

News in Brief

Ethiopia and Djibouti lay the ground work for stronger ties and economic integration

Somali Parliament approves the Prime Minister's new cabinet list

High-Level Event on the Humanitarian crisis in South Sudan

UN High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations' Africa Consultation

Ethiopian Exporters briefed on markets in Canada

The Washington Post "insults" the independent private media in Ethiopia

National Electoral Board's progress in national election preparations

News in Brief

Africa and African Union

The African Consultation of the United Nations Independent Panel on Peace Operations took place in Addis Ababa at the Economic Commission for Africa's Plenary Hall this week on Wednesday and Thursday (February 11-12). Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros also met Jose Ramos-Horta, former President of East Timor, Nobel Laureate, and Chairman of the Panel. **(See article)**

Ethiopia

Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, on an official visit to Djibouti, joined Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh on Saturday (February 7) for the first meeting of the Ethiopian – Djibouti High Level Joint Commission. The Prime Minister also addressed the Djibouti National Assembly on Sunday (February 8). **(See article)**

World Bank Africa Group Executive Director, Louis Rene Peter Larose, met Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn to discuss World Bank relations with Ethiopia on Monday (February 9). He said Ethiopia's rapid economic growth could be a model for other countries.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom on Saturday (February 7) met with the Foreign Minister of Armenia, Mr. Eduard Nalbandyan in Germany. Discussions covered issues relating to the strengthening of bilateral relations in all spheres of common interest.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos held discussions with Ambassador Eduardo Antonio Zuani, Argentine's State Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship on Tuesday (February 10). The two State Ministers signed a general Technical Cooperation Agreement covering joint research, exchange and provision of technical data, information, and products. The agreement also called for the establishment of a Joint Commission.

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Yinager Dessie met with Mr. Malcom Brown, Deputy Minister of Canada for International Cooperation on Saturday (February 7, 2015). The two Ministers' discussion dwelt on bilateral and regional matters of mutual interest. Ethiopia and Canada are commemorating 50 years of friendship this year.

Dr Allan Pamba, GlaxoSmithKline's Vice-President, Pharmaceuticals, East Africa and Government Affairs, Africa, meeting with State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Yinager Dessie, said on Thursday (February 12) that GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) considered Ethiopia as one of the strategic countries in Africa for its growth and investment plans.

Crown Princess Mary of Denmark along with Danish Trade and Development Minister, Mogens Jensen, will arrive in Ethiopia next week on a three-day visit (February 16-18) to exchange views with civil society organizations and individuals championing women's and girls' issues.

The Canadian Trade Facilitation Office (TFO), in association with Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopian Embassy in Ottawa and the Canadian Embassy in Addis Ababa, organized a one day seminar on "Exporting to Canada", in Addis Ababa on Tuesday (February 10). **(See article)**

On Wednesday (February 11), the National Election Board of Ethiopia said the process of voter registration between January 9 and February 19 was going well, and disclosed that a total of 34,000,261 people had so far registered to cast their vote. **(See article)**

The Ethiopian National Defense Force is celebrating the 3rd National Army Day this week. Celebrations opened in Bahr Dar, capital of the Amhara Regional State on Sunday (February 8) and will last until February 14.

Djibouti

President Ismail Omar Guelleh hosted an official visit by Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn at the weekend. **(See article)**

The Government of Djibouti on Wednesday (February 11) welcomed the Somali Parliament's approval of the new Somali government and reiterated its commitment to help the new government to strengthen security, promote national reconciliation and continue reconstruction.

Djibouti and the US co-hosted an African Partnership Flight week in Djibouti this week with some 80 airmen from Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and the U.S., to reinforce partnerships and exchange ideas.

Somalia

The Somali Federal Parliament on Monday (February 9) approved the newly appointed cabinet nominated by Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke by an overwhelming majority, with 191 votes in favor and 22 opposed. **(See article)**

The Federal Parliament passed Independent National Electoral Commission Bill by 113 votes in favor, 21 opposed and 10 abstentions at the beginning of the week. The bill has yet to be signed by the President.

The United States is providing AMISOM forces with twenty MRAP (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected) vehicles to provide them with additional protection while patrolling areas where mines and roadside bombs are still a problem. These MRAPs have been refurbished after service in Afghanistan and more can be supplied if needed.

South Sudan

Government and rebels traded allegations earlier this week accusing each other of breaking the ceasefire in Unity and Upper Nile states. The UN Mission in South Sudan called on both parties to urgently and strictly adhere to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Both sides are due in Addis Ababa at the end of next week for the next stage of discussions to set up a Transitional Government of National Unity.

The United Nations Office for the Humanitarian and Relief Coordination (OCHA), in collaboration with IGAD, held a successful High-Level Event on Humanitarian Crisis in South Sudan and its impact on the region on Monday this week (February 9) in Nairobi. (**See article**)

Sudan

Sudan Presidential Assistant, Ibrahim Ghandour, has been in Washington this week for talks with US officials from the State Department and the White House. His visit follows one by Foreign Minister, Ali Karti. The State Department said the visits did not imply any change in US policy and were a continuation of dialogue on a number of issues of long-standing concern.

The Sudanese army and the Chinese army signed a military cooperation agreement on Tuesday (February 10) within the framework of implementing the outcome of the strategic dialogue between the two nations which was held in China last January. China has also agreed to fund the educational programs run by the Sudanese army.

Ethiopia and Djibouti lay the ground work for stronger ties and economic integration

Last week, there were meetings of the Ethiopia-Djibouti Joint Ministerial Commission and of the High Level Commission during the official visit of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn to Djibouti. During the week, (February 5-8) In addition to the sessions between the ministers and the Heads of Government, the delegations signed a number of agreements and carried out visits to the port and around the city. Prime Minister Hailemariam addressed the Djibouti National Assembly and held discussions with the Ethiopian community living in Djibouti.

The first session of the 13th Joint Ministerial meeting was held on Thursday last week (February 5). Ethiopian Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros led a high level delegation which included the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Sufian Ahmed; Minister of Water, Irrigation and Energy, Alemayehu Tegenu; Minister of Transport, Workneh Gebeyehu; State Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos and other senior government officials. The

Djibouti delegation was headed by Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, Foreign Minister of Djibouti. Ambassadors and experts from both countries attended the meeting.

Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros in his opening remarks expressed the long relationship between the two peoples. He said “our peoples have lived in harmony for centuries. Our cultural and social ties span millennia and are a testimony to our close links.” He noted Ethiopia attached particular importance to its relations with the Republic of Djibouti adding “we are keen to further enhance them today.” He described his pleasure at the start of this year’s joint ministerial commission meeting and that this session also marked the upgrading of the Joint Ministerial Commission meeting to a High Level Summit of the Heads of State and Government.

Dr. Tedros noted that the region was now overcoming its challenges and starting to enjoy stability and move into economic development. He said realization of regional economic integration included continuing the momentum of discussions between countries in the region and indentifying the basic areas for regional development and intervention. Concerning the developments in the region, he said there was no doubt it was now beginning to move beyond its previous instability and conflict, and was now “concentrating on mutual cooperation and economic integration”. He said a prime example of this could be seen in Djibouti with the peaceful settlement of internal differences with the signing of a framework agreement with the opposition National Salvation Union. Dr. Tedros noted that the political and economic committees of the Joint Commission, meeting earlier in the week, had assessed the level of implementation of bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the areas of peace and security, port service, and trade and infrastructural interconnections. He said the Joint Border Administrators’ Commission and the Joint Military Committee had a significant impact in resolving security problems along the borders, bringing together local and state officials at all levels in both countries and helping to minimize destabilizing and terrorist activities. Equally, he underlined, firm cooperation in these sectors could also be strengthened through increased economic integration and investment ties. Dr. Tedros said realization of regional economic integration included continuing the momentum of discussions between the countries in the region and indentifying basic areas for intervention.

Djibouti’s Foreign Minister, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, agreed with Dr. Tedros that Ethiopia and Djibouti could now move their relationship to a higher level to expand on what had been achieved so far. He said it was a distinct honor and real pleasure to receive the Ethiopian delegation, adding “allow me to extend our warm welcome with open arms and brotherly feelings in Djibouti, your second country.” He said such high level delegations on both sides underlined the value both sides attached to the consolidation of their excellent relations. The Djibouti Foreign Minister said “Ethiopia is known for its growing economy, its cultural richness and Djibouti is known for being a logistical and transport hub, to quote only a few examples”. He said economic integration goals could be developed by successfully addressing small challenges and then moving on. He believed almost all countries in the region were working to make the regional integration agenda a success.

Speaking of the mutual and similar vision of the two countries, Foreign Minister Youssouf said their mutual vision of development of economic and political cooperation had “guided our

countries on the path of peace and stability away from the throes of war and discord.” The collaborative efforts of the two nations were demonstrated, he said, in the “promotion of unity against adversity, social cohesion against division and ownership of our destiny against cultural and economic copying.” This had contributed to build new images for both countries across the world. In terms of strengthening and bolstering economic cooperation, Mr. Youssouf mentioned a number of efforts currently in process, including Djibouti’s enormous efforts “to respond to the economic expansion of [Ethiopia] and thus facilitate it.” He said that “since the last Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) meeting in Addis Ababa in mid 2013, the Djibouti government has decided to invest in the construction of the two new ports in Tadjourah and in Djibouti.” Foreign Minister Youssouf also underlined the importance of keeping up the momentum of these developments saying “we need to conclude other agreements that are essential to our daily cooperation in the fields of trade, transport, energy, water and financial sector so as to increase our volume of economic relations and trade and bring better livelihood to our peoples.” He emphasized that Ethiopia and Djibouti would continue to work further in the areas agreed by the experts’ meetings earlier in the week.

The 13rd Joint Ministerial Commission meeting in its second session discussed the agreed minutes forwarded by the experts’ three committees; the political and security committee, the trade and economic committee and the port and transport committee. The Joint Ministerial Commission meeting reviewed the list presented by the experts. This included border trade; arrangements for resting areas for Ethiopian livestock export through Djibouti port; parking areas for Djiboutian transporter; pro-forma invoice procedures for custom clearance; and visa issues as well as the minutes agreed by the economic and commercial, security and political, and port and transport clusters. The Joint Ministerial Commission accepted the suggestions of the experts’ committees and recommended further regular consultations between the two sides. They issued instructions for the preparation of the matrix of implementation and for follow up mechanisms. Subsequently, several Protocols were signed: a Border Trade Protocol, which provides for an agreement on passenger services across the border; a Protocol on the Mega gas project; a Protocol on Mineral Resources; and a Protocol on the power supply for the railway line between Ethiopia and Djibouti. These were signed in the presence of President Ismail Omar Guelleh and Prime Minister Hailemariam.

The 1st Ethiopia-Djibouti High Level Joint Commission met on Saturday with delegations led by President Ismail Omar Guelleh and Prime Minister Hailemariam, with the aim of strengthening bilateral relations through expediting the economic integration. Prime Minister Hailemariam, appreciating the warm welcome for the delegation extended to him, said “I am always delighted to come to Djibouti, and especially on such an occasion – to further uplift and cement the all-rounded, multi-dimensional, relationship between our two countries”. Noting that Ethiopia and Djibouti were not only neighbors but countries that shared strong political, economic and cultural bonds, he said: “the peace, stability and development of Djibouti are our security, peace and development. The peace, security and prosperity of Ethiopia likewise provides the same for Djibouti”. He said the two countries were moving together, hand in hand, towards a common destiny. He emphasized that the current cooperation between the two countries was the best testimony that the nations could prevail over any bilateral or regional challenges together.

The Prime Minister welcomed the Government of Djibouti's role in solving regional challenges through the IGAD framework. He particularly hailed the Government of Djibouti for "the very important role it has been playing to bring peace and stability to Somalia and to South Sudan within the IGAD framework." He said Ethiopia was ready to redouble its effort to help South Sudanese political actors reach a negotiated settlement. He emphasized that it would continue its efforts to bring sustainable peace and stability to Somalia. He noted the importance of strengthening people-to-people relations between Ethiopia and Djibouti and underlined the need to explore other potential areas of cooperation to expedite the process of full economic integration not only between Ethiopia and Djibouti but also in realizing the vision of IGAD for the sub-region.

President Ismail Omar Guelleh stated "this visit of Prime Minister Hailemariam to Djibouti marks a milestone in the relationship between the two countries." Describing Djibouti and Ethiopia as strong, strategic partners, he said the peoples of the two countries shared the same values, culture and economic vision. The President said: "Our successes as economically, politically and socially rich nations are dependent on each other and we will use this visit to continue to identify ways to integrate and to grow our economies to create prosperity and security in East Africa."

