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News in brief

African Union

The 17th Summit of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Authority of Heads of State and Government was held in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo on Wednesday and Thursday this week (February 26-27), under the theme "Consolidating Intra-COMESA Trade through Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development". (See article)

The two day 2014 African Philanthropy Forum under the theme “Access, Equity and Opportunity” was opened by Dr. Tedros Adhanom, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Dr Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Monday (February 24). The Forum aimed to promote inclusive development in Africa in collaboration with stakeholders and discussions covered leveraging youth, advancing women and girls, Africa’s philanthropic infrastructure, and celebration of the power of philanthropy.

IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP) met to consider its annual report for 2013 on Tuesday (February 25) in Addis Ababa and detail its efforts to strengthen the security sector capacity of member states during a largely successful year in which it carried out 38 of 41 planned programs. (See article)

Ethiopia

A delegation led by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn attended the celebration of Nigeria’s centenary on Thursday in Nigeria’s capital Abuja. The delegation included Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom. (See article)

Foreign Minister, Dr. Tedros, met with Mrs. Marian Schuegraf, Head of Division for East Africa, Horn of Africa, Madagascar, IGAD, and the EAC at the German Foreign Ministry, on Friday (February 21). Mrs. Schuegraf said the purpose of her visit was to take the relationship between Germany and Ethiopia to a higher level, noting that relations should not be restricted to peace and security issues but could now focus on other areas including development.

This week, the fifth Ethio-Japan High Level Policy Dialogue Forum was held to discuss efforts to support the implementation of the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), 2010/11-2014/15, and also for formulation of the next-five year plan, focusing on industrial development. **(See article)**

Ato Alemayehu Tegenu, Minister of Water, Irrigation and Energy, emphasized that Ethiopia has the right to utilize its water resources. Speaking at a consultative workshop in Addis Ababa on Sunday (February 23) Minister Alemayehu said Ethiopia had always been willing and ready to share trans-boundary waters with neighboring countries. This was why it had signed the Nile River Basin Cooperation Framework Agreement. Lower riparian countries, he said, would benefit highly from the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). **(See article)**

The new President of Somalia's Puntland State, Dr. Abdiweli Mohamed Ali, in his first trip outside Puntland since taking office visited Ethiopia this week, meeting with Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros on Sunday (February 23) and with Prime Minister Hailemariam. His delegation included Puntland's Interior Minister, Ahmed Elmi Osman; Information Minister, Abdi Weli Hersi Abdulle; and the Commander of Puntland Forces, General Said Mohamed Hersi.

Puntland President, Dr. Abdiweli, arrived in Jigjiga, capital of the Somali Regional State for an official two day visit on Tuesday (February 24). He was welcomed by the President of Somali Regional State, Abdi Mohamed Omar, at Jigjiga's Wilwal International Airport

An agreement was signed on Tuesday (February 25) between the Governments of Ethiopia and Poland for a loan of US\$50 million to support agricultural modernization in Ethiopia. Signed by Finance and Economic Development Minister, Sufian Ahmed and the Polish Ambassador Jacek Jankowski the loan is to be used to finance delivery of agricultural goods to be imported from Poland and augment agricultural modernization activities.

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, and Ethiopia's Foreign Ministry held a workshop this week (February 23 -28) on Countering Violent Extremist Messaging. **(See article)**

Ethiopia's Ambassador to Australia, Ambassador Arega Hailu Teffera addressed a symposium of Ethiopian-Somalis on Sunday (February 23) in Perth, Western Australia to identify the challenges they face. Ambassador Arega spelt out developments in the Somali Regional State including construction of roads, water facilities, irrigation schemes and wireless telecom links as well as significant growth and improvement in health services and in primary and secondary education, vocational training centers and the establishment of Jigjiga University.

The Ethio-American Doctors Group and the Global Ethiopian Medical Enterprise, who collectively number over 250 physicians of Ethiopian origin, have agreed to merge their efforts to pursue a common goal of building and establishing a world-class Center of Excellence Hospital in Addis Ababa.

Djibouti

China's Minister of Defense, General Chang Wanquan and a delegation of top Chinese military officials including Du Jingchen, Chief of Staff of the Chinese navy (PLAN) and Liu Lei, political commissar of the Xinjiang Military Area Command (MAC) of the Chinese army, arrived in Djibouti on Monday (February 24) for a two day visit. General Wanquam held talks with President Ismail Omar Guelleh and other officials including Prime Minister Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed and Defense Minister, Hassan Darar Houffaneh.

China's Minister of Defense and Djibouti's Minister of Defense signed a security and defense strategic partnership agreement on Tuesday (February 25). Djibouti has offered China use of Djibouti as a home port for the Chinese navy in return for military co-operation to expand operational capacities of the Djiboutian armed forces, particularly the navy and air force, for assistance over surveillance, including radar, and training.

Kenya

A Kenyan parliamentary inquiry has apparently blamed poor communications and inadequate preparations for failures in handling the Westgate shopping mall attack in September when at least 67 people were killed by Al-Shabaab. It called for a new body to coordinate the activities of intelligence and security agencies.

A Kenyan court on Wednesday (February 26) dropped charges against 41 men arrested earlier this month after a police raid on the Masjid Mussa mosque in Mombasa on February 2. 129 suspects were originally arrested and charged with being members of Al-Shabaab. 33 others had been released earlier and the remaining 29 have now been released on bail.

Somalia

A conference organized by African Union in Mogadishu this week was attended by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, MPs and ministers, and federal and state government officials as well as the Special Representative of the United Nations for Somalia Nicholas Kay, the AU Representative to Somalia, Ambassador Salah Annadif, and international community representatives. President Mohamud stressed it was important for action and delivery of the pledges made in Brussels last September, for the New Deal Compact to become operational.

Prime Minister, Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed, detailed plans to address terrorist threats at a press conference on Wednesday (February 26). These include a ministerial investigation into last Friday's attack on Villa Somalia, a high level task force to work on security at district level and improve coordination, an investigation of the performance of the security agencies, and the drafting of new anti-terrorism laws.

The suicide attack by Al-Shabaab on the Presidential compound in Mogadishu on Friday (February 21) has been condemned "in the strongest terms" by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Representative in Somalia, Nicholas Kay. The UN Security Council also said it was "appalled" by the attack and that "this and other acts of terrorism would not weaken its determination to support the peace and reconciliation process in Somalia."

