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News in Brief

AU/IGAD

The 476th meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU), held on December 16 devoted an Open Session to the theme: "Sources of Instability in Africa: Root Causes and Responses: Focusing on the issue of Women, Peace and Security". The session which was attended by AU member states, bilateral and multilateral partners, international organizations, women institutions and civil societies emphasized the role of women in peace processes, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post conflict rehabilitation efforts.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) led peace talks on South Sudan resumed (December 18) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The latest round of negotiations will attempt to tackle political issues of forming a transitional government of national unity and achieve sustainable truce between the government and oppositions. **(See Article)**

Ethiopia

200 Ethiopian health workers were sent to West Africa to bolster the response to Ebola. The Ethiopian Ebola response mission was dispatched with the objective of maintaining solidarity and cooperation between Ethiopia and African countries as part of Ethiopia's long-standing commitment to Africa. Health Minister Dr. Kesete-Berhan Admassu said Ethiopia has always been firm in solving African problems and with this special mission, the country is now the largest volunteer contributing African country in the fight against the deadly disease in West African countries.

An Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Team arrived in Cairo on Tuesday (December 16) and met with the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Arab Republic of Egypt, diplomats, religious figures, university professors and journalists. The Public Diplomacy Team was headed

by the Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives of the Ethiopian Parliament, Abdulla Gameda, and comprised of more than 70 renowned personalities. **(See Article)**

Minister of Finance and Economic Development Sufian Ahmed said (December 16) Ethiopia plans to expand industry, sugar factories and power production using proceeds from its oversubscribed debut Eurobond that raised \$1 billion. He emphasized joining capital market will not change the government strategy of financing mega projects and "concessional loans, which we have been receiving from institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, African Development Bank will remain to be our primary financing strategy of government projects."

Ethio Telecom concluded financing and framework agreement with Ericsson on Tuesday(December 16) to upgrade the network capacity and performance focusing on mobile communication and related services. The agreement is aimed to improve quality of network coverage and more innovative mobile communication services.

Eritrea

Foreign Minister of Djibouti Mahmoud Ali Youssef has said his country enjoys "excellent" relations with all its neighbors – except Eritrea. "There has been no major breakthrough with regard to relations between Djibouti and Eritrea, as "Eritrea is not willing to negotiate or be part of the regional peace process," he said.

A consortium of Eritrean groups, from across Europe appealed to European politicians not to open a "new engagement " with the Eritrean government until it has implemented universally accepted human rights. Eritrean civic organizations, representing the large European Diaspora, are appealing to the EU not to make this mistake again saying there is no prospect of ending Eritrean exodus until its human rights record improves. **(See Article)**

Somalia

Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has appointed Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, Somalia's ambassador to the United States, as the new prime minister following the ouster of his predecessor earlier this month. "I'm very happy that I have picked Omar Abdirashid Ali as the new prime minister of the country. I expect him to fulfill his commandments," the Somali president said. Sharmarke said he would "continue working on the efforts to bring about stability" and "taking the country the way forward to free elections." **(See Article)**

United Nations human rights expert, Bahame Tom Nyanduga urged (December 13) the Government of Somalia and the international community to work to strengthen the country's rule of law institutions and safeguard its full transition to peace, stability and democracy. He also calls for the Government to ratify key international human rights instruments including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Convention to eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW]. **(See Article)**

Leaders of the new Southwest State (President Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan) composed of Bay, Bakool and Lower Shebelle regions, has reportedly signed a power-sharing agreement with those who supported the creation of a six-region Southwest state. The supporters of the larger state will take the positions of vice president and speaker of parliament.

Djibouti

Djibouti will not leave Somalia until the African Union peacekeeping mission has removed Al-shabaab from Somalia, Djibouti Foreign Affairs Minister Mohamoud Ali Yusuf said. “Our forces will remain in Somalia until Somalia’s government is standing on its own feet and also we are preparing to deploy additional troops in the region” added the Foreign Minister.

Sudan

Foreign Minister of Sudan Ali Karti on Tuesday (December 16) warned that the announcement by the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, that she will freeze her office’s Darfur investigations is an attempt to escalate the issue of Sudan’s troubled western region and to seek new United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions to arrest those wanted by the court, including president Omer Hassan al-Bashir.

The leadership bureau of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to annul resolution 1593 which referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and demanded that Darfur investigations be sent back to Sudanese judiciary which has jurisdiction over crimes committed anywhere in the country.

Khartoum has renewed accusations that Juba is continuing to provide material and logistical support to rebel groups, saying it has documented evidence to prove the claims and demanded practical steps from Juba to stop harboring and supporting rebels. South Sudan’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Barnaba Marial Benjamin rejected accusations and expressed South Sudan’s full commitment to implement the 2012 cooperation agreement it signed with neighboring Sudan.

South Sudan

The United Nations Security Council strongly condemned (December 15) the serious human rights violations and abuses that caused the death of tens of thousands of civilians and displaced nearly two million people in South Sudan. The council, in a statement, accused the country’s leaders for the tragic events and urged them to reach a compromise for the sake of peace.