In their final communiqué, the two leaders instructed the Foreign Ministers, the co-chairs of the Joint Ministerial Commission, to address and monitor the implementation of the High-Level Joint Commission decisions on a monthly basis. They reaffirmed their commitment and determination to consolidate the existing strategic relations between the two countries and their peoples in all areas of cooperation. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the encouraging progress so far in the areas of political, economic and social cooperation, especially on infrastructure interconnection between the two countries.

The two leaders expressed their commitment to contribute to the prevalence of peace and security throughout the region and to help the people of South Sudan in their efforts to bring peace and stability to their country. They condemned the heinous terrorist attacks in Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia and the countries of the sub region, perpetrated by Al-Shabaab and expressed their commitment to fight against these criminal acts in all their forms and manifestations. Both sides condemned the continued policy of destabilization of Eritrean government and urged the international community to strengthen the sanctions imposed on the regime in Eritrea. They reaffirmed the decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) to revitalize the authority to accelerate the process of regional integration. They expressed their determination to coordinate their efforts to this end. The two sides expressed their support to the Federal Government of Somalia and stressed the urgent need for concrete support to the Government in all areas so that the process of consolidating peace would be irreversible.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Hailemariam delivered an historic speech to the members of the Djibouti Parliament; also present were senior government officials from both countries. The Prime Minister, describing the opportunity to address the Parliament as a "once in a lifetime experience", welcomed it as providing a unique platform to speak to the people's representatives

of Djibouti, whose decisions contributed largely “to further cementing our deep fraternal relations”, and “through them to my Djiboutian brothers and sisters.” The Prime Minister spoke of his belief in the common destiny of the two countries and the commitment to see bilateral relations elevated to the highest possible level. He also described himself as an “enthusiastic proponent of enhanced regional integration that goes beyond the exceptionally exemplary relations that we currently enjoy.” He said high on his agenda was “a call to further action in our quest to meet the perennial demands of our two peoples for an ever closer cooperation, an even greater economic and social union and, who knows, even closer political integration, logically following from our belief in, and dedication to, fulfilling our historic common destiny.” Prime Minister Hailemariam quoted his predecessor’s words to the people of Djibouti: “we full well understand that our lots are tied together for better or worse.” He said the ever increasing people-to-people links demonstrated how committed the two peoples were to ever closer bonds. This was not just because the two countries were neighbors or because of the indispensable role of Djibouti port for Ethiopia. Certainly the ports, pipeline and other infrastructure development were expanding and “the sky is the limit for cooperation”, but the true essence of the depth of the relationship, and “the most precious asset that we share are peoples who have similar languages, culture and an unflappable desire to pursue common dreams and aspirations as well as leaders who have demonstrated the necessary political will to give full vent to the dreams and aspirations of their people for realizing their common destiny.”

The Prime Minister also spoke of the shared values of the two countries and peoples for greater unity and integration. He noted the importance of access to education and the need for cooperation, for “growing and prospering together”. He underlined the readiness of the Ethiopian side and his hope for “reciprocity from our Djiboutian sisters and brothers.” The Prime Minister said the choice was less complicated than people might think. He said “Let's send our children to each other's schools; let our administrators learn from each other's experiences; let our resources be utilized in the furtherance of each other's interests; let our industries serve each other's needs; let our two peoples enjoy the fullest possible measure of benefits emanating from the closest of relations without necessarily having to lose their respective unique choices as well as national identities.” He went on to suggest the world could learn from the close multi-faceted relations of Djibouti and Ethiopia and from the way they were taking their ties to an even higher level. He reminded his listeners that it was necessary to learn to sacrifice short term benefits for longer term strategic objectives. He said it was important that Ethiopia and Djibouti should stand together to defend their mutual strategic goals. This, he said, “is an article of faith we are ready to nurture and defend, at any cost; anyone who stands in the way of our Djiboutian brothers and sisters' quest for prosperity in the name of this or that excuse will most certainly earn our enmity.” History, the Prime Minister concluded “follows its own course; for us, it is incumbent upon us to play our own part, however small, in that grand design.”

Before leaving Djibouti, the Prime Minister also met with the Ethiopian community in Djibouti. In opening the meeting, Ethiopia’s Ambassador to Djibouti, Ambassador Suleman Dedefo, called the participation of the Ethiopian community in developments in Ethiopia significant, notably in its contributions towards the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Prime Minister Hailemariam explained the reasons for his visit to Djibouti as the Joint Ministerial Commission meeting between the two countries was being upgraded to Heads of Government level. He

briefed the community about sectoral developments in Ethiopia, and the government's efforts in supporting the Diaspora to develop themselves and their country, encouraging them to invest and participate in Ethiopia's progress. Participants raised a number of problems that caused difficulties for their work and life in Djibouti and requested the Government to work closely with Djibouti officials to improve these, including limited access to education in Djibouti for the Ethiopian community, limited space for religious activities, and issues over the transit of imports through the port. Prime Minister Hailemariam took note of the issues raised. He said some of these were in process of improvement, and promised that he would raise the others with Djibouti officials. He said that a wide range of developments between Ethiopia and Djibouti were taking place and the growing partnership between the Ethiopian Government, the Ethiopian community and the Djibouti Government would further improve the conditions for working and living in both countries.

Somali Parliament approves the Prime Minister's new cabinet list

The Somali Federal Parliament on Monday approved the newly appointed cabinet nominated by Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke by an overwhelming majority, with 191 votes in favor and 22 opposed. After the announcement of the official results, the Speaker called on the ministers to swear their oaths of office. The approval came after weeks of delay with MPs warning against the reinstatement of certain ministers from the previous cabinet. The Prime Minister announced his third cabinet list on Thursday last week. It was made up of 26 ministers, 26 Deputy Ministers and 14 Ministers of State. A majority of the new ministers are technocrats. They are new faces and there is widespread expectation they will be committed to delivering results for the needs and aspirations of the Somali people.

