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World Refugee Day: the highest ever number of refugees

News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

World Refugee Day was on Saturday (June 20). The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, said in 2014 an average of 42,500 people became refugees, asylum-seekers or internally displaced persons, on every single day of the year. **(See article)**

The US Congress voted on Thursday (June 25) to renew the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) for a further 10 years. Both the House of Representatives and the US Senate voted overwhelmingly to re-authorize AGOA and send the legislation to the President. This will guarantee a seamless and long-term extension for AGOA.

A number of EU warships and air units have been moving into position near Libya for the first phase of an operation to detect and monitor human trafficking and smuggling networks. The EU says this is not to target refugees or migrants but those making money from their lives, and often their deaths.

Ethiopia

The White House announced on Friday last week that US President Barack Obama will become the first sitting U.S. president to visit Ethiopia. His visit in July will be the second stop on a journey that will include a visit to Kenya. In Ethiopia, he will have bilateral meetings with Government leaders and the Commission of the African Union. **(See article)**

The Chairman of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, Professor Merga Bekana announced the final and official results of last month's general election on Monday (June 22). The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four parties, led by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, won a landslide victory taking 500 seats in the 547 seat Federal House of Representatives. The EPRDF and allied parties also took a majority of the seats in the Regional State Councils, winning all but 21 of the 1,987 seats.

Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom met with Foreign Minister Hannah Tetteh of Ghana on Tuesday (June 24). They signed cooperation agreements on information, communications and

the media and on tourism as well as a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of a Joint Ministerial Commission

Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom met with the head of Somalia's Jubaland Interim Administration, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed Islaan "Madobe" on Thursday (June 25) in Addis Ababa.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos has made working visits to the Russian Federation and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan over the last week, holding discussions on issues of bilateral and regional interest.

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team led by Andrea Richter Hume visited Addis Ababa from June 3-17 to conduct discussions for the 2015 Article IV Consultation with Ethiopia. The Mission said in a statement on Friday (June 19) that Ethiopia's state-led development model had delivered rapid and broad-based growth and reduced poverty significantly. **(See article)**

Ethiopia told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva that it fully accepted the delimitation decision of the Boundary Commission and had made repeated attempts to implement the decision in accordance with internationally accepted practice as well as settle the issue through dialogue and normalize relations with Eritrea. It was responding to accusations made by Eritrea during the interactive dialogue on the Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations in Eritrea in Geneva. **(See article)**

The Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tewelde Mulugeta gave a press briefing on Thursday (June 25) on the forthcoming Finance for Development Conference (July 13-16), preparation of the National Diaspora Day celebrations (August 6-12) and the recently signed cooperation agreement between Ethiopia and Ghana to form a Joint Ministerial Commission.

Ambassador Negash Kebret Batora, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Confederation of Switzerland, presented his letters of credence to the President of the Swiss Confederation, Simonetta Sommaruga on Thursday (June 25).

Ethiopia signed a US\$20 million-agreement on Friday (June 19) with China Electric Power Equipment and Technology for the construction of a high-voltage transmission line connecting with Kenya as part of plans to boost regional power exports. The 433-km project will stretch from Wolaita in southern Ethiopia to the border, making half of a planned 1,045 km link with Kenya.

The first Ethiopian Airlines direct flight to Dublin and Los Angeles arrived in Los Angeles on Saturday (June 20). This makes Los Angeles the airline's second destination in the United States after Washington, and increases the airline's destinations in the Americas to four, to eleven in Europe and 87 worldwide.

Djibouti

Djibouti's Energy Minister in charge of Natural Resources Ali Yacoub Mahmoud and the vice-president of Shanghai Electric group Chen Shuyu on Tuesday (June 23) signed an agreement for the construction of a 60 MW wind power plant, the first of its kind for Djibouti.

Eritrea

The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva held an interactive dialogue on Tuesday and Wednesday this week (June 23-24) to discuss the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights Violations in Eritrea which detailed massive human rights violations in Eritrea, some of which might amount “to crimes against humanity”. The three Commissioners were threatened and intimidated by Eritrean Government supporters on arrival in Geneva and had to be provided with police protection. **(See article)**

Kenya

The Central Bank of Kenya on Monday (June 21) lifted the suspension on the activities of Dahabshiil, the biggest money transfer company working in Somalia. The ban on money transfers was put in place after the massacre carried out by Al-Shabaab at Garissa University. It affected 13 companies.

Deputy President William Ruto opened a three day regional conference on “Countering Violent Extremism” in Nairobi on Thursday (June 25). The conference is being attended by high level security officials, delegates from over twenty countries, including Ethiopia, and others outside Africa. In advance of the meeting, the European Union has said it will offer counter-terrorism training to help security agencies in East Africa improve cross-border investigations and prosecutions

Somalia

Speaker of the Somali Parliament Prof. Usman Jawaari called on the Kenya government not to take unilateral actions regarding the border without consulting the Somali government. Somali MPs debating on the reported Kenyan plans to build some sort of barrier along the 700 kilometer border were united in expressing reservations during a debate on Sunday (June 21).

Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency said on Tuesday (June 23) that it had carried out a night attack on a meeting of Al-Shabaab leaders in the town of Bardhere, targeting senior Al-Shabaab commanders. This attack by US-trained NISA special forces, the first to be given publicity, marks a new tactic in the fight against Al-Shabaab.

