

News in Brief

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News in Brief

African Union

The 24th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments of the African Union opened today, Friday (January 30) at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa. Under the theme: “Year of women empowerment and development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063”, the two day Summit of the Heads of States and Governments will focus on discussing the theme of year and reviewing the reports of the African Union for 2014. The Summit will also elect the new Chairperson of the African Union, and review and adopt Agenda 2063. **(See article)**

The 26th Ordinary Session of the African Union’s Executive Council (the Foreign Ministers of the AU), chaired by Ms. Fatma Vall Mint Soueinae, Foreign Minister of Mauritania and Chairperson of the Executive Council, opened on Monday (January 26) at the African Union Headquarters. **(See article)**

The 32rd Session of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee (HSGOC) chaired by President Macky Sall of Senegal, took place on Thursday (January 29). **(See article)**

The Heads of State of the 36 member countries of the African Peer Review Mechanism met on Thursday (January 29)

AU Peace and Security Council met on Thursday (January 29) to discuss the report of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan. The Commission, chaired by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, ended investigations in August and submitted its final report to the Chairperson of the AU Commission in October 2014.

Climate change and radical extremism were the focus of a special meeting on Tuesday (January 27) between AU Chairperson, Dr Dlamini Zuma and the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Martine Lidegaard. Dr. Zuma emphasized Africa’s concerted efforts for a successful Climate Change Summit in Paris, pointing out “Africa is the least contributor, but the most affected.”

IGAD held the first IGAD Meeting of the Ministers of Water Resources on Wednesday (January 21) in Addis Ababa, to discuss sustainable management of water resources in support of socio-economic development, peace building, and regional integration. The meeting approved the IGAD Regional Water Resources Policy and called on IGAD to develop a Water Protocol for its implementation.

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn met with the Special Envoy and Vice Foreign Minister of China, Zhang Ming, on Thursday (January 29) in Addis Ababa. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of Chinese investment in the construction of industrial zones and parks in Ethiopia, and highlighted the potential for Chinese assistance in infrastructural and industrial development as well as poverty reduction. The Special Envoy invited the Prime Minister to visit China

Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom and the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Retno Marsudi agreed on Thursday (January 29) to establish a bilateral consultative forum to expand cooperation. They discussed cooperation in a range of areas including politics, security, economy, trade, investment, and other areas. Mrs. Marsudi invited Dr. Tedros to participate on the Asia-Africa Forum being held in Jakarta in April.

This week Dr. Tedros met with US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ms. Linda Thomas-Greenfield; an EU delegation of Dr. Nicholas Wescott, Managing Director of African Affairs of the European External Action Service, Alexander Rondos, Special Envoy of European Union to the Horn of Africa, and Ambassador Chantal Hebberecht, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Ethiopia; and Zhang Ming, China's Special Envoy and Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. **(See article)**

During the week Dr Tedros also met with the Assistant Secretary-General, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ivan Šimonović; with India's Vice Foreign Minister, Navtej Sarna; Egyptian Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukri; the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Martin Lidegaard; Norway's Foreign Minister, Borge Brende; the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Ivica Dacic. **(See article)**

Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros met with Jean Asselborn, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister of Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg on Tuesday (January 27); with Seychelles Foreign Affairs Minister, Jean-Paul Adam on Monday (January 26), and with New Zealand Foreign Minister, Mr. Murray MacCully.

State Minister Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos met this week with Dr. Casaba Blogh, Deputy State Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Trade Ministry of Hungary on Thursday, (January 28); with Ambassador Angel villa Hernandez, Director of sub-Saharan Africa, and Special envoy of Cuba; Mr. David Dondua First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Georgia on Wednesday (January 28); and with Shin Don-iK, Deputy Minister for

Multilateral and Global Affairs of Korea on Tuesday (January 27). Mr. Shin Dong-iK extended an invitation to President Dr. Mulatu Teshome to visit the Republic of Korea.

State minister for Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dewano Kedir, met with Ambassador William Lacy Swing, Director General for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Thursday January 29; and discussed bilateral relations with Elias Shoniyin, the Deputy Minister of International Economic Cooperation and Integration of Liberia on Wednesday (January 28).

Ethiopia's President Dr. Mulatu appointed seven new Ethiopian Ambassadors at the National Palace on Saturday (January 24) before they left on assignment. Ambassadors Negash Kibret, Dina Mufti, Girum Abay, Kuma Demeksa, Samya Zekeriya, Wubshet Demssie and Wahde Belai, took their oath of office in the presence of President Dr. Mulatu and Foreign Minister, Dr. Tedros.

A Seminar on Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation, organized by the Ethiopian Embassy, in coordination with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JSTA) and the Universities of Osaka, Nagasaki and Tokohu, took place on Monday (January 26), in Tokyo.

Djibouti

The visit of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey to Djibouti was the occasion for signing eight cooperation agreements between the two countries on Saturday (January 24). **(See article)**

Eritrea

The Eritrean government has reportedly released six Eritrean journalists after six years in prison without charge or trial. Seven others, also detained without charge or trial, were released without publicity last year. At least 16 still remain detained and some, including Swedish journalist, Dawit Issac, have been held for well over a decade.

Kenya

Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for the Interior, Joseph Nkaissery, has announced measures aimed at improving security in the counties that border Somalia. They include increasing the number of police stations in Wajir, Mandera and Garissa counties and the deployment of the Kenya Defense Forces along the regions bordering Somalia.

Somalia

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan arrived in Somalia on the third leg of his Horn of Africa tour on Sunday (January 25), following visits to Ethiopia last week, and Djibouti at the weekend. It was his second visit to Somalia. **(See article)**

President Mohamud repeated the Government's call to members of Al-Shabaab to give themselves up **(See article)**

Prime Minister, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke announced a new cabinet list of twenty ministers, and called for Parliament to approve the names. **(See article)**

Zakariya Ismail Ahmed Hersi, former head of intelligence for Al-Shabaab, who surrendered last month, has called on Al-Shabaab members to follow his example. He said “Al-Shabaab is now in total collapse”, and called on members “to seek out a peaceful way of resolving all conflicts and towards reconciliation.”

Commissioner Reine Alapini-Gansou, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa for the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), visited Mogadishu this week, President Mohamud and holding talks with government ministers and intergovernmental organizations.

