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News in brief

Africa and African Union

An East Africa-Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministerial meeting on public governance attended by the Public Administration and Civil Service Ministers of Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and ROK concluded on Wednesday (March 18) in Addis Ababa. It aimed to chart a road map for partnership to build strong institutions, speed up the war on poverty, and boost inclusive and sustainable development capacities. **(See article)**

The US Under-Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, Sarah Sewall, is visiting Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda this week to discuss strategies for preventing terrorism. Her visit, a follow-up to last month's White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism, includes meetings in Mombasa to meet political, religious, security and civil-society leaders

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn paid a three-day official visit to Algeria at the invitation of Algeria’s President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika over the weekend. He held talks with President Bouteflika and Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sella, and witnessed the signing of three cooperation agreements between the two countries. **(See article)**

Prime Minister Hailemariam met with South Korea’s Government Administration and Home Affairs Minister Chong Jong-sup, on Thursday (March 19). Their bilateral talks came after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between South Korea’s Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs and Ethiopia’s Ministry of Civil Service on the need to promote bilateral cooperation in public governance.

State Minister, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos met with Mr. Seán Sherlock, TD, the Irish Minister of State for Development, Trade Promotion and North-South Cooperation on Monday (March 16). During his visit Mr. Sherlock said he would be looking at the development of the Double Taxation Agreement between Ireland and Ethiopia, as well as the bilateral Air Transport Agreement signed in November last year. He said Ethiopia was one of Ireland’s Key Partner Countries, and it would support the implementation of the GTP II.

Ethiopia will be hosting the 34th COMESA policy organ meetings that start on March 20 this week, leading up to the 18th COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa concluding on March 31. The theme would be “Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization”. Ethiopia is taking over chairmanship of COMESA next year from DRC.

The United Nations refugee agency said on Tuesday (March 17) that it has begun the relocation of more than 50,000 South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, moving them from flood-prone areas ahead of the rainy season expected to start in late April. Ethiopia is currently Africa's largest refugee-hosting country with more than 670,000 refugees, mainly from Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea.

The Director-General of the Chuncheon City Administration, Kim Joon-Woo, met with Addis Ababa City Mayor Diriba Kuma on Monday (March 16) on a three day official visit to Ethiopia. Chuncheon City Administration has offered support to Addis Ababa in education, fire and emergency prevention, and a kindergarten would be built in Addis Ababa in collaboration with Korea War Veterans Association.

Ethiopia's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Spain, Ambassador Nega Tsegaye, resident in Paris, presented his Letters of Credence to His Majesty, King Felipe VI of the Kingdom of Spain, at the Royal Palace on Wednesday (March 11).

Women diplomats of the Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, university students and ambassadors residing in Ethiopia, celebrated the 104th International Women's Day on Wednesday (March 18) at the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa. This year's theme of the day was “Empowering Women in Diplomacy”.

Eritrea

The Chairman of the U.N. Commission of Inquiry into human rights violations in Eritrea says it has found "very clear patterns" of human rights violations and a total absence of the rule of law in the country. He said national service was universal and indefinite and most Eritreans had no hope for their future." **(See article)**

Foreign Minister Osman Saleh met with Egyptian Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab on the sidelines of the Egypt Economic Development Conference in Sharm el Sheikh at the end of last week. Discussions covered bilateral relations and trade. Prime Minister Mahlab said Egypt was ready to support Eritrea through the Egyptian Partnership Agency for Development

The Canadian company Nevsun Resources, operating in Eritrea announced on Friday last week that the Bisha Mine had been temporarily shut down due to mechanical issues. The statement coincided with a claim by an opposition movement, the Eritrean Salvation Front, that on March 11 it had attacked a government garage in Asmara which serviced the trucks used in transporting minerals from Bisha to the port of Massawa, and destroyed some trucks.

Kenya

The International Criminal Court (ICC) finally decided to withdraw charges against President Uhuru Kenyatta, on Friday (March 16). This followed a request from ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda last December to withdraw the charges against the President.

The Governor of Kenya's Mandera County, who was the target for the sixth time of an attack by Al-Shabaab on Friday (March 13) last week, wants deployment of Kenyan troops along the border with Somalia to prevent Al-Shabaab incursions and tighten security in the county. He said more than a hundred people had been killed in attacks over the last four months.

Somalia

Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke arrived in Doha on Tuesday (March 17) for an official visit to Qatar. After talks with Qatar's Prime Minister Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani agreements were signed for Qatar to provide support to the development of higher education and for Qatar Airways to start direct flights to Mogadishu.

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Nicholas Kay, has welcomed firm commitments made by Somalia's Federal and regional leaders to meet key Vision 2016 deadlines. He was speaking after meetings with the President, Prime Minister and Speaker, as well as the leaders of Puntland, the Interim Juba Administration and the Interim South-West Administration. **(See article)**

The US Department of Defense confirmed on Wednesday (March 18) that a drone strike in southern Somalia last week had killed Adan Garaar, a leading official in Al-Shabaab's security service, the Amniyat. The Pentagon said Adan Garaar had worked for Al-Shabaab's intelligence wing and was connected to attack on the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya in 2013.