Kenya

The Kenyan government announced Tuesday (December 16) that it was suspending the licenses and freezing the bank accounts of some 510 NGOs, 15 of which were accused of having ties to terrorist groups and money laundering. The others were suspended for alleged accounting irregularities. They have three weeks to submit documentation to prove the legality of their activities and balances.

Kenya signed an agreement to export 30MW of electricity to Rwanda. The agreement was said to be part of a regional initiative to improve the power grid along the Northern Corridor, and is expected to raise Rwanda's electricity generation capacity by 263 percent from current 155MW to 563MW by 2017.

An Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation in Cairo

An Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation, comprising more than 70 distinguished Ethiopians from all walks of life, has been visiting Cairo this week. The Public Diplomacy Delegation, the first of its kind, travelled to Egypt on Monday (December 15) with the objective of building trust and fraternal relations between the peoples of the two countries. The Delegation, which is led by the Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representative of the Ethiopian Parliament, Abadulla Gemedda, includes academicians, parliamentarians, religious leaders, former ambassadors, artists and other prominent personalities drawn from various sectors.

The Public Diplomacy Delegation delivered a message from the people of Ethiopia to the people of Egypt – which the two countries have, a long time relationship and that the people of Ethiopia are committed to raise to a higher level. The Delegation also passed the message that the people of Ethiopia, committed as they are to the mutual growth of both peoples, would also like to have an even closer and stronger relationship with the people of Egypt. A central element of this is, of course, the way that water resources should be used for the full benefit of the peoples of both countries. The Public Diplomacy Delegation conveys the message to the people of Egypt that the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam should be a main element in the connection between the peoples of both countries. It will have significant benefits for the people of Egypt and should not be any cause of fear and suspicion between the two peoples. The Delegation's message is that Ethiopia firmly believes the Nile waters are a basis to provide for the interest of the two peoples in development, peace and prosperity. It underlined to various Egyptian parties and organizations, government and non-government alike, that the only option for realizing this effectively is for the two peoples to cooperate and strengthen their ties in all different and possible ways.

Talking to members of the Delegation before they left for Cairo, Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom expressed his strong belief that the visit by the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation would play a vital role in strengthening the people-to-people relations between the two countries and enhance trust between them. He said the visit of the delegation was particularly timely as it would be able to have a positive impact in building on the positive momentum that had been launched between the leaders of the two countries, exemplified by the resumption of the tripartite talks over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and the successful Joint Ministerial Commission meeting held in Addis Ababa recently. Dr. Tedros added that the visit of the Public Diplomacy Delegation would be instrumental in conveying and underlining Ethiopia's desire for mutual growth, strong links and genuine cooperation with Egypt. The team, he noted, was organized on a similar basis to the Egyptian Public Diplomacy Delegation that had visited Ethiopia three years ago. Speaker Abadulla Gemedda said on the occasion that the delegation had a historic responsibility to encourage the creation of mutual

understanding and trust between the peoples of the two countries. He emphasized that strong people-to-people relations were bound to bring closer ties between the two nations with their long histories of civilization.

Ambassador Ibrahim Idriss, Director General for Boundaries and Trans boundary Resources in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, briefed the Delegation on Ethiopia's policy towards the Nile and on its efforts to create Nile Basin-wide cooperation. Ambassador Ababi Demisse, Director General for Public Diplomacy, told the members of the Delegation that public diplomacy plays a defining role in building and strengthening people-to-people links between two countries. He said the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation's visit had enormous significance in conveying the desire of Ethiopians to encourage and expand bonds of brotherhood with Egyptians. Engineer Simegnaw Bekele, Project Manager of the GERD, also briefed the Delegation on the progress of the Dam and the benefits it will provide for Ethiopia, for the downstream countries and for Africa more generally, in providing clean energy and in encouraging and fostering regional integration. He also explained at length the benefit of the GERD in preventing drought, reducing siltation, regulating water flows, avoiding flooding to downstream countries, and even in sustaining tourism.

During its visit to Cairo, the Delegation took part in the 15th Anniversary celebration of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs and has also had meetings with President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Prime Minister Eng. Ibrahim Mahleab, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, Dr. Ahmed Al Tayeb, the Grand Sheikh of the Al Azhar Mosque and His Holiness, Pope Tawadros II of the Egyptian Coptic Church. Other meetings have been held with Egyptian intellectuals and writers, the members of the Egyptian Public Diplomacy Delegation, and with Mr. Ayman Essa of the Egyptian- Ethiopian Business Council. The Delegation has also visited some of the sights of Cairo including the Modern Arts Museum, the Opera House and Ministry of Tourism.