A suicide bomber attacked the car of the UAE ambassador to Somalia, Mohammed Al Othman, in Mogadishu on Wednesday (June 24). The vehicle was part of a UAE aid convoy. Dr. Anwar bin Mohammed Gargash, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, said the attack would not

undermine the UAE's commitment to support Somalia and its people in their fight against terrorism.

The UNHCR said this week that it had resumed voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Kenya after a month-long suspension due to bad weather conditions. On June 9 a total of 265 returnees from the Dadaab camp complex arrived safely in Somalia. The UNHCR said the total number of returnees provided with return support packages since December 2014 had reached 2,313 people.

Somaliland President Ahmed Mahmud Silanyo told a press briefing at the Egal International Airport at Hargeisa after returning from a two day working visit to Addis Ababa that his meeting with Prime Minister Hailemariam on Monday (June 22) had “concluded with a commitment to not only sustain but enhance security, trade and cross border movements. “

South Sudan

Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin, Chief Mediator of the IGAD peace process said on Thursday (June 26) that the South Sudan peace talks between the warring parties would resume next month after the end of the Ramadan fast. He hoped an IGAD-plus Summit, involving the African Union, the UN, EU, China, the Troika (UK, US, Norway) as well as five African countries (South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria, Chad, and Rwanda) would convene in Addis Ababa with the parties participating. The Mediation has tabled a compromise agreement which it “believed the two sides could live with, and continue to the establishment of a transitional government.”

The Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) on Tuesday (June 23) endorsed the reinstatement of Pagan Amum as secretary-general of the SPLM in implementation of Arusha Agreement on the Reunification of the SPLM, signed in January 21 by the three factions of the SPLM-in-Government, the SPLM-in-Opposition, and the SPLM-former detainees. Pagan Amum returned to Juba on Monday (June 22).

South Sudan’s Council of Ministers approved its bid to join the East African Community on Friday (June 19) but said the Government needed five years to sensitize citizens on the benefits and risks of becoming a member. It would therefore keep observer status for the next five years.

The African Union Commission on Wednesday (June 24) postponed indefinitely a reconciliation meeting between Ngok Dinka and Messiriya Abyei community leaders, though it stressed the importance of holding the traditional leaders’ meeting in order to promote reconciliation among the Abyei communities.

Sudan

The African Union Peace and Security Council meeting on Monday (June 22) extended for an additional period of 12 months the mandate of the African Union United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). It requested the UN Security Council due to meet on June 29 to discuss renewal of the hybrid UN/AU operation for one year, to do the same.

President Obama's visit to Ethiopia underlines the strength of Ethio-US relations

Last week, the White House announced that President Barack Obama will visit Ethiopia and the African Union in July to hold discussions with the Ethiopian Government and the African Union. The announcement sparked wide media coverage of the proposed visit along with comment and analysis of Ethiopia-US relations. The Director of the Atlantic Council's Africa Center, Dr Peter Pham said in an interview that "[President] Obama's upcoming visit to Ethiopia recognizes the country's enormous importance" and applauded the decision. He cited the long standing diplomatic relations between the two countries and stressed the importance of Ethiopia's fast-growing economy and double-digit growth. He said Ethiopia was a worthy country for such a high-level visit. Dr Pham also underlined Ethiopia's potential for investment and the unique role it played the efforts to achieve of stability in the Horn of Africa. "With its population of 90 million and its tremendous potential for US companies," he said "it is also an anchor of stability in a very volatile region."

Dr Pham also pointed out that Ethiopia's location in the Horn of Africa made it an important country in its own right as well as the fact that it is "home to the headquarters of the fifty-four-member African Union." Among the ties between the two countries he mentioned that the two countries "fought on the same side during World War II, and more recently [Ethiopia] worked with the United States in the global effort against terrorism after the September 11, 2001 attacks by al-Qaeda on the American homeland." He praised Ethiopia's current contributions to regional and global peace maintenance and said "Ethiopia ranks fourth worldwide and first among African nations in its contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations around the globe."

Ethiopia's fast growing economy and its potential was another central point of discussion for Dr Pham who spoke of Ethiopia's involvement in development of sustainable energy and hydro-power sources, including the construction of the massive Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. He said "Ethiopia is emerging as an African leader in hydroelectricity" pointing to the "construction program that aims to harness the potential of the Blue Nile which originates in the heart of Ethiopia's highlands near Lake Tana as well as that of the Nile River's other major tributary, the Atbara River." Dr Pham said "The political stability, improved governance, and heavy investment in infrastructure" since the downfall of the military Derg regime in 1991 have "led to growth that has lifted Ethiopia out of abject misery in just one generation." He added: "anyone who has visited the country more than once notes the continuous transformation taking place."

In conclusion, Dr Pham, underlining the importance of the President's visit, argued that Ethiopia was geopolitically important, both because of its size and as the headquarters of the AU. He said that one facet of the partnership was in dealing with the threat of terrorism, particularly Al-Shabaab in Somalia. But, he said, even if Al-Shabaab disappeared "our relationship with Ethiopia would still be of key importance."