The European Union’s Maritime Capacity Building Mission in the Horn of Africa and Western Indian Ocean (EUCAP Nestor) is going to up a base in Puntland. The move will strengthen existing legal and law enforcement frameworks related to anti-piracy and maritime security capacity.

South Sudan

President Salva Kiir and Dr. Riek Machar met in Addis Ababa on Thursday (January 29)

President Salva Kiir called for an extraordinary meeting of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) on Monday (January 26) to debate and ratify the Arusha agreement, signed by three factions of the SPLM last week.

Sudan

President Omar Al-Bashir met with the African Union Chief Mediator for the Sudan, Thabo Mbeki, on Tuesday (January 27) in Khartoum. Mr. Mbeki said the President had expressed his readiness to provide security guarantees for rebel groups to participate in dialogue over the conflict in Darfur and the Two Areas.

The National Elections Commission announced on Tuesday that 15 candidates would run for the presidency in the April election, including the incumbent Omer Hassan Al-Bashir. Six are running on their party ticket, the remainder are running as independents.

President Omer Al-Bashir inaugurated a new Presidential Palace on Monday (January 26). The ceremony was attended by representatives of diplomatic missions, legislators, officials and other dignitaries.

The 24th Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union....

The 24th Ordinary Session of Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union has been taking place at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa this week under the theme: “Year of Women Empowerment and Development Towards Agenda 2063” The week started with the 29th Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives Committee on January 23-24, and was followed by the 26th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, the Foreign Ministers of the AU, on Monday and Tuesday (January 26-27).

The 24th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, the meeting of the Heads of State and Government, opens today, Friday, January 30 and continues on Saturday. The two day Summit of the Heads of States and Governments will focus on discussing the theme of year and reviewing the reports of the African Union for 2014. The Summit will also elect the new Chairperson of the African Union, and review and adopt Agenda 2063. It will consider the responses to the Ebola crisis in Africa as well as consider such issues as South Sudan, Libya and the issue of Boko Haram.

In her opening remarks, Dr Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, stressed the need to forge a cooperative, collective and holistic approach to the new and traditional threats facing the continent. She underlined the need to consolidate and deepen partnerships with the African private sector to champion a stable, united and developed Africa. The Chairperson reiterated the significance of championing a tolerant, accountable, democratic and inclusive culture as well as embodying inclusive social and economic development to address the challenges facing the continent. She noted that in spite of the many challenges appearing in the world, Africa has been determined to realize peace and stability as well as the restoration of the dignity of African people. She noted that Agenda 2063, now being presented for adoption, encompassed the voices, demands and aspirations of the people of Africa and the Diaspora as well. She emphasized that this is the way to prevent poverty, disease and hunger; manage diversity; and silence the guns, adding that Agenda 2063 is “a call to action” to all. It will allow us “to diversify our economies and industrialize; to have the skills and entrepreneurial revolution, unleashing the creativity and energy of our young people, and to effect an agricultural and agro-processing transformation.” The Chairperson of the Commission said the continent would witness numerous elections this year, and she stressed the significance of holding elections in a fair, credible, peaceful and democratic manner. She reiterated the significance of investing in the people of the continent, noting that resource mobilization was at the heart of the implementation of Agenda 2063.

Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, commended the focus of the Summit’s theme in making women’s empowerment at the center of the discussion. The Secretary General, who welcomed Agenda 2063, appealed to the leaders of African countries to better the lives of women. Ban Ki-Moon commended the support extended by the African peoples and their governments to Ebola-affected countries and noted that the world was witnessing progress. He said that joint efforts were delivering practical results in securing peace and stability and he underlined the need to scale these up to bring peace and stability in South Sudan. He also noted that African troops were now “a backbone of our peacekeeping capacity and we rely on the full cooperation of national governments that host UN peacekeeping missions.” He referred to the scourge of terrorism affecting African countries, but also emphasized that counter-terrorism

efforts should take respect of human rights into account. He expressed his hope that this year's elections in Africa would be conducted in a peaceful and democratic way.

Mr. Mohammed Ould Abdelaziz, outgoing Chairperson of the African Union; Dr Nabil El Arabi, Secretary General of the League of Arab States; Mr. Sam Kutesa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uganda and President of the 69th United Nations General Assembly; Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and Chairperson of the Palestine Liberation Organization also made statements at the opening session of the Summit.

Earlier, the Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission, Erastus Mwencha, said on Wednesday that "this Summit is crucial and a turning point in many ways." It would be very strategic for the "Africa we want" not least because of the important activities taking place in the margins of the Summit, notably the launch of the African Union Agenda 2063, a roadmap that will help to transform Africa's economies in the next 50 years. The Deputy Chairperson noted that the Agenda 2063 framework document would also provide input into the global post 2015 development agenda. The Deputy Chairperson underscored the need for Africa to be able to fund its own programs so as to contribute fully to the development agenda of the continent. "Once this is done effectively", he said, "then Africa shall be able to achieve its objectives, one of which is silencing the guns by 2020." He said 2014 has been a very busy and challenging year for Africa with the continent facing "crises like the Ebola outbreak, the drop in the price of oil, and the onset of radicalism and extremism."

Mr. Mwencha also highlighted the progress made by Africa in the domain of peace and security under the African peace and security architecture which has facilitated the rapid response to conflicts within the continent. On Tuesday, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, and current Chair of the East African Standby Force informed the African Union Commission that the EASF was ready for deployment. Rwanda's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Louise Mushikiwado, said all Member States of the East African sub-region had contributed in various ways to activate the EASF and with a resource mobilization strategy in place, the sub-region would be ready for sustainable deployment in three months.

.....the 26th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council....

The 26th Ordinary Session of the African Union's Executive Council (the Foreign Ministers of the AU) opened on Monday (January 26) at the African Union Headquarters. The meeting, chaired by Ms. Fatma Vall Mint Soueinae, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Chairperson of the Executive Council, was attended by the foreign ministers of the AU member states, the Chair of the African Union Commission, Dr. Dlamini Zuma, UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the UNECA, Carlos Lopez, Deputy Chairperson of the AU, Erastus Mwencha and representatives of the AU organs and leaders of the Regional Economic Commissions. The Ministers deliberated on issues on the agenda of the AU Summit in preparation for the 24th Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting later in the week.