Addressing MPs, Prime Minister Sharmarke, who held his first cabinet meeting on Wednesday (February 9), outlined his government's aims for the coming year, with security and preparation for the 2016 elections being at the top of the list: "As a government, we will focus on creating a permanent political solution, improve the areas of security, justice, people's welfare, realization of the Vision 2016 plan, national reconciliation as well as uplifting of the country's infrastructure." Despite his experience, as Prime Minister from 2009 – 2010 and ambassador to the U.S. Prime Minister Sharmarke has a difficult task ahead: including the completion of the Vision 2016 framework to conduct a constitutional review and implementing it; completing the federal system, as well as preparation of National Elections by 2016; providing local government and security to create the enabling conditions for robust private-sector growth, expanding industry and meaningful employment opportunities; and implementing a national poverty reduction strategy focused on strengthening access to health care, education and employment, as well as promoting financial inclusion and developing public infrastructure as well as providing education, employment and engagement opportunities for youth.

Security remains a major problem despite the recent successes against Al-Shabaab. Its control over much of central and southern Somalia has been removed, but it still has significant forces and is able to hit high-profile targets in Mogadishu and other liberated towns as well as carry out

raids against AMISOM and Somali National Army forces. In order to hold free and fair elections all over the country peacefully, the government will need to ensure that all areas are under its control. Somalia's new Defense Minister General Abdulkadir Sheikh Ali "Diini" has said his main priority will be rebuilding Somalia's army. Speaking After his swearing in on Monday (February 9), General Diini said "the rebuilding of an army is not something that can be done overnight. You have to equip the army and rebuild the barracks. We will focus on that and make sure we build a national force." General Diini, a former head of the armed forces, said this would enable the Somali National Army to take control of the country's security without any assistance from foreign troops.

Another issue of immediate importance is the threat to remittances from the US to Somalia. Last week, the US-based Merchants Bank of California said it had halted services to money transfer companies. Aid groups said the decision threatened to stop up to 80 percent of the US\$200 million a year sent annually to Somalia from the US reaching their destination. Somalis across the world are dependent upon money transfer services to send money back home and these in turn need to use banking services within the US and other countries. If the banks refuse to provide these services, remittances come to an end, and the California bank was the last in the US to provide this. Hawala money transfers can't work unless banks in donor countries can transfer funds, and this is what the tight financial controls now in place effectively prevent. And financial regulators offer no alternatives. Overall, Somalis send a total of US\$1.3 billion each year back to Somalia. It is a figure that dwarfs foreign aid. US Congressman Keith Ellison described the decision as 'catastrophic' for Somalis in US who are accustomed to sending money to support to families and relatives in Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia. He said "for the past few years, I have been warning every regulator and official about the devastating effects of closing the last safe and legal pipeline to provide humanitarian remittances to Somalia." Aid agencies point out that remittances form the backbone of Somalia's economy. Hundreds of thousands of Somalis face food shortages. The numbers will rise if money transfer companies cannot remit funds from the United States.

Prime Minister Sharmarke said on Monday that he was fully aware of the devastating impact of the decision to stop Somali money transfer. He said he had personally spoken to the US Government on the issue and repeated calls to US banks to reconsider their decision and continue to support Hawala money transfers. He said no one in the money remittance sector disputed the vital importance of remittances to developing countries. Equally, he understood the limitations imposed by government regulations. He was therefore seeking through open negotiations, to do everything possible to find "a permanent legitimate and transparent solution in the interests of Somalis and regional economy."

Parliament's acceptance of the new government has been widely welcomed. The UN Security Council on Tuesday welcomed the approval of the cabinet list by the Somali Federal Parliament and meanwhile stressed the need for the federal government to accelerate delivery of its vision for 2016. In a press statement, the Security Council underlined the importance of the new political leadership in Somalia quickly delivering in priority areas, including the passage of key legislation to establish the National Independent Electoral Commission, progress toward the establishment and strengthening of interim regional administrations, the stabilization of areas

recovered from the militant group Al-Shabaab, and resuming the implementation and review of the provisional constitution, "without further delay." A joint statement released by the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, IGAD, the UK and the US reiterated their call for Somalia's leaders and institutions to work together to accelerate delivery of the milestones of the Federal Government's 'Vision 2016'. This, the statement said, together with the New Deal Compact for Somalia, remains the guiding framework for engagement. It added that it was important to preserve the unity and stability of the Federal Government. The statement said they were encouraged by the inclusion of female Ministers, adding that 'the participation of women, youth and minority groups and the commitment to work in an accountable way will remain vital as we move forward [in 2015] a critical year to ensure continued success on the road to sustained security and stability in Somalia.'

High-Level Event on the Humanitarian crisis in South Sudan

The United Nations Office for the Humanitarian and Relief Coordination (OCHA), in collaboration with IGAD, held a successful High-Level Event on Humanitarian Crisis in South Sudan and its impact on the region on Monday this week (February 9) in Nairobi. The objective was to mobilize additional funds for relief assistance for South Sudanese affected by the conflict, to save lives, alleviate suffering, protect the most vulnerable people and improve self-reliance and capacity building. Among those attending were UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, and UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, Forest Whitaker who warned that without peace, extreme human suffering would persist in South Sudan. They called on all parties to stop the violence, reconcile their differences and commit themselves to peace.

The conflict in South Sudan has caused 1.5 million to be internally displaced and more than half a million to flee as refugees to neighboring countries. According to recent UN reports, some 6.4 million South Sudanese are now in need of some kind of assistance with 2.5 million people facing severe food insecurity and up to 1.95 million internally displaced. It is estimated that the numbers of refugees in neighboring countries will rise to 820,000. It is a dire humanitarian situation that demands urgent funding and continued humanitarian access. Ms. Valerie Amos told the conference that "people are exhausted, they are desperately in need of assistance, the humanitarian situation is worsening, women are raped and children are recruited as soldiers."

Ambassador Negash Kebret who led the Ethiopian delegation, told the conference, that to address the impact of the crisis, in terms of economic burden, security and environmental degradation, on the States neighboring South Sudan, required the continued engagement of the international community in the provision of resources and other forms of support. Ethiopia, the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, he said, was hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighboring countries, and out of the total of over 650,000, according to the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, the figure of South Sudan refugees in Ethiopia had now reached over 250,000 with the number increasing daily. Kenya and Uganda, he said, were similarly sharing the burden of the refugee flow from South Sudan in a significant way.

Ambassador Negash said “it is in this spirit that, we IGAD Member States, are taking part in this event. More significantly, as neighbors, IGAD countries recognize their special responsibility in contributing to this global effort to extend support to the sisterly country of South Sudan in its hour of need.” He added: “We firmly believe that the collective response to this appeal for assistance will be a clear demonstration of the consciousness of the international community of its responsibility during such humanitarian catastrophic situation, and its solidarity with the suffering of the people of South Sudan.”