The Federal Government of Somalia and the United Nations on Wednesday (February 26) signed an agreement to strengthen relations and cooperation between the government and the UN. Foreign Minister, Abdirahman Duale Beileh, and the UN Special Representative for Somalia, Nicholas Kay, signed the agreement in the presence of President Hassan Sheikh.

IGAD's Ambassador to Somalia, Mohamed Abdi Affey, has promised more support to the Federal Government. Ambassador Affey told Somali Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed at a meeting on Monday (February 24) that IGAD was committed to continuing its support to Somalia until "we have confirmed the country has fully emerged from the long-standing problems and becomes peaceful."

State Minister for the Presidency of the Jubba Administration, Abdiqani Abdi Jama, stressed the need to fully implement the Jubba agreement signed last August in Addis Ababa. Speaking on Wednesday (February 26) he said a number of key issues in the agreement had yet to be implemented including integration of militia forces. New management for Kismayo seaport and airport is due to have been appointed this week.

Reports from the Gedo, Hiiraan, Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle regions claim that Al-Shabaab has launched a mobilization campaign to try to recruit more young fighters against the planned AMISOM offensive, demanding each clan should provide at least 300 fighters.

A delegation from Mogadishu, including MP's from the area, arrived in Baidoa, the capital of Bay region, on Wednesday (February 26) to participate in the formation of a new administration for Bay, Bakool and Lower Shebelle: South Western Regional Administration.

Large numbers of Ethiopian troops, accompanied by Somali military forces from Bula Hawo, Dollow and Luuq arrived in Garbaharey, the capital of Somalia's Gedo region on Tuesday (February 24) as part of the opening of AMISOM operations against Al-Shabaab held areas around Bur Duba and Bardere.

The European Union started its first military training mission for Somali forces (EUTM Somalia) in Mogadishu on Monday (February 23). The EU training mission, previously stationed in Uganda, moved to Mogadishu in December. It includes trainers from Italy, Sweden, and Hungary.

South Sudan

Kenya's President Kenyatta on a visit to South Sudan's capital, Juba, Wednesday (February 26), called for a speedy resolution to the South Sudan conflict after holding talks with President Salva

Kiir. He said his visit was to extend “support and stand in solidarity” with the government. Talks covered the status of the remaining political detainees, the need to respect the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, the position of IGAD member countries and formation of an interim government.

Ethiopia’s Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom visited South Sudan’s capital Juba on Tuesday (February 25), meeting President Salva Kiir and other senior officials of the South Sudan Government, and delivering a message from Prime Minister Hailemariam, the current chair of IGAD. Talks with President Kiir focused on the peace process and ensuring that the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement is implemented fully as soon as possible.

South Sudan government and SPLM-in-Opposition negotiators confirmed on Wednesday (February 26) that IGAD mediators had put the formation of an interim government on the table for discussion. Representatives of the two parties, meeting in Addis Ababa, were quoted as saying they accepted the proposal in principle.

Clashes erupted at the weekend between pro- and anti-government forces in Jonglei state, the largest state in South Sudan, with both sides blaming the other of launching attacks and violating the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement.

Sudan

The Government of Sudan has agreed to accept a draft framework agreement put forward by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) moderating the peace talks between the Sudan Government and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement –North (SPLM-N). Last week, AUHIP Chairman, Thabo Mbeki adjourned the stalled for ten days. The two parties failed to achieve any progress in their last round of direct talks (February 13- 18). .

The centenary celebration of Nigeria

The centenary celebration of Nigeria was held on Thursday (February 27, 2014) in the capital Abuja. The colorful celebrations marked the centenary of the amalgamation of the northern and southern British protectorates to form the state of Nigeria in 1914. A hundred years ago, the British Governor, Lord Fredrick Lugard, united the then separate protectorate areas through the Zungeru Declaration to form Nigeria. The centenary commemoration at the Abuja International Conference Center was attended by more than a dozen African leaders, including the Presidents of Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Liberia, Malawi and Senegal as well as Prime Minister Hailemariam and Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros and Francois Hollande, President of France and Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Union. Dr. Dlamini Zuma Chairperson of the African Union Commission also attended the ceremony.

The celebration was also marked by an international conference on “Human Security, Peace and Development: Agenda for the 21st Century Africa”. Opening the Conference, Nigeria’s President

Goodluck Jonathan noted that governments place a high premium on regime security often at the expense of people's security. He said that Africa's development, evident in its increasing economy, growing middle class and its expanding democratic practices, meant it was time to reflect on the nexus of human security, development and peace. President Jonathan highlighted the need to work on the empowerment of woman, on reducing global carbon emissions, and youth employment for the betterment of society. He called the mindless acts of murder committed by the Boko Haram extremists as neither Nigerian nor African and noted that security issues cost Africa more than US\$18 billion.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn also spoke on the "The imperatives of Human Security, Peace and Development in Africa," noting that Africa had for centuries found itself at the receiving end of injustice with its people constantly subjected to all kinds of senseless violence imaginable, whether through the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism or, more recently, through neoliberal economic orthodoxies that had caused unparalleled havoc to Africa and its people. Africa was beleaguered by "pervasive violence, rampant conflict and war, extreme deprivation and abject poverty," as the theme of the conference aptly captured. Aspects of human security must be defined over and above mere absence of conflict, he said, to encompass human rights, good governance, access to education and health care among other things, adding that "ensuring human security in the context of our continent is about addressing the myriad challenges that we have faced for decades on end. These challenges are not only questions of development, though they are certainly that; they are also at the heart of many civil wars and conflicts throughout the continent past and present." The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of improved governance structures, inclusive political arrangements and proper development policies to ensure human security, peace and development in order to continue the positive trajectory of the development of Africa. He said "That is, of course, why we need to put in place policies that ensure equitable distribution of wealth among citizens; and ensuring economic development, as opposed to just growth; in other words [demonstrating] a need for a developmental role for the state."

Speaking about continental governance efforts, Prime Minister Hailemariam said the AU's constitutive act clearly stipulated that the security threat to Africans anywhere was no longer the exclusive responsibility of the state. Its principle of non-indifference mandated each member state to act when citizens of a member state were subjected to collective violence such as genocide and crimes against humanity. "The continent", he said "has been very consistently opposed to unconstitutional routes to power and has been adamant in its collective effort to promote democracy and good governance throughout Africa with the help of Africa's own institutions including the APRM forum."