Dr Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, introduced the Annual Report on the activities of the Commission in 2014 to the Council. The Report highlighted the work of

the Commission on Agenda 2063 which is being presented to the Summit for adoption and the work in progress with regard to the first Agenda 2063 10-year plan which is intended for adoption at the June Summit this year. Dr. Zuma said integration remained central to the continental vision, noting that initiatives to accelerate infrastructure development and agreements to implement free trade zones were encouraging. She said the Commission would present a comprehensive report on the State of Integration in the context of Agenda 2063 to the June summit. The upcoming meeting of the Ministers of Economy and Finance in March would look at funding for Agenda 2063 and later in the year Ethiopia would host the global conference on development financing.

Dr. Zuma spoke of the need to silence the guns and neutralize the threats of terrorism, intolerance and extremism, as well as the risk of slow movement on integration, infrastructure and the diversification of economies and the largest risk: failure to finance development, adding “we must go the next step to plan what to do to mitigate these risks.” She said Africa “must do more and better for African youth,” including increasing investment in education in science and technology, skills development through vocational training, and better treatment of teachers, and lowering the cost of access to internet service. These would be the way to tackle the problem of African youth migration and trafficking, and falling prey to extremism.

The Chairperson said the AU efforts for peace, stability and the consolidation of democracy and good governance were paying off and the African Peace and Security Architecture meant situations could be addressed before they became entrenched. She called for immediate and collective action against Boko Haram, adding “we must work diligently towards silencing the guns by the year 2020, and nip in the bud this threat to African prosperity, peace and human security.” She expressed “deep appreciation to our peacekeepers” and called for “a monument for our AU peacekeepers that have lost their lives in the duty of the peoples of the continent.” She said the collective fight against the Ebola Virus Disease was showing results in response to the call for African health workers to be deployed in the three Ebola-affected countries and paid tribute to the volunteers and others involved.

Dr. Zuma underlined the importance of the theme- the Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063 – and said firmly “we must also do more this year to increase the representation of women in government, in the judiciary and other public and private institutions and their participation at the tables in peace negotiations.” She also stressed the importance of a common African position in the global negotiations on the post-2015 agenda, on climate change and sustainable development goals.

UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the UNECA, Carlos Lopez stressed the role that agriculture could and should play in pushing forward the industrialization of Africa, noting that while “the world economy is slowing down; Africa, fortunately, is not.” He said that in the past year Africa had shown itself an epicenter of investment adding that markets needed to expand with a view to sustain growth. Mr. Lopez also reminded the meeting that the continent had two years to go before 2017, the establishment of the continental free trade agreement, which, he said, would “represent a fundamental change for current and future generations.”

.....The NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee Summit

The 32rd Session of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee Summit (HSGOC) was also held on the sidelines of the Summit this week. It was attended by a number of Heads of State including the Chairperson of the HSGOC, President Macky Sall of Senegal, Presidents Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Jacob Zuma of South Africa and Prime Minister Hailemariam of Ethiopia as well as Dr. Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Opening the session, President Macky Sall noted the challenge facing the financing of NEPAD's transboundary infrastructure projects but he hailed the first ever Finance Summit held in Dakar in July last year. The Summit had aimed to devise innovative finance mechanisms to implement selected infrastructure projects in Africa and it also deliberated on ways to increase private sector involvement in financing infrastructure through de-risking measures. It agreed on the importance of promoting innovative domestic resource mobilization, including the issuing of infrastructure and Diaspora bonds. President Sall said the idea of selecting projects on the basis of their bankability was a major success of the Summit. He also noted that infrastructure was the key driver to realize the dream of making Africa a major investment destination.

Ibrahim Mayaki, Chief Executive Officer of the NEPAD Agency told the Summit that NEPAD was working on a series of key development issues including agriculture, food security, climate change and natural resources, regional integration and infrastructure, science and technology as well as other cross-cutting issues such as gender-based capacity building. He noted that NEPAD had launched the Agriculture Climate Change Framework Initiative. This has a target of at least 25 million small-scale farmers practicing climate-smart agriculture by 2025. It includes two sub-programs – the Gender Climate Change Agriculture Support Program and the NEPAD-NGO Alliance. The Gender Climate Change Agriculture Support Program is “aimed at improving the capacity and capabilities of government departments and women small holder farmers to respond to the impacts of climate change.” It is being implemented in five countries, and provides support in the creation “and strengthening of national platforms to increase the voice of women in decision making in all aspects of the agriculture value chain; capacity building to increase productivity; improve the quality of commodities; and technical support to organize themselves in cooperatives.” The Alliance, with five NGO's, also aims to build capacity, in this case of some 6 million farmers in climate-smart agricultural techniques. Mr. Mayaki added that “the NEPAD Climate Change Fund has supported through financial grants and technical assistance, measures aimed at strengthening resilience and adaptation to climate change”, assisting projects in 10 countries. In discussion, members raised issues of falling oil prices and security and the effect on mobilizing finances and ensuring implementation of the projects.

President Jacob Zuma of South Africa presented a progress report of the NEPAD Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative (PICI). He said NEPAD provides a fine example of Africa solving its own problems, pointing out that “a good number of NEPAD Programs are owned by

Africans with commendable backing of international organizations.” President Zuma lauded the outcome of the Dakar Financing Summit in introducing the innovative approach for making infrastructure projects bankable. He also praised the Service Delivery Mechanism for the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) and its support for early-stage project preparation and development. He emphasized the importance of the Infrastructure Skills for Development (SDM) to train project personnel for the success of PIDA projects. President Zuma highlighted Africa need to work towards the implementation of projects to capture the positive momentum of growth which was currently evident in the falling poverty rates in the continent. Infant Mortality Rating was decreasing; there was a decline on in extreme hunger; and an increase of Foreign Direct Investment. He said the implementation of regional infrastructure plans would unlock the economic potential of the continent

President Zuma gave an account of the current status of key infrastructure projects. The North-South Corridor project encompasses 12 countries: Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Sudan, Djibouti, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, Malawi and Botswana. It covers a host of programs for railways, trans-boundary roads ,power interconnections and ports has secured funding for a feasibility study of the 270km Kapoeta-Raad road in South Sudan. Most of the more than a dozen feasibility projects and design studies have been completed under auspices of SADC, EAC and COMESA. The pre-feasibility study of navigational link from Lake Victoria to the Mediterranean via the Nile River is due to be completed by May 2015. Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda have abolished roaming charges for telephones as part of the One Africa Network Initiative. The Prime Minister of Algeria, Abdelmalek Sellal, also reported on the progress made in the Trans-Sahara–Algeria project, noting that the section from Algeria had almost reached the border with Niger, and the final section of 222km was launched in December 2014.

