

News in Brief

Speaker of the Ethiopian House of People's Representatives visits Saudi Arabia

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...while Ethiopia makes "significant efforts" to address human trafficking

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Ethiopia's AMISOM contingent championing peace and stability in Somalia

Election public observers carried out for the general election in May

News in Brief

Ethiopia

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) announced that election of public observers for the upcoming national election was held successfully in 45, 000 polling station and registration of voters has begun on January 09, 2015. **(See Article)**

Ethiopian Investment Commission announced that (FDI) inflows to Ethiopia have shown a significant increase during the past four years of the Growth and Transformation Plan period. The commission announced that Ethiopia has attracted 983 projects with a combined capital of 296 billion birr in the last four years.

Fetien Abay Abera (PhD) ,Director of Institute of Environment, Gender and Development Studies at Mekelle University won African Union Kwame Nkrumah Scientific Awards 2014, Regional Award for Women in recognition for her outstanding achievements in Science and Technology on December 19, 2014. Doctor Fetien is awarded as East African laureate in the earth and life sciences category.

Ministry of culture and tourism announced that the tourism sector in Ethiopia has created 783,638 jobs during the past four years of the Growth and Transformation Plan. Job creation is increasing with the opening of new hotels, cafes, souvenir and retail

shops. Ministry has also provided tourism related training for 1,460,000 people working in the sector.

Eritrea

President Isayas Afewerki's unusually short interview in New Year reveals the government's intransigence to continue with domestic and foreign policy of enduring repression of its own people and isolating the young nation (**See Article**)

The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report of the U.S. Government criticized the Eritrean Government for not making efforts to curb human trafficking also confirming that Eritreans continue to flee Eritrea due to harsh conditions of mandatory national service (**See Article**)

Djibouti

The Government of Djibouti and the opposition announced on Tuesday last week (December 30 2014) that they had reached an agreement after 18 months of discussions and negotiation. This will allow the main opposition party to take up its seats in the National Assembly (**See Article**)

Somalia

Ethiopian contingent of AMISOM in sector three is contributing to Somalia's peace in its robust engagement in security, humanitarian affairs and support to regional state formation (**See Article**)

General Garad Nur Abdulle, Head of the Somali Police Force Training and Planning Department, announced on January 08 2015 that the first squad of a new specially trained Somali counter terrorism police unit to be deployed to fight Al Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab killed individuals it said were spying for the CIA and other intelligence agencies in front of a large crowd in the southern town of Bardhere.

South Sudan

The 29th Heads of State and Government Extraordinary Summit of the Inter Governmental Authority (IGAD) will be held in on January 19, 2014 in Addis Ababa. The summit is expected to discuss reports of the two warring parties of South Sudan on the modalities of the formation of the national unity government

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom met on Wednesday (January 07, 2014) with President Salva Kirr Mayardit of South Sudan and Minister of Foreign Affairs and

International Cooperation, Barnaba Marial Benjamin in Juba, capital of South Sudan. The bilateral talks covered issues related to the upcoming IGAD Summit in Addis Ababa on January 18 and developments of the ongoing IGAD-led peace negotiations

New UN report, released by the human rights division of the UN Mission in South Sudan revealed that hundreds of civilians were killed when South Sudan's armed opposition forces retook control of the Unity state capital in April last year.

Sudan

The leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) Mohamed Osman al-Mirghani has endorsed president Omer Hassan al-Bashir's bid for a new term, a senior party official told reporters.

President Omer Hassan al-Bashir who addressed a meeting of the National Congress Party (NCP) students' secretariat on Wednesday (January 9, 2014), stressed his party's keenness to broaden participation of opposition in the parliament in order to enable it to draft the permanent constitution and noted that NCP will not run in 30% of the electoral constituencies.

Kenya

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi will make his first 2015 foreign trip to Kenya from January 10 to 11 .Wang's trip is considered important as it is meant to follow up on proposals and cooperation agreements signed between China and Kenya recently.

Speaker of the House of People's Representatives visits Saudi Arabia

A delegation led by the Speaker of the House of People's Representatives, Abadula Gameda, paid a visit to Saudi Arabia (December 26- January 2 2014) upon the invitation of the Shura Council, the legislative organ of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia The delegation, which included members of the Standing Committee for Foreign Defense and Security Affairs of the House of People's Representatives met with representatives of the Shura Council. The Chair of ParliamentaryTwinning Committee of the Shura Council noted Saudi Arabia's readiness to boost the Kingdom's long-standing and historic ties with Ethiopia. Noting the fact that Saudi Arabia was the second largest importer of Ethiopian products, the Chair highlighted the need to further deepen trade ties between the two countries. Speaker Abadula highlighted the significance of holding the meeting between the two law making bodies as a means of

strengthening the government-to-government ties. Other members of the Ethiopian delegation emphasized the geographic proximity of Ethiopia to the Middle East and stressed that this offered an opportunity to create a stronger bond between the two peoples. They also noted the importance of strong Ethio-Saudi relations for fostering strong African-Arab links.