Prime Minister Hailemariam detailed Ethiopia's own experiences, noting that Ethiopia had been a nation driven by war, conflict, marginalization and abject poverty. "With its decades-long civil war, ethnic inequality and oppression, abject poverty", he said "Ethiopia 23 years ago was a powder-keg on the brink of disintegration and its nations and nationalities subjected to all kind of violence." But, he said, with the pro-poor development policies of the past two decades and a political structure that helped in managing diversity, the country had gone a long way to address the challenges. He noted that "the federal arrangement we did put in place, for which, by the

way, we drew lessons from Nigeria's experience, was meant to address any political shortfall; the government also immediately proceeded to implement pro-poor development policies with added attention paid to the most marginalized groups in the country." He added that not only had these policies proven their mettle by lifting millions of people out of poverty, but "the new political dispensation had proved pivotal in expediting the economic development we have begun to register."

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia stressed that human security was freedom from want and a quest for fulfillment of basic services. She shared Liberia's experiences in nation building, reconciliation and national healing and the customary dispute resolution of the Land Commission in the period after the Accra 2003 Accord. Against the backdrop of rapid growth, President Sirleaf described the interplay between economic developments and security, suggesting that as income doubled, the security risk halved. Discussing the integration of the European Union, Jose Manuel Barroso expressed his admiration of ECOWAS' decision to adopt common external tariffs. He said that EU-Africa relations were deepening in every way, in aid, trade and security where the EU, he said, supports full operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture. He noted that human security with a focus on human rights and good governance were central elements of the partnership. He reiterated that Africa's security problems were also the problems of European Union. Continued support in this aspect, he said, defined the relationship between the two continents. President Hollande of France echoed the view that Europe had a high stake in Africa's security. He said Africa was suffering from all the forms of trans-boundary trafficking in people, arms and drugs which also affected Europe. He stressed that France's intervention in Mali and the CAR had been necessitated by humanitarian issues, and France, he added, had now decided to double the aid it was giving to Africa and increase its training of security forces. The former OAU Chairperson, Dr Salim Ahmed, highlighted the complimentary nature of physical security and human security, noting that the latter could not be realized without adequate physical security. Mark Simmonds, the UK Minister for Africa, underlined the transformative role of UK aid to Africa's development, and argued that human security rested on government's decision to have an open government that created opportunities for all its citizens.

The Ethio-Japan High Level Policy Dialogue Forum and preparations for GTP II

The Japan-Ethiopia Industrial Policy Dialogue involves policy dialogue between Japan and Ethiopia at three levels. There are direct dialogues with the Prime Minister, the series of High Level Fora, led by the Senior Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister and involving the participation of Ministers and State Ministers of relevant ministries; and thirdly, meetings and discussions with policy makers and practitioners. Overall the dialogue also includes features to support the implementation of the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), 2010/11-2014/15, and also the formulation of the next-five year plan, focusing on industrial development.

During the First and Second High Level Fora of Phase II of the Policy Dialogue, discussions concentrated on the export promotion agenda, while the focus of the third High Level Forum was

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) promotion at policy and strategy levels with reference to the experience of Asian and other African countries. The Fourth Forum deliberated on strategic FDI promotion, focusing on aspects of technology transfer. The second phase of the Fifth High Level Forum underscored the significance of FDI inflow on the country's efforts to transform industry in general and the manufacturing sector in particular within the Growth and Transformation Plan. Ethiopia has focused on export-led industrialization primarily supported by light manufacturing development. This has meant that planning, formulating and implementing an industrial policy that will help produce high quality products has been a focus of the High Level Policy Dialogue Forum in its formulations, suggestions and consideration for the second Growth and Transformation Plan, GTP II, which will follow GTP I after 2015.

Briefing the Forum, Ato Ahmed Nuru, Special Advisor to the State Minister of Industry, noted that the Government of Ethiopia placed vital importance on the light manufacturing and industrial sectors based on the principles of coordinated foreign and domestic investment, export-led strategy, agricultural development-led industrialization and labor intensive mechanisms. The aim was to make Ethiopia free of poverty, human suffering, and instability. He indicated that the industrial development policy recognized the pivotal contribution of major priority areas including textile and garment production, leather and leather products, agro-processing, chemicals, construction materials and metals to provide the means to speed up the country's industrial development and allow for incorporation in the global industrial value chain. Ato Ahmed noted that Ethiopia had established six industry development institutes over the last decade for the already identified priority sectors to help the country become competitive and integrate in the global market. He underlined the effective role of the Government in exporting value-added products in the fields of leather and textile clothing trade. The Government, he said, was supportive of the increased inflow of investment, and the implementation of various programs and projects in the industrial development institutes, particularly that for light manufacturing, had helped Ethiopia strengthen its TVET programs, product development centers and laboratories as well as academic programs.

Ato Getaneh Taddese, Director General of the Ethiopia Kaizen Institute, indicated that during the second chapter of the GTP Kaizen would focus on transforming the manufacturing industry, producing a more capable workforce and transforming the working culture. He suggested that ensuring the sustainability and quality of Kaizen would be instrumental in attaining the goals of the GTP. Professor Kenichi Ohno from the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, commended Ethiopia's efforts to increase FDI inflow and investor interest in the country's manufacturing sector. At the same time, he noted Ethiopia's capability to exploit the potential opportunities in light manufacturing had not yet attained the highest levels. He stressed much remained to be done by the Government in its efforts to improve the lives and livelihoods of its citizens with the creation of a globally competitive and environmentally-friendly industrial sector. Professor Toru Homma, Senior Adviser on Private Sector Development at the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) presented the Forum an international comparison of manufacturing performance as a supplemental analysis for helping to set Ethiopia's light manufacturing targets.

Ato Mekonnen Manyazewal, National Planning Commission Commissioner, stressed that the Forum's deliberations came at an important juncture in the preparation of the GTP II. He said Ethiopia could and should draw important lessons and best practices from other countries so as to accelerate and push forward its industrial development programs and projects. He underlined the pivotal importance and contribution of FDI to help the country fast-track its development, build a skilled work force, provide technology transfer and integrate domestic enterprises with the outside market during the second phase of the national plan – the GTP II. He emphasized the need to improve the country's FDI attractiveness, targeting companies crucial for the economy. He cautioned that Ethiopia faced a highly competitive international environment and urged it to concentrate on ways and means to win in such an environment: quality, productivity and competitiveness were important, particularly in the manufacturing sector, as the country moved to GTP II, he said.