Following discussions, Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee adopted a number of recommendations. These included implementing the Dakar Agenda for Action Acceleration Strategy, the PIDA Service Delivery Mechanism and the Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative (PICI); pursuing the goals set in the Post-Malabo Declaration on PIDA; and Capacity Building of Regional Economic Communities and for climate-smart agricultural programs. HSGOC re-elected President Macky Sall as Chairperson and its bureau members, who include Ethiopia, for another two years term.

A discussion was also held on Structural Transformation and Regional Integration in the context of the Africa’s Infrastructural Development. A representative for Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank, noted that Africa’s trade and infrastructural problems were largely concerned with trade facilitation issues which, she said, required policy intervention. The problems prevented intra-Africa FDI flows while also leading to the loss of many profitable opportunities in Africa. She also mentioned that logistical problems, high transport costs, and cumbersome goods clearance and trade facilitation regulations made trading in Sub Saharan Africa uncompetitive in terms of the ease of doing business. She raised the example of the cost of moving a container from Japan to Lagos which would cost US\$1,800 while moving it from Durban to Lagos would cost US\$8,000. Welcoming the efforts of some countries to ease cross-border trade, she urged countries and REC’s to streamline and harmonize trade facilitation

polices. The AfDB representative said low labor costs and quota and duty free access to EU and US markets provided strong incentives for Africa's industrialization prospects, and she noted Ethiopian initiatives in manufacturing leather gloves and Dangote Cement as having taken advantage of these incentives.

Carlos Lopez, UNECA Executive Secretary, also stressed that infrastructural development was a requirement for structural transformation of Africa's economy. Africa's transport, he said, remains uncompetitive posing bottlenecks for private sector development. Freight costs were higher for developing countries. He said there had been steady improvement in electricity provision but 60% of Africa still will not get power before 2020. Mr. Lopez also said there was a challenge to fill the US\$42 billion gap for financing infrastructure in Africa, with private investment only amounting to US\$8 billion. He said the Dakar Agenda should come up with mechanisms to encourage private sector investment in infrastructure and address the fear of regulatory risks and contract enforcement by giving guarantees and creating arbitration institutions to settle disputes.

A Representative of the UN Secretary General presented a report on Africa's partnership engagement. He emphasized the importance of the principle of complementarity, coherence and strategy between the Regional Economic Communities (REC's) and the AU and the UN. He emphasized that the UN sees REC's as the building blocks of the continental body and said that the UN was reviewing and reorganizing its support system for greater engagement with the continental body and the REC's. He also stressed that donors should honor their commitments for ODA contributions and there should be greater involvement of the private sector. Africa, he said, needed to continue its engagement with the G-20 and the G-7 groups, and with and other emerging economies to ensure the success of the Dakar Agenda for Action.

....and other meetings on the sidelines of the Summit

Other meetings and events during the week included the launch of the AU Commission's Implementation Strategy and Roadmap to Transform African Agriculture. On Tuesday (January 27), the AU Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture in collaboration with the NEPAD Agency, officially unveiled the Implementation Strategy and Roadmap to facilitate the operationalisation of the 2014 Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Africa Agricultural Growth and Transformation for shared prosperity and improved livelihoods, as adopted at the 23rd Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in Malabo, in June 2014. It was officially launched by Ms. Soueinea, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania, and Chairperson of the Executive Council. AUC Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture Rhoda Peace Tumusiime said, "We took advantage of the 10th Anniversary of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) to take stock of the experiences and use lessons learnt to chart the way forward. We have highlighted the importance of agriculture and mobilized citizens, stakeholders and partners to enhance cooperation, collaboration and partnerships to exploit the full potential that agriculture offers." She said "We are committed to working towards making concrete changes in our people's lives through the transformation of Africa's agriculture and its accelerated growth in the AU Member States." The Malabo Declaration adopted seven key commitments comprising the 2025 vision and goals of Africa

Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation. These are: recommitment to the Principles and Values of the CAADP Process; commitment to Enhancing Investment Finance in Agriculture; commitment to Ending Hunger in Africa by the year 2025; commitment to agriculture contributing to poverty reduction at least by half by the year 2025, through Inclusive Agricultural Growth and Transformation; commitment to tripling Intra-African Trade in Agricultural commodities and services, by the year 2025; commitment to Enhancing Resilience of Livelihoods and Production Systems to Climate Variability and other related risks; and commitment to Mutual Accountability to Actions and Results.

The High Level African Trade Committee (HATC) also met on Thursday. HATC is mandated by the Summit to provide a facilitating role and deal problems that arise in the process of establishing a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by 2017 or in the Action Plan for Boosting Intra-Africa Trade (BIAT), as agreed by the AU Ordinary Session of January 2012. The meeting reviewed and discussed the recommendations of the Ministers of Trade on intra-African trade, the Continental Free Trade Area, World Trade Organization issues, and AGOA and give strategic guidance to the Commission on the way forward. It also reviewed progress towards the launch of the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiations at the next AU Summit.

The 22nd Summit of the Committee of Heads of State and Government of the African Peer Review Mechanism took place on Thursday (January 29). The Republic of Cote d'Ivoire acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) at the meeting, and Benin and Sierra Leone presented Progress Reports on the implementation of their National Programs of Action. Kenya was elected new Vice-Chair of the APRM, and two new Panel Members from South Africa and Nigeria were appointed. President Zuma announced the appointment of Professor Adebayo Olukoshi, previously Director of the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning as Chief Executive Officer of the APRM Secretariat. The African Peer Review Mechanism was established in March 2003 by the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) of NEPAD. It is an instrument for self-monitoring and good governance for Member States. Currently, the APRM has thirty-four member states that have voluntarily acceded. Of these countries, seventeen have completed their self-assessment exercise and have been peer-reviewed by the Forum of Heads of State and Government.