Not everyone agreed. The Washington Post in an editorial on Wednesday (June 24) entitled “Mr. Obama’s visit to Ethiopia sends the wrong message on democracy” criticized the recent election in Ethiopia and condemned the President’s visit. In fact, of course, contrary to the Washington Post’s allegations, the elections were calm and peaceful, and as the election demonstrated, Ethiopia provides a pluralistic political platform which allows the people to take sole ownership of political power and the decision making process. This has been the case since the adoption of a democratic constitution in 1995 which was implemented following a comprehensive dialogue among the country’s nations, nationalities and peoples. Elections in Ethiopia are purely and solely decided by the people of Ethiopia, not by “independent election observers.” The democratic framework that has been put in place provides the necessary legal basis for all political stakeholders to observe the rule of law and respect the choices and democratic rights of the people in choosing their own government through free, fair and democratic elections. The results demonstrated quite conclusively that the opposition parties, although they got 30% of the vote, simply failed to provide any sufficiently impressive program to attract enough support in face of the decade of substantial growth that the ruling EPRDF have provided. .

Ethiopia and the United States of America have been uniquely strong strategic partners for more than a century now. Since the first treaty of commerce was signed between the two states nearly 112 years ago, aiming “to perpetuate and strengthen the friendly relations which exist between Ethiopia and the United States of America”, the relationship has been growing. It has been steadily strengthened and diversified across wider political, economic and social spheres. There have been numerous political, capacity building and economic developments as well as substantial humanitarian cooperation between the two countries over the years. The only exception in this was during the time of military junta, the Derg, which specifically aligned itself with the Soviet bloc. With the downfall of Derg in 1991, Ethio-U.S. relations dramatically improved and the US lifted legislative restrictions on non-humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia. Since then, the two countries have continued to share an outstanding partnership in bilateral, regional and global issues. Their close relationship, especially in the response to regional instability and in support of the war on terror, and recently increasingly through economic involvement, has been established on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.

Today there are three significant pillars to the bilateral relationship between Ethiopia and US. These are economic growth and development; democracy, governance, and human rights; and regional peace and security. The United States and Ethiopia continually work together to enhance areas of cooperation that include, but are not limited to, food security, improved health services, strengthened education, promotion of trade, and expanded development. The United States has demonstrated its support for good governance and welcomed Ethiopia’s dedication to maintain security in the region, including its involvement in peacekeeping missions in Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan.

To further cement these three pillars of bilateral relationship, Ethiopia and the United States have also established a Bilateral Dialogue Mechanism with the aim of discussing any and all issues in an open and frank manner. The Bilateral Dialogue Mechanism continues to serve as an effective vehicle for the two governments to engage in discussion of political, economic and security issues and has enabled the two countries to deliberate on a whole range of issues that can foster

wider and deeper cooperation with a view to enhancing economic growth, democracy and regional peace and security. Both sides now recognize the importance of backing up these close political and diplomatic relations with increasing investment and trade links.

President Obama's visit will add an important dimension to the way Ethiopian-United States relations are continuing to expand year after year in bilateral and diplomatic spheres; in social and economic sector development; in regional and global peace and security cooperation; and in the vitally important area of people-to-people relations. The visit will open investors' eyes to the opportunities in Ethiopia as well as make a difference for the US to compete with European and Asian investors in Ethiopia. The timing is appropriate as the US African Growth and Opportunity Act has just been extended for 10 years by Congress.

UN Human Rights Council's interactive dialogue on Eritrea....

The UN Human Rights Council held an interactive dialogue on Eritrea following the formal presentation of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea and in the presence of the three commissioners, Chairman Mike Smith (Australia), Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth (Mauritius), the UN Special Rapporteur on Eritrea and Victor Dankwa (Ghana). The Council also had before it the report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea.

The Chairperson of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, Mike Smith introduced the Commission's report, which as we noted last week, described in detail a state that rules through fear with a vast security network that reaches into every level of society. It cited a litany of systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations carried out with impunity by the government. Mr. Smith told the Human Rights Council that after more than two decades of independence, the dream of a democratic Eritrea seemed more distant than ever. Eritrea, he said, was marked by repression and fear, and "Since independence, ultimate power in Eritrea has remained largely in the hands of one man and one party. Those in control often rule arbitrarily and act with impunity... The Eritrean people have no say in governance and little control over many aspects of their own lives." He noted that under the pretext of defending the integrity of the state and ensuring national self-sufficiency, the government subjected much of the population to open-ended national service, either in the army or through the civil service. All Eritreans are conscripted by age 18, and while national service is supposed to last 18 months, in reality conscripts end up serving for an indefinite period, often for years in harsh and inhumane conditions. He said forced labor was so prevalent that all sectors of the economy rely on it, and all Eritreans are likely to be subject to it at some point in their lives. The overwhelming climate of repression prompted hundreds of thousands of Eritreans, mostly young people, to risk their lives escaping the country. He urged that governments in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East continue to provide protection to Eritreans and avoid sending them back to a country that punishes anyone who tries to leave without permission. He emphasized that "those who assume Eritreans are leaving solely for economic reasons are ignoring the country's "dismal human rights record and the suffering of its people." He added: "In engaging with the Eritrean

authorities on solutions to stem the flow of asylum seekers from Eritrea, the international community should place human rights considerations at the forefront of any package of proposed abatement measures”; and he emphasized “it should insist on tangible progress on human rights in Eritrea, in particular the adoption of real reforms that seriously address the problems identified in this report.”