In a meeting with Egyptian Prime Minister Eng. Ibrahim Mahleab in Cairo, Speaker of the House of People's Representatives, Honorable Abadula Gameda said, "Ethiopia and Egypt have long standing historical, religious, cultural and social relations." Honorable Abadula explained that Ethiopia believes in fair and equitable usage of Nile waters and underlined the building of the GERD has a sole objective of eradicating poverty. He assured Prime Minister Mahleab that Ethiopia's GERD will not cause appreciable harm to any of the downstream countries. Egyptian Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahleab welcomed the Ethiopian public diplomacy team on behalf of the government and people of Egypt. He stressed the point that Ethiopia and Egypt need to foster cooperation in areas including education, trade, tourism and investment. He said the cooperation between the two countries needs to go beyond the Nile to strengthen the bilateral ties in all areas. He stressed that it is time to enhance and boost South-South cooperation generally and Ethiopia and Egypt in particular to the benefit of the peoples of both nations. The Prime Minister underlined that the ties of Ethiopia and Egypt should be based on mutual benefit and trust. Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Delegation member Honorable Med. World Lauret Dr. Tibebe Yemaneberhan expressed that Ethiopia and Egypt relations should be strengthened more through people to people relations. Mrs Mulu Solomon, also a member, expressed that Ethiopia and Egypt should strive to work and develop their peoples together. On the second day of the visit, the Ethiopian team met with Grand Sheik of Al Azahar , Dr. Ahmed Al Tayeb. On the occasion,

Dr. Ahmed Al Tayeb noted the special place of Ethiopia in the history of Islam. He said “Ethiopia is the first country that gave refuge to early Muslims saving them from persecution.” Highlighting the long, historical, cultural and deep religious ties of the two people, he said “Egyptians are certain that Ethiopians are not the people who take happiness from the suffering of Egyptians.” While visiting Pope Tawadros, Speaker Abadula, said the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy Team brought a message of love, cooperation from Ethiopians to the Egyptian brothers and sisters. He said “Ethiopia’s sole objective of building the GERD has no other objective other than eradicating poverty. Pope Tawadros II said “Ethiopia’s projects will not harm Egypt as we are one family.” While meeting Egypt’s President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, Speaker Abadula explained that the GERD Project is among other projects implemented in Ethiopia to reduce the poverty in the country. Hon. Dr. Ashebir Getenet expressed that the cooperation between Ethiopia and Egypt should be strengthened considering the historical ties of the two countries and the interests of the people. Vice President of Addis Ababa University, Dr. Hirut Woldemariam noted that the International panel of Experts Report (IPOEs) on GERD clearly stated that the Dam does not harm Egypt and it benefits downstream countries. President al-Sisi has told Ethiopian Public Diplomacy team that with a new government in the country “Egypt does not refuse the development of Ethiopia and the GERD.”

Preparations for next year’s National Elections on schedule

Ethiopia’s fifth National Elections are scheduled to be held on May 24, 2015. Ethiopians who are eligible to vote will be going to the polls to elect representatives both for the House of People’s Representatives and for the Regional States and the two City Administration Councils of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. In the run-up to the election, the Ethiopian National Electoral Board (NEBE) is undertaking a number of pre-election preparations and activities. Successive briefings by the Board indicates that the NEBE is on schedule in carrying out all the major activities that have to be undertaken before the announcement of the election results which will be made on June 22, 2015. These 30 activities, which are now being carried out, were agreed on with the majority of the political parties operating in the country. The NEBE recently announced that out of the 75 registered political parties, 58 political parties had submitted their election symbols in accordance with the required timetable. Similarly, the dispatch of electoral materials to a total of 547 constituencies and 44,454 election posts is already taking place ahead of voter registration. Registration of candidates started last week (on December 10) and will be taking place between December 10, 2014 and January 6, 2015. Voter registration is being held between January 9 and February 19, 2015.

In a recent interview with the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, Professor Merga Beqana, the Chairperson of the NEBE, highlighted the major activities undertaken by the Board over the previous four years since the 2010 national election. The Chairperson pointed out that the Board has undertaken a thorough analysis and evaluation of the weaknesses and strengths shown by the NEBE’s performance in the discharge of its constitutional duties when conducting the 2010 elections. It had subsequently undertaken a number of measures to improve its capacity and ensure the primary goal of the elections to broaden and deepen the democratic rights of citizens. Among these activities was the issuance of the laws governing the conduct of the parties, media personnel, election candidates and other related matters. The NEBE has issued a Code Of Conduct for the Mass Media and Journalists on the Manner of Reporting about Elections. It has

amended its Directive on the Code of Conduct of Election Officials' Recruitment at Various Levels, its Directive on the Registration of Candidates, the Directive for the Registration of Electors, and the Directive Concerning the Procedure for the Activities of Public Observers and Representatives of Political Parties and Private Candidates. It has also issued the Regulations Concerning the Procedure for Determining the Apportionment of Government Financial Support to Political Parties and the Regulation on Organization and Procedure of Grievance Hearing Committees established by the Board at every level for elections. In addition, to increase the public accessibility to the laws and regulations, the Board is organizing translations into a number of different local languages. It has also signed contracts with a number of different media outlets to conduct voter education and introduce election laws to the general public.

Apart from all this, the NEBE has been conducting capacity building activities along with the restructuring of the organization of regional electoral offices. Following a study it conducted, the NEBE itself has been working on improving its own staffing and increasing its qualified personnel. Professor Merga said, "we are working with a vision of building a strong institution and laying the foundation for an institutional framework that can serve for the coming 30 or 40 years." The NEBE has also conducted a series of consultative meetings with political parties in a bid to create awareness about the practical application of the electoral laws and regulations. According to Professor Merga, the Board has paid particular attention to raising the level of participation of women. To that end, it has conducted awareness creation training in coordination with women associations in all of the nine regional states and the two city administrations. Similar training has also been given in association with the youth associations.