.....Bilateral discussions on the sidelines of the AU Summit

This week, Foreign Minister, Dr. Tedros Adhanom has been holding a series of bilateral meetings this week, both before and after the AU Executive Council session and on the sidelines of the AU Summit.

Dr. Tedros met with US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ms. Linda Thomas-Greenfield on Thursday. They exchanged views on the challenge that radicalization is posing to Africa and more widely and on ways to tackle it in the context of the Maidugri meeting to remove the threat of Boko Haram. Dr. Tedros stressed that effective counter-terrorist activity required the education of vulnerable youngsters and emphasized the need for effective control of terrorist finances and the importance of developing intelligence-sharing mechanisms to deal with such groups as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Ms. Thomas-Greenfield said their designation as

terrorist groups was helping to stop terrorist financial activity and agreed the need for concerted action. They noted the meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Hailemariam was important in expanding cooperation between Ethiopia and the US. They agreed on the need to take practical steps to translate the high level of commitment into effective action. Ms. Thomas-Greenfield, they reaffirmed the need to extend full support to the IGAD-led mediation process on South Sudan and noted the importance of preventing any backtracking of the process to end the conflict. They welcomed the release of the names of the new cabinet in Somalia and agreed on the importance of encouraging stabilization measures in the areas freed from Al-Shabaab. Dr. Tedros noted the importance of encouraging encourage trade and investment to change the narrative of a failing Somalia, and said Ethiopia was currently working with Government of Somalia to host a Somalia business forum in Addis Ababa. The two sides also exchanged views about Ethiopia's upcoming national election in May.

Dr. Tedros also met with Dr. Nicholas Wescott, Managing Director of African Affairs of the European External Action Service, Alexander Rondos, Special Envoy of European Union to the Horn of Africa, and Ambassador Chantal Hebberecht, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Ethiopia. The focus was on the regional political and security situation and on ways to strengthen cooperation between Ethiopia and the European Union. Dr. Tedros emphasized the need to sustain cooperation and support to keep up the momentum of positive change and particularly in regard to Somalia, where remarkable progress was being made. At the same time he stressed that the leadership of the Federal Government of Somalia needed to take practical steps to meet the goals of its Vision 2016. Dr. Tedros underlined that Ethiopia would continue supporting Somalia on the basis of the needs and priorities set by the Federal Government to realize a stable, secure and vibrant Somalia. Speaking on Eritrea, Dr. Tedros noted that the regime in Asmara remained determined to continue its policy of destabilizing the region. There had been no change in its behavior. He said: "Hosting rebels from neighboring countries, Eritrea has chosen the path of destruction rather than cooperation and mutual development". He said it was imperative that the UN imposed sanctions to stop Asmara from disturbing the regional peace were fully implemented. Dr. Tedros also reiterated the urgent need to end the conflict in South Sudan and bring durable peace there. He said IGAD was continuing to work towards producing incremental changes, building on the agreed points of forming a national unity government in a manner that can provide a real solution. Mr. Westcott shared the view there was an urgent necessity to end the conflict in South Sudan and reaffirmed the European Union's support to the IGAD-led mediation process. The EU delegation and Dr. Tedros also exchanged views regarding Ethiopia's upcoming national election in May. Dr. Tedros said the pre-election process was on schedule and there had been impressive voter registration. The Government and the ruling party were taking all necessary measures to make sure that the election would be held in a manner that ensured widespread participation by the public and by all political parties.

At the beginning of the week, Dr. Tedros welcomed the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Ivica Dacic and his delegation. He said government-to-government relations were the defining elements of the relationship between Ethiopia and Serbia and they could be turned into effective tools to create more space for an economic partnership that could herald a new era of cooperation. Dr Tedros stressed the need to tap into all potential areas of cooperation. He pointed out that Serbia's comparative advantages in trade,

investment and other areas of cooperation complimented Ethiopia's investment and trade priorities, adding that both countries therefore had the opportunity to make their ties key promoters of solid business cooperation for mutual betterment and progress of their two peoples. Mr. Dacic reiterated that Ethiopia was a country which the people and Government of Serbia valued highly and on which they could rely to expand the already existing partnership for greater development. The First Deputy Prime Minister said that Ethiopia and Serbia shared numerous cultural and religious commonalities and the two governments should forge a mutually closer and stronger partnership in all areas of common interest. He stressed the importance of upholding and strengthening cultural, trade and investment ties. He pledged that Serbia would deliver win-win and tangible results.

In his discussions with Norway's Foreign Minister, Borge Brende, the same day, Dr Tedros underlined Ethiopia's determination to remain a proactive defender of the maintenance of collective peace and security, committed to the advancement of harmony and stability in the region. He also emphasized that it attached special importance to dialogue to resolve disputes. Dr Tedros gave a briefing on the ongoing IGAD-led South Sudan peace talks as well as IGAD's role in trying to bring an end to the conflict between the South Sudanese warring parties and advance the cause of peace and stability. The Foreign Minister recalled the successful conclusion of the 53rd Extraordinary Meeting of the IGAD Council of Ministers held in Mogadishu on January 10, adding that the very fact that the meeting had been held in Mogadishu underlined the improving security situation in Somalia.

Foreign Minister Brende said that his visit to Addis Ababa was a testimony to Norway's commitment to further strengthen and deepen bilateral ties with Ethiopia. He stressed that Norway was committed to scale up cooperation with Ethiopia to a higher level. Underlining the need for further consolidation of the bilateral partnership of the two countries, Mr. Brende disclosed that Norway's Foreign Affairs Ministry was proposing to place Ethiopia among the six focus countries for its development cooperation program. Dr Tedros welcomed this decision which, he said would significantly assist Ethiopia's efforts to realize a carbon-free middle-income country status by 2025. The bilateral discussion covered promotion of the Ethio-Norwegian partnership and expanding their relationship and the two Ministers reached a consensus in to jointly push forward cooperation in many areas including climate change, education, private sector engagement, trade and investment.