The EU has approved the extension of its military train-and-advise mission (EUTM) in Somalia until 31 December 2016. The decision came during a meeting in Brussels of EU foreign ministers on March 16. The training mission was launched in 2010 and is now based in Mogadishu.. The Mission, which has a staff of 125, has trained some 5,000 troops.

As part of a program to enhance maritime security off the coast of Somalia and in the Horn of Africa, the European Union has donated Information Technology (IT) material including 25 computers and other equipment and six 4x4 vehicles to the Somali Coast Guard.

Norway has appointed a new ambassador to Somalia for the first time in 25 years. Ambassador Victor Conrad Ronneberg who is based in Nairobi, presented accreditation letters to Somalia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs on Wednesday.

Somaliland has announced that it will not hold any further talks with the Somali Federal Government without mediation from the international community following the collapse of the last round of the Turkish-mediated talks two weeks ago. Somaliland Foreign Minister, Mohamed Bihi Yonis, suggested possible mediation by IGAD or as a second option by Ethiopia.

South Sudan

President Kiir said on Saturday that the UNSC threat to impose sanctions on South Sudanese leaders could lead to an escalation of conflict and the only people who would suffer would be ordinary people. The UNSC formed a committee earlier this month to list individuals whose assets could be frozen and a travel ban imposed for obstructing peace talks.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Dlamini Zuma expressed concern on Tuesday (March 17) over the apparent leaking of the draft report of the African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan. She said the report had not been publicly released to anyone and it would only be released once the African Union Peace and Security Council decided to do so. The leaked report has generated anger among people mentioned in the document.

Prime Minister Hailemariam makes an official visit to Algeria

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn paid an official visit to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria at the weekend (March 14-16) at the invitation of the President of Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The Prime Minister along with a delegation that included Foreign minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom was given a warm welcome on arrival at the Houari Boumediene International Airport in Algiers. The visit reflected the willingness of both countries to strengthen their historic bonds of friendship, solidarity and cooperation following their Declaration of Strategic Partnership. A communiqué from the Algerian presidency said the discussions between the Algerian President and the Ethiopian Prime Minister and between the two delegations would help to strengthen and enhance the brotherly relations and cooperation between Algeria and Ethiopia, which, it stressed, were bound by the Declaration of Strategic Partnership signed in Algiers in June 2013. They would also encourage mutually beneficial exchanges and economic partnerships. The communiqué noted the political consultations between the two leaders would "strengthen convergence of views between the two countries on international and regional issues of common interest, particularly regarding peace, security and development in Africa."

During the visit, Prime Minister Hailemariam held fruitful discussions with the Algerian President on bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern. On bilateral issues, the Ethiopian Prime Minister noted that the warm political and diplomatic relations that the two countries enjoyed have not been reflected in their economic relation. In this regard, he said, "it is time that we should make the effort to lift our economic relations to the level it deserves and to a level that reflects the reality of our relationship." In addition, the Prime Minister suggested that, in order to use the considerable possibilities available for development of economic ties, it was time to encourage the business people of both countries to establish more extensive interaction and collaboration between them. As one way to improve the economic relations, the Ethiopian Prime Minister said Ethiopia had decided to open its embassy in Algeria. He added that it would also be important to work towards starting direct flight between Addis Ababa and Algeria by their respective airlines.

President Bouteflika also emphasized the deep and historic relations between Ethiopia and Algeria. He acknowledged the insignificant economic relations between the two countries, but stipulated the need to redouble the efforts of both countries to cooperate in economic, social and cultural fields. In addition, President Bouteflika underlined the importance of cooperating in areas in which already had a comparative advantage. In this regard, the President noted Ethiopia's huge potential in livestock production and Algeria's equally substantial demand for livestock products. During their talks, the two leaders agreed that failures to implement previously signed agreements had impeded the development of their economic relations.

On regional issues, President Bouteflika and Prime Minister Hailemariam reviewed the various conflicts and crises in Africa. They reiterated their firm and joint condemnation of terrorism on the continent, and agreed it needed a continental response. In this context, they renewed their commitment to combine their efforts with a view to fighting this scourge, a scourge which continues to hamper the peace and security of the continent. They recognized the pivotal role that their countries played in the promotion of peace, stability and security in their respective regions as well as in the continent at large. In order to augment their efforts at peace-keeping in Africa, they reiterated the need to provide sustainable support for the African Union in its quest for political solutions to crises and conflicts in Africa. They reaffirmed the necessity of working towards the socio-economic development of the continent, in the spirit of the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). They agreed this was a prototype for resolving the complex and multidimensional challenges that hampers socio-economic development in Africa.

Prime Minister Hailemariam also held bilateral talks with Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalik Sellal. During their discussion, they agreed on specified ways to strengthen their relations, and at the end of the talks, Prime Minister Hailemariam and Prime Minister Sellal witnessed the signing of three agreements, part of the overall effort to enhance cooperation in various fields. Two of these covered Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Animal Health, while the third was a Memorandum of Understanding on Diplomatic Training. In addition, the two countries agreed to further enhance cooperation in a number of other areas, including agriculture, transport, horticulture, industry and petroleum. Algeria also agreed to send a business delegation to explore the investment potential and opportunities in Ethiopia.

