To this day, she points out, political decisions are promulgated by presidential decree. Shortly after the war a group of the President's closest advisers, the so-called G15, criticized his policies as "illegal and unconstitutional". Eleven of them were detained, and it remains unclear if or when will ever face charges or even whether they are even still alive. According to the UNHCR report, disappearances, torture and detention without trial are common practice in Eritrea. In 2001 President Isaias closed all independent newspapers and had a number of journalists arrested. According to Reporters without Borders, sixteen journalists were still in prison in 2015, and Eritrea has occupied bottom place in its regular World Press Freedom Index for the past seven years.

Ms. Weber's comments were neither exceptional nor unusually critical of Eritrea but that has not stopped the Government's supporters launching a vigorous attack on her competence, accusing her of producing many factual errors as well as failing to understand the 'reality' of Eritrea and its relations with other states: "Eritrea's "isolation" was not self-imposed; it was an elaborately designed effort by the US and its allies, France and the United Kingdom." Ms. Weber has bought "lock, stock, and barrel" into Ethiopia's view of Eritrea as apparently demonstrated by her comments on the National Service Program, Diaspora Tax and regional policies. One response even claimed, despite the testimony of literally thousands of people who have fled the country over the last fifteen or more years that since its inception, Eritrea's National Service Program had been deliberately and maliciously maligned, and misrepresented. In fact, if anything, Ms. Weber underestimates the impact of national service which covers the country's entire available workforce. Some conscripts have been in national service from 1997 to the present day, not just for ten years as Ms. Weber suggests. Government officials frequently defend this on the basis of the need for nation building, to reconstruct Eritrea's devastated economic and social war-ravaged infrastructure.

They seldom mention it also means forcible incorporation of the majority of the workforce as cheap labor in Government or party-owned companies.

Ms. Weber is criticized for claiming that the UN sanctioned Eritrea for providing arms and “asylum” to members of the Union of Islamic Courts. The claim has been that “neither the UN Somalia Eritrea Monitoring Group nor any other agency of the UN has been able to provide evidence to this allegation fabricated by Ethiopia and its handlers”. In fact, Eritrean troops had huge presence in Somalia and there is also no dispute that leading members of the Islamic Courts took refuge in Asmara in 2007 and spent years there. One such person was, of course, Sheikh Hassan Dahir ‘Aweys’, one of the main leaders of the ICU, and subsequently a founder of Hizbul Islam and an ally, and subsequent member, of Al-Shabaab. He has never concealed his links with either Asmara or Al-Shabaab. He is not alone. There is detailed evidence of Eritrea’s support for destabilizing activities in the region, in reference to hosting Ginbot 7 whose leader has just returned to Asmara, training for a variety of guerrilla movements, supporting anti-government activities in Somalia and attacking Djibouti in 2008. This latter aggression, of course, together with Eritrea’s continued refusal to acknowledge its aggression, was and remains one of the reasons for UN sanctions.

The “Eritrean conspiracy narrative” is actually one of the most frequent elements of President Isaias’ annual perorations to the Eritrean people. The US and to a slightly lesser extent, almost every other country in the world, including most of Europe and almost all Eritrea’s neighbors, not just Ethiopia, are accused of collaborating in a long-term conspiracy going back to the 1940s: “the so-called international community has abrogated its moral and legal obligations and has found itself to be irrelevant on matters of peace, stability and security in the Horn region.” There is no evidence for any of this except in Eritrea’s conspiracy theories.

The real problem appears to be that when Eritrea offered its views on Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, Syria and other crises, “the US led international community chose to ignore Eritrea’s positions;” and pique at being ignored is hardly the most obvious basis for foreign policy. One Eritrean government commentator put it this way “Alas...Eritrea’s invaluable insights and opportunity to learn from an astute and mature leadership with deep knowledge of the region and its dynamics were squandered...”. Astuteness and maturity are seldom words that are normally associated with the speeches of Eritrea’s leadership which most observers usually evaluate as turgid, repetitive, disorganized even incoherent. Nor does the suggestion of “deep knowledge” of the region accord with the reality of Eritrea’s isolation and certainly not with the actuality of its use of aggression as a central element in its foreign policy.

In fact, Ms. Weber sees the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia as deadlocked and, despite Ethiopia’s repeated offers to talk “anywhere, anyplace, anytime”, believes it unlikely that any “thaw” is likely in the foreseeable future. Her ‘solution’, therefore, is to use regional mechanisms both for conflict mediation and for trade and economic integration. She claims reintegrating Eritrea into regional affairs could defuse the

scenario of the alleged threat of external intervention and thus de-legitimize the regime's policies. This, she argues, would contribute to transforming Eritrea from regional spoiler to constructive actor. The African Union could assume a security guarantee for Eritrea. In return for Ethiopian implementation of the Algiers agreements, Eritrea could be expected to curtail its military service and engage constructively in the region. The international community could assume the role of a guarantor of regional integration, though this would require a more balanced policy in the Horn of Africa, and should work to neutralize the Eritrean conspiracy narrative.

It all sounds easy, but as the Ethiopian Government has consistently pointed out, there has at no stage in the last decade or more been the slightest evidence of any Eritrean interest in any such policies nor any indication whatever of any attempt to change its own regional policies of aggression and destabilization. These have continued unabated. Until there is clear evidence of a change of policy in Eritrea, it must be premature to suggest lifting of UN sanctions, or make any change in the international approach to a country whose own people are abandoning it at the rate of over 5,000 a month!