The following day, Monday (January 26), Dr. Tedros Adhanom, meeting Martin Lidegaard, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, expressed his thanks to the Government of Denmark for hosting the successful High Level Ministerial Partnership Forum on Somalia, held in Copenhagen in November last year. This, Dr. Tedros said, had laid the foundation for the successful conclusion of the IGAD Council of Ministers meeting in Mogadishu earlier this month. The two Ministers shared ideas on Sustainable Development Goals and climate diplomacy, and Dr. Tedros, who welcomed Denmark's support for mitigating climate change, reiterated Ethiopia's keenness to work with Denmark in cooperation in green development and agro-processing. He emphasized that Ethiopia was determined to become a carbon neutral, middle income and climate resilient economy by 2025, and said it would welcome Danish investors and business involvement in Ethiopia's trade priorities. They would be builders and

promoters of Ethiopia-Denmark relations and they would open new avenues for further strengthening of Ethio-Danish relations.

Foreign Minister Lidegaard said Denmark valued its links with Ethiopia. It considered Ethiopia a stable and peaceful regional partner. It had become an exemplary model of progress, providing remarkable contributions to regional peace and stability. The two Ministers discussed the threat of radicalization and its impact on national, regional and global policies. Dr Tedros noted that the fight against radicalization needed a coordinated, comprehensive and forward-looking regional and global approach that embraced the acceleration of economic and social development, the creation of job opportunities and the promotion of a culture of tolerance and harmony as well as improvements in good governance, democracy and human rights. This, he said, would help to dry up the breeding ground for radicalization and undermine youth vulnerability to this threat. The Ministers agreed on the need to prevent the scourge of radicalization and advance the cause of peace and stability.

Dr Tedros, who noted that Ethiopia's regional diplomacy placed emphasis on collective security, stressed that the concept attached special importance to dialogue to resolve differences, and in this he included Eritrea. Indeed, dialogue could, he said, have opened the possibility for normalization of Ethio-Eritrea relations and have advanced regional integration. To the dismay of Ethiopia, however, this had been prevented by the intransigence of the Eritrean Government, which, Dr. Tedros pointed out, had continued to host, finance and assist rebel groups as part of its regional destabilization objectives. It was also using rebel groups as a conduit for financing Al-Shabaab militants in Somalia. All this, said Dr. Tedros, made it clear the regime in Asmara had still not made any behavioral change in its foreign policy. He emphasized the importance of the international community taking measures to put an end to such negative activities and the need for it to implement fully the sanctions imposed on Eritrea by the UN Security Council.

Dr. Tedros also met Zhang Ming, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government and Vice Foreign Minister on Monday to discuss bilateral relations and China-Africa issues of mutual concern. Zhang Ming said China-Ethiopia relations were a model for other countries and he welcomed Ethiopia's facilitation of daily diplomatic routines which, he said, did much to strengthen bilateral ties. Dr. Tedros noted that the frequent high level visits between the two countries were a testimony to the strong relationship and welcomed China's support in stabilizing and pacifying the region and its various development partnerships. He acknowledged the importance of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) which, he said, was making a meaningful difference to the continent.

Dr. Tedros agreed that relations between the two countries were excellent and noted that the frequent high level visit between the two countries senior officials alone was a testimony to this. He said Ethiopia cherished its relations with China. In addition to the bilateral engagements between the two countries, he said, "we appreciate China's help to pacify the region" such as the South Sudan. The Vice Minister gave assurances that China would continue to play a role in support of regional pacification and stabilization efforts in South Sudan and Somalia. He noted that despite an improving situation in Somalia, Al-Shabaab was still a challenge and collaboration was needed to control and curb threats to stability. He said China has been

supporting IGAD's efforts and it would continue doing so in order to help produce the peace and stability crucial to the region.

He said this year was the 45th anniversary of Ethio-Chinese diplomatic relations and mentioned that the recent visits of President Dr. Mulatu and Speaker Abadulla showed the continued bilateral relations. The Vice Minister detailed plans to open a regional transportation center and initiatives for poverty alleviation in the Horn of Africa. He assured Dr. Tedros that the Chinese Government would encourage reputable and substantial Chinese companies to invest in Ethiopia in various transportation, infrastructure, agriculture and energy. Zhang Ming also noted expectations that Ethiopia would facilitate people-to-people relations and visa processes. He said China was working to increase scholarships and personnel training in various areas and planned to open a cultural center. Zhang Ming invited Prime Minister Hailemariam to visit China in the near future.

Dr. Tedros' bilateral discussions with Mr. Navtej Sarna, Vice Minister of External Affairs of India and Special Envoy of the Minister, were held on Tuesday (January 27). They gave a clear signal of the interest of both countries in cooperating in a number of fields, including space science, security, counter-terrorism, railways and education in addition to already existing areas of partnership. The two Ministers discussed the India-Africa partnership and the cooperation of Ethiopia and India on bilateral and global issues of mutual concern. They agreed on the importance of strengthening and expanding existing relations in the proposed fields of cooperation. They also reached an agreement on the importance of reactivating the Ethio-India Joint Ministerial Commission. This would allow for a review of all areas of cooperation, for challenges to be identified and ways to be devised to resolve these as well as chart a way forward for mutual progress. The Ministers also exchanged views on the contributing role of the India-Africa Summit in encouraging cooperation between the two countries.

Dr Tedros, noting the long standing, genuine and cordial relations between Ethiopia and India, suggested that close cooperation on education would serve both countries as an important building block for a mutually beneficial cooperative partnership that could deliver tangible results. He underlined Ethiopia's keenness to encourage Indian investors and business persons' involvement in various different investment sectors and noted the importance of organizing business forums to promote and showcase investment opportunities and create linkages between their respective businesses. He emphasized the importance of expanding trade ties and increasing the volume of trade, currently standing at US\$1 billion. Mr. Sarna, describing Ethio-India bilateral relations as cordial and constructive, noted the strong cooperation in the field of capacity building especially in terms of human development. The Vice Minister said India appreciated Ethiopia's strong economic development. He stressed importance of taking the relationship to a higher level to help achieve the common development of the two nations. He agreed the need to deepen and strengthen their partnership in such areas as security, space science and railways as well as broadening cooperation in education.