Under the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), which is due to end in 2015, the country envisions laying an ambitious but solid foundation for its industrial development by boosting manufacturing. The GTP aims to double the national GDP from the manufacturing sector from its 10% to 21% and to raise its share of the total economy to 15.6% at the completion of the program by 2015. The contribution of the manufacturing sector in 2009/10 was less than five per cent of GDP and the share of manufactured exports was around 0.5%. Under the GTP, the plan is to increase the contribution of the manufacturing sector to exports from 3.6% (in 2010/11) to 10% by 2014/15. One of the main areas of focus in the manufacturing sector has been textiles and garments with the target of increasing textile export earnings to a billion dollars by 2014/15. Ethiopia is also planning to raise the gross value of textile and garment industry production to US\$2.5 billion by the end of 2014/15, scaling up production capacity by 90%. This will involve the creation of 40,000 new jobs within the GTP period.

Other sectors within manufacturing that have been given priority under the GTP are leather and leather products, agro-processing, pharmaceuticals and chemical products. Overall, the GTP envisages a significant shift towards industrialization. The projections indicate that by 2025, the agriculture sector share of the economy will be less than 30% while the industry and service sectors will have increased to 32% and 39% respectively. The industrial sector has grown about 15% rate in the past three years.

Overall, progress in the various sectors of the economy has been satisfactory and indications are that most of the goals set by the GTP will be attained during the plan period. This is also the case in the manufacturing sector. The performance of the sector in terms of job creation has been well ahead of the target each year. About 700,000 jobs were created through micro and small enterprises (MSEs) and housing projects in the first year of the GTP, and more than 1.1 million jobs were generated in 2011/2012. Job creation has continued at a higher rate. Overall there have been close to four million jobs in total created across the country during the three years of the Growth and Transformation Plan period, with performance exceeding target by over a million. This success can be attributed particularly to the expansion of micro and small enterprises (MSEs) and a number of on-going mega-projects.

It is in line with these achievements that the government is now preparing the next five year plan, Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II). This was why the main focus of the Ethio-Japan Fifth High Level Forum for Phase II Policy Dialogue of Industrial Development in Ethiopia was concentrated on light manufacturing industries.

The 17th Summit of the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa

The 17th Summit of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Authority of Heads of State and Government was held in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo on Wednesday and Thursday this week (February 26-27), under the theme "Consolidating Intra-COMESA Trade through Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development". The Presidents of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Malawi, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the Vice Presidents of Burundi, Comoros and Kenya, the Prime Minister of Rwanda, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Swaziland attended the Summit. Other member States were represented by their Ministers and State Ministers. Representatives of continental and international organizations also attended including UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of UNECA, Dr. Carlos Lopes, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission. The Ethiopian delegation to the Summit was led by State Minister for Finance and Economic Development, Ato Ahmed Shide, and Ambassador Fisseha Yimer represented the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the 13th meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

During the Summit, President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni of the Republic of Uganda handed over the rotating Chairmanship of the COMESA Authority of Heads of State and Government to President Joseph Kabila, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ethiopia has joined the Bureau as Vice Chair and Uganda has become Rapporteur. Ethiopia will host the 18th COMESA Summit and assume the Chairmanship. The last time Ethiopia hosted the COMESA Summit was in 2002.

Unlike previous Summits where issues of peace and security have tended to overshadow discussions, during this Summit the COMESA leaders were able to hold a focused discussion on how best to unleash the potential of the region for economic development and to fast-track regional integration. A Roundtable Discussion under the theme "Turning the Tables - Natural Resources as an Anchor for Transformation", was ably moderated by Dr. Carlos Lopes of UNECA. Dr. Lopes has been an ardent advocate of Africa's transformation agenda ever since he assumed his post in September 2012. During the discussion, leaders underscored the need for countries of the COMESA region to increase the benefits accruing from the exploitation of Africa's natural resources. It was pointed out that Africa has long been donating money and jobs to the outside world by continuing to export raw materials, and speakers therefore emphasized the importance of commodity based industrialization. They noted with satisfaction the new COMESA initiative on minerals' value addition and on industrial clusters. They also recognized the importance of infrastructure networks that can link production centers and distributions hubs across the region. In this connection, they also commended Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda

and Uganda for adopting innovative financing mechanisms to develop a modern standard gauge railway network.

In relation to the theme of the Summit in particular, the Heads of State and Government deliberated on the report of the Secretary-General on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMES) as the drivers of economic growth and regional integration. It was noted that MSMEs have been significantly contributing to economic growth and wealth creation in the region constituting 40% of Intra-COMESA trade. The Summit adopted the COMESA Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises strategy and directed the Joint Committee of Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Governors to consider the proposal for setting up a COMESA MSMES Fund and a women's Economic Empowerment Fund that would facilitate access to affordable financing and capacity building by ensuring the inclusion of women and youth.

With reference to the COMESA Free Trade Area, the Summit noted with satisfaction that Intra-COMESA trade, since its establishment in 2000, has increased six fold to US\$19.3 billion by the end of 2012. COMESA is indeed the largest Free Trade Area in Africa with 490 million people and a combined GDP of US\$425 billion. The Summit commended the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Uganda on their commitment to deposit their accession instruments to the COMESA Free Trade Area with the secretariat no later than December this year. With regard to the ongoing negotiations between COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the establishment of a Tripartite Free Trade Area, the Summit noted the progress made so far and urged member States to ensure that the negotiations were completed by June this year. There was general agreement that the Tripartite FTA would be an improvement on the existing Free Trade Areas in the tripartite region.

The Summit, however, was not exclusively focused on economic issues and regional integration. The Heads of State and Government also considered the prevalence of durable peace and stability was necessary for creating an enabling environment for investment, economic development and regional integration. It was in this context the Summit reviewed the state of peace and security in the COMESA region. The leaders noted the continued improvement in the overall security situation in Somalia and directed COMESA's Secretary-General to initiate discussions with the Somalia government so that the country could once again renew its membership of COMESA. The Summit also expressed its deep concern over the eruption of conflict in South Sudan and called for a comprehensive resolution of the conflict to be reached including addressing root causes. The Summit appreciated the efforts being made by IGAD particularly by Prime Minister Hailemariam of Ethiopia and other regional leaders.

The 17th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government was preceded by series of other meetings including meetings of the Council of Ministers, of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of the Business Partnership Forum.