The Special Rapporteur stressed the plight of unaccompanied Eritrean minors crossing international borders which, she said, was becoming increasingly visible. These minors represented a group with special protection needs as they faced significant risk of falling prey to many forms of abuse, sexual, economic and criminal. She explained that national service, which was identified by the Commission as forced labor, distorted the fabric of the family life because of the absence of the father. Girls and women were discriminated on gender basis in both military camps and within the army. They were subjected to gender specific exploitation by officers and trainers, who used them for domestic service and also subjected them to sexual abuse. Ms. Keetharuth said she was encouraged by a few signs that Eritrea was increasing its engagement with the international community, but concrete action, rather than vague promises, were necessary. Arbitrary military service, and while Eritrea had acceded to the Convention against Torture in September 2014, it did not accept the Committee against Torture’s inquiry procedures. Migration, she said, was very closely linked to human rights violations, and she warned that trading human rights for short-term political or economic gains could undermine the long-term enjoyment of all human rights by all in Eritrea. She said issues that should remain on the agenda included arbitrary detention, unaccompanied minors, migration, and economic and social rights.

Speakers expressed concern that some of the grave, systematic and widespread human rights violations in Eritrea, including torture and sexual torture, might amount to crimes against humanity. They were especially troubled at the lack of accountability for those violations. The regime had created a climate of fear in which dissent was stifled and a large proportion of the population was subjected to forced labor and imprisonment, causing involuntary migration. The Council should support further investigation into allegations of crimes against humanity in Eritrea and build on the Commission’s findings by strengthening the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. Thousands of Eritreans continued to flee the country to escape the unchecked and brutal repression; the international community must continue to provide them with protection in line with their non-refoulement obligations. There was also concern about reprisals against witnesses who cooperated with the Commission of Inquiry; speakers said measures must be taken to ensure that individuals and their families were not subjected to targeted state persecution for engaging with the Commission. Speakers repeatedly called on Eritrea to extend full cooperation to the Commission of Inquiry and take all necessary measures to implement the Commission’s recommendations. Eritrea was urged to implement the Constitution of 1997, ensure the separation of powers and bring to justice all perpetrators who had committed human rights abuses. Many speakers repeatedly stressed the need to limit the duration of national service to 18 months and while some noted statements suggesting this was to be reduced, they strongly urged Eritrea to actually implement the reduction. Almost all speakers expressed concern over the way Eritreans were subject to systems of national service and forced labor that effectively abused, exploited and enslaved them for indefinite periods of time.

Speakers regretted the lack of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur. The massive flight of Eritrean victims as migrants, asylum seekers and refugees triggered by human rights violations was of grave concern, with more than 300,000 persons, or over five per cent of the population, fleeing during the past decade. There were calls for Eritrea to release all those detained without charge or trial and to put an end to torture, forced military service and forced evictions as well as human trafficking of Eritrean emigrants. Other speakers raised the issue of the thousands of prisoners of conscience that continued to be held in secret detention in Eritrea, and of whom their own families had no knowledge. There concerns about detention conditions, prolonged solitary confinement and the widespread use of torture.

One country, Djibouti also drew attention to the fact that it still had no news of its own citizens who had been held as prisoners in Eritrea since 2008.

Among those speaking were Norway, Croatia, Republic of Korea, Spain, Venezuela, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sudan, Iran, Luxembourg, Ireland, Cuba, Somalia, Ethiopia, Austria, France, and Estonia as well as a number of non-governmental organizations.

Eritrea, speaking as the concerned country, strongly attacked the Commission and the Special Rapporteur. Eritrean Ambassador Tesfamichael Gerahtu said Eritrea had been “sullied and denigrated with gratuitous and unprecedented irresponsibility by an entity established by this assembly.” He said the establishment of the Commission was intended “as a substitute and fall-back option to the UNSC imposed sanctions in order to continuously harass Eritrea for ulterior political motives.” He accused the Commission of deliberately short-changing “its investigative mission to bolster preconceived, politically motivated conclusions and recommendations,” dismissing the Commission’s interviews as an “insufficient sample” and describing the Commission's “highly subjective standards of proof and validation as ill-suited to ascertain potentially fallacious testimonies of asylum-seekers or well-known individuals who espouse different, even subversive, political agendas.” He claimed the Government of Eritrea declined to interact with the Commission “not because it has something to hide but because of deeply-held convictions of principle.” He referred to the Commission's “unabashed bias” in dismissing the “existential threats that Eritrea has and is still facing”, and accused the Commission of having “members within its ranks that espouse sinister political agendas against Eritrea due to their close and unorthodox association with subversive groups.” In conclusion he claimed “the bleak narrative on human rights in Eritrea that the Commission had portrayed was widely at variance with the prevailing reality in the country.” Eritrea, he said, had seriously engaged with the Universal Periodic Review process and with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. It rejected the Commission of Inquiry’s report.

Eritrean Ambassador Tesfamichael Gerahtu was criticized by the President of the Council for using improper language: Mr. Ruecker said he must ask “The distinguished delegate from Eritrea to use language in the future that is adequate for this council and preserves the integrity of our mechanisms. The commission is not ignorant and they don't have a sinister political agenda and this is not a travesty of justice. I must reject these formulations.”

