

News in brief

The High Level Ministerial Partnership Forum on Somalia in Copenhagen...

...while efforts to resolve the differences between Somalia's President and Prime Minister continue

Bilateral meetings and Diaspora engagement for Dr. Tedros in Copenhagen

The Second Ethio-French Business Forum held in Paris

The contribution of Pulses, Oil Seeds and Spices to Ethiopia's economy

Tri-lateral experts meeting on sustainable use of the Dawa River

UNHCR highlights a sharp increase in the numbers of Eritrean refugees

"Ethio-Eritrean People-to-People Relationship for Peace" Conference

News in brief

Africa and the African Union

The Africa-China Poverty Reduction and Development Conference, held under the theme of 'Industrial Development: Cross-Perspectives from Africa and China', concluded on Wednesday (November 19) with African and Chinese officials calling for a deepening of their partnership. The Conference, co-hosted by Ethiopia, the AU Commission, the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China and UNDP, identified key areas for joint initiatives to reduce poverty.

The Powering Africa Summit, bringing together government officials, international energy partners and other stakeholders to discuss enhancement of the energy sector opened in Addis Ababa on Thursday (November 20). Among those attending were Ethiopia's Minister of Water Irrigation and Energy, Alemayehu Tegenu, and State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Yinager Dessie.

A five-day seminar and research conference on African Aviation began in Addis Ababa Monday (November 17) to discuss ways to strengthen an enabling environment for secure air transport services in Africa and increase air transport coordination by African countries.

Ethiopia

Dr Tedros Adhanom, Minister for Foreign Affairs, visited Copenhagen this week to take part in the High Level Ministerial Partnership Forum on Somalia. During his visit he held talks on Tuesday (November 18) with Denmark's Foreign Minister, Martin Lidegaard, Sweden's Foreign Minister, Ms. Margot Wallstrom, and with Egypt's Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry as well as with the UN Under Secretary General of Political Affairs, Jefferey Feltman and with the Chair of the Danish Foreign Policy and Foreign Affairs Committee, Ms. Mette Gjerskov.

On Wednesday (November 19), Dr. Tedros also met with the European Union Foreign Affairs High Representative, Ms. Federica Mogherini; and with Faris Mohammed Al Mazrouei, Assistant Minister for Security and Military Affairs in the UAE Foreign Ministry. Dr. Tedros will be making an official visit to the United Arab Emirates this weekend.

Dr Tedros Adhanom held a meeting with representatives of the Ethiopian Diaspora in Copenhagen on Monday (November 17) and encouraged them to participate in the process of development, democratization and good governance in Ethiopia. He also met with representatives of the Confederation of Danish Industry, Arla Food Ingredients Company, and GAIN, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition; and held talks with the FOSS Foundation's Senior Vice President for Global Sales and Marketing

Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister to coordinate the Economy and Finance Cluster and Minister of Communication and Information Technology and Mr. Matthias Fekl, French Minister of State for Foreign Trade, Promotion of Tourism and French Nationals Abroad, opened the second Ethio-French Business Forum in Paris on Monday (November 17). **(See article)**

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dewano Kedir met this week with a delegation led by the Chairman of the Chinese Energy Company, Guangcai Energy plc, Ms. Cheung Hiu Ching, to discuss investment and business potential and opportunities in Ethiopia.

The Fitch Group, the financial information service rating company, has given Ethiopia a 'B' for its long-term foreign and local currency Issuer Default Ratings (IDR), and for its short-term foreign currency Issuer Default Ratings. The rating is based on analysis of developments in economic performance, debt ratios, governance indicators, and other areas. Fitch expects real GDP growth of 9% in 2014 and 8% in 2015.

The US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Patricia Haslach, speaking at Bahr Dar University Marine Engineering School on Tuesday (November 18), has reiterated continued US support to Ethiopia's successful human development efforts.

The Ethiopian Horticulture Development Agency, said at the weekend that Ethiopia hopes to increase revenue from horticultural exports from US\$245 million last year to US \$371 million this fiscal year (2014-15). Over 120 foreign and domestic companies are currently engaged in horticulture development in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's Ambassador to Turkey, accredited to Georgia, Ambassador Ayalew Gobeze, has presented his credentials to Georgia's President, Giorgi Margvelashvili, and conveyed greetings from President Dr. Mulatu Teshome of Ethiopia to President Margvelashvili and the people of Georgia.

The Ambassador of Ethiopia to Sweden and other Nordic Countries, Ambassador Woinshet Tadesse, presented her credentials to the President of the Republic of Finland, Mr. Sauli Niinisto, on Thursday last week (November 13).

The annual diplomatic bazaar organized by the Diplomatic Spouses Group of Ethiopia (DSGE) will be held on Saturday (November 22) at the Millennium Hall in Addis Ababa. The bazaar aims to mobilize funds for charitable causes and support for vulnerable groups in Ethiopia.

Eritrea

A UN delegation headed by Ms. Leila Pakkala, UNICEF Regional Director and Ashraf El Nour, International Organization for Migration's Regional Director for East and the Horn of Africa, was in Asmara this week. They met Foreign Minister Osman Saleh as well as the Ministers of National Development, Health, Labor and Human Welfare, Land, Water and Environment, and Finance and the heads of the National Unions of Youth and Women.

The UNHCR office in Addis Ababa announced on Monday (November 17) that more than 6,200 Eritreans had crossed into Ethiopia over the previous 37 days, 1,200 of them in the first week of November. **(See article)**

Kenya

One person was shot and over 250 arrested over the weekend as police searched the Masjid Shuhaad and Sakina mosques in Mombasa. Police officials said the mosques were being used to recruit for militant activities and to conceal weapons. In further operations on Wednesday (November 18) police found explosives at three more mosques and another 109 people were detained on suspicion of undergoing militant training.