Another area of emphasis has been on measures related to ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. Professor Merga said the NEBE "is working to make the playing field level to all parties. " It has introduced public funding of political parties to help them play their role in the democratization process, organizing a public funding scheme based on the practical realities, including the financial constraints, faced by all political parties in Ethiopia. Professor Merga says the scheme has three categories of support. The first is the election-time support which was started for the 2010 national election when the NEBE allotted 55% of the fund to parties which had seats in the House of People's Representatives and Regional Councils; 25% was divided among the parties on the basis of the number of candidates they fielded in the 2010 election; 10% of the fund was divided among all parties on the basis of mere participation in the election; and the final 10% was exclusively shared between women candidates in order to encourage participation of women in the election. This formula, Professor Merga says, is unique to Ethiopia: "no other country allots 10% of election funding to women candidates." This, he said, showed the NEBE's commitment to encourage women's participation in public affairs. He noted this support was already having a good impact as the number of women in the Ethiopian Parliament had now reached 28%, a figure that was well above the majority of African countries. Professor Merga added that despite the international practice of making parliamentary seats the major criteria for funding, and criticism from the ruling party "we have not made seats as primary criteria to apportion the fund to make it equitable".

The second form of support provided by the NEBE is to provide some support to finance the day-to-day activities of political parties. Here, however, the criteria are based solely on the number of seats held in the various legislatures. On this basis, the NEBE, for instance, provided 10 million birr in February 2011 to ten of the political parties. The NEBE's third form of

support relates to such services as the rental of conference rooms or town halls and the provision of office equipment.

In addition, the NEBE has introduced specific mechanisms to ensure the impartiality of election officers. Professor Merga said “we have introduced a vetting system of election officers by their immediate election supervisors to check that they are not members of any of the political parties.” Election officers will have to take an oath to discharge their duties without fear or favor and mechanisms have been set up to hold them accountable in cases where they are found in violation of the election code of conduct and election laws. Grievance handling procedures, with a strict timeline, have been put in place to review and respond to any complaints presented by political parties. Professor Merga noted the important role now being played by the Political Parties Joint Committee established under Proclamation 662/2009 which governs the electoral Code of Conduct as a supplementary mechanism to address grievances.

Apart from what has already been carried out, Ethiopian Government officials have also underlined the readiness of the Federal and Regional Government administrations to make sure that the importance of the election in the eyes of the electorate. In a session held on July 27, Prime Minister Hailemariam specifically noted that strong public participation was vital to ensure that the election should be free, fair and democratic. He called on all opposition parties to abide by the electoral law and the code of conduct which had been passed by the House of Representatives to make sure that the election would be held in peaceful manner. Minister Redwan Hussein, Head of Government Communications Affairs Office with the Rank of a Minister, recently met with 17 Ambassadors from European Union countries. He told the EU Ambassadors that sufficient airtime and news paper columns would be allocated in such a way as to make sure that each party running in the election would be able to disseminate its ideas and programs freely. He said that, as in the 2010 election, the EPRDF used 80% while the opposition used only 50% of the airtime and column space available in papers, there should be no complaint about shortage of broadcasting time. Minister Redwan noted the possibility of civic associations and public and private media outlets running programs and election debates. This, he said, would allow for additional opportunities for party members to communicate and build up their own constituencies. Mr. Redwan, however, cautioned that any move by any political party to take state power through unconstitutional means would not be tolerated. He said “the government will take action in accordance with the law”. The EU Ambassadors and the NEBE agreed on the importance of capacity building of media personnel as part of the electoral process.

The NEBE’s preparations are all under way to ensure the upcoming national election is free, fair and democratic. At the same time, successful elections will also rest on the commitment of stakeholders to abide by the electoral laws and respect the institutions entrusted with conducting the election by the Constitution. In this regard, the NEBE has shown remarkable progress in encouraging the creation of an institutional framework to encourage increased participation of youth, women and civic society in general and ensure the election will reflect the will of the people.

IGAD urges South Sudanese to consign the means of violence to history

Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, Head of IGAD Special Envoys to South Sudan, emphasized this week (December 15) that IGAD remained firm in its efforts to work for a durable peace, end the

suffering of the people and create a stable, prosperous and secure South Sudan. In a statement marking the first anniversary of the South Sudan crisis, Ambassador Seyoum noted that the region, the friends and the partners of the continent's newest nation were sad at the continuing crisis affecting South Sudan. He highlighted the uncertainty engulfing the nation, the suffering and displacement of its people, the repercussion of the ongoing crisis and the furtherance of fear, suspicion and mistrust among the country's various communities. He urged rejection of war, vengeance, hatred and further destruction and called on them not to be misled by rumors and unhelpful rhetoric.