The Commission Chairman, Mike Smith in his concluding remarks said that the most urgent measure was for Eritrea to change political will and acknowledge the issues it faced, followed by the adoption and implementation of the constitution, which would include the rule of law and access to justice for victims. Eritrea must urgently demobilize its citizens and end indefinite military service, as well as release all political prisoners. The Government had to understand that the system they had set up was simply not acceptable in the modern world. He stressed that the origin of migration flows from Eritrea was simply the Eritrean people's impossibility to work freely in their own country. The Chairman said the Commission's overall conclusion was that human rights violations were so systematic that they may amount to crimes against humanity and require further investigation. He said the Security Council should refer this situation to the International Criminal Court.

In a subsequent press conference on Wednesday (June 24), Mike Smith said the choice for Eritrea was either to open up or implement the Commission of Inquiry's recommendations or face the path of the International Criminal Court. He said the Commission did not believe it had been duped by its informants: "there was too much consistency in the way in which people were able to talk about their experiences...every story is different, every story is personal but the elements in the way in which they are treated, the way the system deals with them are sufficiently common that we are absolutely convinced that we described is accurate." He said the Eritrean government had made statements, there had been tweets from senior government officials as well as pro-government websites trying to discredit the report, but, he said in almost no case that I could think of "had they actually come up with contrary evidence." He said "we have been given no single example of people being brought before a court and punished for overstepping the mark, abusing, torturing people to death or sexually abusing young trainees." In response to a question whether President Isaias Afwerki could be considered personally culpable, Mr. Smith said it was hard to determine who was authorizing arbitrary arrests as arresting officers had no warrant and sometimes no uniforms. Ms. Sheila Keetharuth, the Special Rapporteur to Eritrea, said that in the case of the "G-15", government officials and parliamentarians who had disappeared in September, 2001, the order could only have come up from the highest authority in Eritrea given their seniority.

The members of the Commission were subject to various threats and acts of intimidation in their hotels and on the streets by Eritrean government supporters after they arrived. Mr. Joachim Ruecker, the President of the Human Rights Council told the Council on Monday that the police were contacted and security around members of the Commission had to be redoubled. He said the Council had taken additional security measures to ensure that the interactive dialogue could proceed calmly and with dignity. Mr. Ruecker said disagreements with members of the Commission of Inquiry or other mandate holders could always be expressed but it was "totally unacceptable for them to be subjected to threats and intimidation in the context of discharging their mandates which are established by the United Nations Human Rights Council". Numerous speakers at the dialogue expressed their dismay at the threats and intimidation. They called for such harassment to be fully investigated.

...and Ethiopia responds Eritrea's false accusations at the UN Human Rights Council

Eritrean Ambassador Tesfamichael during his comments on the Commission also accused it of working in cahoots with Ethiopia and Djibouti and recycling, wholesale, worn-out disinformation routinely disseminated by entities that bear ill-will against Eritrea. He specifically complained that the Commission “with amazing imprudence and insensitivity” suggested that “the international community and the United Nations assist Eritrea and Ethiopia to solve the border issue through diplomatic means”. Ambassador Tesfamichael repeated, yet again, Eritrea’s allegations that Ethiopia had refused to implement the Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Commission and that “Ethiopia remains in flagrant violation of international law”.

During the interactive dialogue, Ambassador Negash Kibret, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations in Geneva, thanked the Commission for its report and joined several other delegations in condemning in the strongest terms the threats and intimidation against the Special Rapporteur and the Commissioners. Ambassador Negash also responded to the accusations made by the Eritrean representative against Ethiopia and detailed Ethiopia's position which, as he pointed out, has been made clear time and again over the years. Ethiopia fully accepts the delimitation decision of the Boundary Commission and has made all possible attempts to implement the decision in accordance with internationally accepted practice. It has continuously called for the peaceful settlement of the issue through dialogue and exerted all efforts to normalize relations with Eritrea. Two years ago, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn even made an unprecedented peace overture to Eritrea, offering even to go to Asmara to initiate a bilateral dialogue. Prior to this, the Ethiopian government has repeatedly announced publicly and confirmed repeatedly to third parties that it is ready to start dialogue at anytime, place and level of Eritrea's choosing. Unfortunately, said Ambassador Negash, Eritrea has remained intransigent.

The problem between Eritrea and Ethiopia is not a border problem; it is rather that Eritrea’s leadership stubbornly refuses to enter into dialogue. It uses the border dispute as a pretext to perpetrate violations of the human rights of its own people. Its own misguided policies of destabilization towards the sub region have even compelled IGAD and the African Union to request the United Nations Security Council to impose two rounds of mandatory sanctions. Ambassador Negash said Ethiopia believed boundaries between and among neighbor states should serve as a platform for building bridges and for providing friendship and cooperation rather than a source of endless dispute and conflict. Nations, he said, are neighbors by force of circumstances and not by choice. This imposes an obligation on them to live in peace and harmony with their neighbors. Eritrea should recognize that whatever issues it has must be solved through political dialogue: “It should stop using the border issue to violate the human rights of its own people.”

The IMF describes Ethiopia's economic growth as "rapid and inclusive."

The Article IV Mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) issues country-specific reports of economic growth and development on annual basis. An IMF team, led by Andrea Richter Hume was in Addis Ababa between June 3 and 17 for this year's Article IV Consultation with Ethiopia. During its two-week long visit, the IMF team met with Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn; Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Sufian Ahmed; the Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia, Teklewold Atnafu; State Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Abraham Tekeste; and Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister with the rank of Minister, Neway Gebre-ab; as well as other senior officials and representatives of the private sector, the international community, and civil society.