The discussions between the two sides dwelt on a number of issues aimed at strengthening bilateral ties between Ethiopia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Following questions by members of the Shura Council, Ethiopian delegates detailed the investment incentives available for power generation and agricultural investment in Ethiopia. They underlined Ethiopia's immense potential in hydropower, wind and geothermal energy and the policy framework for their development. Outlining the investment incentives, and the increasing flow of foreign direct investment, the Ethiopian delegation encouraged Saudi businesses to invest in Ethiopia. They also noted that Ethiopia will vail support to King Abdullah's Agriculture Initiative. They pointed out that at the moment, Saudi investment in the agricultural area in Ethiopia left much to be desired and they urged their counterparts to take advantage of the geographical proximity of the two countries and incentives available. Inviting Saudis to take part in the sector, they listed some of the possible benefits which included tax holidays, credit provision, and investment guarantee schemes. They also highlighted other elements: the conducive policy framework, cheap labor, swift procedures for provision of land and a steadily improving infrastructure.

Speaker Abadula noted that the Ethiopian Government was working with all stakeholders to ensure that Ethiopian workers coming to Saudi Arabia were well trained and equipped with the necessary skills for the jobs they would be undertaking. He told the Shura Council that the Government was working on a new bilateral labor agreement with Saudi Arabia to alleviate any problem of under-age migrants, adding, "Strict rules were being put in place in the passport issuing process." Referring to the trafficking of Ethiopians to Saudi Arabia, Speaker Abadula noted the challenge faced by the Government of Ethiopia in trying to halt human trafficking across the long and porous Ethio-Somalia border to Yemen. He said that Ethiopia and Yemen were cooperating to try to curb the problem, but he also noted the need to work closely with Saudi Arabia and other regional countries. Human trafficking, he said is a global problem that requires global action.

In a meeting with Saudi Arabia's Minister of Labor, Adil Feqih, discussion focused on regularizing the employment of Ethiopian workers in Saudi Arabia and curbing illegal migration. Speaker Abadula said a national committee in Ethiopia led by Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen aimed to create a nation-wide movement against illegal migration through various educational and sensitization programs. He said Ethiopia had banned the recruitment of workers to the Middle East for the time being to thoroughly analyze the problems of illegal migration and curb human trafficking. He stressed Ethiopia's resolve to make the process of foreign employment free of intermediaries who had actually been responsible for human trafficking under the guise of legal migration. He said the Ethiopian Government had identified poverty and unemployment as main push factors for illegal migration and therefore it believed that job creation in Ethiopia had become a major step in preventing human trafficking and illegal migration, adding that "Ethiopia is witnessing positive changes; we are creating more than two million jobs every year." The two sides also discussed on the rights of Ethiopian workers in Saudi Arabia. Minister Adil noted that a draft labor agreement had been drawn up between the two ministries of labor. He stressed the need to speed up the signing and ratification process to put in place effective mechanisms to safeguard workers' rights. He also noted the importance of closely monitoring government offices to ensure that staff were not collaborating with traffickers.

The delegation also conferred with the Saudi Human Rights Council and the Saudi Agent Ministry for Social Development. Speaker Abadula emphasized the deep social relations between the two countries to Dr. Abdullah A. Al-Youssef, head of the Agent Ministry. He said Ethiopians consider Saudi Arabia as their second home, citing the fact that many Ethiopian Muslim clerics have been trained in Saudi Arabia. He stressed the need to build on the long tradition of friendship.

During the visit, Speaker Abadula also met with more than 500 Ethiopians living in Riyadh and surrounding areas. He briefed them on developments taking place in Ethiopia, highlighting the immense role that the Diaspora could play in nation building and the Ethiopian renaissance. He emphasized that Ethiopia provided an exemplary model of a country that had produced rapid, pro-poor and broad based development over the past decade. He said Ethiopia was not only developing but was also ensuring sustainable growth through massive conservation work that was "greening" once bare mountains and plateaus. He said the long struggle to improve people's lives and build a democratic society was bringing tangible changes in the lives of the people, further creating a strong sense of solidarity and togetherness in the fight against poverty.

Referring to concerns raised by Ethiopian residents over their rights and their protection, Speaker Abadula said the Government would continue to work with Saudi officials to address any maltreatment of Ethiopian workers. He emphasized, however, that Ethiopians should obey the laws of the Kingdom. He stressed that the Government would be working to improve the awareness of Ethiopians coming to Saudi legally about the country's laws, their rights and duties in Saudi and cultural differences. Speaker Abadula also responded to questions relating to the freedom of religion in Ethiopia, noting that it was duty of the government and of citizens to obey the core principle enshrined in the constitution, which is the separation of religion and government. He said that as there was no state religion in Ethiopia and all believers were treated equally. Ethiopia, he said, was a land of diverse faiths. Speaker Abadula also replied to queries about the Diaspora housing program, the ownership of property in Saudi Arabia and the problems faced by women in trying to organize themselves as members of the Diaspora in Saudi Arabia.

In addition to its discussions with the members of the Diaspora, the delegation visited the Ethiopian Community School in Saudi Arabia and attended an Oromo Development Association Fund Raising Program to raise funds to build a special needs school.

Government and opposition in Djibouti conclude agreement

The Government of Djibouti and the opposition announced on Tuesday last week (December 30 2014) that they had reached an agreement after 18 months of discussions and negotiation. This will allow the main opposition party to take up its seats in the National Assembly. Mr. Abdulkader Kamil, President of the Government's Presidential Majority Union (UMP) party and Mr. Ahmed Youssouf, President of the opposition Union for National Salvation (USN), signed the agreement. The USN has boycotted parliament, since the parliamentary elections held in February 22, 2013, accusing the Government of rigging the vote. The Union for Presidential Majority (UMP) won 55 of the 65-seats Assembly while USN was said to have won 10 seats. This was the first time that the opposition had won any seats since multiparty politics was introduced in 1992.