Ambassador Seyoum stressed the importance of refusing to make this appalling year of horror and tragedy a defining feature of South Sudan's future. What had happened, he said, was "a shocking reminder of the dangers of choosing war over peace, division over harmony, destruction over creation, hate over empathy." The choices made over the past year had achieved nothing except the unleashing of suffering, displacement, death, famine and numerous other debilitating conditions affecting the lives of the people of South Sudan. He said the region was fully aware of the suffering affecting the people of South Sudan and the wrongs committed against them, but he emphasized that it was important that these wrongs did not beget new wrongs. He assured the people of South Sudan that the region would continue to stand firm on the side of reason and right to "help South Sudanese find a peace that is more than the absence of war." He appealed to "the leaders and people of South Sudan to make this choice, too: to consign the means of violence to history, and not to see violence as the way to resolve political problems." Now was not a time to repeat history, he said. Ambassador Seyoum extended thanks to the international community for its continued support of the IGAD-led South Sudan peace process. He also appealed to it to scale up its support for IGAD's efforts in the search for a lasting and just solution for South Sudan.

Noting that IGAD-led South Sudan peace process negotiations would reopen on December 18, He said the warring parties were expected to submit their consultation reports to another Summit of IGAD Heads of State and Government. He expressed his hope that the principals of the warring parties and the people of South Sudan would "make the upcoming Summit and the resumption of what we call now the Third Phase, First Session be the final one to conclude their negotiations, reach agreement on some outstanding issues so that the implementation process of their agreements could begin."

The peace talks resumed on Thursday (December 18) aiming at finding peaceful ways to resolve the country's one year of crisis and end the suffering of civilian population. The peace talks also aimed to reach a consensus on outstanding thematic issues of proposed power-sharing arrangements and the formation of a Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU). IGAD Special Envoy Lazaro Sumbeiywo read the message from Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, Head of IGAD Special Envoys, and noted that both parties to the conflict had committed flagrant violations of the commitments made so far to end hostilities and strike a peace deal. He underlined that those violations were "completely unacceptable and are direct violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement." Expressing IGAD's and the international community's profound disappointment by the outrageous actions of the parties, He called upon them to fully comply with the commitments made earlier to stop the conflict. He also recalled the agreement reached at the last Summit by the IGAD Heads of State and Government requesting the two

principals to hold consultations on the issue of the structure of the executive of the Transitional Government of National Unity. He also said that a lot had remained to be carried forward, saying that the transitional security arrangements and the resource, economic and financial management committees would continue to work out on outstanding agenda items from where the peace talks were adjourned on November 4. He added that the committees intended to report the progress made so far to the Envoys on December 21, and a final plenary discussion would be made on the same date before the adjournment of this session. Ambassador Tewolde Gebremeskel, IGAD Director for Peace and Security, said the peace process was now at a “critical juncture,” stressing that both parties should put aside their political differences and capitalize on the interests of their people. He noted that in the face of looming famine the parties were expected to reach an agreement before the New Year.

In an opinion piece published by *Foreign Policy* magazine, Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commented on the ways to save South Sudan from collapse. He underlined that it was the responsibility of the leaders to rescue the people from the ongoing and unfolding catastrophe. He said the existing gulf between the commitments made by warring parties and the practical implementation of those pledges had meant further escalation of the violence and more suffering as well as creating a fertile ground for the re-arming, recruiting and training of soldiers, regional rebels, and militias, thus exacerbating the ongoing violence. The leaders of South Sudan, he said, appeared untouched by the suffering of their people. The Secretary-General went on to say that the grave risks and the impending dangers engulfing South Sudan needed more than peacekeeping and humanitarian relief work. He urged the leaders to demonstrate political will to change their course, prevent the resumption of war and demonstrate resilience to put a stop to the country’s man-made crisis.

The UN Secretary-General urged neighboring countries and partners around the world to stay firm and put pressure on both their leaders and their respective military commanders to continue to participate in the peace talks, work to find common ground and emphasize the importance of peace rather than war. Noting that the consultations being made by the parties with their supporters on the issue of a transitional power-sharing arrangement, the UN Secretary-General said the success of this IGAD-led peace deal needed the resolve of the warring parties and the continued support of the international community. He urged the leaders of South Sudan to show statesmanship, refrain from hostilities, and agree on an inclusive power-sharing arrangement with a transitional phase of governance. He said he appreciated the positive efforts undertaken earlier this month by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and welcomed its decision to scale up IGAD’s mediation efforts with a committee of five Heads of State and Government. The establishment of this regional coalition, he said, signified a bold step by Africa to try to avert this crisis from worsening further. Now was high time for the leadership of South Sudan to demonstrate genuine commitment and action for the creation of a united and peaceful South Sudan. South Sudan’s leaders must, he said, “pull their country back from the brink.”

The Washington Post on Monday (December 15) published an opinion piece by John F. Kerry, US Secretary of State, and Susan E. Rice, US National Security Adviser. They called on the leaders of South Sudan to stick together and sink differences for the resolution of the crisis. What was important now was the formation of a transitional government with a mandate to provide security for all South Sudanese. They suggested that the government should capitalize on the development of “a transparent system for managing the country’s resources and agree on an

inclusive constitutional drafting process to focus on improved governance.” Considering the scale and scope of the tragedy, they also stressed the need to map out a reconciliation process to heal wounds and dedicate efforts to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. In the face of a multitude of threats to the people of South Sudan, the authors reiterated the imperative to silence the guns. They went on to note that “We do not have the luxury of time... Now, the whole world is watching to see what the leaders of South Sudan will do. Will they continue on the path of conflict and condemn their country to another year of suffering? Or will they make the hard choices, work together and restore to their country the hope that its citizens so richly deserve?” It would be in the best interests of the people of South Sudan, they concluded, for both parties to give a chance for peace.