During his visit, Prime Minister Hailemariam paid tribute to the Martyrs of Algeria's National Liberation War at the Martyr's Sanctuary of Algiers where he laid a wreath in commemoration. The Prime Minister also visited the Mujahid Museum where the details of the struggle of the Algerian People against colonialism are preserved, and signed the guest book of the Museum.

Ethiopia at the 3rd United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

The five day 3rd United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held in Sendai, Japan (March 14-18). It was the most important event in emergency and disaster risk management since the Hyogo Framework for Action was agreed in Kobe, 2005 and representatives from 187 countries including Heads of State, ministers and some 20 top-level

UN officials including Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon were among the several thousand participants attending. A high-level Ethiopian delegation led by State Minister of Agriculture, Mituku Kasa attended the conference.

The Conference met under the auspices of General Assembly resolutions which called for a review of how governments, national and international non-governmental organizations, communities, disaster experts and other stakeholders had carried out their respective commitments for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The Hyogo Framework For Action, in an effort to substantially reduce disaster risks by 2015, formulated 5 priorities of action that included: ensuring that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation, identifying, assessing and monitoring disaster risks and enhancing early warning, using knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels, reducing the underlying risk factors and strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

It was in line with such global framework that State Minister Mituku delivered Ethiopia's official statement at the Plenary Session. He emphasized that the salient aspects of the Ethiopian new Disaster Risk Management Policy were consistent with the Hyogo Framework for Action, which was adopted at the World Conference held in Kobe, Japan, in January 2005. He described the efforts of the Government of Ethiopia in implementing the strategic plan and programs designed under the Policy to prevent and address the challenges associated with the natural disasters and calamities in the country. As the efforts of enabling communities and nations to become resilient to the effects of natural, technological and environmental hazards; thereby reducing the multidimensional risks associated with socio-economic vulnerabilities, could not be realized on unilateral basis, the State Minister expressed the firm belief of Ethiopia that Disaster Risk Reduction requires joint international actions and sharing responsibilities among all sectors, actors and stakeholders. He underlined that Ethiopia saw its official representation at the Conference as critical in sharing lessons and experiences with other actors around the world.

As stressed in the Hyogo Framework for Action, addressing international and regional platforms of cooperation and partnership are the basis for framing the modalities of cooperation for the Post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction. State Minister Mituku said Ethiopia was a model in this regard. He pointed to Ethiopia's experience in forging regional platforms as demonstrated in its new Disaster Risk Management Policy which was not only consistent with the Hyogo Framework for Action, but was also aligned with the African Union and IGAD strategies on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, aimed at tackling challenges caused by Disasters on the Continent and its sub-regions.

The State Minister also noted that Ethiopia was currently making preparations for the UN Third Financing for Development which will be held in Addis Ababa in July; he called for member states' support and cooperation to make the Conference a success. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon referred to the Sendai meeting as an excellent beginning for "our journey to the Addis Ababa meeting in July." The UN Secretary General in his opening remarks to the Conference noted that as the Conference was "bringing together national leaders, mayors, businesses, researchers, farmers, parliamentarians, community leaders and other experts," and it had drawn

more high-level participants than any other international conference ever held on disaster risk reduction, he had every expectation it would produce real results.

Apart from reviewing the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, the 3rd United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction addressed the three key areas for intervention laid out at the Tokyo Conference on International Study for Disaster Reduction and Resilience held in January this year. These included assessment of the present state of disaster risks, issues associated with key directions, and findings and recommendations for prospects of future action. The Tokyo consultative workshop in its assessment of current trends maintained that manmade factors, such as globalization, population growth, poverty, urbanization and changes in land use were worsening the already existing negative impacts of natural hazards. Losses were apparently on the rise in both developed and developing nations and it appears that the problem of consolidating disaster risk reduction and sustainable development was becoming critical. Similarly, the Conference emphasized the need for collaborative global action to boost national and international stakeholders' capabilities of monitoring disaster risks and their social impact

The Conference agreed a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction as the successor to the Hyogo Framework for Action. The new global plan of preparation for future natural and climate-linked disasters to cover the next fifteen years outlines seven global targets, including a "substantial reduction in global disaster mortality, a substantial reduction in numbers of affected people and a reduction in economic losses in relation to global Gross Domestic Product". A central element in the new framework is health. The framework calls for action to build the resilience of health systems for all types of disasters and emergencies, making hospitals and health facilities safe and operational in disasters, better preparing for epidemics and pandemic, and including vulnerable people, children, the old, and those with life-threatening and chronic diseases in disaster risk reduction measures.

It did not however provide any numerical targets or the definite financial commitments that many had hoped for. The NGO Oxfam welcomed the agreement's emphasis on women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, "who are particularly vulnerable to disasters" but said the Conference's failure to "make concrete commitments to finance disaster risk reduction threatens to undercut its ambitious anti-poverty agenda – and puts added pressure on governments to take bold action at more high-profile international conferences on the Sustainable Development Goals and an ambitious new global climate change agreement later this year". Oxfam said "the world's poorest people, who are most vulnerable to natural disasters, have again been let down by governments."