Somalia

The first Ministerial High Level Partnership Forum on Somalia's New Deal Compact on Somalia agreed at the Brussels Conference in September 2013, met in Copenhagen this week (November 19-20). Co-chaired by the UN and the Government of Somalia, the Forum brought fifty-six delegations of donors, international organizations and other stakeholders to assess progress. Ethiopia's Foreign Minister, Dr. Tedros, Chair of IGAD's Executive Council led the Ethiopian delegation. **(See article)**

The United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Nicholas Kay met with Somalia President Mohamud, Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed and Speaker of the Federal Parliament Mohamed Osman Jawari on Saturday (November 16) to try to resolve the dispute between the president and the Prime Minister. **(See article)**

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has welcomed the formation of the Interim Southwest State in Baidoa and congratulated its elected leader Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, former Speaker of the Parliament. The Southwest state brings together three regions, Bay, Bakool and Lower Shabelle and will have its capital at Barawa, a port liberated from Al-Shabaab last month.

A cabinet meeting in Mogadishu on Tuesday (November 18) chaired by Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed approved legislation for the creation of the Independent Higher Electoral Commission and for the Boundary and Federalization Commission. It also approved the US\$216 million budget for the fiscal year 2015.

A new Financial Management Information System was launched by Somalia's Finance Minister Hussein Abdi Halane at the weekend. The Minister said this would improve accountability in

processing transactions, and provide greater transparency on contracts and concessions as well as asset recovery. The system will go live in January 2015.

The Somaliland and Ethiopian governments have signed a bilateral trade and infrastructure agreement. Ethiopia's Minister for Finance and Economic Development, Sufian Ahmed said the agreement will enhance the economy of the two countries and a Joint Technical Committee will be set up to implement the provisions of the agreement which cover the Berbera Corridor and supply of hydro-power for Somaliland.

South Sudan

The UNHCR has started relocating nearly 15,000 South Sudanese refugees who had been stranded for a few months in western Ethiopia after flooding. The refugees are being moved from the Matar Way Station to the Pugnido Refugee Camp, home to some 45,000 refugees. The UNHCR says Ethiopia is now hosting more than 190,000 South Sudanese refugees.

Sudan

The Head of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), Thabo Mbeki said the talks between the Government and Darfur rebel groups will start a day later than planned in Addis Ababa on November 23. The Sudan Government, the Sudan Liberation Movement of Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) are due to participate in the process.

African Union mediator Thabo Mbeki announced on Monday (November 17) the adjournment of peace talks on the Blue Nile and South Kordofan conflict. He said the parties felt the need to conduct consultations and reflect on the elements of their draft agreement.

The High Level Ministerial Partnership Forum on Somalia in Copenhagen

The High Level Ministerial Partnership Forum on Somalia was held in Copenhagen on Wednesday and Thursday this week (November 19-20). Co-chaired by the Somalia Federal Government and the United Nations, the meeting was called to consider the progress of the New Deal Compact for Somalia which aimed to bring together Somalia and its international partners and international organizations to promote the vision of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Somalia. The Compact for Somalia was agreed at Brussels in September last year, and the Forum reviewed progress across the five New Deal Peace and State-Building Goals: Inclusive Politics; Security; Justice; Economic Foundations and Revenue and Services.

Ms. Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Prime Minister of Denmark in her opening remarks underlined the social, economic and political changes in Somalia. She appreciated the efforts of the United Nations, the African Union and IGAD to stabilize and develop Somalia, adding that the military operations of AMISOM and the Somalia National army had been successful. Denmark, she said, was committed to support Somalia to realize its development, democracy and peace.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of Somalia explained that positive and tangible changes have been taking place in Somalia. The President stressed that the co-operation and collaboration of international stakeholders was absolutely vital to restore peace and development and ensure the reconstruction of Somalia. President Mohamud noted that the Federal Government, over the past two years, had focused on building a foundation and laying the groundwork for stabilization and reform. The Somali Compact, he said, was a testament to the partnership between Somalia and the international community, based on mutual accountability and shared risk between the Government and its international development partners. The Compact, he stressed, underlined the importance of Somali-owned and Somali-led planning, based on the establishment of joint priorities reached through dialogue and sustained through reconciliation. In line with the Peace and State-Building Goals, the Federal Government, in partnership with the international community, civil society and the Somali people, had, he said, laid down the basic building blocks of state reform. It had developed legal frameworks and governance structures, formalized Somalia's presence in the international community, strengthened the relationship with neighboring countries, re-structured key institutions, established forums for dialogue, developed paths for political reform and put in place the architecture for linking international support to the priorities of the New Deal Somali Compact.

The President, noting that the Government was winning the war but still had to win the peace, said terrorism could not be defeated through military means alone. The Government had to deliver the services Somalis needed and protect and advance the welfare of Somali people. The key to maintaining sustainable peace and stability was the formation of a unified and federal Somalia. Vision 2016, he said, was central to this as it outlined the framework for federalism through reconciliation, the adoption of a revised constitution and the path to democratic elections in 2016. The President said building a nation was not something that happened overnight. The current challenge was to create legitimate institutions and processes. Today, the beginnings of an effective state in Somalia were visible, he said. Basic services such as education, health and protecting people's security were starting, and legitimacy, created through accountability, ownership and sustainability of delivery of the expectations of society was beginning.

Dr Tedros Adhanom, Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chair of the IGAD Executive Council, told the Forum there had been real and comprehensive progress in Somalia over the previous two years, and after two decades of anarchy and chaos, he said, there was a glimmer of hope for peace and stability in the country. He said those signs of progress were what motivated all stakeholders to continue to support Somalia's peace building and reconstruction efforts. The Minister said the disagreement within the Somalia leadership had cast a shadow on Somalia's peace and state building process. The Somalia leadership, he said, should set aside their differences and rise to the challenge by dedicating all their energy to consolidating peace building and state reconstruction efforts in order to lay a solid foundation for a successful transition by 2016. Dr Tedros stressed that New Deal Compact, a focused and committed leadership and solid government structures capable of providing basic services provided the key to delivering the priorities set out in the Vision 2016 Framework. The Minister called on the international community to continue to sustain its support to Somalia based on the commitments embodied in the New Deal Compact, to build a sovereign, secure, democratic, united and federal Somalia at peace with itself and the world. This was, indeed, in the interest of all.