Somalia: President Hassan appoints a new Prime Minister....

Eleven days after the removal of the then Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed by a Parliamentary no-confidence vote, President Hassan has appointed a new Prime Minister. His choice this time was Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke. Mr. Sharmarke, an economist with additional degrees in political science and political economy, was previously Prime Minister during the transitional government from 2009-2010. He resigned after falling out with the then President Sheikh Sharif. In July, he became the first Somali ambassador to the United States for more than twenty years. He previously worked for the United Nations as a political advisor in Sudan and Sierra Leone. His father was Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, former President of Somalia, and Prime Minister 1967-69, who was assassinated by his bodyguard in Lasanod on October 15, 1969 during a visit to drought-stricken regions in northern Somalia. The assassination led to the military takeover by Siad Barre. Mr. Sharmarke, who is 54, becomes the first person to hold the premiership twice.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced the appointment on Wednesday (December 17) at a ceremony attended by Federal MPs led by Parliament Speaker, Mohamed Sheikh Osman Jawari, and international community representatives. He said: “I am very pleased today to appoint Ambassador Sharmarke as Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Somalia. Ambassador Sharmarke is well known and revered across Somalia. He brings much knowledge and many years of relevant experience to this position, including having previously served as Prime Minister.” The President added: “While the constitution gives me the sole right to appoint my Prime Minister, this was a decision in which I valued the input of different Somalis, representing different sections of the Somali community as well as the international community. This is my decision and not anyone else’s.”

The President noted that the Prime Minister’s role “is of great significance to Somalia. Under my leadership as Head of State, the Prime Minister heads the Federal Government and is responsible for ensuring that the Government, including all the Ministers and Ministries carry out their tasks on time, transparently, and accountable to the best interest of the Somali people. Somalia must act swiftly to resolve several outstanding tasks linked to security, political and development progress. There is much to do, and little time. The important process of nation-building as per Vision 2016, and ensuring the security and development initiatives of the New Deal Somali Compact are quickly implemented are crucial.” He went on to add, “Ambassador Sharmarke has my full trust. He also carries the heavy weight and burden of responsibility on behalf of all Somalis. Together, and with the Council of Ministers, we will ensure that the progress made over

the past two years is solidified. Every Somali should know that peace and prosperity are not the products of wishful thinking, but of hard work, commitment and dedication. I am confident that Ambassador Sharmarke will not rest in his role until security, stability and development are recognized across Somalia.”

Mr. Sharmarke thanked the President and said he would work to bring about lasting peace and democratic elections over the next few months. He told reporters he would "continue working on the efforts to bring about stability" and "taking the country the way forward to free elections". After he has been endorsed by Parliament, the Prime Minister will have thirty days to choose a cabinet, in consultation with the President. He said he would soon nominate a cabinet “that will help the country realize its full potential.”

Mr. Sharmarke’s appointment, which has yet to be endorsed by Parliament, was welcomed by the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) for Somalia, Ambassador Maman S. Sidikou. Ambassador Sidikou said the appointment was another positive step forward for Somalia and demonstrated further the effectiveness of the country’s institutions in meeting their constitutional responsibilities. He also noted that Mr. Sharmarke had “a wealth of experience drawn from his previous term as Prime Minister between 2009 and 2010 as well as his international public service experiences in the United Nations and the African Union.”

If the appointment is confirmed by parliament, Mr. Sharmarke, a Somali-born Canadian citizen, will become the country's third prime minister within the last 26 months. On December 6, the 275-seat parliament voted Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed out of office following a month-long impasse between the President and Prime Minister. Abdiweli’s predecessor was ousted in a similar vote a year earlier in December 2013. The United Nations, United States and European Union have all warned that power struggles in the Villa Somalia were a damaging distraction for the country; and United Nations Special Envoy Nicholas Kay said the tensions put at risk political goals including the planned referendum on a new constitution due to take place next year, ahead of elections in 2016.

...and a UN Expert underlines the need to strengthen legal and judicial institutions

Meanwhile, on Sunday (December 14) Bahame Tom Nyanduga, a UN Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia, said the “the Federal Government together with the international community need to allocate adequate resources to strengthen the rule of law institutions and ensure that the interim regional administrations benefit from the New Deal Compact for Somalia.” Mr. Nyanduga who had just finished his first official visit to Somalia, said the Government should also ratify key international human rights instruments including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict and the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW]. Mr. Nyanduga praised the Federal Government for its adoption of a National Action Plan to combat sexual violence, but he also expressed concern at the capacity and resource constraints, which, he said, were slowing progress in strengthening the country's judicial institutions and were contributing to the “pervasive role of military courts trying civilians.” He called on the Government to uphold its commitment made under the Universal Periodic Review

to place a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. In addition, Mr. Nyanduga urged the Federal Government to ensure that it incorporated international human rights standards and principles when adopting legislation and called for the speedy adoption of a bill establishing a national human rights institution. He called on the authorities to ensure that the media were allowed their right to freedom of expression as well as to ensure the safety of journalists, adding that it was “imperative for the media to exercise professionalism and responsible media reporting.”