Workshop on countering extremist messaging in the region

A workshop on Countering Violent Extremist Messaging opened in Addis Ababa on Monday (February 23) this week. Organized by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa, and the Government of Ethiopia, the week long seminar was held in collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), the U.S. Department of State, and the Near East and South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA). Among those attending the opening session were Ambassador Taye Atskeselassie, Director General for American Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ambassador Patricia Haslach, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia; Brigadier-General Wayne W. Grigsby Jr., Commanding General of the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA); Ambassador Saleh Sahboun, Permanent Representative of the League of Arab States to Ethiopia and the African Union; and Mr. Peter Otim, Acting Head of the Defense and Security Division, African Union.

Ambassador Taye officially opened the workshop on behalf of the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs, welcoming it as one of a series of high profile and valuable regional workshops organized by the African Center for Strategic Studies. The subject of the Workshop, which included the state of security in the region of the greater Horn, the challenges we face in the fight against extremism, the rise of information technology and proliferation of extremist messaging as well as the more obscure methods of communications employed by violent groups were particularly important. He pointed out that information technology might have transformed the way we live but it could also be used by those forces which wanted to inflict violence and terror. One main focus of counter terrorism experts was to counter terrorist use of Internet, text messaging and other electronic media and finding effective ways to do this was the key to the workshop. Equally important, he said, was to focus on how to counter extremist narrative and reach out to the most vulnerable groups and individuals who can be led into the paths of radicalization and violent extremism.

Ambassador Taye pointed out that the region had a number of unique features including states with intra-state conflict and war offering international terrorists the possibility of a safe haven, as well as access to major sea lanes, with important maritime commercial traffic, making it attractive to terrorists and pirates. The region also included local or indigenous terrorist groups which either had no interest in or were impatient with peace, development and democracy. He therefore felt there was an increasingly evident need for Africa and the US to work together in the areas of security and counter terrorism, and the workshop emphasized the emerging consensus to address the challenge at a regional level. He hoped it would come up with much needed recommendations to make the needs of the region operational.

Ambassador Haslach began the session by touching on the U.S. and Ethiopian governments' efforts in advocating counter narratives to extremist messaging. She encouraged participants to develop practical recommendations for countering extremist messaging in the region, in order to enhance common endeavors to improve collective security. Brigadier-General Grigsby Jr. gave the meeting an update on CJTF-HOA's activities and its programs in countering violent extremism, specifically looking at its efforts in messaging and strategic communications, as well

as in strengthening partner capacity. He noted that it was quite possible to change attitudes but it was always more difficult to change behavior, especially in regard to violent extremism. Ambassador Sahboun explained that the Arab League holds regular conferences addressing countering violent extremism with Arab and African countries, and he stressed that working across all levels and sectors was paramount if progress was to be made. Mr. Otim noted that it was not always easy to define terminology regarding violent extremism and terrorism exactly, but he emphasized that this should not mean that no action need be taken. It was important not to be complacent when dealing with these issues.

Approximately 60 participants from nations in and around the Horn of Africa, U.S. government officials, civil society leaders, and experts from international organizations attended to discuss strategic approaches to countering violent extremist messaging. Among the workshop's goals were also facilitation of cooperation and discussion among governments in the Horn of Africa and around; to enhance and institutionalize cooperation among security forces; and to generate a network to promote democratic governance.

IGAD Security Sector Program reviews performance

IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP) held a meeting to consider its annual report for the year 2013 on Tuesday (February 25) in Addis Ababa. The Program, which covers strengthening the security sector capacity of member states, had a largely successful year, and according to Commander Muluneh Abebe, head of the ISSP, in 2013 it managed to carry out 38 out of 41 planned programs, a 93% target accomplishment rate.

The ISSP was set up after the IGAD Capacity-building Program Against Terrorism (ICPAT) project came to an end in 2010. ICPAT was established in 2006 to build up state capacity in security and judicial institutions, covering counter terrorism, interdepartmental cooperation within and among states and border control management. Within that framework, ICPAT conducted training in counter terrorism and money laundering, legislative reviews and carried out research on possible ways to formulate protocols on security cooperation. These and other activities of ICPAT created increased levels of awareness on security issues in the region and the realization that more cooperation was needed if the issues were to be addressed adequately. At the time, lack of regional cooperation, competing national priorities, unclear demarcation of roles, limited access to national policy makers and other significant constraints, held back full achievement of the ICPAT program. These constraints and the ever present security threats in the region underlined the necessity for establishing a strong institution capable of addressing the security situation and endowed with the required mandate. The 2013 report specifically mentioned that at the time that ICPAT's mandate ran out in 2010, IGAD found it "imperative to restructure it in a bid to establish a strong and viable institution capable of mediating contemporary and emerging security threats facing member states". In 2012, the IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP) was adopted.

The ISSP set out to build on what ICPAT had accomplished, seeking to restructure and reorganize ICPAT's activities under four components. These are counter terrorism, maritime security, containment of transnational organized crime and capacity building for security institutions. These components reflect the contemporary threats that face member states of IGAD and aim to make intra- and inter-state cooperation the center of a new approach to deal with these security threats. They also revolve around building up the capacity and laying the foundations of a regional cooperation that can promote the establishment of an effective security framework capable of forecasting, managing and preventing security threats. This has led to the emphasis on the objectives of promoting the signing and ratification of regional conventions, protocols and their domestication into national laws; promoting the development of regional policy frameworks that can engender cooperation in security matters; and developing and strengthening a wide range of state, regional and community based structures for enhancing security.

With these objectives in mind, the Program planned on carrying out four main activities during 2013. The first was the focus on developing and promoting a comprehensive institutional, programmatic and normative framework at regional and state levels for combating contemporary and existing transnational security threats. The Program conducted multiple workshops aiming at promoting international and regional legal instruments and encouraging IGAD member states to ratify and domesticate these instruments. Moreover, border studies and national assessment studies of the legal framework of security institutions of member states were also conducted. A second focus was the promotion of cooperation in addressing contemporary and emerging transnational security threats and security sector reform. Transnational organized crime, dealing with trafficking in small and light weapons, human trafficking, trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, money laundering, cyber-crime and corruption, has recently seen a significant rise in the IGAD region. The Program conducted research and assessments on human trafficking and smuggling in Ethiopia and identified perpetrators, networks, sources, routes, destinations and conditions. The third major activity revolved around developing the institutional capability of IGAD and member states to address security threats, and the ISSP conducted training and human capacity-developing sessions on dealing with financing of terrorist activities, anti-money laundering and other topics. The final planned area of activity was to review and strengthen the institutional framework of the ISSP itself, working towards securing adequate staff for the program, and establishing working cooperation with the AU, the UN, Global Counter Terrorism Forum, and Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation to exchange best practices and avoid duplication of efforts.