The Under Secretary-General of Political Affairs of UN, Jefferey Feltman said the Somalia people and government had been striving to reconstruct and develop their country. He stressed that continued and transparent international humanitarian support was needed to realize a democratic, stable and prosperous Somalia, but he also added that Somalia simply “cannot afford to repeat the pattern of division and paralysis.” The UK’s Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, noted that pushing for faster implementation of Somalia’s New Deal Compact was very important for reconstructing and developing Somalia. He said the UK had demonstrated its commitment to Somalia and would continue to provide support.

In a communiqué, the Forum endorsed the New Deal Somali Compact which links the Federal Government's commitment to working towards stability and the unity of Somalia with the international community's commitment to provide support. The Forum welcomed the progress report and said the international community would continue to use the principles of New Deal Engagement in Fragile States based on mutual accountability between Somali government institutions and international partners, as the basis for ensuring a nationally-led and nationally-owned approach to development. It encouraged the Federal Government to continue its efforts to operationalize the Somali Compact with effective involvement of sub-regional and regional administrations. It agreed finalization of a new federal state structure was central to the international stakeholders’ efforts to restore Somali state, and added that regional administrations such as Puntland, the Interim Juba Administration, Galmudug and other emerging administrations should be closely engaged in the implementation of vision 2016.

The Forum emphasized that the Somali people needed to see the tangible results and deliverables at the local level and it committed Forum participants to the Somali Compact, to improving the effectiveness of the Peace and State-building Goals and their working groups and to dedicate allocation of resources to help further strengthening the link between central and local administrations, in order to enhance further development. The Forum also recognized that the establishment of the New Deal financing architecture had made progress, with the establishment of the UN and World Bank-administered funding windows and that aid flows have increased. It said it looked forward to the quick establishment of the remaining funding windows, administered by the AfDB and IMF.

Participants stressed the importance of an all inclusive and legitimate 2016 election and the constitutional review process. They underlined the importance of professionalization of the Somali police force, reducing piracy, ensuring the rule of law and the creation of independent judicial services and effectively managing Somalia’s public finances and combating corruption. Other important issues to be given attention were developing infrastructure, improving the humanitarian situation, protecting and promoting human rights, ensuring active participation of women in all Somalia state affairs and addressing the needs of youths.

In conclusion, the High Level Ministerial Partnership Forum emphasized that it was now time for inclusive politics and for unity of purpose within the Somali government. The Forum participants called on the Federal Government leadership to unite and ensure stability in Somalia.

...while efforts to resolve the differences between Somalia's President and Prime Minister continue

Meanwhile, Somalia's partners, AMISOM and IGAD have been increasingly concerned over the political deadlock between Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed. The problems between the two became public after the Prime Minister announced his first cabinet reshuffle on October 25. The main element in the reshuffle was an exchange of position between the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Farah Abdulqadir, and the Ministry of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry, Salim Aliyow Ibrow. Two State Minister and four deputy ministers were also involved in the proposed reshuffle. Following the announcement, the President issued a statement saying it was unfortunate that at a time of governmental engagement in planning for national elections and the creation of rule of law, the Prime Minister should make important decisions without any consultation. The President said this was a violation of the constitution as were previous promotions and demotions of officers in the armed forces. The statement said the reshuffle was therefore illegal and the ministers should therefore return to their prior duties..

The President's comments encouraged a number of MPs to submit a no confidence motion against the Prime Minister in the Federal Parliament. The motion came up for debate on Tuesday (November 11), but the session rapidly collapsed into confusion as MPs shouted and blew whistles to disrupt proceedings. After several hours, the Speaker of Parliament, Mohamed Sheikh Osman Jawari, was forced to adjourn the session. Another unsuccessful attempt was made to debate the motion on Saturday (November 15). On Monday (November 17), Somali media outlets reported that 14 cabinet ministers had sent a letter to the Prime Minister calling on him to resign; the next day three state ministers and 17 assistant ministers held a press conference in Mogadishu to make the same request. Among the Ministers calling for the Prime Minister's resignation were the Ministers of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Interior, Defense, Finance, Foreign Affairs as well as Planning and Fisheries and Marine Resources. The Prime Minister responded to the call by the majority of cabinet ministers by calling their demand 'unfortunate', and adding that he was "ready to accept resignation letters from the ministers who are not able to rise to their responsibilities". He asked cabinet ministers to play a neutral role in defusing the tension and exercise their day-to-day duties normally

This is not the first time this problem has arisen between President and Prime Minister. Just a year ago, the then Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon was defeated in December 2013 in a no-confidence vote in Parliament after he refused to resign when called upon to do so by President Mohamud after disagreements over a cabinet reshuffle. While MPs and cabinet ministers and allies of the two protagonists argue over responsibility for the dispute, issues between Somalia's two leading figures will continue until there is some agreement and understanding of their respective powers and responsibilities under the provisional constitution. This is ambivalent and does not reflect realities.

Members of the international community and Somalia's partners were quick to express anxiety over the controversy and its possible effects on the progress of Vision 2016. This was intensified by the fact that the problem became public shortly before the First Ministerial High level Partnership Forum held this week to review the New Deal Compact agreed at Brussels in

September last year. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Nicholas Kay, expressed his deep concern over what he called political tensions between the President and the Prime Minister on Sunday (November 2). He said these put at risk the country's efforts to achieve the critical political targets set out in Vision 2016. He called on "all parties to seek a mutually satisfactory compromise that will allow Somalia's political and security progress to continue without interruption." Ambassador Kay repeated recent calls by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon for political unity and continuity at the highest level of the Federal Government. He noted that any action by any party that created political turmoil would be reported to the UN Security Council, adding that he continued to offer the use of his good offices to seek a compromise. He said he was working closely with AMISOM, IGAD, the European Union, Ethiopia, the UK, the United States and many others in search of a solution.

EU representatives, Alexander Rondos and Michele Cervone, also voiced their "deep concern" over the public differences between the President and Prime Minister, pointing out this was already having an impact on the functioning of the Federal Institutions and Somalia's state and peace building goals. They called upon both leaders to find a solution to their differences "now, in a spirit of pragmatism and for the good of all Somali citizens," adding that "the political leadership of Somalia must now rise to its responsibilities and demonstrate that peaceful politics can allow for cohabitation. They said "Parliament, as the primary organ of the Federal Institutions, has a special responsibility in these times and we call upon members of the legislative to respect the integrity of the process and the institutions. It is an issue that we, as a main donor, will be monitoring closely." Their statement said Somalia needed "responsible political leadership" and added that "the EU remains ready to look at all options should these calls not be heeded and the situation deteriorate further."