The deal signed between the two sides was part of a political dialogue framework agreement aiming to bring to an end the 20-month disagreement between the opposition and the government. The expected outcome of the agreement is the return of the opposition members to take seats in the National Assembly. A press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Djibouti said, the agreement “paves the way for the participation of the opposition in the political life of the country and the setting up of working commissions between the government side and the opposition side as well as the start of political and institutional reforms jointly proposed by the two sides.”

The statement by the Ministry also emphasized that culmination of the political negotiations should be devoted to continuing the progress made in the fight against poverty, in the consolidation of social peace and in the fight against terrorism. It said the agreement, which promises to assign guarantors to see that “each of its terms is respected and fully translated into action”, gave opportunities towards joining the efforts of the various political forces of the country in greater synergy to support the objective of strengthening the democratic process. It also consolidates previous achievements and allows the operation of a stable democracy.

The agreement was described as an important juncture to bring stability to the nation, restore democracy and the rule of law and, as promised by President Ismael Omar Guelleh, would provide “a significant calming of the political climate in the country”. Prime Minister, Abdoukader Mohamed Kamil, said the day would be historic “not only because it has allowed an inclusive political agreement but also and especially because it has allowed the Djiboutian people to take an important step.” The President of the USN, Ahmed Yusuf, said that Djibouti "will be an original example to follow in Africa and around the world" if both parties succeed with the realization of this framework agreement. “

Minister of Finance and Economy, Ilyas Moussa Dawaleh, Secretary General of the Popular Rally for Progress (RPP), the main political party of the ruling UMP alliance, said that the signing of the framework agreement was a historic turning point to the young democracy of Djibouti. "Today there is no victor nor vanquished," he said. The Minister of Energy, responsible for Natural Resources, Ali Yacoub Mahamoud, said it was important to remember three things about the agreement: the personal involvement of the President Ismail Omar Guelleh; the political maturity of opposition leaders; and the reaching of a sealed agreement without the intervention of a third party. He said: “We must commend the role of President Ismail Omar Guelleh who

took the initiative of these negotiations and who has been involved more closely by reaching out repeatedly to the opposition, especially when negotiations were at a standstill”.

According to Ismail Harred Gedi, Vice-President of the opposition USN, which was one of the architects of the framework agreement and the main interlocutor with the government, the signing of this agreement reflects the will of all parties to overcome differences in the supreme interest of the country and to provide good governance in Djibouti, in accordance with the Constitution and democratic values. A statement by the opposition made it clear it also appreciated the agreement and the fact that it was reached without any outside involvement: “Today the political leaders of the government and the opposition demonstrated their political maturity by signing the framework agreement on political dialogue between the Government and USN.”

The statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs added that a commission, made up of members of the UMP and the USN would now work on a “definitive accord.” It said the agenda would include democratic reforms, the status of the opposition and a reform of the nation's electoral commission. In due course, the USN deputies would return to the National Assembly, opening the way for their full participation in the political life of the country. Bipartisan working commissions would be established and work on the political reforms proposed by both parties the statement said.

Given the fact that the Horn of Africa is enjoying unprecedented economic growth and relative peace and stability, ensuring political stability and consolidating democracy and good governance is vital to ensure the sustainability of the positive changes taking place in the region's economy and security. This agreement will undoubtedly enhance regional stability and the fight against terrorism and extremism and poverty. The leadership shown both by the Government and the opposition in Djibouti is a remarkable step towards producing an exemplary culture of dialogue and engagement to resolve differences. It is no coincidence that the Arab League and the Organization for Islamic Co-operation have welcomed the agreement.

No policy changes in President Isaias' New Year interview

On the occasion of the year's end, on Tuesday (December 30), President Isaias gave an unusually short interview of no more than two hours to his media, to inform the country of what he had planned for it over the next year. He commented on the implementation and progress of development programs and programs set for implementation in 2015. He spoke of consolidation of the political process and strengthening of the country's single ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). He also noted the streamlining of programs to 'reward' the youth currently engaged in what is euphemistically called "the national development process", that is the open-ended national service conscription process widely regarded as the recruiting ground for the 'forced labor' under the Warsai-Yikealo program which provides workers for construction, mining and other 'developments'. The President also referred, as usual, to the need to safeguard the country's sovereignty and programs envisaged to strengthen national defense, (mis-) quoting alleged statements from Ethiopia of plans to "wage invasion against Eritrea".

Much of the interview followed predictable patterns: as usual, he spoke at length of the "multi-faceted acts of enemy conspiracy directed against the nation's peace and sovereignty". He said popular efforts continued to counter these anti-Eritrea conspiracies, and deal a crushing blow to such enemy activity. He said: "In this way, we shall frustrate enemy designs to keep us hostage in terms of both physical and psychological sense." The President said that "for 15 years we didn't face a military attack, but economic, diplomatic, political and defamation [attacks], to prevent us from implementing development plans." In fact, of course Eritrea has not faced any attack since it became independent, though it has itself attacked Djibouti twice, Yemen and Ethiopia.