In its preliminary report, the IMF team stated that "Ethiopia's state-led development model has delivered rapid and broad-based growth over many years." It added that the development model that the country had embarked on had also "reduced poverty significantly, while keeping inequality low." In order to ensure the sustainability of the rapid and inclusive nature of this economic growth, however, the IMF urged an increasing role for the private sector. Taking note of Ethiopia's significant economic potential and productivity, a key driving force behind the development and reform, the Article IV Mission noted that "the outlook for Ethiopia remains highly favorable."

In fact, IMF's report complements the 2015 Budget Speech that Ethiopia's Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Sufian Ahmed, delivered to the House of Peoples' Representatives last week. The Minister, similarly stressing the sustained rapid and broad-based nature of Ethiopia's economic growth, has brought about significant poverty reduction and a rise in citizens' income levels. Consequently, the poverty rate has shown a continued decline from 38.7% in 2005 to 29.6 in 2011. It is projected figure to drop to 22.7% this current fiscal year, given the continued and sustained economic growth and development.

Reflecting on Ethiopia's overall performance in investment, agricultural growth and infrastructural development over the current year, the Article IV Mission reported that the country's "economic momentum has been strong." It described public investment in infrastructure as "robust" and performances in agriculture as "solid." Regarding the country's performances in the export sector, the report indicated that Ethiopia's exports were hit by a two factors: lower commodity prices in the international market and the impact of Ebola on travel receipts. Imports, on the other hand, showed a sharp increase, particularly in capital goods and construction-related services. The Government has acknowledged the setback in the export sector and the Minister noted in his budget speech that although exports showed significant increases in the first two years of the Five-Year Growth and Transformation Plan, in 2011-12, the export sector had failed to achieve any growth since 2013. Apart from lower commodity prices in the international market, the Government has identified other factors involved including a failure to ensure sufficient diversification of export in terms of variety, quantity and quality. Minister Sufian emphasized the need to expand export growth and diversification, to boost agricultural productivity and enhance investment flows, scaling up efforts in particular to meet the growing development of the manufacturing sector.

One of the points noted by the IMF Report was an improvement in Ethiopia's investment performance where there was "a strong pick-up in foreign direct investment and foreign disbursements to state-owned enterprises [allowing] gross international reserves to increase modestly." The Report also stated that the IMF welcomes "the National Bank of Ethiopia's medium-term objective of having foreign exchange reserves cover three months of the following year's imports of goods and services." Another significant achievement with reference to continued prospects for economic growth and development, according to the Mission, was the country's strong performance in making sure that inflation remains in single digits. It described this as an "important achievement for macroeconomic stability." In order to ensure this was sustained, the IMF called on the government to continue its cautious monetary policy.

With reference to the way forward, the IMF Mission identified boosting domestic and foreign resource mobilization and reducing bottlenecks for doing business as the key factors required to sustain the rapid and broad-based growth over the medium term. To assist in this, the Mission suggested three possible areas for intervention: enhancing tax administration, improving oversight into mainly state-run public enterprises, and boosting domestic savings. With reference to the need to improve the country's tax administration, the Mission said that "Increasing tax revenue collection, a more durable way of financing government expenditure, will play an important role in bolstering domestic resource mobilization." In order to building an oversight function into public investment and to provide for debt sustainability, the IMF suggested consideration of innovative forms of financing, including increased private-public partnerships and other related options. The Mission also emphasized the need to scale up domestic savings as one key aspect of resource mobilization. It noted that the significant expansion in bank branches in recent years had already done a good deal to increase the depositor base." The IMF team welcomed Ethiopia's plans to develop capital markets but advised that raising interest rates on government securities and other key securities above inflation rates, and increasing the use of indirect tools for monetary management, should remain a pre-requisite for this.

Minister Sufian, while acknowledging the IMF's emphasis on the need for ensuring effective resource mobilization schemes, underlined in his Budget Speech, planned Government interventions including the intent to significantly improve Ethiopia's tax administration. This would involve enhancing tax-related data management systems and raising awareness programs on tax and taxation.

Overall, the IMF's 2015 Article IV Mission to Ethiopia proposed the need for enhanced reforms in a number of areas, including expansion in export growth and export diversification, public investment infrastructure, increasing the efficiency of customs clearance and other administrative procedures. The Mission's preliminary report will be submitted to the IMF Executive Board, which is expected to complete the 2015 Article IV Consultation in September.

State minister Ambassador Berhane visits the Russian Federation and Jordan

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos has made working visits to the Russian Federation and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan over the last week, holding discussions on issues of bilateral and regional interest.

In Russia, he held discussions with the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mikhail Bogdanov, with the Chairman of the International Affairs Committee in the Russian Council of Federation, Dr. Konstantin Kosachev and with the Deputy Director of the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Tatiana Nikolaevna Mozel. Discussions covered a range of topics relating to bilateral and regional issues. There was general agreement on the need to continue and deepen existing relations between the two peoples, governments and institutions. Ambassador Berhane and Mr. Bogdanov agreed to conclude the Air Service Agreement, currently under negotiation by December this year as this would pave the way for expanding trade and investment relations. It was also agreed to re-activate the existing Joint Commissions on Economic, Trade, Science and Technology. Another issue underlined during the discussions was the importance of regular political consultation between the two Foreign Ministries. Ambassador Berhane and Dr. Tatiana Nikolaevna Mozel agreed on the importance of exchanging experiences, curricula and trainees. The Russian Federation appreciates the efforts made by African states, under the rubric of African solutions for African problems, and by Ethiopia in particular, to bring about peace and stability. There was also agreement by both sides on the importance of tackling problems affecting the interests of both countries.