The same day, Tuesday (January 27), Dr. Tedros also held talks with Mr. Sameh Shoukry, Foreign Minister of Egypt. Their discussion covered the progress made in the Tripartite National Committee on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as well as in the high level

political discussions the two countries have been holding. The two Ministers later briefed journalists on their talks. Dr Tedros pointing out that Ethiopia and Egypt have had regular meetings at all levels since the agreement made by President El-Sisi and Prime Minister Hailemariam in Malabo last year. He said their bilateral discussions on Tuesday were part of the agreement made in Malabo, and added that both countries were continuing their dialogue at technical, levels, between their Water and Foreign Ministers and at Heads of State level. He said the two leaders had so far met twice and they would be meeting again in Addis Ababa on the margins of the 24th AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government Summit later in the week. This, he said, would also help to drive the technical level discussions forward. Dr Tedros said that he had “candid and productive” discussions with Minister Sameh Shoukry. The key point of their meeting had been to evaluate the progress made in the Tripartite Dam Talks and discuss ways to help the technical level talks speed up the progress of the two studies recommended by the International Panel of Experts. He said the discussions had also focused on evaluating the progress made so far in the high level political discussions, assessing problems and devising mechanisms to improve relations.

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said that over the previous six months both countries had a “productive relationship”, which was paving the way to address issues of common interest in “a very candid and transparent’ manner. He said on all issues of common interest, he tried to look at the issue through Ethiopian eyes; adding that “I have every indication that Dr Tedros views the issues from the eyes of Egyptian Government and People.” Mr. Shoukri, who noted that both countries had encouraged the achievements of the technical committee, emphasized that “we look forward to the political commitment on both sides helping to achieve greater progress.”

Turkish President Erdoğan in Djibouti and Somalia

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan arrived in Somalia on the third leg of his Horn of Africa tour on Sunday (January 25), following visits to Ethiopia last week and Djibouti over the weekend. It was his second visit to Somalia. On his first visit in August 2011, when he was still Prime Minister, he was the first non-African leader to visit Mogadishu in decades. He was welcomed enthusiastically by Somalis not least because, ignoring the general view that Mogadishu as too dangerous, he flew in with his family and a large delegation. On this occasion, he was again accompanied by his wife, Emine, and daughter, Sumeyye Erdoğan , as well as Deputy Prime Minister, Numan Kurtulmus; Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu; Economy Minister, Nihat Zeybekci; Science and Industry Minister, Fikri Isik; and Forestry and Water Minister, Veysel Eroglu as well as other officials and businessmen. The visit was aimed at re-energizing the strategic partnership between Somalia and Turkey and to reaffirm Turkey’s long-term commitment to Somalia. Together with the visits to Ethiopia and Djibouti it also underlined Turkey’s commitment to its relations with Africa.

President Mohamud, who said Somalia had become a different country since President Erdoğan’s last visit, noted relations between the two countries had intensified steadily. He paid tribute to the significant contribution the Turkish government and people have made to aid and

development initiatives in Somalia, pointing out that the friendship between Turkey and Somalia began in the 16th century with ties between the Ottoman Empire and the Adel Sultanate. He praised Turkey for investing in Somalia despite the insecurity caused by decades of turmoil, acknowledging the Turkish commitment even in the face of significant risks. Turkish interests in Somalia have been the target of Al-Shabaab on a number of occasions, most recently last week, on January 22, when the hotel where the Turkish delegation was making last preparations ahead of Erdoğan's visit was attacked and four people killed. President Erdoğan thanked those Turkish nationals who have continued to serve and work in Somalia despite the danger and the threats

The bilateral discussions between the two Presidents concentrated on the increasing dialogue and cooperation between Somalia and Turkey over economic, social and security issues. New development agreements were signed focusing on elements of military and security cooperation, youth and sports initiatives, marine transportation, police support and cooperation between Turkish National Radio TRT and Somali National TV. At a joint press conference after their talks President Mohamud said "We thank Turkey for her ongoing development assistance in support of economic, military, social, infrastructure partnership and humanitarian aid initiatives. The Somalia people are grateful for Turkey's friendship throughout the years and we look forward to strengthened ties between our countries."

Turkey, in partnership with the Federal Government of Somalia, has launched a number of development and infrastructure projects in Somalia, ranging from health and sanitation projects, including the construction of numerous hospitals, to the construction of roads and buildings, and the rehabilitation of Aden Adde International Airport. Turkey is building a new Embassy in Mogadishu, planned to be "one of the biggest Turkish embassies in the world," and a Turkish company, the Albayrak Group, is carrying out the modernization of the Port of Mogadishu, described by President Erdoğan as "in a very strategic place and constitutes an important source of income for the Somali government." The President also spoke of Turkey's "humane, conscientious, Islamic duties" and said Turkey would build houses in Somalia for the country's low income groups: "we said let's start construction of residential buildings," adding that "first let's make a city plan and in the first step let's build 10,000 homes, thereby changing the city's appearance." He said he believed these would be ready within a year or two.

On this visit President Erdoğan attended the inauguration ceremony of a new terminal at the Airport, constructed by the private Turkish construction company, Kozuva: "I wish this building will bring good luck to Somalia, which has gone through hard times." He also opened the new 200-bed Somalia-Turkey Training and Research Hospital which has been named the Erdoğan hospital. This will be operated jointly. The Turkish Health Ministry will provide specialized personnel and financial support for the next five years, after which the hospital will be run by Somalia. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Turkey's international development body, undertook the project and Turkey will cover \$85.6 million of the estimated \$135.7 million operating budget during this period. Some 52 Turkish and 91 local staff will work as hospital administrators, head doctors, administrative directors or financial directors and 36 Somali assistants are expected take to part in the hospital's training program each year.

Earlier in Djibouti, on Saturday (January 24) President Erdoğan signed eight cooperation agreements with President Ismail Omar Guelleh. These covered the creation of a special economic zone of 500 hectares and the establishment of a partnership between the Radio Television of Djibouti and the Radio Television of Turkey, as well as the establishment of a framework for technical cooperation in the fields of youth and sports, maritime transport and police training. Djibouti and Turkey also agreed to initiate cooperation in the military sphere, pledging to work closely in security and in the fight against terrorism.

Speaking at a joint press conference after their talks, the two Presidents reaffirmed their commitment to raise the levels of trade and strengthen bilateral cooperation. President Erdoğan said the two countries shared “ties of friendship and age-old trade and we have an obligation to strengthen them further.” He reaffirmed the commitment of the Turkish Government to work for the strengthening of exchanges between the two countries, and said the agreements would allow both parties to reinvigorate their cooperation.