As Ambassador Tewelde Gebremeskel, Director of IGAD's Peace and Security Division noted in his opening statement at the session, the region has registered an impressive economic revival over the past decade but "the security situation still requires critical leadership and decision to bring about peace, security and stability in the region". In light of the new and dynamic nature of emerging security threats facing the region, he added, it is indeed imperative to streamline and coordinate region-wide efforts to contain these threats.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam - a symbol of regional integration

Ethiopia has always been the major contributor of the Nile, with its Blue Nile feeding the rainfall from the Ethiopian Highlands to the wider Nile downstream. Since the Government announced the start of construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project in 2011, with the aim of generating 6,000 mw, the project has attracted attention from a number of media outlets. The project was awarded to Salini Costruttori SPA, an Italian company which has built more than 20 dams in Europe, Asia and Africa, including the Gilgel Gibe II and Tana Beles dams in Ethiopia and is currently constructing the on-going Gilgel Gibe III dam. The electro and hydro mechanical work at GERD is being undertaken by Ethiopia's Metal and Engineering Corporation (METEC), while Alstom, a French engineering company, will supply turbines and generators and supervise the installation of all the electro-mechanical equipment for the hydro-power plant's consulting work is being carried out by a joint Italo-French Engineers company.

The primary objective of the GERD project is the generation of electricity. It will enable Ethiopia to completely cover the country's internal power needs. These have been growing at an average rate of 25% a year. A reliable and affordable source of energy is a fundamental need not just for the wellbeing of the population but also for the economic growth and poverty-reduction efforts being undertaken by the country. Many rural communities in Ethiopia still do not have the benefits in health and quality of life provided by electrical services, such as lighting or refrigeration. Ethiopia also aspires to be the green energy hub of East Africa, delivering clean and renewable energy at cost value to neighboring countries. It has already signed contracts to export electricity to Kenya, Djibouti and Sudan. According to various studies, a unit percent increase in energy supply can increase economic growth by at least one percent. On that basis when GERD begins operations, the national economy will increase by an additional four percent. This, in turn, will provide a catalyst for mutual development, interdependence, helping create long-lasting peace between countries throughout the region.

However, the benefit of the GERD is not restricted to power supplies. The Dam will regulate the flow of the water and ensure a steady flow throughout the year, preventing the occurrence of floods downstream in Sudan or Egypt. Equally, GERD will hold back a major portion of silt and sedimentation. Over the years, this has rendered dams located in downstream countries much less effective, causing them to lose their water storage and electric power generation capacities. Indeed, this had meant both Sudan and Egypt have had to allocated huge sums to infrastructure maintenance, including replacement of turbines and dredging of clogged irrigation channels. Another benefit is that the topography of GERD's location and the fact that the reservoir is to be built in a deep gorge will help minimize the water's direct exposure to sunlight and reduce evaporation loss by up to 4 billion cubic meters annually. This, of course, means there will be significantly more water available for downstream countries to use.

Ethiopia has, time and again, demonstrated its determination to promote mutual benefit among all the Nile riparian countries and assist in the eradication of poverty from the region in this 21st century. It was at the proposal of Ethiopia that the International Panel of Experts conducted its studies of the impact of the GERD project on lower riparian countries; and Ethiopia immediately accepted in full the recommendations of the IPoE Report, and has set about implementing them.

In this connection, and contrary to some media reports, Ethiopia has not rejected proposals presented by Egypt. Indeed, the Egyptian government has not presented any new proposals over implementation of the IPoE report on GERD or on mutually beneficial utilization of the River. During his recent official trip to Ethiopia, made at his own request, Egyptian Water Minister, Mohamed Abdul Muttalib, did not advance any new proposals. He only raised issues of the proposed confidence building and other unresolved issues that had been discussed at the last tripartite meeting in Khartoum in relation to the establishment of a new international panel of experts. Ethiopia and the Sudan agreed that the issue of the principles of confidence building presented by Egypt in Khartoum had clearly been dealt with under the Cooperative Framework Agreement and emphasized that the tripartite meeting agenda was focused on technical issues. In regard to Egypt's call for the establishment of a new international panel of experts, Ethiopia and Sudan felt this was unnecessary in the light of the IPoE's Report, but accepted the idea as something to be set up if the agreed national committee found itself in disagreement over the two recommended studies which the three parties had mandated it to oversee.

The Egyptian Minister also suggested halting construction of the GERD until Egypt had conducted further studies. This was rejected by the Ethiopian government which told the Minister quite clearly that the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was a "flagship project" for the nation, and that it would be completed within its project timeline with the full participation of Ethiopians at home and abroad. As a matter of fact, according to the National Coordination Office for the Dam, the GERD will begin to generate 700mw electricity from September 2015.

Following the Egyptian Water Minister's meeting with Ethiopia's Minister of Water and Energy, Ato Alemayehu Tegenu, Egyptian media outlets intensified their negative campaign against the GERD Project and Ethiopia. They claimed technical matters were an issue, including building standards or whether the Dam was safe from collapse. These were nonsensical, not least since the Dam is being built to the levels of 21st century state-of-the-art technology, very much improved since the construction of the Aswan High Dam fifty years ago. Imaginary doomsday scenarios of collapse are not helpful in finding solutions for differences. Ethiopia hopes Egypt to come to its senses. It is clear there is no alternative to move to start discussions with all Nile Basin states over the use of the waters of the Basin for the mutual benefit and best interest of all.

Ethiopia has made clear its preference to continue talks since this is the only way to resolve differences and to produce a win-win solution. At the same time, the Ethiopian government has emphasized that it is not ready to conduct further discussions in the absence of the Sudan or outside the framework of the tripartite Water Ministers' meetings. For Ethiopia, cooperation among Nile Basin countries was and remains a central principle of policy. This underlines its determination to respond to any concerns and the reason for immediately accepting the IPoE's recommendations and starting to implement them unilaterally and without delay. This was also why it immediately agreed at the tripartite Water Ministers' meetings to the further studies suggested by the IPoE. Ethiopia has, in fact, made every effort to take into account the concerns of Sudan and Egypt, and will continue to do so in order to implement the GERD, a project that will have valuable multi-fold applications throughout the whole East Africa region. Its successful

implementation will be a source of hope, power, prosperity and pride for the region and a very real symbol of regional integration.