The Mogadishu-based Peace and Human Rights Network said this week, in a report released on international Human Rights Day, that human rights conditions in Somalia remained grim, with the ongoing problems of assassinations, targeted bombings, harassment, rape and the mass displacement of people. At least five journalists have been killed this year, two in Baidoa, two in Mogadishu and one in Galkayo, and another six injured; and according to the National Union of Journalists there have been about thirty cases of arrests of journalists in Mogadishu. In its report, the PHRN noted that human rights activists, journalists, religious leaders, politicians and women in particular were subject to continuous intimidation and human rights abuses. These were happening to Somalis every day. The report said the security situation in Mogadishu was still largely unstable. The Peace and Human Rights Network Chairperson, Zahra Omar Malin, said discrimination and lack of protection for human rights was widespread even though there was a central government recognized by the international community. She urged the government to take steps to ensure security, adding that it was important to have investigations and accountability to provide for prosecutions for those who commit these transgressions. She said PHRN in the coming year would be working to ensure that prisoners are not tortured, that they are visited regularly, and that gender-based and clan discrimination could be prevented. She also said it would be launching a campaign to combat rape.

The outgoing Minister of Women and Human Rights Khadijo Mohamed Diriye, marking Human Rights Day, said that while Somalia has participated in and is a signatory to historic agreements that have established international standards for the protection and promotion of human rights, it had not been able to live up to those standards. She said “the reality that exists in our country today is that Somalia has become famous for its abuse of human rights, for being a country that does not hold those who transgress human rights to account, and for being the lowest ranking nation in terms of the protection of human rights.” However she said the Government was committed to reverse that perception. Her ministry was, she said, working on a national action plan to end gender-based violence as well as the discrimination of minorities and vulnerable members of society, and legislative bills on human rights and child protection had been drafted.

Eritrean NGOs appeal to the EU to stop any new effort to engage with Eritrea

A Consortium of eight Eritrean civic and human rights organizations, made up of NGOs based in the UK, Italy and Sweden as well as elsewhere, has expressed deep concern over European Union efforts to limit numbers of Eritreans seeking asylum in Europe. It is also seriously worried by EU efforts to “re-engage” with the regime in Eritrea as part of this effort to cut the flow of Eritrean refugees into Europe. Under the title “Listen to our agony” the Consortium, notes “Eritrea is hemorrhaging people.” It says “ as many Eritreans are fleeing their country, seeking refuge in the rest of the world, as Syrians. Yet Syria is in the grip of a deadly civil war and

Eritrea is not.” Eritreans, it says are driven into exile by the Eritrean regime’s “gross violations of human rights and the endless military service which has created a cycle of poverty...From January to August 2014, more than 28,000 Eritreans, including almost 3,000 unaccompanied children, came to Italy alone by sea. From there they make their way to wherever they can find sanctuary, whether in Sweden, Germany or the Netherlands. Hundreds camp in Calais hoping to find a way into Britain.”

The NGO Consortium point out that the repressive nature of the Eritrean regime has been recorded by numerous human rights organizations as well as by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth. She confirmed in her first report in May this year that violations of human rights in Eritrea include indefinite national service; arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detention; extrajudicial killings; torture; inhumane prison conditions; infringement of freedom of movement, of expression and opinion, of assembly, association and religious belief; sexual and gender-based violence; and violation of children’s rights. Her report adds: all evidence confirms that the above-mentioned violations continue unabated and they “form the background to the exodus of young Eritreans.” It describes the unending conscription, and the associated use of conscripts for ‘forced labor’ as the main drivers, and notes that the numbers are rising sharply. The result is that the numbers of asylum-seekers in Europe from Eritrea has nearly tripled. In Ethiopia and Sudan, the number of Eritrean refugees has also increased sharply. The UNHCR says that in 2014 “nearly 37,000 Eritreans have sought refuge in Europe, compared to almost 13,000 during the same period last year.”

The increase in the flow of refugees and asylum claims was what led the Danish Immigration Service (DIS), as we noted last week, to announce tighter controls for asylum seekers in Denmark after it produced a report claiming “the human rights situation in Eritrea may not be as bad as rumored.” The DIS report dismissed the authoritative work of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights situation in Eritrea and reports of all other human rights organizations on the situation in Eritrea. The resulting criticisms were so substantial and so detailed that the DIS felt obliged to change its mind and withdraw the proposed limitations on asylum. The UK also appears to be trying to find reasons to limit numbers of Eritrean asking for asylum. A delegation from the British Foreign and Home Offices arrived in Asmara last week.

The upsurge of refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea has meant European policy makers have tried to limit numbers arriving by making the process harder, by increasing security at entry points to Europe or by cutting back rescue services in the Mediterranean to discourage people from making the dangerous attempt to cross the sea. The Consortium described the last of these as an “inhuman policy” that has been widely condemned as it effectively leaves many to drown.