The High-Level Event concluded with pledges of US\$618 million, \$529 million of it new money, to support the humanitarian response in South Sudan. The funding will enable aid organizations to take advantage of road and river access to reach more people in the most cost-effective way, and pre-position supplies to enable delivery of aid in the rainy season when roads become impassable. Overall, the South Sudan response plan requires US\$1.8 billion in 2015; and an additional US\$809 million is required to the needs of South Sudan refugees and host communities and countries in the region.

UN High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations’ Africa Consultation

The African Consultation of the United Nations Independent Panel on Peace Operations took place in Addis Ababa at the Economic Commission for Africa’s Plenary Hall this week on Wednesday and Thursday (February 11-12). The UN High-Level Panel was established by UN Secretary- General Ban Ki-Moon to review UN peacekeeping operations to ensure that they are able to address the challenges facing the world of today and the future.

Prior to the meeting of the High Level Consultation Panel, Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros met a delegation, led by Jose Ramos-Horta, former President of East Timor, Nobel Laureate, and Chairman of the UN’s High-Level Independent Panel on Peacekeeping Operations, on Tuesday (February 10). The two parties reviewed African and global peacekeeping operations, discussing mechanisms to strengthen the partnership between the African Union and the United Nations in peacekeeping. They also shared details of Ethiopia’s considerable experience of successful peacekeeping operations, and considered mechanisms to enhance future operations. Dr. Tedros emphasized that consultations should be strengthened and encouraged between the troop contributing countries (TCCs) as well between AU and the UN peacekeeping operations. President Jose Ramos-Horta noted that Ethiopia had a special place in continental and global peacekeeping efforts since it is the seat of the African Union and an important troop contributing country with vast experience in conflict resolution in Africa. He agreed on the need for the secretariats of the UN and AU to work closely to come up with a more dynamic approach to peacekeeping operations.

President Ramos-Horta asked Dr. Tedros for recommendations for mechanisms of partnership between the troop contributing countries and cooperation between the UN and AU, to incorporate in the consultations of the High level Panel to consider ways to build the capacities

and improve troop deployment and operations. Dr. Tedros detailed the characteristics of Ethiopian peacekeeping operations including their prioritization of civilian protection and care and their operational flexibility in particular regional situations. He underlined the need for the UN to enhance financing and improvement of troop capacity and recommended a mechanism to build up a larger number of better quality troops who could be deployed quickly and at a lower cost. He agreed on the need to keep up the momentum of political consultation to bring coherence in peacekeeping deployment and operations. He stressed the UN and AU coordination should be improved. The two sides also discussed various related issues including the role of neighboring countries to facilitate operations in any given area. President Ramos-Horta suggested a high level forum could meet in the near future in partnership with Ethiopia and troop contributing countries in New York to continue consultations.

The African Consultation of the UN High-level Independent Panel took place the next day with representatives from the troop contributing countries and invited generals and senior officers with operational experience of peace operations participating. State Minister of Ethiopian Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos, opened the meeting, welcoming the Panel to Addis Ababa. He noted that “after the Brahimi report 15 years ago, we very much welcome the establishment of this panel to undertake a comprehensive review of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in all their aspects.” The State Minister noted that nine out of the sixteen UN peacekeeping operations are currently deployed in Africa and this was the reason that “in its 24th ordinary session held recently in Addis Ababa, the AU underlined its significance and instructed the commission to develop a common Africa position [on peacekeeping] taking into account the need to further promote an innovative and forward looking partnership between the AU and the UN in the advancement of peace, security and stability in Africa.”

Ambassador Berhane underlined the increasing magnitude of the difficulties that peacekeeping operations were encountering in relation to terrorism and extremism. He stressed “whether it is in Somalia, Mali, Central African Republic or the Democratic Republic of Congo, peacekeepers are increasingly dealing with terrorism or negative forces hell bent on creating havoc and mayhem against innocent civilians.” He said such challenges were testing the fundamental and longstanding principles of peacekeeping. He said there was a need for robust and clearly spelt out mandates and enhanced capacity for peacekeeping operations. It is only when such efforts are put in place that it is possible to ensure effective implementation of the required objectives and the security and protection of civilians as well as peacekeepers, he said. He pointed out there was a “need to recalibrate the existing normative and institutional framework to address the emerging challenges and draw practical lessons from past experiences.”

Ambassador Berhane praised the expanded and deepened cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union in recent years. At the same time, he noted that a more dynamic partnership including regional mechanisms was absolutely critical in order to respond more quickly and effectively to violent conflicts that might happen on the continent. In addition, he said, in the years ahead the support extended to the African Union and its institutional capacity for peacekeeping should be considered as a critical element in the overall objective of the maintenance of international peace and security. The UN, he said, should scale up its support to the AU in this regard. Ambassador Berhane noted Ethiopia’s significant contribution as one of

the largest troop contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and he reaffirmed Ethiopia's commitment to continue to play a meaningful role in the advancement of peace and security in Africa, and globally.

The High Level Panel divided into two working groups for the Consultation, with discussions focusing on conflict prevention, good offices, mediation and peacemaking in Africa and in strengthening cooperation and effectiveness. Also on the agenda were the recommendations of the Troop Contributing Countries for Improving UN peacekeeping operations. The working groups recommended a number of mechanisms for improving various elements of peacekeeping deployment and operations among which were mechanisms to prioritize civilian protection, creating a forum for continuous further consultation, integrating peace building and state building, formalizing pre-deployment training for specific regional situations, and creating a joint forum for the UN and the AU to build upon existing operational mechanisms.

Ethiopian Exporters briefed on markets in Canada

The Canadian Trade Facilitation Office (TFO), in association with Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ethiopian Embassy in Ottawa and the Canadian Embassy in Addis Ababa, organized a one day seminar on "Exporting to Canada, on Tuesday (February 10). The seminar, held under the Canadian Market Access and Capacity Building Program (2014-2018), allowed Canadian experts from the TFO to brief Ethiopian exporters on strategies to export products to Canada and detail the helpful trade readiness capacity building services available. TFO Canada, set up by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in 1985, is a not-for-profit organization with a mandate to facilitate access to Canadian markets and to share Canadian trade expertise for the benefit of smaller exporters in developing countries. It is funded largely by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, partner governments and other sources. The seminar attracted around 70 participants from various sectors including trade supporting government institutions and exporters and processors from coffee, oil seeds and pulses, textiles and garment producers, the leather and leather products sector, and experts from the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations (ECCSA).