President Mohamud acknowledged the efforts of all those who had expended energy and resources in supporting Somalia to achieve the substantial progress made, and said expectations of continued progress were high, but "so too, are expectations that Somalia must be allowed to lead its own transformation." The statement said that when Somalia agreed to participate in the New Deal Compact mechanism, it did so based on the Partnership Principles which were explicit about the need and expectation for a nationally-led and nationally-owned development. The statement went on "I call now for respect of these principles. I call for respect of Somalia's sovereign right, protected by and explained in our Provisional Federal Constitution, to determine its own future, a future that will be determined by the people of Somalia, our Federal institutions, and our legislation." The President said "While I appreciate the concerns of the International Community, the best way to support Somali leaders and institutions is to respect and allow them to resolve differences through legitimate means within the existing and maturing institutions."

Ambassador Kay and other partners made another effort to mediate between the President and Prime Minister on Sunday (November 16) before the president left for the Copenhagen Conference. At a meeting also attended by the Speaker as well as the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, Alex Rondo, the EU Special Envoy to Somalia Michele Cervone d'Urso and the Danish, Italian, Swedish and UK Ambassadors to Somalia, Ambassador Kay urged the Somali leaders to find a solution that would allow the Federal Government to implement the Vision 2016 plan for Somalia's political transformation in a timely manner.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also issued a statement earlier underlining its worries over “the worsening political clashes between the country’s highest institutions”. The statement said a government crisis on the eve of important international events had “extremely serious consequences for the country’s stabilization process.” It described the political crisis as “incomprehensible” and added that it “could be easily resolved if the different actors showed a sense of responsibility and restored the political debate to the sphere of normal political argument”. Earlier, a statement from the State Department in Washington warned that the no-confidence motion could deepen political turmoil, adding that "actions to put forward a parliamentary motion for a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister do not serve the interests of the Somali people." A State Department spokesperson said that while the U.S. remained neutral in the dispute, it was "committed to the principles of the New Deal Compact which aims to build a sovereign, secure, democratic, united, and federal Somalia." She said that because Somalia's leadership was distracted with political division, the U.S. “did not see the utility” of sending a delegation to the High Level Partnership Forum on Somalia in Copenhagen.

Bilateral meetings and Diaspora engagement for Dr. Tedros in Copenhagen

Ethiopia’s Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom, in Copenhagen this week for the High Level Partnership Forum on Somalia, also held a number of bilateral meetings as well as meeting members of the Ethiopian Diaspora in Denmark.

In Copenhagen, Dr. Tedros held meetings with Danish Foreign Minister, Martin Lidegaard and the Chair of the Danish Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy, Ms. Gjerskov; as well as with the Foreign Ministers of Sweden and Egypt, Ms. Margot Wallstrom and Mr. Sameh Shoukry, respectively; the Assistant Minister for Security and Military Affairs in the UAE Foreign Ministry, Mr. Faris Mohammed Al Mazrouei; the UN Under Secretary General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman; and the European Union Foreign Affairs High Representative, Ms. Federica Mogherini.

He briefed Mr. Lidegaard on political developments in Ethiopia and its efforts to realize development, democracy and peace through active participation of all communities at grass-roots’ level. He stressed Ethiopia had achieved double digit growth for over a decade and the Government was working to ensure equitable distribution of wealth among the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia. He said the relationship of Ethiopia and Denmark could be strengthened through expanded investment, trade, and tourism and people-to-people links. He invited Foreign Minister Lidegaard to visit Ethiopia. Dr. Tedros also briefed Ms. Gjerskov on the situation in South Sudan and Somalia, on Ethiopia’s efforts to help resolve the crisis in South Sudan and on Somalia’s progress in stabilizing and restructuring the state. In his discussions with Ms. Wallstrom, the Foreign Minister of Sweden, Dr. Tedros noted that Ethiopia was building a comprehensive green economy from scratch to mitigate and tackle global warming and climate change. He expressed his hope that Ethiopia and Sweden could work closely to boost investment, trade, tourism and wider economic links. Ms. Wallstrom agreed Ethiopia and Sweden should work to expand existing trade and economic relations and raise these to a higher level. She

suggested members of the Ethiopian Diaspora should be mobilized to participate in the development activities of Ethiopia. Dr. Tedros invited Minister Wallstrom to visit Ethiopia.

In an exchange of views with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry, Dr. Tedros underlined the importance of candid, honest and continued consultation, and said collaboration and co-operation was crucial to enhance and boost Ethio-Egypt relations. He underlined the interlinked and common interests the two countries had in all social, economic and political areas. These, he said, required due attention and strong follow up. Mr. Shoukry said business-to-business links and a strong economic partnership was vital to expand the relationship of the two countries. The ministers also discussed the current situation in Somalia and in South Sudan. In his talks with Mr. Al Mazrouei, Dr. Tedros underlined that Ethiopia wanted to enhance its relationship with UAE, in all areas of economic, social and political affairs. They agreed that it was important to combine efforts to fight terrorism in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Mr. Al Mazrouei noted the importance of the struggle against terrorism in the Horn of Africa, especially against the activities of Al-Shabaab, which, he said, was against development, against peace and against Islamic religious principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Dr. Tedros is making an official visit to the United Arab Emirates this weekend.

Dr Tedros Adhanom briefed both the UN Under Secretary General of Political Affairs and the European Union Foreign Affairs High Representative on the situation in South Sudan, stressing the importance of continued international support. In South Sudan, the inclusive IGAD-led peace talks were producing a framework for the warring parties to resolve the crisis, and, as in Somalia, it was vital that all stakeholders continued to offer support and assistance. Dr Tedros said European Union support for Somalia should continue to enhance efforts to realize a developed, democratic and stable Somalia. Both Mr. Feltman and Ms. Mogherini welcomed the continued effort of Ethiopia in South Sudan and Somalia. Ms. Mogherini also welcomed Ethiopia's commitment and efforts to realize a developed, secure and stable state in Ethiopia as well as provide these benefits for the wider region and for Africa. She reiterated the EU's commitment and support to the development of Ethiopia.