Ethiopia would like to see more Russian investment in Ethiopia. There are some 35 Russian companies which have investment licenses in Ethiopia, but only two are operational with six others are at the implementation stage. These are either projects with Russian capital or joint ventures with Ethiopian companies. The main areas of interest are floriculture and horticulture, vehicle assembly, hospitality business (hotel and resort), cement production and building materials as well as real estate. There are a lot of other areas of potential interest: mining and mineral resources, energy, infrastructure, construction, agriculture and agro-processing and tourism. The level of Russian interest and involvement in Ethiopia does not correspond to the long historic and political ties between the two countries.

On his visit to Jordan, State Minister Berhane Gebre-Christos conferred with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom, Nasser S. Judeh on issues related to extremism and on Africa as well as bilateral issues. Minister Nasser Judeh, while appreciating the effort made by Ethiopia in tackling extremism, underlined the need to cooperation. He noted the Hashemite Kingdom was playing a similar role to Ethiopia in bringing about peace and stability in Africa. Developing a regional force that could tackle problems affecting peace and stability in a coordinated manner was one of the issues on which both sides agreed. They also agreed that as much emphasis should be given to tackling Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram as has been given to dealing with ISIS. These forces provide an equal threat to the peace and stability of Africa. The two ministers had a detailed discussion on bilateral issues and agreed to that they should have permanent representation in each other's capitals and they should hold regular political

consultations. They also agreed to finalize a draft Trade and Cooperation Agreement. This is expected to be signed and ratified by both sides soon.

Following his successful visits to the Russian Federation and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Ambassador Berhane has started a visit to Spain.

World Refugee Day: the highest ever number of refugees

World Refugee Day was on Saturday (June 20) and this year it was marked by the fact that the number of people who fled from their homes last year was the highest since records began. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, said that in 2014 an average of 42,500 people became refugees, asylum-seekers or internally displaced persons, every single day of the year. That is four times more than just 4 years ago. Across the world, he said, almost 60 million people have been forcibly displaced by conflict and persecution. Nearly 20 million of them are refugees, and more than half are children: “Their numbers are growing and accelerating, every single day and on every continent.” Commissioner Guterres said those people rely on us for their survival and hope, adding “They will remember what we do.” He said “Fifteen years into a millennium that many of us hoped would see an end to war, a spreading global violence has come to threaten the very foundations of our international system.”

The Commissioner went on to say that even as this tragedy was unfolding there were some countries, including those most able to help, which were shutting their gates to people seeking asylum. He said borders were closing, pushbacks increasing, and hostility rising. Avenues for legitimate escape were fading away, and humanitarian organizations like the UNHCR, run on shoestring budgets, were unable to meet the spiraling needs of so many victims. The Commissioner said that since the beginning of civilization people have treated refugees as deserving of protection. Whatever their differences, they had recognized a fundamental human obligation to shelter those fleeing from war and persecution. Today, however, “some of the wealthiest among us are challenging this ancient principle, casting refugees as gate crashers, job seekers or terrorists.” The Commissioner said this was short-sighted and morally wrong; in some cases it was also in breach of international obligations. He said richer nations must acknowledge refugees for the victims they are, fleeing from wars they were unable to prevent or stop. Wealthier countries must decide on whether to shoulder their fair share, at home and abroad, or to hide behind walls as “growing anarchy spreads across the world.”

Commissioner Guterres said: “We have reached a moment of truth. World stability is falling apart leaving a wake of displacement on an unprecedented scale. Global powers have become either passive observers or distant players in the conflicts driving so many innocent civilians from their homes.” He said it was “now urgent for all those with leverage over the parties to these conflicts to put aside their differences and come together to create the conditions for ending the bloodshed.” In the meantime, he added, “the world must either shoulder collectively the burden of helping the victims of war, or risk standing by as less wealthy countries and communities, which host 86% of the world's refugees, become overwhelmed and unstable.” He

said the world needed to renew its commitment now to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its principles – “to offer safe harbor, both in our own countries and in the epicentres of the crises, and to help refugees restore their lives. We must not fail.”

The Commissioner was in Turkey to mark World Refugee Day as a gesture of support to the country which in the last year has taken over from Pakistan as the biggest refugee-hosting nation in the world, largely as a result of conflict in Iraq and Syria. Turkey now hosts more than 2 million refugees in total and spends more than US\$6 billion on helping Syrians alone.

Two days before World Refugee Day, on Thursday last week, the UNHCR issued its annual Global Trends Report: World at War, detailing the increase in number of refugees and the forcibly displaced in 2014, the largest leap ever in a single year. Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. If these people all lived in a single country, it would be the 24th largest in the world, just behind Italy and ahead of South Africa and would contain 8% of the global population. The figures are terrifying. In 2014 some 13.9 million people became newly displaced, four times higher than the previous year. Worldwide there were 19.5 million refugees (up from 16.7 million in 2013), 38.2 million displaced inside their own countries (up from 33.3 million in 2013), and 1.8 million people were awaiting outcome of claims for asylum (against 1.2 million in 2013).