During the Conference, State Minister Mituku also participated in several High-level events organized on the Conference margins. These included a Round Table Ministerial meeting on Governing Disaster Risk and Overcoming Challenge; a working Session on Building Resilient Future for Rural Areas; and Ministerial Round Table on Reducing Disaster Risk in Urban Settings. At all of these the State Minister outlined the activities being carried out by the Ethiopian Government and the achievements that had been registered. He indicated that a lot remained to be done to address the challenges of disasters in a sufficient and sustainable manner.

Inquiry Commission on Eritrea reports “clear patterns” of human rights violations

The UN Human Rights Council appointed a Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea in June last year after hearing reports from the UN Special Rapporteur, Ms. S. Keetaruth. The Commission of Inquiry was given the mandate to examine a broad range of alleged violations since Eritrea gained independence. The Commission was appointed in September. It decided its procedures and methodology should be guided by the principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity, transparency, integrity, confidentiality, and the principle of “do no harm”, and that its findings must be based on “reasonable grounds to believe” standard of proof. It is due to provide a written report on its findings of human rights violations in Eritrea to the Council in June this year, but prior to this the Chair of the Commission, Mike Smith, delivered an oral report on the progress of its investigation on Monday this week (March 16) to the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Mr. Smith noted the Government of Eritrea had made no effort to cooperate with the Commission and failed to answer repeated requests to visit the country and to obtain additional information that would be relevant for its investigation. It had therefore used alternative sources of information to obtain direct and first-hand information “in a transparent, independent and impartial manner.” As a result it had, said the Chairperson, delved into the human rights situation in Eritrea to an extent never achieved before, interviewing around 400 people in five different countries and receiving 140 written submissions. The Commission had also consulted experts in various countries including Ethiopia and Djibouti and spoken with a variety of representatives from inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies. Although, the Commission would continue to collect testimonies and evaluate the information received, it could, said Mr. Smith, already report on “very clear patterns of human rights violations” and on the Commission’s systemic understanding of them.

The Commission found the dominant element of the situation in Eritrea appeared to be the so-called state of “no war, no peace” to which the Government of Eritrea frequently referred. This, it said, had become “the pretext for almost all the State’s human rights violations” in the country. The Commission said it consciously using the word “pretext”: because the so-called “no war, no peace” situation was not a status recognized under international law. It was no more than an expression “abusively used by the Eritrean authorities to disregard international human rights.” Under this pretext, Mr. Smith said the whole society had been militarized, national service was universal and of indefinite duration. Most Eritreans had no hope for their future: “national service, whether in a military unit or in a civil assignment, is the only thing that from the age of seventeen they can expect to spend their life doing – paid between less than one and a maximum of two dollars a day. On such wages, they struggle to fulfill their basic needs, let alone think about raising a family.”

Mr. Smith pointed out that under this pretext the Constitution had never been implemented and the National Assembly was not sitting; there was no rule of law in the country; and no one was being held accountable for violating the rights of groups or individuals. He went on to say that under this pretext, the Government had curtailed most freedoms, from movement to expression;

from religion to association. It had “created a condition in which individuals feel that they have hardly any choice with regard to the main decisions in their lives: where to live, what career to pursue, when to marry or who to worship.”

Mr. Smith said that in order to enforce and perpetuate such a system, “pervasive State control and ruthless repression of perceived deviant behavior – particularly within national service – are crucial.” The regime had therefore created a network of spies “that goes so deep in the fabric of social life that a man employed by national security might not know that his daughter is similarly employed.” This led to the extra-judicial executions, enforced disappearances and incommunicado detentions, all aimed “at silencing all perceived critics and teaching a lesson to them and others – because you are never really told why you are arrested, and once you have been arrested, for how long you will be detained and where.”

Mr. Smith said the Commission had been able to verify that detention in Eritrea was an ordinary fact of life, experienced by mass of individuals, men and women, old and young, including children. The report noted, detention centers ranged from the official to the unofficial, located above ground or underground. Some were metal containers where prisoners were kept in extreme heat, others were fenced areas, providing no shelter. “Once in one of them, there is a likelihood that you will be subject to torture to extract a confession or to simply punish behavior,” Mr. Smith said. He quoted witnesses who had described what sort of behavior might lead to torture: looking at the torturers with a “judging eye”, refusing or protecting the women with whom torturers wanted sexual activity, walking too slowly in military training, drinking water without permission or merely asking for medicine. All of these could lead to serious punishments like being tied in the ‘otto’ position, with feet and hands tied behind the back and lying face down at the hottest time of the day.