In his visit to Copenhagen, Dr. Tedros also met with representatives of the Confederation of Danish Industry, the Arla Food Ingredients Company, and GAIN, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, and paid a visit to the FOSS Agricultural Technology Innovation Center. The Minister described the priority areas for investment in Ethiopia and underlined the abundant investment, market, trade and tourism opportunities available. He also emphasized that availability of land for development, raw materials, trained and trainable manpower and conducive legal frameworks, policies and strategies for domestic and foreign investors. Dr. Tedros also noted that the Ethiopian Government would provide all possible support to any Danish companies and to members of the Confederation of Danish Industry who were interested to invest in Ethiopia. In his visit to FOSS, he met with the Foundation's Senior Vice President for Global Sales and Marketing. He said for Ethiopia to have co-operation with high-tech companies like the FOSS Foundation to find solutions to agricultural problems was essential for its efforts to transform the country's agriculture. The Government had made the transformation and improvement of the agriculture sector and production mechanisms a priority and it would welcome a FOSS branch in Ethiopia.

In his meeting with representatives of the Ethiopian Diaspora in Copenhagen, the Minister emphasized the importance of the contribution of all Ethiopians and those of Ethiopian origin to the process of development, democratization and good governance in Ethiopia. The engagement of the Diaspora, he said, was a crucial element for the realization of the Ethiopian renaissance and more generally for the renaissance of Africa. Dr Tedros said the Ethiopian government was working hard to reach middle income level in the next ten years. The Ethiopian economy was one of the fastest growing economies in the world and the only non-oil economy in Africa that had been growing at double digit rates for more than a decade. He briefed those present on the current macroeconomic progress, infrastructure development, and country's political and social transformation. Members of the Diaspora, he said, could and should play a major role in working to attract investment, trade, tourism and in mobilizing development co-operation, loans and technical assistance. They could also promote and enhance the image of their nation to the outside world.

The members of the Diaspora told the Minister that they appreciated the government's efforts to transform the country. They regretted that the Diaspora in Denmark had been less active due to lack of organization, but they underlined their strong interest in participating in development and democratization. They asked the Government to assist in their involvement and to help coordinate their efforts. They also pledged US\$70,000 to support the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project, describing it as a symbol of national pride for Ethiopians all over the world, not just for those in Ethiopia.

The Second Ethio-French Business Forum held in Paris

The Second Ethio-French Business Forum, held this week in Paris, emphasized the need to redouble efforts to deepen a cooperative partnership in various fields of common interest between the two countries. It also reached a high degree of consensus on the need to create conditions for the promotion of a stronger economic partnership between France and Ethiopia. The meeting was intended to make a start to encourage the business communities to become the engines for a closer economic partnership between Ethiopia and France, renewing the historic bilateral ties between the two, and intensifying cooperation in the areas of trade and investment, using economic diplomacy as a driving force for the consolidation of economic growth as well as exchanging views on ways to tackle the challenges facing the two business communities.

Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister to coordinate the Economy and Finance Cluster and Minister of Communication and Information Technology, and Mr. Matthias Fekl, French Minister of State for Foreign Trade, Promotion of Tourism and French Nationals Abroad, opened the Forum on Monday (November 17). The meeting at the French Agency for International Business Development (UBIFRANCE) brought together around 32 Ethiopian firms and contractors and representatives of almost 150 French companies, including many Small and Medium Enterprises and intermediate-sized companies.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael gave an overview of Ethiopia's investment and trade opportunities and its investment policies and strategies as well as noting the country's

increased political stability, the rise in foreign direct investment and trade inflows and the remarkable economic growth the country had registered over the last decade and more. The Minister emphasized that Ethiopia was keen to welcome French firms, on the basis of win-win results, to invest in Ethiopia. He commended the participation of French investors in various development projects in Ethiopia and praised their interest in engaging to work in concert with business people and with the Government. He pledged that the Government of Ethiopia stood ready to improve the investment and trade landscape to help sustain the positive trend of economic and political stability as well as speed up the transition of the country's economy. Representatives of the Ethiopian Investment Commission and the Ethiopian Chambers of Commerce and Sectoral Association briefed the Forum on Ethiopia's progress, strategic location, improved business and investment climate, infrastructure connectivity, adequate and trainable labor force, increased foreign direct investment and overall political and economic trajectory.

The Forum acknowledged the long history of Ethio-French relationship, and stressed this should be maintained through the engagement of the two business communities. It also featured a series of business-to-business meetings between the interested parties from both countries. Some representatives of French companies, including Vergent, Alstom, Nutriset and Bpifrance which are already investing in Ethiopia, shared experiences. Overall, the Forum displayed the interest of a number of French companies to participate in Ethiopia's telecommunication, agro-industry, energy, infrastructure and other sectors.

Bilateral talks between Mr. Matthias Fekl and Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael delivered a clear signal that both countries believed in the need to revitalize their long-standing relations and elevate business and investment ties to a new height. During his visit, Dr. Debretsion met with President Hollande's Advisor for African Affairs and discussed the need to consolidate the bilateral relations, forge closer investment and trade partnership, encourage French companies network with their Ethiopian counterparts, and enhance political dialogue, increasing consultations to maintain a sound momentum for bilateral relations. They also discussed Ethiopia's role in the Horn of Africa, the current political and security situation in the region, air services and other matters of common interest.

While in France, Dr. Debretsion paid a visit to the leading satellite manufacturer, Airbus Defense and Space, a subsidiary of Airbus Group, in Toulouse, and held productive discussions with officials of this company on ways to collaborate and coordinate efforts for the development of Ethiopia's telecom sector.