The President said the exodus of the country's youth to avoid unending national service conscription and the related Warsai-Yikealo program was part of the conspiracy against Eritrea. When asked about benefits for those who worked for the Warsai-Yikealo program, in most cases for the usual national service conscript 'pay' of 500 nakfa (\$12/month), he said "It's impossible to speak of promises and rewards," though once again, as on many occasions in the past two decades, he promised a collective reward for the entire nation when "our current development campaigns" succeed. Mentioning the sacrifices made by many who had spent their time and their lives in the struggle for independence, he said "people should not look for rewards," adding "who has the right to decide what to give from the government coffers?" He said the work of the youth should be seen as a continuation of the sacrifices of the struggle: "rewards cannot be

attained by being hasty and in a hurry, [they are] attained as a result of work, now is not the time for [rewards].”

His message to the youth who had left the country was clear: they would regret their mistake in leaving. He said “If they have plans to live under welfare, we will meet after a limited journey... if they are regretful, good... but as for those who are tormenting over rewards, time will reconcile us.” In response to whether conscription had affected productivity, Isaias said, “those in the front-lines are not cursed.” By this he apparently meant that enforcing conscription for all between 18 and 40/55 provided equality for everybody. All had to serve in the military equally.

On the matter of a constitution, which he had first mentioned six months ago, the President said that he had assembled a group of people to carry out the task of formulating a Constitution “that would satisfy the aspiration of generations.” However, he added that “the essence of this task is not to focus on satisfying external desire but live up to the expectation of generations for which immense sacrifice has been paid”. The President gave no details of this body nor did he mention the names of any of those appointed none of whom have been made public. He had, himself, never actually mentioned what he found wanting in the previous constitutional draft – widely welcomed at the time and described as ‘excellent’. This, drawn up in 1997, allowed for the creation of political parties and the launching of a process for a constitutional democracy. The National Assembly accepted the draft, but the President then refused to implement it. He later claimed this had been prevented by the war against Ethiopia that he himself had launched in May 1998.

Nothing more was heard of a constitution until the President made the surprising reference to the idea six months ago. In his speech the President said more information about the constitution he was planning to give Eritreans, “will come in its time.” He gave no further details except to add that “we do not want to be goaded into a gathering of bickering” by discussing details. He added “we do not ask for permission or cooperation from anyone” though “the constitution will be prepared [as] the time for drafting or planning a transitional system has arrived.” He failed to add that he has been presiding over a “transitional” government since Eritrea’s independence, de facto in 1991 and de jure in 1993.

President Isaias’ speech, in fact, provided no evidence of any change in external policies, or alteration in the behavior of either the President or the country. Eritrea pays little or no regard to international law and accepted diplomatic norms and remains dedicated to destabilization in the Horn of Africa, harboring, training and financing

individuals and groups bent on acts of violence or terrorism. President Isaias, denying Eritrea was isolated or “out in the cold,” underlined the point claiming that sanctions were meant to undermine Eritrea's sovereignty, frustrate its development efforts, decimate its capacity and create feelings of tension to distract his government from the objectives it set out to achieve. However, all this was “in vain”, he said, because the regime “had shattered the campaign and conspiracy.”

In its latest report, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea provides overwhelming evidence that the Government of Eritrea continues to violate UN resolution 1907 “by importing weapons and ammunition from Eastern Sudan on a regular basis and with the knowledge and direction of Eritrean officials affiliated with the president's office”. The report says Eritrean support for regional armed groups continued to relate largely to its rivalry to Ethiopia and mentions the support provided to armed opposition groups “including the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the Tigray People's Democratic Front (TPDM), and Ginbot Sebat (Ginbot 7)”. The conclusion of the Monitoring Group is that UN sanctions should continue as Eritrea has shown no interest in changing policies. Ethiopia, the major target of Eritrean destabilization, has repeatedly made it clear it is always open for dialogue in the interest of peace and stability in the Horn and more widely. It has clearly shown it will continue to work, in cooperation with IGAD, the AU and the UN, for peace, stability and sustainable development of the people of the sub-region and for Africa. It would welcome signs that Eritrea is prepared to do the same. Indeed, as Ethiopia has repeatedly said, the regime in Asmara needs any change in behavior to be reflected in its policies and their implementation. Sanctions should remain in place until the regime is prepared to observe international norms as required by law and play its part in the community of nations.

The intransigence of the regime in Asmara has also taken its toll on the people of Eritrea. It is no secret that the excesses of the indefinite military service and repeated violations of human rights leading to desperation and poverty have encouraged the exodus of so many thousands. Eritrea had good rains in 2014 and should have had a better harvest than for several years. It was not, however, impressive. One reason appeared to have been that many farmers were called for military training during the harvest season and a lot of crops were damaged by rain before they could be stored. The President explained that as “training is a priority, harvesting can wait, we can afford weeks or months to do that... and one has to make a decision.” He said: “we made a trade off.” In other words, the government decided the training for farmers was more important than collecting the harvest. As a result there were food shortages

reported in the cities during the year. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea has confirmed the many arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, the lack of freedom of movement, expression or opinion, and the many extrajudicial killings, which she said formed "the background to the exodus of young Eritreans". Hardly surprisingly, the number of asylum seekers in Europe from Eritrea has tripled over the past year with close to 37,000 Eritreans arriving there. The President's New Year interview did not betray any sign of regret over the numbers leaving the country. He stressed he wouldn't indulge in promises to stop the young fleeing the country in droves. Indeed, he even said Eritrea has no shortage of manpower to undertake its planned 'development' projects.

The problem of Exodus from Eritrea continues unabated....