The Canadian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador David Usher, noted that TFO Canada was funded by the Government of Canada to deal with challenges of global poverty by promoting sustainable economic development through market information, advice and enhanced engagement. He said Ethiopian exports to Canada had tripled since 2001, but they still remained modest. He believed seminars of this type could encourage businesses from developing countries further investigate market opportunities in Canada. Despite the market accessibility offered for Least Developed Countries through Canada's Market Access Initiative (MAI), in particular for textile, apparels, and leather products, the size of exports to Canada had been minimal. He advised Ethiopian exporters to take advantage of the market information being offered by TFO Canada and said increased exports mutually benefit both countries. Ambassador Usher noted that as this year, 2015, marked the 50th Anniversary of Canada-Ethiopian diplomatic relations the

embassy would be holding a series of programs to celebrate the partnership between Canada and Ethiopia.

Ato Kebede Abera, Deputy Chief of Cabinet of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said that TFO Canada had made some important contributions to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in many countries. He said Ethiopian exporters could benefit from building up their competitive capacity in terms of design, quality, price or service, for a better share of Canadian markets. He expressed his hope to see greater trade flows through practical and tailor-made training. He said the seminar could create an interactive platform for Ethiopian exporters to understand and pay attention to consumer trends and Canadian trade rules and regulations. Speaking of bilateral relations, Ato Kebede said Ethiopia and Canada had built a strong development partnership, visible in the areas of development of women's entrepreneurship, investment climate improvement, and micro and small business growth. Ethiopia had immensely benefited from market access opportunities offered by Canada to least developed countries, including tariff-free access for textile and garment exports. Canada is one of the countries that has been involved in providing training in export preparedness, provision of expert advice and market exposure as well as capacity building support to SMEs to allow them to enter, benefit and move up global value chains. Ato Kebede mentioned that TFO Canada had recently offered an opportunity to about a dozen Ethiopian textile and leather exporters to participate in the Canada-Africa Business Summit held last September. He welcomed the dedication and determination of Canadian Government and business leaders to inject new impetus into Ethiopia's economic take-off and modernization and to create a mutually cooperative partnership. There was still much more that could be done to benefit from the potential of increased economic relations.

The Director of Partnerships and Programs of TFO-Canada, Mrs. Ainsley Butler, presented details of trade information portals, rules and technical regulations, product certification and classification, as well as tariff treatment, application of duties and taxes, market entry strategies, and of the services offered by TFO Canada. She gave details of the documents needed and of the system requirements that would help Ethiopian exporters and of where to find the necessary information. She said TFO-Canada could assist in introducing exporter missions to experienced buyers or distributors in Canada and offered tailor-made consulting services to assist individual SMEs from developing countries to enter the Canadian market. Overall, she explained, exporter training was designed for participants to learn practical planning techniques and how to produce export plans for new firms or for existing and emerging women exporters. These areas of engagement were in line with Ethiopia's priorities, she said, and TFO-Canada was encouraged to try to find the "right mix of deepening its trade capacity training based on priorities of exporters and also concentrating its intervention to ensure maximum impact."

Ato Nigusu Kebede, Business Promotion Director at the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry, also made a presentation on "Foreign Trade Promotion Services" offered by the Ministry and its diplomatic missions abroad, to support Ethiopian producers and exporters. The Director said that external economic relations was a major priority of Ethiopia's foreign policy, and he emphasized that the external economic dimension of the foreign policy and political resources was concentrated on economic issues and promoting external capital and technology inflows to Ethiopia.

Trade is one of the strategies that can be exploited to enhance growth prospects, and Ethiopia attaches great importance to foreign direct investment from all over the world including Canada. Continued and sustained political support, guidance and engagement from the leaders of both countries is imperative. Supporting the agenda of cooperative economic partnership should continue, it is essential to encourage Canadian business confidence in the growing economic importance of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Government recognizes that trade facilitation is an essential ingredient in making supply chains work for developing countries, and it is exerting maximum efforts towards this end. Reducing the cost of trading has real economic deliverables for countries like Ethiopia which have the potential to exploit comparative advantage in such sectors as textiles, leather production, agro-processing, floriculture and agriculture. It should be added that for Ethiopia, it is also imperative that international transactions consider the active engagement and economic well-being of women. In other words, the existence of fair economic allotment is an indispensable foundation for a democratic dispensation and sustainable development and stability. The support of TFO Canada in the promotion of women-led export business is particularly welcome.

The Washington Post “insults” the independent private media in Ethiopia

Last week, the US news paper, the Washington Post, produced an editorial entitled “Ethiopia’s stifled press” claiming among other things that Ethiopia has no private media outlets. This was a real slap in the face for the number of independent private media outlets that operate freely in the country. There is really no excuse why the Post couldn’t have checked on the English (if not the Amharic) press which includes Reporter (English version), Fortune, Capital and Addis Standard, or even looked at their websites. One might also add there the briefest glance at these outlets would see plenty of criticism of government and government policies, and there’s a good deal more in the Amharic papers. Justifiably incensed by the display of such incompetence by a mainline US newspaper, Addis Standard tartly observed that it served no one, particularly not the independent media outlets, including Addis Standard magazine, to generalize that the government had left “Ethiopia with no independent private media outlets.” That, it said, wasn’t true. Describing it as “a consistent mistake the world keeps on making”, it added that this sort of statement “comes as an insult to all of us.”

In fact, the Washington Post clearly hadn’t bothered to check whether Ethiopia’s press was independent, stifled or free. Indeed, not only was it obvious it hasn’t read any of the Ethiopian press outlets in English, nor presumably in Amharic, it was content to rely on one single source for its allegations, and this not for the first time, was Human Rights Watch which recently released yet another in its long line of reports deliberately designed to try to affect the outcome of the electoral process in Ethiopia. One might note that the Government has tried on a number of occasions to engage with HRW to explain the reality of democratic progress and other developments taking place in Ethiopia. Despite all such efforts, HRW has consistently made no effort to acknowledge the positive changes that continue to take place in the country. The next elections are due in May, and HRW, as in 2010 and 2005 when it released several reports

making largely unfounded allegations in the run up to the voting, is again making every effort to influence the results.