The contribution of Pulses, Oil Seeds and Spices to Ethiopia's economy

Ethiopia's annual real GDP growth rate for the last decade has been impressive, estimated at an average of around 10.9%. The largest contribution to this has been the agriculture sector but the Government has also carefully designed a number of policies and strategies with the support of different partners relating to other sectors of the economy, including both the service sector and industry. While these have recorded significant development, agriculture which accounts for around 41% of GDP and grew by 7.1%, last year, continues to play the dominant role in regard

to exports. In fact the Government has continued to emphasize the need to strengthen the country's agricultural resilience and support sectoral improvement, specifically encouraging value addition. The agriculture sector remains the dominant sector in terms of its contributions to GDP (41%), foreign exchange earnings (85%), provision of raw materials for agro-industries (70%) and creation of job opportunities (around 79%). The US, Germany, China, Belgium and Saudi Arabia are some of the main countries receiving commercial agricultural commodities. The African Economic Outlook and other reports forecast that the momentum of the agricultural sector, and of the economy as a whole, is expected to continue for the next two of years or more.

There is still every reason to believe that there is huge potential for further expansion of production and export of agricultural commodities. In addition to its coffee and livestock exports, Ethiopia, is currently, the second largest exporter of sesame globally, the world's fifth largest chickpea producer, and also has a very substantial potential for further growth in pulses and oilseeds as well as for the growth and export of spices. In fact, exports of oil seeds, pulses and spices have already become the second largest export earner next to that of coffee. Indeed, the pulses, oilseeds and spice sector has been a major element in the growth of the export sector and for the country's economic development. In the last fiscal year, (2013/14) the contribution of pulses, oil seeds and spices to export earnings was a substantial US\$920 million, providing 28% of overall agricultural export earnings.

Last week, the "4th International Conference on Pulses, Oilseeds and Spices" which was organized by the Ethiopian Pulses, Oilseeds and Spices' Association in collaboration with various Ministries, underlined the importance of the contribution of the sector to exports and to the economy generally. The conference was held under the theme of "Global Partnership for Sustainable Market Growth" on Wednesday and Thursday last week (November 12-13) at the Sheraton Hotel in Addis Ababa. The conference was organized with the aim of strengthening and expanding existing market linkages and creating new outlets to help diversify product varieties as well as consolidate foundations already laid. It also expected to look at ways international buyers, potential investors, research institutes, development partners and other value chain actors might tap the full potential of the sector and allow it contribute optimally to the country's overall development perspective.

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome opened the conference and in his opening remarks he noted that Ethiopia was endowed with immense unutilized investment opportunities in agriculture with a particularly favorable climate for the production of a wide variety of pulses, oil-seeds and spices. Noting the Government's efforts to harness the sub-sector to meet the Growth and Transformation Plan's targets, the President noted that "the government has fully committed itself to take all measures deemed necessary for attaining the target laid down in its first GTP which aimed to increase the land coverage of these crops." The expansion plans envisaged increasing both the volume of production of all three areas and the exportable value of the sub-sector. President Mulatu said that the Government, in addition to putting in place specific policies to provide a strategic framework for the sector, also undertook a number of measures designed to enhance the environment to foster private sector engagement in the production, processing and exporting of the pulses, oil-seeds and spices. The President reiterated the Government's call for investors to participate in the huge potential of the sector.

The Country Mission Director of the United States Agency for International development (USAID), Dennis Weller, emphasized the importance of the sector and the support provided by USAID. He also noted that with more than four million Ethiopians smallholder farmers relying on the production of sesame and chickpeas for their livelihood, developing the value chains were “an important part of the program”. Ethiopia produces more than 400,000 metric tons of chickpea a year and similar quantities of other oil seeds and pulses.

Ato Haile Berhe, President of the Association of Ethiopian Pulses, Oilseeds and Spices Processors and Exporters (EPOSPEA), noted the importance of this fourth conference. It was, he said, producing a platform for international buyers and national exporters, to allow them to strengthen and expand existing links, and create new market outlets. It would allow the sector contribute more positively to the overall development of the country. EPOSPEA has more than 115 active members. The previous three conferences were held under the themes of “Ethiopia the Lands of Crop Diversity”; “Agri-Commodity trade: Challenges and Opportunities”; and “International Marketing of Agricultural Commodities.” All were successful as the continual growth of the sector underlined.

Tri-lateral experts meeting on sustainable use of the Dawa River

The first tri-lateral consultative meeting of experts to discuss cooperation in the management and sustainable use of the Dawa River Basin was organized by IGAD in Nairobi last week. The three day meeting, Tuesday to Thursday last week (November 10-13) considered the resources of the Dawa River Basin and the possibilities for enhancing the livelihoods and resilience of the cross border communities of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia resident in the basin.

The Dawa River rises in the southern Ethiopian highlands and forms part of the Kenyan-Ethiopian boundary before entering Somalia and joining the Juba River. The Dawa River Basin is therefore a concern of all three countries. It flows through drought-prone areas that are inhabited by vulnerable pastoralist communities whose livelihoods are defined by the physical and developmental aspects of the river and affected by underlying Trans-Boundary river management issues.

Available studies indicate that the water and other resources of the Dawa River Basin could constitute a major potential source for development and socio-economic benefits for each of the three countries. Economic development of the Basin would allow exploitation of the Basin’s water resources which would in turn provide support for interventions aimed at improving the livelihoods of the cross-boundary communities.

While no agreement exists between the three Dawa Basin Countries, Kenya and Ethiopia enjoy coordinational relations and have an existing Joint Ministerial consultative framework under which such issues as trans-boundary water resources could be discussed. In addition, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are all members of IGAD. This formed a good basis for IGAD to convene last week’s consultative meeting of experts, and the IGAD secretariat facilitated dialogue between the three states and the communities of the basin and other relevant stakeholders. This helped to

mobilize the necessary discussion of strategic policies and investment plans that will be required to achieve development of the Dawa River Basin.

The consultative meeting of the three countries' experts underlined the importance of cooperation for any management and sustainable use of the Dawa River. They agreed on the value of harnessing and promoting this common resource. During their meeting, the experts also agreed on the formation of a technical team to collect information, produce studies and report on their findings. The importance and relevance of the meeting was underlined this week after the Dawa River burst its banks again south of Dolo, and farmers in the areas of Beled Hawo and Dolo in Somalia had crops destroyed, after torrential rain in the area.