The exodus of Eritreans, up to 6,000 a month to Ethiopia and thousands to Sudan, a majority youngsters, continues. Many also try to move on to Europe despite the sharply increased dangers to those trying to reach Italy by sea. One new trick by human traffickers/smugglers recently has been for crews to abandon ships in bad weather leaving their human cargo helpless. In two recent cases, it was the Italian coast guard that eventually boarded the ships and steered them to safety. In fact, the ships used to transport migrants across the Mediterranean are often barely seaworthy. Their passengers are refugees, desperate to escape war or persecution, or illegal migrants trying to escape poverty or hunger. The distinction, especially for those coming from Eritrea, is minimal. Numbers continue to grow, with the conflict in Syria, the collapse of Libya and the continuing repression in Eritrea: indeed, the "flow of desperate people heading into Europe is growing exponentially." Figures from the European Union's border agency, Frontex, show that 270,000 people tried to enter Europe illegally in 2014, and according to the International Organization for Migration, more than 3,000 died in their attempts to cross the Mediterranean during the year.

For 15 months Italy ran the Mare Nostrum program, which rescued thousands of would-be refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean, but Italy was unable to continue the program which cost \$12 million a month. It was replaced in November by a cheaper and smaller EU program, Frontex's Operation Triton. The Frontex operation is limited, with patrols staying largely within 30 nautical of the European shore and its budget is less than a third of Mare Nostrum, and it has just two planes and a helicopter, and about seven patrol vessels. It has been criticized as effectively saying "Let them drown,"

and the need for such a program has been underlined by the fact that even this smaller program rescued over 11,000 migrants in the last two months of the year. In fact, across the EU, support is rising for stronger action to try to stop arrival of refugees and migrants despite the fact that in the absence of any attempt to improve the internal policies of Eritrea, or resolve the conflict in Syria, the numbers of those trying to flee their homelands and reach Europe are likely to continue to rise.

In November, Pope Francis made an impassioned plea for Europe to recognize the "human dignity of immigrants." "We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery," he told the European Parliament. In his first mass of this New Year, the Pope also urged people of all religions and cultures to unite to fight modern slavery and human trafficking. He said everyone had a God-given right to be free. All of us, the Pope said, "are called [by God] to be free, all are called to be sons and daughters, and each, according to his or her own responsibilities, is called to combat modern forms of enslavement from every people, culture and religion, let us join our forces." Last month, the Pope who has already made defense of migrants and workers a central issue of his papacy, appealed to consumers to shun low-cost goods that may be the product of forced labor or other forms of exploitation. In November, the Walk Free Foundation, an Australian-based human rights group, released its second global slavery index. This estimated that almost 36 million people were living as slaves, forced into manual labor or born into servitude as well as victims of debt bondage or forced prostitution.

The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report is the U.S. Government's principal diplomatic tool to engage foreign governments on human trafficking and provides a detailed look at the issue around the world. It classifies each country as Tier 1, 2 or 3 on the basis of efforts to comply with the problem and the efforts to address it. Its country reports include detailed assessments of every country and make a conscious attempt to identify the many ways in which individuals are exploited. Almost every country professes to support a tough response to trafficking, but the reality is often more complicated. Any anti-trafficking effort that fails to challenge the situation in a country which is a major source of migration, for example, or in which the political, economic and other forces encourage exploitation and forced labor, will inevitably be limited in its capacity to affect the problems of human trafficking and human smuggling.

The US places Eritrea in Tier 3, and notes that it is "a source country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor domestically, and to a lesser extent, forced prostitution and labor abroad." It notes the tens of thousands of persons fleeing the country "many escaping the government's mandatory national service program," adding that "some are forced to serve indefinitely in the military under threats of

detention, torture, or punishment of their families....Working conditions are often harsh and sometimes involve physical abuse.” The report notes that the government’s exit control procedures and limited issuance of passports and exit visas “effectively oblige those who wished to travel abroad to do so clandestinely, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. ” It also notes “some fleeing Eritreans face being shot and killed by Eritrean or Egyptian authorities or are forcibly repatriated to Eritrea, where they are sometimes detained without charge”.

The report on Eritrea notes that the Government is not making any significant efforts to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. It didn’t provide any data for the report on efforts to combat human trafficking and “continued to subject its citizens to forced labor of a non-military nature in its compulsory national service, often for periods of indefinite duration.” It failed to identify and protect victims of forced labor and sex trafficking, and “it continued to arrest and detain unidentified victims for acts committed as a direct result of being subjected to human trafficking, such as immigration and prostitution violations.” Nor did it take any effective measures to stem the exodus of thousands of Eritreans fleeing the country every month to seek economic opportunities abroad “via clandestine migration that increased their vulnerability to forced labor and sex trafficking abroad. The report says the government did not distinguish between human smuggling and human trafficking, nor did it report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in human trafficking. It made few apparent efforts to identify or provide protection to trafficking victims. It adds that the government made no more than “weak efforts” to prevent trafficking.

The dangers of fleeing Eritrea were sharply underlined twice last month. On December 24, there were reports that at least eight Eritreans died when their boat capsized in the Atbara River in Sudan. The smugglers with whom they were travelling held four survivors to ransom. This, reportedly, led to clashes between Eritrean refugees in the Shegarab refugee camp and locals accused of responsibility, and then to an attack on the refugee camp. According to the UNHCR, there are over 117,000 Eritreans, with over 1,000 new arrivals estimated every month, in the three Shagerab camps in Eastern Sudan. A day earlier, Eritrean websites reported that “ 13 children who were escaping from Eritrea” were gunned down by Eritrean military at the border near Korora, in the far north of north of Eritrea, bordering Sudan. The killings took place in September and, according to the reports, the children were shot in a military truck being used by a smuggler on the Ghindae-Port Sudan escape route, one of several used by Eritreans. Of the thirteen killed, three were said to be sisters aged 13, 16, 18. Three others survived.