Mr. Smith asked “Is it surprising that faced with such challenges, Eritreans leave their country in their hundreds every day? They brave death to cross borders, deserts and seas – and many of them never make it to “the other side”. Eritreans currently make up the second largest group, after Syrians, making the perilous journey in small boats across the Mediterranean to Europe. Tens of thousands more remain in neighboring countries. He said the Government of Eritrea, the international community and the United Nations had all sought ways to address the situation. He acknowledged some changes in Eritrea in recent years. Eritrea had recently ratified the UN Convention against Torture and it had recently announced that National Service would be limited, once again, to 18 months for new recruits. He said the Commission would like to hear more about this and he would like to encourage the Eritrean Government “to follow up on its engagements with real change on the ground.” At the same time, Mr. Smith stressed that the massive exodus of Eritreans should not, and indeed could not, be tackled, without addressing the human rights situation in the country. In conclusion he said that the Commission remained available to visit and engage in dialogue with the State of Eritrea.

As the representative of a concerned country, Eritrean Ambassador Tesfamicael Gerahtu spoke at the session. He said Eritrea reiterated its position that a country specific mandate on human rights – that is the appointment of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea – without the consent of the concerned state was “counter-productive.” This was why the Government of Eritrea did not allow the Commission to visit the country. The Ambassador said

there were no gross and systematic violations of human rights in Eritrea, and he spoke of preconceived ideas and conclusions. He said co-operation with Ethiopia and Djibouti “as countries with belligerent stance on Eritrea was unacceptable”. Eritrea, he said, rejected the oral report, calling its information “unreliable, unproven and sensational.”

The SRSG for Somalia welcomes commitments to meet Vision 2016

A statement this week from the office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia (SRSG) Nicholas Kay, welcomed “firm commitments made by Somalia’s Federal and regional leaders to meet Vision 2016 deadlines”. The statement said these deadlines were necessary to complete Somalia’s federal state formation process, and review the provisional constitution without any extension of the terms of the Federal President and Parliament in September 2016, as set out in the provisional federal Constitution.

Over the previous ten days, SRSG Kay held a series of meetings with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke and the Speaker of the Federal Parliament, Mohamed Osman Jawari, to discuss peace and state-building progress across the country. The SRSG also met with the President of Puntland, Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gaas in Garowe; the head of the Interim Juba Administration (IJA), Sheikh Ahmad Islam ‘Madobe’ in Kismayo; the head of the Interim South West Administration (ISWA) Sheikh Sharif Hassan Adan in Baidoa.

The Special Representative, recalling his mandate from the Security Council to provide the good offices of the United Nations and strategic policy advice to assist Somalia’s peace-building and state-building efforts, said he was encouraged by the firm commitments he had heard from the President, Prime Minister, Speaker and the leaders of Puntland, the IJA and the ISWA to delivering Somalia’s Vision 2016 plan. He said that across the country there was a determination to respect this deadline. Equally, he noted, there was concern that time was now very short.

Mr. Kay said “there is a strong consensus that in the period between now and the beginning of Ramadan, several important milestones need to be achieved.” Among these he listed the appointment of the Commissioners of the National Independent Electoral Commission and for the Boundaries and Federation Commission and for the operationalization of these Commissions. There was also the need for the establishment of inclusive regional assemblies for the IJA and ISWA, the formation of interim administrations in the Central Regions and in Middle Shabelle and Hiiraan. Other priorities were agreement between the executive and parliament on a legislative timetable to include producing and passing Bills on Political Parties, Citizenship, the Electoral Law and the Constitutional Court, and the need to achieve significant progress in accordance with the recent Memorandum of Understanding on the constitutional review process.

Mr. Kay said that the UN and Somalia international partners would continue to provide support for Somalia’s institutions and people as they undertake the ambitious state-building agenda that they had set. He said in the coming months a visiting United Nations technical mission would assist by reviewing progress towards elections; and a High-Level Partnership Forum in June in

Mogadishu would bring together Somalia's partners to undertake careful consideration of the political and security progress being made under the New Deal Somali Compact, as agreed in Copenhagen last November. He also noted that later in the year, all stakeholders, the Federal Government, Parliament, the Interim Regional Administrations, civil society, and the International Community, would need to consider exactly how best to achieve an inclusive and representative process in 2016. This could only be done once it was known how much political and security progress Somalia will have achieved, but when the time comes "it will be important there is broad consultation and agreement." For the moment, what was most important, said Mr. Kay, was that "the agreed priority remains the collective effort to complete state formation, review the federal constitution and carry out the essential preparatory work for democratization." In this context, he welcomed the planned meeting of leaders of the Federal Government and Parliament, the IRAs and Puntland in Garowe in early April. He hoped this would give broad endorsement to a clear political calendar.

In conclusion Mr. Kay warmly commended the Federal Government's commitment to accelerate much needed progress until the end of their mandate in September 2016 and I welcome the engagement of Somalia's emerging federal member states in supporting this process. He also saluted the courage of members of the Federal Parliament and urge MPs to re-double their efforts in the coming session to pass essential laws.

A day or two later, in an interview with the Voice of America, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, while praising the achievements of the Somali Government, also said categorically that it would not be acceptable if Somali leaders tried to extend their term of office. Mr. Kay said: "There can be no term extension for Somali leaders after their term expires, in August, 2016, and the international community won't accept that."