The theme of its latest report was the freedom of the media. Published last month, its title is “Journalism is Not a Crime: Violations of Media Freedom in Ethiopia.” The title, of course, begs the question. Journalism is not a crime, and no one on Ethiopia thinks it is, nor has anyone ever suggested it might be. But even if journalism is not a crime, that does not mean that journalists never commit crimes. The implication is an interesting example of what might almost be considered reverse double standards. For journalists to be arrested and convicted of crime in, for example the UK as a number have been over the last year or so, is apparently quite acceptable. They were convicted, inter alia, of phone tapping and other criminal activity for journalists to be convicted of rather more serious crimes, including terrorist activities and support, is apparently unacceptable – at least in Ethiopia. HRW, for example, apparently considers ESAT, a TV station operating outside Ethiopia, in Holland, and broadcasting on behalf of a designated terrorist organization, Ginbot 7, which is openly dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Government in Ethiopia in alliance with Eritrea, as an independent and unbiased media outlet. ESAT is by any standards closely associated with avowed enemies of the Ethiopian state and has frequently and openly made public its support for the violent overthrow of the government. It would scorn to be considered unbiased or independent.

HRW, after devoting twenty of thirty pages to allegations of media harassment by the government, does also admit that journalists from the state media and private can also suffer from “threats, harassment and intimidation” from opposition sources, particular in the Diaspora – the main source of HRW’s allegations about the Government. However, HRW manages to limit its remarks on this aspect to no more than one brief paragraph (on p.28 of its report) quoting one single journalist, based outside Ethiopia who points out “ if we do not criticize the government for everything, the opposition media attacks us mercilessly with online smear campaigns and by email, phone and even in person”. And those responsible for this sort of activity are exactly HRW’s sources. It might be added that this sort of activity, despite HRW’s dismissive and brief reference, is actually common and widespread.

In fact, neither the Washington Post nor Human Rights Watch made any real attempt to understand the workings of the media in Ethiopia. After this government came to power and committed itself to freedom of the press (for the first time in Ethiopia), there was an explosion of publications, far more in fact that the market could absorb. Within a few years, numbers began to decline and in face of a relatively limited actual or potential readership a considerable number of papers have closed. One effect of this has been that many journalists subsequently left the country, but not because the papers have been closed by the government or the journalists exiled. In most cases, the papers for which they worked have simply not been efficient or productive enough to survive. People just didn’t buy copies most of the papers which have disappeared.

One reason for this has certainly been the poor quality of much of the journalism and reporting. One editor of a now closed (Amharic) paper was asked a couple of years ago why he continued to print what he knew were lies about the then Prime Minister Meles. His response was “I know they are lies but my readers expect me print them; if I don’t, they won’t buy the paper”. Possibly

an exaggeration but one containing more than a core of truth as reading his paper, much praised by the opposition (and by international advocacy organizations who probably never read it) would have quickly demonstrated. One prominent individual, much feted by the international media, was responsible for publishing a series of articles some years ago specifically supporting the Holocaust and implying that something similar might be usefully carried out in Ethiopia. He is now, not surprisingly, in jail, although apparently regarded by HRW and other advocacy organizations as a defender of free speech and outspoken critic of government 'repression'. Many of those who left the country have been quick to make allegations against the government and underline their credentials as advocates of a free press fighting repression. All too often they appear to have been strongly encouraged to do so after they left by international advocacy organizations.

This underlines exactly why so many of the opposition media outlets no longer operate in Ethiopia itself. The Government has actually had no need to use all the supposed "various strategies and techniques to close down publications" listed by HRW. The quality of the journalism and reporting has provided reason enough. The majority of cases of "financial difficulties", that HRW accuses the Government of organizing, were not brought about by government harassment so much as by a failure to sell enough copies. Publications simply went bankrupt after failing to tap into a sufficient market. In some cases, it seems clear that the setting up of a publication or the creation of particular media enterprises was specifically intended to cause disruption and incite violence and disturbance. Their subsequent closure had more to do with the fact that they were specifically opposed to law and order rather than to any claimed support for freedom of the press.

Of course, journalists defend other journalists, and their advocacy organizations will do the same, but that's no excuse for exaggerating, even falsifying the facts. Ethiopia has always tried suspected criminals on the basis of regular judicial procedures – though certainly these can sometimes be criticized for delays and people have been held in unsatisfactory conditions. But there is no evidence for the routine dismissal by advocacy organizations of all such cases without exception or the similar blanket denial of the validity of all judicial processes. That comes under the heading of the wild and unsubstantiated exaggeration propagated by opposition movements in the Diaspora and accepted uncritically by advocacy organizations which seldom, if ever, check their information or the political affiliation of their sources. As an international media outlet, the Washington Post, which is no doubt dedicated to unbiased accuracy, shouldn't need to parrot unvarnished opposition versions of the situation, as HRW persistently does, nor disparage the probable results in advance of what will actually be a genuine, if currently rather one-sided, democratic election.

The fact is that there is no systematic repression of the independent media. It has been over 20 years since censorship was abolished in Ethiopia and the content of media reports left to the media organizations themselves. The prevailing environment of media freedom in Ethiopia today clearly shows that journalists who behave responsibly can and do operate freely. But Ethiopia has suffered a great deal of terrorist activity inside the country as well as facing the very active potential threat of Al-Qaeda groups operating in neighboring states, in Yemen and Somalia, and even in Kenya. Journalists are not saints; they can be terrorists as well as supporters, even active

members, of armed opposition movements. The country cannot afford to allow unconstrained incitement to ethnic and religious hatred. The track record of Ethiopia is very clear where respect of the constitutional order and the law are concerned: anyone who breaks the law, whether government officials or journalists, will face prosecution. Being a journalist, or a member of an opposition party, or a government official, does not constitute a license to violate the law. Any action that compromises the integrity of the constitutional order threatens to obstruct the democratic process, a process to which the Government and people remain committed. The building of a democratic society in Ethiopia is not a luxury, but a necessity for building a vibrant, responsible and united Ethiopia where the equality of all nations and nationalities of the country is respected.