The UNHCR Report gives regional details of the way the number of refugees and internally displaced people is on the rise. It noted that in the past five years, at least 15 conflicts had erupted or reignited. The report said “Few of these crises have been resolved and most still generate new displacement.” In 2014 only 126,800 refugees were able to return to their home countries. This was the lowest figure for over thirty years.

On Sub-Saharan Africa, the UNHCR said the forced displacement totals in 2014 were only marginally lower than the Middle East, with 3.7 million refugees and 11.4 million internally displaced people, 4.5 million of whom were newly displaced in 2014. Conflicts in the Central African Republic, Nigeria and the DRC produced many of the refugees but the Horn of Africa was also a central element in any calculation of numbers with Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea being major sources of refugees; Ethiopia and Kenya are major hosts. The UNHCR report noted that in 2014 Ethiopia replaced Kenya as the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and the fifth largest worldwide with a major influx of South Sudanese fleeing from the conflict there reaching nearly 190,000. Today, Ethiopia is hosting 265,000 South Sudanese refugees as well as 246,000 from Somalia, 136,000 from Eritrea and 41,000 from other countries. The total in April this year was just under 690,000, 50% of whom were women and girls, and over 54% were children including 35,000 unaccompanied or separated children. As of last year Kenya was host to 575,334 registered refugees and asylum-seekers, again with a sharp rise as a result of the conflict in South Sudan. South Sudan's crisis caused massive internally displacement as well as a flow of refugees into its neighbors. By the end of last year, some 1.8 million South Sudanese had been forcibly displaced, of whom almost 1.3 million were internally displaced and more than 575,000 were refugees in neighboring countries. Numbers are continuing to rise.

The third largest producer of refugees in the Horn of Africa is Eritrea though there the cause remains repression and human rights violations rather than conflict, as the recent UN Commission of Inquiry conclusively demonstrated. The UNHCR says the number of Eritreans outside the country and under its concern was nearly 417,000 at the end of 2014, and the total of those fleeing Eritrea had nearly doubled in the past six years. The current rate of flight is around 5,000 a month. While many have ended up in Ethiopia, Eritreans also make up one of the largest proportion of refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Italy. One of the most recent and highly visible consequences of the increasing flow of refugees has been the dramatic growth in the numbers seeking safety through dangerous sea journeys, across the Mediterranean, the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea, and in Southeast Asia. The UNHCR says more than 219,000 refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea during 2014, almost three times the previous highest figure of 70,000 in 2011. Of these the UNHCR said more than 3,500 women, men and children were reported drowned or missing in the Mediterranean last year. Numbers are continuing to rise.

Many refugees end up in camps that are essentially prisons as they have to stay for long periods, whether for months as in US-Mexican border detention centers while people wait for determination on their cases, or years, even decades, in the Dadaab complex in Kenya, where the UNHCR runs a complex largely inhabited by refugees from the civil wars in Somalia. There are currently about 450,000 people in Dadaab which was originally designed for no more than 90,000, and many have been there since Dadaab was opened in 1991.

The UNHCR points out that in contrast to the long-term camps seen in developing countries the industrialized nations have been markedly less hospitable and patient in the face of the growing crisis. France has returned some 6,000 migrants to Italy so far this year, claiming that the latter has failed to properly process them. Most recently, it closed part of its border with Italy, prompting Italian police to forcibly close a camp of mostly Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees. Italy is looking for help from other European countries to absorb the flow of refugees from across the Mediterranean. Some 57,000 people have arrived so far this year.

In fact, despite the fears expressed in European countries and other wealthy nations over the growing refugee and migrant influx, developing countries are hosting 86 % of all those who fled war or persecution in their own countries. Some governments contend that the majority of these people, who risk their lives at sea or in long journeys across deserts in the hands of abusive smugglers or ruthless human traffickers, are just looking for a job. Some refugee source countries also suggest this is the reason for their people's flight: one Eritrean ambassador said in response to the Report of the UN Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violation in Eritrea: "Let me tell you, all those 'refugees' are economic migrants."

UN officials and human rights organizations are increasingly concerned that this attitude is apparently becoming shared by members of the EU. There is a suspicion that some EU states are drawing up secret deals with Eritrea, which may involve the regime being given money or having sanctions lifted in return for imposing tougher border controls to stop Eritrean citizens fleeing the repression and human rights violations they suffer there. Norway and the UK toughened their response to asylum requests from Eritrea earlier this year, citing last year's

highly controversial Danish report which suggested many Eritreans were fleeing for economic reasons. That report has been largely discredited and two of its three authors resigned in protest at its publication. Nevertheless, despite the numerous and detailed accounts of human rights violations in Eritrea, as well as UN sanctions on Eritrea, the refusal rate for Eritrean asylum applications in the UK has nearly doubled this year, rising from 13% to 23%. The reports of human rights violations in Eritrea have, however, now been very substantial and additional comprehensive support by the damning UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea, report presented to the UN Human Rights Council this week. Indeed, this has been underlined this week by Eritreans living in different parts of the world who have been demonstrating to voice their concerns over the treatment of refugees and their asylum cases, highlighting the massive human rights violations in their home country.