The Development Assistance group's latest comments on resettlement

As we noted last week, the recent statement by the UK's Department of International Development (DfID) that it was ending support for the successful Promotion of Basic Services (PBS) program in order to shift assistance towards other areas of economic development, was predictably interpreted by the usual critics of Ethiopia as a response to their criticisms that DfID's funding for the PBS program in Gambella Regional State was contributing to the resettlement program to which they were opposed. DfID actually made it quite clear that Ethiopia was delivering impressive progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and the needs of the country were changing. The UK's approach to development in Ethiopia was therefore evolving, but equally, it remained firmly committed to poverty reduction in Ethiopia. The change in approach would not affect the amount of aid DFID would be providing.

Various advocacy organizations have repeatedly made allegations of "villagisation-related widespread abuses" including forced displacement of people from their lands and forests and other human rights violations. As we have noted on many occasions, at no point have these organizations produced any acceptable, independently verified, or indeed verifiable evidence, of the abuses they claim have occurred in the resettlement program, in Gambella, in the Lower

Omo or any where else. There were fresh allegations last week by Survival International about people being forced off their land in the Lower Omo with the additional claim that there had been no flooding of the river last year because of the start of the filling of the Gilgel Gibe III dam and “associated large-scale irrigation for commercial plantations on tribal land”. In fact, the annual floods take place in September and the filling of the Dam began in January this year and there is no significant reduction of the river’s flow. Given the amount of rainfall in area of the sugar plantations, it is now known that the amount of water needed for irrigation, and only for three or four months each year, will be no more than 4%-6% of the river’s flow. In addition, despite the claims, there have been continuous consultations with the indigenous peoples of the Lower Omo. Nobody has been forcibly resettled.

It might be noted that the Commune Development or Resettlement Program is designed to meet five major objectives: enabling the communities dispersed in various parts of the regions to join together to establish a central village for sustainable and stable way of life; facilitating access to basic development services and amenities to the people; raising the livelihoods of the communities that are totally dependent on cattle raising to a more productive semi-pastoralist stage; ensuring food security and enabling the people partake in the benefits of sustainable development and of good governance.

In fact, as we said on numerous occasions, all the alleged reports of human rights abuses in the Lower Omo, and the claims that donors “support an oppressive government hell bent on turning self-sufficient tribes into aid-dependent internal refugees” have been investigated time and again. No independent sources – and the advocacy organizations cannot be considered independent in this context – have substantiated the claims. No donor representatives, missions visiting the areas, or NGOs working there have found any such evidence.

The most recent independent evidence of development in the Lower Omo comes from the latest Donors’ Development Assistance Group mission to the area. The DAG has been making regular visits to the area, and to Gambella, in 2010, 2012, and again in August last year, visiting South Omo and Bench-Maji. Following the visit last year, which look specifically at development activities in the area including resettlement, the DAG sent a letter to the Minister of Federal Affairs and the State Minister of Finance and Economic Development in February this year. This concluded categorically: “The DAG missions found no evidence of the Government of Ethiopia forcible resettling people.”

The mission found that significant efforts had been made to improve the standard of living in resettled villages, and in, for example, two of the villages it visited it found agreement that life was similar or better than life before moving, though there were also some complaints about water pumps, health clinics and sanitation. Another site, however, had not been successful. The DAG was clear that its interviews revealed that people welcomed access to water, health and veterinary services. There was less agreement over education but where the school was up and running, the response was positive. The DAG felt that the resettlement was often gender positive with women gaining more directly from greater access to health, water and irrigated agriculture. In Bench-Maji where provision of basic services, provision of food in areas of shortage and improved housing were encouraging the settlement of agro-pastoralists, the local population was positive over access to education,

roads and health developments. There were also questions over some problems including access to water, costs of health care and unclear processing of land allocation, lack of sources of income for women, and poor security.

At the same time the mission did have some questions over the operation of the program. It found, for example, that some communities remained mistrustful of the Government. It suggested the Government should use the opportunities to make sure its working relationship with all local communities was positive. It noted the importance of handling the process of development effectively and emphasized the importance of transparency about developments taking place in the area and of listening to the local communities. The mission suggested the government might in some cases consider slowing down the speed of development to allow more time “for a softer transition” thus avoiding any possibility of problems.

Among its fourteen recommendations, the Development Assistance Group underlined the importance of ensuring resettlement was based on informed consent, adding that transparency and meaningful consultations were essential. It suggested the Environmental Impact Assessment for the sugar plantations should be published, and that NGOs might be used to assist local communities in the resettlement process. It emphasized the importance of ensuring services are available and affordable before people move and that they are maintained acceptably subsequently. Other suggestions included offering a formal guarantee to protect communal grazing lands, establishing an ombudsman-led grievance mechanism and sound conflict management mechanisms, working to anticipate possible risks of social problems and developing benefit sharing mechanisms for local communities to share in the gains from the sugar plantations.