...while Ethiopia makes significant effort to address human trafficking

The US Report on Ethiopia places it in Tier 2, classifying it a source, a destination and a transit country for people subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The report notes, “many young Ethiopians transit through Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, or Yemen as they emigrate seeking work in the Middle East”. It also adds that “many Ethiopian women working in domestic service in the Middle East face severe abuses”. The report says that while the Government of Ethiopia doesn’t fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, it is “making significant efforts to do so.” The report itemizes the convictions of traffickers and the work with international partners to shelter and provide emergency care to trafficking victims. In 2013, the Government temporarily banned labor recruitment and began to revise the relevant employment proclamation to control labor agencies and provide better protection of citizens working abroad. It facilitated the return of thousands deported from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, many of whom were “likely trafficking victims,” and worked with NGOs and international organizations to provide services for returning migrants

The report recommends tightening oversight of overseas recruitment agencies, amending the criminal code to include a clear definition of human trafficking and strengthening penalties for sex trafficking and other related offences. It also suggests trafficking-awareness training for diplomats posted abroad, and the appointment of labor officials to help to ensure the protection of Ethiopians seeking work or who are employed overseas, more pre-departure training for migrant workers, more engagement with Middle Eastern governments to improve protection for workers abroad, improved activity by the national anti-trafficking taskforce, and the launching of national anti-trafficking awareness campaign at the local and regional levels. Most of these have, in fact, already been instituted.

The report says the Government’s efforts were focused on transnational trafficking rather than internal efforts and it describes the efforts to prevent human trafficking as “moderate,” detailing some of these, including the co-ordination of regional and national awareness raising campaigns through the media and the Women’s Development Army. Officials from federal ministries and agencies meet weekly as part of the technical working group on trafficking. An inter-ministerial taskforce on

trafficking meets quarterly and was, for example, extensively involved in the detailed response to the deportation of Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia. The Government is enacting legislation for greater oversight of private employment agencies, to mandate the placement of labor attachés in Ethiopian embassies, and to establish an independent agency to train migrant workers. New labor migration agreements were negotiated in 2013 with the Governments of Djibouti, Sudan, the UAE, and Kenya, and others have followed.

South Sudan parties continue to violate the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement

The IGAD Special Envoys to South Sudan mediating the talks in Addis Ababa strongly condemned reports of heavy fighting in Nassir, Upper Nile State, and near Bentiu town in Unity State, last week. The Special Envoys reiterated their call on all forces to immediately cease hostilities, urging all forces to display restraint as per their “repeated pledges to end the war.” A press statement issued by the Special Envoys referred to warring parties’ commitment to an unconditional, complete and immediate end to all hostilities at the 28th Extra-Ordinary Summit of the IGAD Heads of State and Government on November 7, 2014, expressing their “expectation, plea and hope” that this commitment is fully respected. The statement said IGAD Monitoring and Verification Teams have been instructed to investigate these latest incidents and determine responsibility for the violations. The IGAD Special Envoys appealed to the warring parties at the start of the New Year “to make the gift of peace to the people of South Sudan, and ensure that the conflict does not continue for one moment longer.” They also renewed their call to the IGAD Heads of State and Government, the African Union, the United Nations, the Troika, the European Union, the People’s Republic of China and the broader international community to join them in pressuring the parties to immediately end hostilities and commit to the ongoing peace process.

These week the rival parties continued to trade threats to wage an all-out war on each other despite mounting evidence that the international community and IGAD will impose sanctions unless they reach a negotiated settlement as a matter of urgency. South Sudan’s Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Michael Makuei Lueth, told reporters on Tuesday (January 6) that the government would pursue rebels to the end if they continued attacks on positions held by its troops. He said “The rebels of Riek have

refused to listen to what the international community and the region are saying, that peaceful settlement is the only way to resolve this conflict, which is the path the government is following and accepted to negotiate with them without conditions.” He said there was a general feeling from “our people and in the region” that Juba government should not negotiate with rebels who seek to seize power through unconstitutional means. He went on: “As the government, our position is very clear. If the rebels attempt to attack us again we will get them. We will give them a hot pursuit and we will not stop except when our forces reach the place they usually start from.”

The Deputy Head of the SPLM-In-Opposition’s Humanitarian Affairs Committee, AyiiAyii Akol, rejected Mr. Lueth’s allegations and denied that rebel forces had started the recent fighting against the government troops in the Unity and Upper Nile states. He said Riek Machar had instructed tall SPLM-in-Opposition forces to observe the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. He said the Government was aiming to resume oil production in Unity state in areas under its control and the attacks were launched by its armed forces to make territorial gains before that. Mr. Akol described Mr. Lueth’s statements as a clear declaration of war, adding “If this is what they want, then they should know we are ready for anything.”