Self-serving criticisms of Ethiopia's development

Africa's recent unprecedented economic growth and the attendant social development, particularly in poverty reduction and improved provision of basic services, has significantly undermined the assumption that African countries were lost causes and would remain permanently aid-dependent. Ethiopia's recent achievements in increased access to education, reduced maternal and child mortality, significant reduction in the incidence of poverty, improved infrastructure, increased food self-sufficiency and agricultural productivity have made the country an example of the way to translate fast economic growth into real benefit for the vast majority of the poor. The participatory aspect is, in fact, a central and key feature of the country's impressive economic development.

Not surprisingly, this growth trajectory over the past decade has been endorsed by other governments and organizations. Equally, it has become something of a cause célèbre for some institutions and individuals who make a living out of activism and advocacy to try to question. Far removed from reality and the actuality of progress and development, and from any knowledge of reality on the ground, these elements time and again have issued 'reports' and 'studies' claiming this development is either non-existent or is driven by abuse and violence. In sharp contrast to the type of businesspeople in the past who profited from poverty around the world, these well paid activists of today make their living out of denouncing development, arguing that remote and undeveloped areas of the country must remain unchanged. They have a patronizing way of conducting business, but it is their total lack of responsibility for the possible harm they might cause that must be of real concern.

The Omo Valley and the various development projects underway in the area have made it a perfect focus for the kind of sensationalized headlines these organizations produce. The Omo Valley is an area where the Ethiopian government has started to implement an ambitious development program that will transform the area in terms not only of vastly enhancing the economic output of the Valley but also of significantly improving the living standards of the communities living there. It is implementing an integrated development scheme that includes hydroelectric generation, irrigated agriculture, sugar plantations and mills and adequate access to a multitude of social and infrastructural services, most of which have never appeared in the Valley previously. The hydroelectric power generation project, the Gilgel Gibe III dam, is part of the national policy of building a green economy through utilizing the abundant water resources of the country. It will generate up to 1800mw upon completion. 75% of the project has been completed and power generation will commence in September this year. The other major project which will certainly have a major and significantly positive impact on the Valley is the Kuraz Sugar Development Project, with sugar plantations covering an area of 175,000 hectares of land and five sugar factories. Associated developments allow for the building of more than 20,000 houses, jobs for up to 200,000 people and other benefits.

In other words, the combined Omo Valley development projects can be expected to transform a hitherto backward and remote valley into an economically vibrant and socially developed region. Upon completion, the development projects will provide the peoples of the Valley with clean energy through the rural electrification program, access to education and marketable skills, improved health services and tens of thousands of new job opportunities. They will also effectively link the region to the rest of the country for the first time as well as open up wider commercial opportunities. The projects will also benefit the region and its inhabitants by controlling the river's flow and preventing the devastating seasonal floods that have previously caused a number of disasters. The regulated water flow of the river will also be useful for the implementation of irrigated agriculture both at commercial and household levels. According to those who deal in water management, water storage in large dams makes sound ecological sense, not least in providing a key adaptation measure to mitigate the effects of climate change and a boost to growth and development. Water storage is a good solution to the problems of climate variability and uncertainty, as well as providing for energy generation and the water needs of industry and agriculture. This is particularly true of the dams on the Omo River which will allow for significant mitigation of the effects of drought, minimize the previous effects of flooding, and provide regulation of the flood retreat cultivation practiced by those living in the valley.

One of the more frequent claims by 'activists' is that the projects in the Omo Valley pose a significant threat to the livelihoods of local inhabitants and to the environmental and ecological balance of the region. This is simply not the case. Nor is it true that local peoples have not been consulted over the sugar development projects. Environmental impact assessments over and above the legal requirements for the projects have been carried out and approved by relevant authorities. Equally, when the government embarked upon realization of the sugar development sector of the Growth and Transformation Plan, from the outset it considered the potential benefits for the communities dwelling in and around the projects. Since then the activities carried out have included putting into operation plans to make the local communities primary beneficiaries of the developments. It might also be noted that the sugar cane development is part of the country's green growth economy, playing a significant role in environmental protection.

Before the commencement of the Kuraz Sugar project an extensive range of discussions were held with local communities. The result has been to provide them with a sense of ownership of the project, and the development of active participation and cooperation. Compensation was promised and provided for those moving into new villages and the people are benefitting from various infrastructure and social service developments. The most recent independent visit to the Lower Omo Valley, to look into security in the area, towards the end of last year, found no evidence of any forced removal of local populations as has been claimed by 'activists', and no indication that local authorities might have been "riding roughshod" over the rights of the indigenous peoples. It also saw detailed evidence of consultation over resettlement as well as compensation. USAID, DfID and other NGOs operating in the Valley have come to similar conclusions. The last donor ambassadorial group to visit the Lower Omo similarly found no sign of clearance of land without adequate consultation or compensation, or of forced resettlement. In fact, and not surprisingly, local agro-pastoralist communities have welcomed the developments, including the provision of schools, clinics, jobs and other infrastructural developments.

Those who are prone to hurl accusations against projects like those in the Omo Valley have had to show considerable skill in avoiding the need for any detail or actual evidence to support their claims. They do not appear to bother to do any research and merely repeat again and again earlier allegations, ignoring the fact that these are nearly always no more than repetition of old unproven claims. They refuse to accept any evidence with which they disagree, insisting that anything that contradicts their own claims must be unreliable, biased or designed to support government policies; a result of failure to investigate properly. It is hardly convincing.

One very obvious example of all this was a recent piece in the Huffington Post, by Lori Pottinger of International Rivers. Her position is made very clear in the title: “Ethiopia pushes River Basin toward Hydrological Disaster”; as does her opening sentence: “In a remote part of East Africa, the Ethiopian government is furtively transforming a pastoral landscape populated by indigenous agro-pastoralists into an industrial powerhouse of dams and plantations.” Ms. Pottinger claims “Information is hard to come by on these land conversions”, though that doesn’t prevent her making a substantial number of allegations, though she also suggests that this is why Human Rights Watch has been forced to use high-tech tools, including satellite imagery, to document changes in the Omo Valley. These images, she says, reveal the clearing of land to make way for sugar plantations in the Lower Omo; and Ms. Pottinger comments that providing irrigation to plantations “could be devastating to people and ecosystems downstream”; Lake Turkana “might drop by about two meters” (or it might not), or that the Lake “could drop as much as 16 to 22 meters” (or possibly not).