In an earlier statement, the DAG noted that it had visited over 65 villages in the Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, Afar and Somali regions and South Omo where resettlement is taking place. It said it had met with Government officials at regional and woreda levels, Government staff such as development agents, teachers and health extension workers, and with a wide range of women and men, including those who had moved or were planning to move to both new and existing villages, as well as those choosing to stay in their original villages. It had found that implementation of resettlement had improved over time, and that the Government was increasingly providing information to communities about resettlement in terms of timing and objectives. In areas where the program has been in place for some time, the quality of basic services was, even if delayed in many places, found to be the same, as good as or better than it had been where they lived previously. People often said they preferred the new village, even when they had not initially wanted to move. It repeated that there was a need to ensure that people who were moving to areas with different livelihoods got the necessary extension and education services to enable them to take advantage of the new opportunities. It said there had been some specific complaints, and some concern, over the quality of consultation, the quality of construction of public services, the issue of a grievance redress mechanisms and the speed, scale and sequencing of implementation. It concluded, however “ we did not find reports of systematic or widespread human rights abuses.”

East Africa-South Korea Ministerial meeting on public governance

An Eastern Africa-Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministerial meeting on public governance concluded this week in Addis Ababa charting a road map for future partnership in the area of public governance. The aim was to look for ways to usher in a transformative economy, build strong institutions, speed up the war on poverty, and boost inclusive and sustainable development capacities. The meeting, which brought together the Public Administration Ministers of Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and the Republic of Korea, underscored the central importance of investing and cooperating on public governance to secure a sustainable socio-economic future for the people of East African countries and the ROK. It also opened a window of opportunity for all countries to draw lessons from the ROK to help rise above the challenges facing government administration, public safety and regional development as well as steer a course effectively and efficiently addressing the needs of the public.

Ms. Aster Mamo, Ethiopia's Civil Service Minister and Coordinator of the Good Governance and Reform Cluster with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister, delivered a key note address. Appreciating South Korea's support in capacity building, and acknowledging the long friendship and partnership of Ethiopia and South Korea, Ms. Aster said the meeting could be regarded as a platform to enable citizens' access to public services and it offered an opportunity to embrace innovation and excellence in the area of public service. She said also East Africa-South Korea cooperation on public governance would accelerate regional integration in the region. She also said that Ethiopia's national economic, social and political changes and development success was premised on the institutionalization of effective, efficient and accountable public governance. Towards this end, the government had put in place a national civil service reform program and had taken various measures to involve the public sector as well as hasten social development. In doing so, she said, the government had encountered a myriad of challenges in the practical implementation of the good governance program. It was devoting serious efforts to tackle those challenges in order to pave the way for the smooth and efficient roll-out of national and regional development. Ms. Aster reiterated that Ethiopia was committed to the creation of effective public service delivery to satisfy the needs of the public.

In his opening remarks, Dr Chong Jong-sup, Minister of Government Administration and Home Affairs of the ROK, said that recent political stability coupled with its dynamic economy was enabling the continent of Africa to gain more and more influence in the world. The Minister said the ROK was looking forward to work jointly with Africa to provide blueprints for various cooperation projects in the sphere of public governance. He said the meeting could be seen as a stepping stone to initiate practical cooperation, explore future opportunities and share successes and failures relating to national development through good governance. It would also identify solutions suitable to the situation in each country. The Minister said that committed public officials and good governance were at the heart of Korea's own transition from being one of the poorest countries in the world into a donor and innovative country within six decades. He pointed out that Africa was poised for a giant leap forward and said South Korea was committed to be a partner in Africa's future sustainable development agenda. Discussions considered the place of E-Government in the Republic of Korea and the implications of Saemaul Undong as a local development model which had assisted in achieving development through self-help and cooperation.

The meeting concluded with the signing of a mutual cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs of the Republic of Korea and the Ministry of Civil Service of Ethiopia. This is intended to consolidate a partnership in the overall area of public governance based on mutual trust and ensure sustainable development. The agreement allows the two countries to prioritize cooperation in the spheres of government innovation, E-Government regional development, local administration and other operating systems inside and outside of government. These are designed to enhance public administration efficiency, democracy and transparency and scale up customer satisfaction. With regard to government innovation, the two parties agreed to enhance government operations and functions, administrative performance and culture in order to improve overall government capacity and provide the best service possible for citizens. The agreement also allows the two parties to craft strategies for accountability and transparency in local self-governance. With reference to E-Government, the two sides agreed to establish the infrastructure for a new administration system to improve public service delivery through e-Governance and information communications technology. The agreement permits the two sides to promote policies and projects for regional development with a view to improve human development and better living conditions.

The promotion of effective governance, as well as creation of inclusive, participatory and accountable public institutions, has been central to the success of the Republic of Korea. Inspired by this, Ethiopia has made the building of human and institutional capacity development and deepening of good governance as one of the main pillars of its Growth and Transformations Plan to help succeed in overall national development goals, including sustaining faster and equitable economic growth, maintaining agriculture as a major source of economic growth, facilitating conditions for the industry to play key role in the economy, investing on the expansion and quality of infrastructure development, and fostering women and youth empowerment and equitable benefit. Public servants have been made agents of the national vision and aspiration through the practical implementation of the Civil Service Reform Program and the Good Governance packages. At the same time, much remains to be done to resolve the continuing structural and institutional hurdles that the civil service still faces in delivering services to the public. The commitment with the Republic of Korea for cooperation on the challenges facing governance and on the employment of e-Government provides a timely effort to consolidate the gains already made and move further toward the establishment of a stable democratic and developmental state.