There have been reports that both sides have acquired additional weaponry in recent weeks; and there are fears that both sides now intend to use the dry season, which runs to April, to intensify fighting. Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom met with President Salva Kiir Mayardit of South Sudan and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Barnaba Marial Benjamin in Juba. The talks covered issues related to the upcoming IGAD Summit in Addis Ababa on January 18 and developments of the ongoing IGAD-led peace negotiations. Dr. Tedros Adhanom told journalists in Juba that he “had a very fruitful discussion with his Excellency president Salva Kiir Mayardit. We had two issues: one is the upcoming IGAD summit in Addis Ababa on January 18, which he will be attending. The other issue which we discussed was the progress of the peace talks and also the preparations for the upcoming IGAD summit.” Dr Tedros said that he had extended an invitation to take part at the upcoming summit, expressed his hope that this summit will consolidate the gains made so far in the past IGAD summits and help the warring parties resolve the outstanding issues. Dr. Tedros noted that the upcoming summit will feature the presentations of reports by the two warring parties from their consultations, noting that “since there was agreement on most of the issues, we will build on the issues which were agreed previously.”

Ethiopia's AMISOM contingent championing peace and stability in Somalia

Ethiopia has often been a victim of external aggression and other security threats during its long history, and faced by continuing and emerging security threats in a highly volatile region, it places great emphasis on a neighborhood policy of robust, sustained and proactive promotion of collective peace and security. This foreign policy orientation, valuing the interdependence of peace and development, underlines the importance of a secure and stable region as a prerequisite for the economic transformation of the region as well as for Ethiopia's own national economy. It also recognizes that any such regional economic transformation only comes through cooperation and integration allied to changing the conventional history and negative imagery of the Horn of Africa, and indeed of the continent. This approach also stems from recognition that no country can stay apart in the present uncertain international political and economic situation. It needs a cooperative foreign policy direction and common security architecture. Political, economic and social affairs as well as the people's future destiny are inextricably intertwined with the region and regional diplomacy must lie at the heart of the nation's national foreign policy direction and security architecture.

Ethiopia has brought all its foreign policy commitments into the building of a secure, tranquil and harmonious region. It has demonstrated sustained support to neighbors grappling with their own internal political, security and humanitarian crises. Counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, peace building and mediation have taken centre stage in the country's position on common, sustainable security and a development path through shared and multilateral approaches. Peacekeeping has proven a significant element in the country's principled and determined cooperative diplomatic activities to help others fix their problems. Indeed, the country has paid in blood for the advancement of collective security and peace with meaningful and exemplary success in the region and in other parts of the continent and the world.

Ethiopian troops are currently being deployed in various UN and AU missions abroad discharging their mandate effectively. The role being played by Ethiopian troops in the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) are testimony to Ethiopia's commitment to provide a catalyst for the creation of a stable, democratic, unified and prosperous Somalia and in supporting the leadership in advancing the transition of Somalia from fragility to resilience. Brigadier-General Gebremedhin Fikadu Hailu, Commander of the Ethiopian troops in AMISOM's Sector Three, and Ethiopia's Ambassador to Somalia, Ambassador

Wondimu Asamnenu, and last week gave an account of Ethiopia's contributions and the resulting military, political security, and humanitarian gains made so far by the Ethiopian troops stationed in Baidoa. Baidoa is the headquarters of AMISOM'S Sector three contingents, covering the areas of Bay, Bakool and Gedo regions. These have demonstrated their success in dislodging Al-Shabaab militants from their strategic strongholds as well as in effectively conducting AMISOM's concept of operations in various military, humanitarian and stabilization activities.

Brigadier-General Gebremedhin noted that AMISOM's Sector Three, manned by Ethiopian troops, had made substantial headway in carrying forward AMISOM's mandate in terms of peace-support operations and in stabilization, as well as in creation of key enabling conditions for the conduct of humanitarian and other relief activities. Brigadier-General Gebremedhin said noted Ethiopian troops had encouraged peace and stability through the successful protection of Somalia's federal state institutions. He detailed the way Ethiopian troops had spearheaded the efforts to drive Al-Shabaab away from major strategic towns. He said since AMISOM had launched Operation Eagle last year, it had taken 12 strategic towns from Al-Shabaab extremists, and of these, Ethiopian troops had captured 10, demonstrating exemplary speed, courage and resolve. He indicated that the successes of Ethiopian had become a locomotive offering a stimulating effect for other AMISOM Sectors and units to clear Al-Shabaab militants away from their strongholds all cross southern Somalia. The General said the speedy and successful operations by Ethiopian troops had boosted their popularity as well as liberated many areas from Al-Shabaab. During AMISOM's Indian Ocean Operation, Ethiopian troops, he said, had also played a major role in taking control of Al-Shabaab's main base, Hegel. He said their contribution under AMISOM loomed large in helping Somalia remove the threat of Al-Shabaab, and he added that advancement of peace and security in Somalia is vital to the better future of the Somali people.

Ambassador Wondimu Asammenw said Ethiopian success was not confined to military gains. Ethiopian troops, he said, had given sustained support and assistance to their Somali brothers and sisters in political and humanitarian spheres of action. Ambassador Wondimu noted Ethiopian troops gave support to political leaders to encourage them sink differences through dialogue and reconciliation, and help prevent deterioration of the security crisis. They had also devoted time and energy to the safe delivery of humanitarian aid, relief and basic services to the needy in the recovered areas from Al-Shabaab along with stabilization efforts in the liberated areas. The Ambassador went on to indicate that political progress was on a winning course in Somalia, pointing out that

the formation of regional administrations was instrumental in eradicating the threat posed by extremists and in rooting out Al-Shabaab from Somalia. The local population residing in the three regions (Bay, Bakool and Gedo) said Ethiopian troops, participating in the freeing of a string of towns from Al-Shabaab, had shown the true meaning of good neighborliness and brotherhood in a time of difficulty.