President Guelleh emphasized the historic nature of the visit which, he said, would begin a new chapter in relations between the two countries. He highlighted the valuable assistance of Turkey especially in the field of renewable energy, welcomed the signing of the agreements. He said Djibouti intended to take full advantage of Turkish experience in the exploitation of geothermal energy. President Guelleh referred to the modernization of Djibouti’s port infrastructure and noted these efforts had helped Djibouti to obtain economic growth in recent years of more than 5% per year. This sustained growth, he said, encouraged the development of trade and he welcomed the increasing number of businessmen in Djibouti.

A Turkey-Djibouti Business Forum was held during the visit and President Erdoğan addressed Djibouti’s National Assembly during his visit. The two Presidents also attended a launching ceremony for the renovation of the Bourhan Bey road in the center of Djibouti.

Somalia’s Prime Minister announces a new cabinet.....

A statement from the Office of Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke on Wednesday (January 28) said that over the past few days, the day-to-day tasks of the government had come to a standstill. “We couldn’t remain in such challenging atmosphere”, and as a result “after consulting with the President, the Speaker of Parliament, legislators, civil society and the entire Somali community, tonight I have named cabinet ministers.” The statement said the Prime Minister was “confident in the composition of the council and in their individual and collective capabilities to deliver on the aspirations of the Somali people.” It added that “the new cabinet ministers have no connection with the current political conflict.” On January 12, Prime Minister Sharmarke had announced a 59 strong government of 25 ministers, 26 deputy ministers and 9 state ministers. As a result of strong opposition in Parliament to the inclusion of some former ministers, he felt it necessary to dissolve the cabinet before it could be considered by Parliament.

Wednesday’s statement called on the Members of Parliament to express and extend confidence in the cabinet as it took on the arduous task of implementing key legislative and policy priorities

in line with Vision 2016. The prime Minister said: "While I do not have the slightest reservation in the capabilities of the new cabinet, I'd like to remind other stakeholders in this process that the task ahead of us is no easy one and the clock is ticking." He reiterated his administration's vision to remain in touch with the sentiments of the public, build a consensus and make resolute decisions. He said: "The appointments made tonight are a clear manifestation in our relentless effort to defend public interest, offer a better alternative for the Somali people and firmly etch Somalia on the path of stability and progress." The Prime Minister said the list of deputy and state ministers would also be announced shortly .

The new list has three women as Ministers of Education, Health and Women and Human Rights Development. It includes the former head of Central Bank who resigned in 2013, Abdisalan Hadliye Omar, who is named to the Foreign Affairs portfolio. Among the cabinet are two journalists. Most of the appointments have not held any previous cabinet posts. Earlier, after the rejection of his previous choices by Parliament, MPs warned the Prime Minister against reinstating certain ministers from his predecessor's cabinet. Two parliamentary committees warned the Prime Minister against reinstating certain ministers who served in his predecessor's government, accusing them of creating recurring political wrangling between the President and the former Prime Minister. In a statement issued after their meeting, 90-members affirmed their willingness to support the appointment of "political novices" who, they said, would be acceptable for designated positions.

...and the Somali President says the door is always open to those who reject Al-Shabaab

As the number of defections from Al-Shabaab continues to grow, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has repeated the government's commitment to ensure the safety of any defector who rejects Al-Shabaab's doctrine of destruction and violence and embraces the peace process. This follows the defection of Al-Shabaab's former intelligence chief, Zakariya Ismail Hersi (Zaki) last month, the most recent defection of commander Hussein Dhubi in Luuq on January 15 as well as the steady flow of foot soldiers abandoning Al-Shabaab. Another former senior Al-Shabaab commander, Sheikh Mohamed Said Mohamed "Atom" was recently taken off the UN sanctions list.

The President said: "senior leaders of al-Shabaab have already defected, and the Federal Government of Somalia has assisted them in removing the sanctions against them. I want to reassure the people of Somalia that this was not done lightly. Those leaders genuinely regret their previous actions. They sought and continue to seek reconciliation, particularly with those who were affected by their actions. They willingly speak out against al-Shabaab and its un-Somali, un-Islamic doctrine, and they paint a terrifying portrait of life within that unholy organization: cruelty, infighting, deception, corruption and worse. For these reasons the Federal Government is willing to engage with them, those who were once our enemies, and to assist in their assimilation back into the Somali community." He added: "the Federal Government will continue to speak to discontented al-Shabaab leaders to encourage them to choose peace."

The President said the Government "was not only speaking to the leaders of al-Shabaab: many, many of the foot soldiers of al-Shabaab have also defected, and more are looking for a way out

of the dark place in which they are trapped. We say to them: the door is always open to you, but you must reject al-Shabaab's perverse creed. You will not be abused or killed. The Federal Government guarantees your safety. Somalia has a place for every one of you. We will help you to get an education or learn a trade or find a job." He said the Government offered a willing ear and a helping hand. It was aware that they only joined Al-Shabaab because they needed money for their family or a friend they trusted persuaded them. Some possibly didn't know what they were joining. The President said: "many of those who have defected tell us of their shock when they realized what they had become involved and complicit in". And he added: "But what you did then does not have to dictate the rest of your life."

The President also said that in this context he had a message for the people of Somalia. He said he knew some were uneasy regarding reconciliation with former members of Al-Shabaab. He could, however, reassure them. He said: "The Federal Government has a process in place, to recognize genuine defection. Defection comes with conditions: recognition of previous crimes; rejection of violence and rejecting Al-Shabaab; embracing a peaceful resolution to conflict; a commitment to play an active part in re-joining a community and contributing to its welfare." He said those who defect go through a process of supervised rehabilitation and once they re-join the community "they are constantly monitored by the Somali security forces to confirm their continuing commitment to rejecting al-Shabaab." He emphasized that members of Al-Shabaab who were not willing to make those commitments and who continued "to revel in brutality, deception, extortion and depravity will be subject to the due process of the law." He said new Counter Terrorism legislation specifically designed for the task responsible could join the peace process after they have served their sentences. At the same time, he asked the Somalia people to accept the need to exercise forgiveness for those who choose the path of peace, adding " I ask so that we can together close this dark chapter in Somalia's history."