In fact, the development of the Omo Valley is certainly not a secret, nor has it been in any sense furtive. The government, and indeed the media in Ethiopia, has published all the details widely both in Amharic and in English, in both print and broadcast outlets. Anyone travelling in the Lower Omo can see the developments for themselves; there is no need for satellite technology. Information on the projects is public and not at all hard to come by. What is more difficult to find is any evidence of the claims International Rivers, HRW and others have made that the development constitute a disaster or that human rights abuses have accompanied developments.

In fact, because of these allegations, there have also been a number of investigations by donors, NGOs, international agencies and others - over a dozen in all. And despite claims by advocacy organizations, these bodies are not complicit in large-scale human rights violations and environmental destruction. They just haven’t found any, perhaps because they don’t exist except in the minds of externally-based advocacy organizations or a few externally based and funded opposition groups. It is symptomatic that the only response of these organizations to all the investigations by others is to claim: “the blind eye turned by USAID and DFID [and others] to the human rights violations and forced evictions that accompany the so-called development strategy of Ethiopia is shocking.” In other words, despite the actual evidence on the ground “you are wrong, we are right!”

Incidentally, it might be added that Ethiopia fully agrees that governments have a duty to consult and cooperate with indigenous people to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources. It does exactly

that; and that is why developments in the Omo Valley will be for the benefit of all the peoples of the Valley and of Ethiopia.

Other claims that the Gilgel Gibe III Dam and other developments will cause “a huge drop in the water levels of Kenya's Lake Turkana” are equally difficult to back up. The assertion is that the Lake might drop by about two meters during the initial filling of the dam, and Ms. Pottinger says “reservoir filling is expected to take up to three years, and during this time the Omo River's annual flow could drop by as much as 70%,” adding that “after this initial shock, regular dam operations will continue to devastate ecosystems and local livelihoods.” These figures are plucked out of the air and have no basis in fact. The most recent United Nations Environment Programme report, for example, on “the Gibe III Dam and its Potential Impact on Lake Turkana Water Levels” (February 2012), notes that without any significant climate change the Omo River will continue to provide some 80% of the inflow into Lake Turkana, and that depending upon rainfall scenarios the median effect of the Dam would produce a 2 meter fall in the lake levels over a seven month period while the reservoir was filling. It added that should the rainfall levels remain the same there would be no change. Alternatively, with below average rainfall, there could be a fall in the lake level of up to 4.3 meters during a period of eight to sixteen months while the reservoir was filling. This, of course, would be affected by the length of time over which the dam was filled, and this could be adjusted as required. The report also noted that the lake levels in any case actually fluctuate three to four meters seasonally in any one year. It might be added that the most comprehensive study of the impact of the dam, done in 2010, calculated that the hydrological impact would be a fall of up to 2 meters in Lake Turkana, no more.

“Authoritarian Contagion” in Africa?- not in Ethiopia

Two or three weeks ago, Robert Herman, Vice President for Regional Programs for Freedom House, wrote a piece entitled “Authoritarian Contagion in Africa”. This was aimed largely at personalities and events in Kenya, and no doubt Kenyans will respond. Mr. Herman, however, made it clear he sees “authoritarian contagion” as a growing problem in Africa, and indeed targets Ethiopia, and its late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, as the “regional pioneer” of this approach. He claims the Ethiopian government has issued laws on NGOs, the media, and terrorism that have “collectively devastated the country’s political opposition and civil society”, alleging that “most prominent democracy and human rights groups have been forced to abandon or radically scale back their work, and many of the leading activists have fled into exile.” He then claims that international donors have ignored these “repressive actions” and failed to use development aid as leverage, even after the legislation’s “ruinous effects became apparent”.

Mr. Herman wonders whether this was out of consideration for Ethiopia’s role in combating terrorism in Somalia or from fear that the country would turn to China as an alternative patron. Neither of these are very plausible explanations for donor policies, and he fails to consider the far more obvious reason: that this legislation was not as “repressive” or as “ruinous” as he suggests. Indeed, it is not. Ethiopia, for example, still has a vibrant and active free press; political opposition has not been very successful nor as active as it might, but it certainly remains vocal;

and civil society has not been devastated. Donors indeed may have noticed that while Ethiopia has been obliged to take note of security issues, with organizations like Al-Shabaab active in neighboring countries and with states like Eritrea basing its foreign policy on aggression and destabilization, it has not actually ignored democratic concerns.

In fact, neither the independent media nor civil society organizations have been “devastated” or “decimated” by the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSP), the Press Law or the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, though the CSP certainly brought some much needed, and welcome, structural organization and control into the administration of Civil Society Organizations. There were 3,800 NGOs registered before the Proclamation was passed, with numbers increasing at about 75 a year. No more than 739 originally fulfilled the administrative requirements of the bill, but since then a total of 2,991 have been registered at a rate of nearly six hundred a year. Of these some 344 are foreign organization. In fact, most of the NGOs and Charities and Societies operating in the country welcomed the Proclamation, and the main critics of this legislation, including advocacy groups, were organizations that were not prepared to allow the government to check their operations regularly and audit their books on an annual basis.

Similarly, there has been no decline in the operation of the free press, and to suggest otherwise indicates a failure to read current press publications in Ethiopia. Certainly numbers of publications have fallen since the early 1990s when there was a flood of publications many of which were unable to attract sufficient readers and some of which did not deserve to survive. Those that have survived have certainly more than upheld the banner of a free press. Equally, it is simply untrue to say that “over the past five years most legitimate political avenues for peaceful protest have been shut down and opposition leaders, civil society activists, and independent journalists have been jailed or forced to flee”, though certainly some of those involved in illegitimate activities, including terrorism, have been arrested, tried and sentenced.

Certainly, Ethiopia has put a lot of emphasis on security and on macro-economic concerns, not least on a highly successful pro-poor policy which has already lifted millions out of poverty and will lift millions more out in the next few years. It has also made massive advances in education and health. It is going to be one of the few countries that will achieve all the Millennium Development Goals by next year’s deadline. This is all part of its efforts to become an effective democratic developmental state, and it is very clear from any close analysis of policies and actions on the ground that both elements of this are equally important. Democracy is indeed as important to Ethiopia as development, and, far from either implementing or spreading “authoritarianism”, the government has consistently underlined the absolute necessity for democratic development, for a free press, an independent judiciary and even for a functional opposition, and worked for their implementation. It is fully aware that “prioritization of security and macroeconomic concerns over democratic performance is a self-defeating strategy.” Equally, it is fully aware of the need to consider all three in the modern world, and it does so. It would be rather more helpful if commentators paid more attention to the realities of the developments in the country and less to the inaccuracies prevalent on opposition websites in the Diaspora.