The capture of the series of strategic towns by Ethiopian troops and other AMISOM and Somali forces allowed for the formation of the Interim Southwest Administration on November 19, 2014 and the subsequent election of Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan as its interim leader. The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, Ambassador Maman S. Sidikou, commended Ethiopian forces under AMISOM in Baidoa for the provision of “a conducive environment for these elections, and the reconciliation conference as whole, to proceed without fear. It has”, he said, “resulted in renewed hope for the people of Bay, Bakool and Lower Shebelle.” On December 03, 2014, AMISOM, in welcoming the swearing-in of the Head of the Interim South West Administration in Baidoa, noted that the “Ethiopian Contingent under AMISOM provided the necessary support for the State formation process and will continue to support the new administration and the people of the State.”

Beyond the military and humanitarian support provided by Ethiopian troops, their participation within AMISOM is also apparent in the realm of politics, including support for the formation of the Interim Administration of the South West Regional State and encouragement to political leaders to usher the regional state into a new era of stability and development. They have also helped political leaders and communities work for reconciliation to sort out differences within the new state. The Interim South West Administration has made clear its support for the Federal Government’s efforts to realize the goals of Vision 2016. Attending the inauguration of the Interim President for Somalia’s South West State on December 3, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, Ambassador Sidikou, acknowledged the political backing accorded by Ethiopian troops to Somali political leaders and communities: “the African Union and indeed all the people of Africa who have committed their sons and daughters to helping their Somali brothers and sisters enjoy peace and their right to life, will continue to support restoring the country back to its place of pride and glory.”

Prime Minister Hailemariam, speaking to the media last month, stressed the contribution of Ethiopian forces to the stabilization of Somalia and the elimination of

Al-Shabaab militants. He said Ethiopian troops, in collaboration with the Somali National Army, had speeded up the removal of Al-Shabaab militants away from 65% of Somalia. The Prime Minister further indicated that Ethiopia was providing positive input into the development of the capacity of Somali forces to spearhead the struggle against Al-Shabaab on their own.”.

Overall, Ethiopia in Somalia has been implementing the principles of the United Nations, the African Union and IGAD in safeguarding international peace and security, helping prevent further violence in several countries, save the lives of various communities and inject new impetus into the promotion of nation-building efforts.

Election public observers carried out for the general election in May

According to the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia it has become necessary to enable the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia to exercise their right to self-administration without discrimination through their representatives elected in a direct and free election. To this end any electoral activity shall be guided by an electoral law that meets international standards, and to meet this objective, constitution has established an electoral institution, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) to conduct free, fair and peaceful elections at every level in an impartial manner, during which Ethiopians freely express their will on the basis of equal popular suffrage and through a secret ballot. The electoral system enables political parties with different views to participate freely in the election, introduce their aims and objectives to the electorate in a peaceful and legal manner and allows the people to elect their representatives on the basis of informed decisions and free expression of their will.

For the election in May, the National Electoral Board has now put in place the necessary instruments to enable political parties, and independent candidates running for elections, to play a constructive role in ensuring fair, peaceful, free and democratic elections. Drawing important lessons from the previous four elections, the NEBE has underlined the importance of commitment to the rule of law and to full respect for freedom of expression as critical factors in the 2015 election. It has emphasized its belief that citizens elect the government of their choice by voting for their preferred candidates at periodic elections. To be able to do this, they must be fully informed about who is contesting for election and their proposed policies and about the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia itself. The National Electoral Board has therefore worked out all the necessary preparations in full consultation with all stakeholders, including

opposition parties, the ruling party and independent candidates. It has in fact been doing its best to ensure free access to information is in place. It officially declared the election schedule and distributed details to all stakeholders and competing parties, and announced when public observers would be nominated and elected. The NEBE also announced the schedule and dates, over the radio and television.

In any genuine democratic election system, the election of public observers is of vital importance. Accordingly the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia planned, discussed with all stakeholders, including opposition parties on the conduct of the election of public observers across the country, was held on December 21. All the competing parties therefore received letters from the NEBE suggesting their attendance to observe the process. This took place at all 45,000 polling stations and in the 547 election constituencies, and the public chose around 227,735 public observers for the election. None of the candidates were members of any political party. The political party representatives and others agreed the election of the public observers was clear and transparent and the election process was successfully guided by the rules and regulations with the participation of all stakeholders. The NEBE had urged the public to turn out in full force and elect their observers freely and fairly after assurances that the nominated candidates were nonpartisan.

In addition to the election of the observers, in accordance with the Electoral Law of Ethiopia Amendment Proclamation (No. 532/2007), public election observers' committees were established at constituency and polling station level. Each polling station will have five public observers elected from among residents of the polling station. The public observers are tasked to follow up and observe the election process at all levels in an impartial manner.

The National Electoral Board disclosed the timetable for the general election on October 30 last year. Political parties that are participating selected their election logos from November 24 to December 9. Candidates' registration started on December 25 and lasts until February 4. Voter registration will take place between January 9 and February 19. Election campaigning can start on February 14, and ends on May 21. Voting is scheduled for May 24 and the final results will be declared on June 22, 2015.