Last week's Dawa River Basin discussions also fall within IGAD's Inland Water Resources Management Program (INWRM) which has been crafted with the objective of harnessing the region's water resources in an integrated and coordinated manner in order to encourage the achievement of food security, avoid potential or actual water related conflicts and attain peace and sustainable development. INWRMP aims to promote regional cooperation in sustainable water resources management through improved policy and legal frameworks, developing the capacity of member countries for the implementation of integrated water resources management and develop information systems for decision making in water resources development.

One of the strategies is for the creation of a regional platform, which will be able to formulate common goals and strategies, identify priority regional projects, mobilize financial and human resources, coordinate and monitor interventions at regional level and share experiences, good practices and knowledge to improve performance. As part of this, IGAD is holding a Forum on "Water for Regional Cooperation" at the beginning of December (December 3-5), in Nairobi, and the Forum has been planned within the framework of the INWRM. It is intended to be a tool to assist IGAD in executing its mandate in the water sector, providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to discuss water and regional cooperation issues, creating synergies among on-going and planned water related projects, aligning development partners' water-related programs to IGAD water resources management policies and strategies and agreeing on water resource related investment areas.

UNHCR highlights a sharp increase in the numbers of Eritrean refugees

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees took to social media on Sunday (November 16) to note that the numbers of refugees from Eritrea, fleeing to neighboring countries, had shown a dramatic surge in numbers. UNHCR said over 5,000 Eritreans had crossed into Ethiopia alone last month and the upsurge had continued with over 1,200 more arriving in Tigray Regional State during the first week of November. The UNHCR also said Sudan had been witnessing "a marked increase in the number of arrivals" since the start of the year and over 10,700 of them have sought refuge in Sudan this year alone. In fact, the numbers leaving Eritrea has experienced a major jump. Indeed, Eritrea has become one of the top countries of origin of those attempting to leave their homes and fleeing to neighboring countries; and of the thousands arriving in Ethiopia

and Sudan, many will try to go further and take the hazardous sea journey from Libya across the Mediterranean to Italy and so reach Europe.

The UNHRC noted that a growing number of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia and Sudan have become frustrated with the paucity of services and inadequacy of any lasting solution for their problems. This includes a lack of self-reliance opportunities in the refugee camps. The absence of adequate funding for Eritrean refugees in both countries has meant “a lack of secondary and post-secondary education as well as vocational training and job opportunities.” Ethiopia has provided a number of scholarships, but this is far less than the number of refugees who have flooded across the border. Inevitably many of the refugees have been forced to drop their future hopes and aspirations. In many cases, especially in Sudan, this has led them to “fall prey to unscrupulous smugglers and put themselves in danger by trying to cross the Mediterranean on overcrowded and unsafe boats.”

UNHCR reiterated its concern that refugees crossing into Ethiopia and Sudan today would attempt to make the risky journey to other parts of the world and attempt the crossing to Italy. It stressed the need to provide venues for refugees to access education and livelihood opportunities in host countries and keep people from desperation and hopelessness. It appealed to European governments to scale up the support they could offer to provide “credible legal alternatives to dangerous voyages” and protect “people from the risks of traveling with smugglers.” The UNHCR also emphasized that a comprehensive response mechanism to the problem of the dangerous sea-crossing ought to produce strong capacity to come to the aid of people at sea as well as enhance mechanisms to provide for their safety. The UNHCR urged European governments to spare no effort to facilitate family reunification and provide student or employment visas to benefit refugees.

A UNHCR spokesman, Adrian Edwards, told journalists in Geneva this week that the number of asylum-seekers in Europe from Eritrea over the first 10 months of this year had tripled compared to the same period in 2013. He said this year there had been nearly 37,000 Eritreans who had sought refuge in Europe, compared to around 13,000 during the same period last year. Mr. Edwards added that the UNHCR office in Italy reported that “22% of the people arriving by boat are Eritrean, a total of nearly 34,000 people this year. This makes Eritreans the second largest group to arrive in Italy by boat, after Syrians.”

There is also growing concern over the safety of those trying to reach Italy by sea from North Africa as Italy’s “Mare Nostrum” Operation has come to an end. The “Mare Nostrum” rescue mission was a large-scale effort launched a year ago after the Lampedusa tragedy in which about 365 migrants, mostly Eritreans, died when their boat sank within sight of the shore. During the first ten months of this year, “Mare Nostrum” was responsible for saving over 150,000 men, women and children. Half of those rescued were asylum seekers from Syria and Eritrea, the rest came from Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Palestine or Somalia. “Mare Nostrum” is being replaced by an EU “Triton” mission run by the EU border agency, Frontex, but “Triton” will deploy only seven boats and three aircraft to help those trying to cross a sea in which this year alone more than 3,000 people have died after boats capsized or, in at least one case, were sunk by the traffickers who had overloaded it. The cost will be less than a third of the “Mare Nostrum” which deployed 32 ships and two submarines as well as planes and helicopters.

Last week, Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship told a conference on "Fundamental Rights and Migration to the EU" that one of his top priorities over the next months would be development of a comprehensive EU Plan to tackle migrant smuggling. He also said a new initiative for the Horn of Africa and Mediterranean transit countries will be signed at a Ministerial Meeting on November 28. .

Commissioner Avramopoulos told the Conference that the protection and promotion of human rights of migrants, regardless of their status, was not optional. He reminded his listeners that a year earlier at Lampedusa 360 people died while trying to reach Europe. The majority were, of course, Eritreans. It wasn't the first, nor has it been the last tragedy affecting migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, but, he said, it underlined what must be avoided in the future. The Commissioner said after the Lampedusa disaster, a Task Force Mediterranean was set up to respond to the problem. A number of actions had been taken to increase cooperation with other countries, provide assistance for EU Member States most affected by migratory pressure, to reinforce border surveillance and increase efforts against human trafficking and smuggling.