2015 (2007 EC) national election debates start on Ethiopia TV and radio

Following the regulations and directives of the House of People's Representatives, most of the preparations for this year's May election are now complete. The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) laid down a detailed timetable over the last few months providing for the effective conduct of a democratic, free and fair election at the federal and regional state levels. Part of this has been the provision of broadcast media air time (600 hours of TV and radio) and print media platforms (700 columns of coverage). These have been allocated on a formula based on the number of seats held by a party at the last election (40%); the number of candidates (40%), and the number of women candidates (10%), and participation (10%). The NEBE said

that the formula was fairer than previous allocations and had the added advantage of improving the opportunities for women candidates.

With the start of campaigning and the publication of party manifestos, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation has also started to organize a series of political debates on TV. Following an agreement by the Joint Council of the Political Parties, the first of the televised debates was held on March 13. The Joint Council agreed on nine subjects for the debate on March 13 last week, on 'Multi-party Democracy and Human and Democratic Rights in Ethiopia'; the other subjects to be discussed will be Federalism; Agricultural and Rural Policy; Urban Development and Industrial Policy; Good Governance and the Rule of Law; National Security; Foreign Policy; Infrastructure; and Education and Health. All of these will be debated over the next few weeks.

The parties taking part in the two hour long discussions were the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (MEDREK), Semayawi (Blue) Party, the New Generation Party (NGP) and the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party.

The Minister heading the Government Communication Affairs Office, Redwan Hussein, noted that for the EPRDF, as for Ethiopia, development and democracy were the inseparable sides of the same coin. He said Ethiopia was a democracy that centered on "people's rule". He said the constitution had been established with the consent of peoples, nations and nationalities acting together in a situation in which unity and diversity feed on each other I support of this. Minister Redwan also elaborated further on the place of human and democratic rights in Ethiopia's multi-party democracy.

Dr. Merara Gudina, representing the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Unity Forum (MEDREK), argued that for a multi-party system to really exist, several basic criteria needed be in place. Among these were that citizens should have opportunities to choose among two or more genuine alternatives; that elections should only take place under a system in which human and democratic rights are fully respected; there should be independent electoral board, an independent court and a free and independent media. Without these necessities a multi-party democracy could not prevail and none of these were present in this election, he said. The President of the New Generation Party President, Asfaw Getachew, spoke of the type of democracy that his party felt would suit Ethiopia best. Liberal democracy, he said, was a more appropriate democratic form than the revolutionary democracy of the ERPDF. Engineer Yilikal Getinet, President of the Semayawi (Blue) Party and Tigistu Awal, President of the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party, also presented their parties' stance on whether or not Ethiopia has a genuine multi-party system.

In response to some of these views, and also representing the EPRDF, Asmelash Woldesilassie, noted that over 75 political parties were registered and were operating in Ethiopia. That, he said, best demonstrated the reality, and indeed the practicality of Ethiopia's multi party system. He also pointed out that Ethiopia had an all-inclusive constitution that guaranteed both human and democratic rights of citizens clearly and precisely.

The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority (EBA) has now scheduled other sessions for further debate over the next few weeks among the five political parties participating. While the parties have welcomed the debates, some have complained that the time allotted, two hours, is too short to deal properly with these major issues.

The EBA has also been evaluating the use of allocated time by the political parties and how the parties are using the free airtime and newspaper columns allotted to them. Some political parties have failed to make full or even any use of the free airtime and media allocations. The EPRDF, however, has used 95% of its allotted free airtime and newspaper columns while others have used no more than 50% of the potential coverage. Medrek, Semayawi and the All Ethiopian Unity Party were identified as making better use of newspaper articles. The evaluation identified some of the problems including a lack of journalistic capacity in some parties, a tendency to deliver election campaign material at the 11th hour, and the fact that some political parties appeared preoccupied with TV campaigns and neglected radio and print media. This and a lack of sufficient media skills were among the issues identified in the meetings with heads of media houses. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority noted that over the previous few weeks some ten political parties had to be asked to make some change or adjustments to the content of their proposed material and to the background music they selected in accordance with the Election Law and the Election Code of Conduct signed by the parties.

As part of the final preparations, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia and the Addis Ababa Police Commission have been giving training for legislators and for middle rank and senior police officers in different towns on ways to facilitate a model and democratic election and formalize peaceful solutions of possible complaints or post-election disagreements. In training given in collaboration with the Federal Police Commission held in Adama last week the Chairman of the NEBE, Professor Merga Bekana who has the rank of Minister, said it had been two decades since the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia had been using their constitutionally guaranteed rights of choosing the representatives they wanted. He said the country's election processes were in line with international standards and assured the benefits of a multi-party system for the people. The chairman also noted that the process was being strengthened from time to time as necessary, "to reach an excellent level where it is now to be found"