Another option being considered is the policy of renewed ‘engagement’ with the Eritrean government on the basis that it might be possible to persuade the regime to change policies. This, the Consortium points out, has, of course, been tried before to no effect whatever. The first time was in 2001 when there was a general clampdown on all forms of criticism and opposition. Independent media were closed and senior government officials and journalists, the “G-15”, were arrested and disappeared from public view. They were never formally charged, much less tried, and have been held incommunicado. Among those detained was Dawit Isaak, a Swedish-Eritrean journalist. The EU has repeatedly called for his release. When the arrests took place, the

Italian Ambassador to Eritrea, Antonio Bandini, presented a letter of protest to the authorities. He was promptly expelled. Other European ambassadors were withdrawn in response. The EU presidency said relations between the EU and Eritrea had been “seriously undermined” by the government’s action and that the return of EU ambassadors would be conditional on the willingness of President Isaias to engage on human rights dialogue. He made no effort to change his attitudes but some EU Ambassadors nevertheless returned to Eritrea.

Despite the complete lack of movement by the government over the detentions and over the crackdown on NGO activity, the EU decided to try to have a ‘new beginning’ with Eritrea. President Isaias was “warmly welcomed” when he visited Brussels in May 2007, and the European Commission initiated a process of political re-engagement with Eritrea. It said “both sides need political dialogue to bring some results: the European Commission needs a visible sign of cooperation from Eritrea in order to continue to justify its soft diplomacy, while the increasingly isolated Eritrean regime might need to keep a credible interlocutor and a generous donor.” The Commission suggested the liberation of Dawit Isaak on humanitarian grounds could be such a sign.” In 2009, the then EU Development Commissioner, Louis Michel, opened talks with Eritrea. In August, after receiving assurances from an Eritrean diplomat that Dawit Isaak, would be released into his care, he visited Asmara. However, once he met President Isaias, it was immediately clear the President had no intention of allowing Dawit to go free. Brussels, the NGO Consortium, said had learnt nothing from its mistakes in 2001, while the Eritrean regime had learnt that if it remained obdurate EU politicians would, in time, give in to its demands.

Now, the Consortium says, the EU is trying again. In 2011, the EU drew up a ‘Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa which said the EU’s involvement should be focused around five main areas: “the development partnership, the political dialogue, the response to crises, the management of crises and the trade relationship.” It suggested that this could be achieved by “the development of democratic processes and institutions that contribute to human security and empowerment will be supported through: promotion of respect for constitutional norms, the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality through cooperation and dialogue with Horn partners; support to security sector reform and the establishment of civilian oversight bodies for accountable security institutions in the Horn countries; and implementing the EU human rights policy in the region. Under this, the EU has given aid worth €122 million between 2009 and 2013 to Eritrea. It appointed EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa Alex Rondos in 2012 and he managed to cultivate a functional relationship with Eritrea. In July this year, Italy’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lapo Pistelli, made an official visit to Asmara, the first by an Italian government official since 1997, and said that it was “time for a new start”.

Despite this, the Consortium emphasizes, since the Strategic Framework was drawn up the situation inside Eritrea “has gone from bad to worse.” Eritreans are leaving the country in record numbers; “there has been no progress on the release of political prisoners, the implementation of the Constitution or on freedom of expression; and the country remains a one-party state, locked into permanent repression.” The United Nations Special Rapporteur said there was no improvement and in June the international community “took the rare step of establishing a Commission of Inquiry into the country’s human rights.”

The Consortium says a number of lessons can be drawn from previous EU attempts to build a relationship with the regime in Asmara. The first is that “there is no evidence that President Isaias and his government has any intention of moving away from its current policies, which involve the systematic denial of human rights.” Secondly, “past promises of reform, made by Eritrean diplomats, carry no weight. Political prisoners remain in detention, democratic rights are denied and there is no freedom of conscience or religious expression...any softening of pressure is regarded by President Isaias as a sign of the weakness of international resolve.” Thirdly, no promises of aid or international assistance have resulted in any softening of the regime’s policies; and finally “achieving a ‘new engagement’ with Eritrea without seeing concrete, verifiable changes in the policies and practices of the regime would require abandoning the human rights agenda that is an integral part of European development policy.”

The Consortium says the EU should listen to all those Eritreans who call for decision-makers to keep up pressure on the Eritrean regime. The EU should listen to the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur, describing these as “a comprehensive list of measures that would free Eritrea from its repression”. They include: ensuring that all development cooperation is checked carefully to make sure it fully respects international human rights norms and standards; any businesses investing in Eritrea should note the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and ensure these are applied to prevent the use of forced labor. Bilateral and multilateral actors should work for the release of all political prisoners and those detained for religious beliefs; call for an immediate end to incommunicado detention and torture as well as for all detainees to be brought before a judge or released, and international monitors should be given access to prisons. Efforts to protect those fleeing Eritrea, in particular unaccompanied children, should be strengthened, by granting temporary refuge, enforcing non-refoulement, promoting legitimate migration from Eritrea and counter human smuggling and trafficking.

The Consortium’s conclusion is that it is only after “progress has been made, and has been verified to have been made, [that] the way can then be open for a ‘fresh start’ and the resumption of ‘full engagement’, aid and other assistance to Eritrea.” It emphasizes that “until this takes place the EU must remain true to its commitment to human rights as an integral part of its relationship with its development partners. To do otherwise will only serve to strengthen the regime and to perpetuate the tragic exodus of Eritreans from their country, to drown in the Mediterranean, or arrive on the shores of Europe.”