National Electoral Board's progress in national election preparations

An overall legal, political and institutional framework for the national elections and the general management of the electoral process are necessary elements in advancing the cause of peaceful and free elections, democratic governance, pluralism and, indeed, of inclusive prosperity. The performance of all the actors in pre-election activities is also significant in ensuring the electoral processes satisfy the demands for genuine, transparent and democratic elections. These elements in the electoral system and process, spearheaded by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), come as a result of the cooperation and joint commitment of all involved including the Government, the general public and political parties as well as civil society organizations. The NEBE's early preparedness, drawing on past experience to strengthen and learn from weaknesses apparent in past elections, and its swift practical discharge of pre-election activities, have served as a basis to encourage popular participation. It has also enabled people to enjoy their constitutional rights and freedoms, to make elections free and fair, and in addition assist in consolidating democratic governance. No room has been left for anyone to cast doubt over the preparations and the pre-election activities designed to ensure the upcoming elections are free, fair and democratic.

One demonstrable point has been the impressive preparations done by the NEBE to make voter registration a success, and its activities were matched by the people's resolve to take their election cards in time. This emphasized the Board's determination to set the democratic arrangements on a solid and firm basis. Compared with the previous four rounds of elections, this one has produced an unparalleled number of people registering to vote in May's National Elections. On Wednesday (February 11), the NEBE, noting that the process of voter registration between January 9 and February 19 was going well, disclosed that a total of 34,000,261 people had so far registered to cast their vote since the commencement of registration. This necessary element for the conduct of free, transparent, participatory and competitive elections underlines the determination of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in carrying out its constitutional duties. This week the Board, reiterating its call to all eligible members of the electorate to register within the allotted time, noted that the number of voters registered so far amounted to over 95% of the targets it had set. It also said the surge in numbers was unprecedented in Ethiopia's electoral history. The numbers of registered voters in the previous national elections in 2010 and 2005 amounted to totals of 31,926,520 and 25,600,000 voters respectively.

These results testify to the NEBE's impressive role in encouraging people to register through the employment of media and other efforts. It also demonstrates the will and enthusiasm of the country's nations, nationalities and peoples for a democratic system, to provide this as the only viable avenue for any political party to assume political power and take up the authority of a government. In other words, it emphasizes the collective desire and resolve that the future of the country must be determined and positions of political power filled through, and only through, the conduct of democratic, genuine and fair elections. In this context, the NEBE, in close cooperation with the media, the Government and other relevant bodies, is playing a major role in increasing female voter participation. Indeed, the increased participation of women in voter registration is testimony to the way the NEBE has carried out its constitutional duties to promote equal participation in the country's political affairs.

In an interview with the Ethiopian News Agency, Ato Demisewu Benti, Public Relations Director at the NEBE, also announced on Wednesday (February 11) that out of a total of 60 political parties, 38 had so far fielded some 1,306 candidates, of whom 238 were women, to run for the House of People's Representatives. Thirty one parties had also registered 2,567 candidates, of whom 682 were women, to run for seats in the Regional States and the two City Administration Councils of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. The registration of candidates took place between December 25 and February 11. Ato Demisewu said that the registration of candidates had been supposed to end on February 4, but because some political parties had been failed to complete the process on time and had requested an extension, the registration was extended for another week until February 11. Announcing the extension, the NEBE had appealed to all parties to immediately field their nominated candidates and emphasized that no further extension would be allowed. The Public Relations Director added that the political parties had used the added time effectively in registering their candidates. He noted that the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front had taken the lead in the number of candidates to run for the elections at the House of People's Representatives – a total of 457; the opposition Ethiopian Federal Democratic Union Forum (MEDREK) had registered 214 candidates to run for the House of People's Representatives. The Public Relations Director also said the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front had registered the greatest number of women candidates for the House of Representatives, 168; as well as a further 578 women standing for seats in the Regional States and the two City Administration Councils of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. He pointed out that according to the adjusted time frame for the election, campaigning was now set to start on February 23.

The momentum and the interest in the election is growing as the NEBE takes the lead in facilitating the conditions for an effective and responsible democratic electoral system that values the participation of political parties and peoples and gives shared responsibility for the success of the election to political parties, civil society organizations, the Government and the people. This is reflected in the amount of air time allocated to the contesting political parties. Genuine democratic elections display the peaceful competition of political ideas, programs, platforms and personalities on various national issues. The NEBE has, therefore, made media campaigning one of the central elements to help the nations, nationalities and peoples obtain adequate, impartial and balanced information to allow them to make informed decisions and

choices. Allocating air time for campaigning among the respective parties is a necessity to allow them to communicate their message to the electorate. The NEBE has allocated broadcast and press coverage through a formula based on the number of seats held by a party in the Federal House of People's Representatives and the Regional Councils at the last election; the number of candidates chosen by the party for this election; the number of women candidates fielded; and the fact of participation in the election. Ten percent of the air time is allotted equally to all political parties on the basis of participation. Forty percent is allocated on the basis of the number of seats previously held by parties in the Federal House of People's Representatives and the Regional Councils; and another forty percent on the basis of the number of candidates each party has put forward. The remaining ten of the time is divided among political parties on the basis of the number of female candidates each party has produced. The NEBE said that the formula used this time round was fairer than the allocations made previously and had the added advantage of improving the opportunities for women candidates.

The formula, which covers the activities of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority over the state-owned broadcast and press coverage, was devised by the NEBE after close discussion with all political parties at both Federal and Regional levels on the criteria necessary and the need for air time allocations to get out their required messages and political views. The formula underlines the central right to information as well as the required need to express the diversity of views and the importance attached to freedom of speech for parties to argue for their legitimate right to hold political power and advance the cause of democracy. The use of the media and of air time also has the benefit of requiring political parties to make constructive and productive debate and launch serious and realistic discussion on the real national economic, social, political and security issues in order to let people make an informed choice. It is worth underlining that this formula mainstreams gender equality as a central factor in the country's political processes and will help women take their rightful place at the heart of the electoral process, allowing them to own their future destiny as well as make a real difference in their lives.

The successful preparations being undertaken by the NEBE and even more important the people's desire to have their say in the May National Elections is a clear manifestation of the resolve for a better tomorrow through the execution of peaceful, free and fair elections. This successful implementation of the NEBE's constitutional mandate and duties, in close collaboration with all stakeholders, is also a clear signal of the way the country's institutions, as well as the laws and rules laid down by the Constitution and electoral legislation, are effectively managing the electoral process and the activities of stakeholders. This round of the elections also exhibits increased and effective women's participation in national decision making processes. There is a real opportunity for all political parties to demonstrate real boldness in competing for the genuine reflection of the voices, aspirations and demands of the people in embodying a democratic developmental state at peace with itself and with the outside world.

Voting is scheduled to take place on May 24 ; the final results will be declared on June 22.