The Commissioner said one of his main aims was to develop a comprehensive EU Plan to tackle migrant smuggling. He said he wanted to see a stronger criminal justice response to this crime, investigating and prosecuting those responsible more vigorously. This should focus both on dismantling criminal networks, through reinforced intelligence sharing, investigation capacities, and prosecution, and on prevention, through information campaigns about the dangers. The Commissioner said he wanted increased cooperation with third countries involving strengthened policy dialogue with countries of origin and transit. The EU Commission at the conference in Khartoum last month had put forward a new initiative for the Horn of Africa and Mediterranean transit countries, paving the way for a reinforced policy dialogue and concrete cooperation over specific projects with relevant authorities. He said the EU planned to reinforce and expand Regional Development and Protection Programs in North Africa and in the Horn of Africa in order to stabilize refugee populations in transit countries and improve the situation of people in need of international protection on their way to Europe.

Various views have been expressed to explain this continuing rise in the flow of refugees from Eritrea. Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, briefing the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly at the end of last month emphasized the bleak landscape of Eritrea's polity and the country's economy and its internal security. Ms. Keetharuth said her consultations with Eritrean refugees in Europe had made it clear that incessant human rights violations were driving thousands of Eritreans, many of them young and unaccompanied children, to seek refuge outside their country. They were fleeing from "systematic and widespread human rights violations, namely indefinite forced conscription and violations in the context of the national service, arbitrary arrests and detention, incommunicado detention, inhumane prison conditions, extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture, especially in the context of the attempted coup in 21 January 2013 (the 'Forto' incident)." Violations committed in the context of national service, she said, included arrests and detentions, round-ups by the military police in homes, workplaces, streets or other public areas, conscription of Grade 12 students and minors directly into the armed forces, and sexual violence against women during their military service. National service in Eritrea, she said, constituted

“forced labor”; it was involuntary in nature with conscripts recruited without their consent to perform military service, and since the Government had carried out little or no demobilization, the majority of conscripts were forced “to serve in the military for most of their working lives for a paltry salary.” Forced labor is, of course, prohibited by the ILO Forced Labor Convention (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention 1957 (No. 105), both ratified by Eritrea.

A statement from Eritrea’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday (November 20) as usual continued to externalize the problem. It said migration and population movements were always influenced by ‘push and pull’ factors, and in the case of Eritrea the “pull factors have been immensely augmented in recent years by deliberate policies of certain governments and agencies who chose to encourage, for sinister political purposes, the youth to defect from the National Military Service as "slave or forced labor" was and is peddled to spice up and rationalize these policies.” The statement blames Ethiopia’s “continued belligerence” for extended National Service and accuses the UNHCR itself as a catalyst in bolstering the “pull factors” by invariably categorizing all Eritrean migrants as "prima facie asylum seekers". The statement claimed the Eritrean Government was involved in regional efforts to curb illegal migration and human trafficking, and added that “the UNHCR can be part of this constructive process if it is really prepared to review its past, misguided, policies.”

Meanwhile Professor Kidane Mengisteab from Eritrea, Professor of African Studies and Political Science at Pennsylvania University, in a paper published by Chatham House, identified several key drivers behind the continuing emigration, much of it of the youth, and the growing number of Eritrean asylum seekers across the world. One reason why Eritreans uproot themselves from their villages and towns and flood into neighboring countries and Europe, he says, is the monopoly of political and economic power in the hands of a tiny elite which has exacerbated the impoverishment of the people of post-independent Eritrea. This has prevented Eritrea from effectively playing its role as a state. Professor Kidane, in a compelling account of the regime’s political and economic praxis, notes that the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice’s monopoly leaves little political or economic space for civil society to have any significant influence on domestic or foreign policy. It also closes off all prospects for democratization because the party, as a major employer and supplier of resources, can, and does, strangle any opposition or demands for change at birth.

Professor Kidane also notes that the imposition of an open-ended national service system with “forced labor”, in conjunction with other policies and strategies, had driven youth into flight. This, together with the absence of a multi-party democratic system of governance; a lack of any effective channels for peaceful expression of people’s demands or expectations; long-term imprisonment of political dissidents; a policy of economic exclusion and an almost unprecedented economic decline, had resulted in simmering discontent and considerable, if still largely unvoiced, opposition to the Government and leadership of President Isaias. The Government’s response was confined to suppression and arrests of dissidents and rivals, and the human rights violations perpetrated by the Government had led to Eritrea being categorized as a ‘pariah state’ by the international community.

“Ethio-Eritrean People-to-People Relationship for Peace” Conference

Last week, a conference under the theme of the “Ethio-Eritrean People-to-People Relationship Conference for Peace” was held in Addis Ababa. The conference was organized by the Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development (EIIPD) with the aim of strengthening and institutionalizing a more constructive people-to-people relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Nationals of both countries from Ethiopia and abroad attended the conference.

Eritrean singer, Resom Gebre-Georgis, launched a new video entitled “peace” in which he expressed the value of peace, of friendship and of cooperation between the peoples of the two countries. In his opening remarks, the Deputy Executive Director of EIIPD, Moges Teklemichael, underlined the existing solidarity of the peoples of both countries, pointing out that this had strong historic roots and it had successfully passed the test of time and trying circumstances.

A member of conference organizing committee, Tsega-Luel Wolde-Kidan, said that both the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples want peace more than anything else. There was a long-standing friendship between the two peoples and they are keen to renew their relations. They had many things in common and public diplomacy, therefore, had a major role to help achieve cooperation and friendship. Another important enabling condition was the continued determination of the Ethiopian government to restore peace and strengthen people-to-people ties. Once people cooperated fully, Tsega-Luel added, they can influence governments to work for peace.

During the discussions, participants detailed their experiences and gave examples of the close, brotherly and historic ties between the peoples of both nations. Many agreed that these strong relations between Eritreans and Ethiopians could be considered fertile ground for citizens of both countries to embark on their efforts at diplomacy in an attempt to bridge the impasse between the two governments. They also noted that strengthening people-to-people relations could lay the foundation for a durable peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia and also for the whole region.

Eritrean participants commended Ethiopia's open door policy for refugees and its assistance to those crossing the border. Ethiopia hosts tens of thousands of Eritrean refugees and is now providing thousands of Eritrean youths with scholarships and facilitating efforts for Eritreans to reclaim their former properties. Participants agreed that these measures were invaluable in building confidence between the people of the two countries and in forging friendly relations between them.

Participants at the conference extended a call to nationals of both countries in their respective Diaspora to build on activities on the home front. This would help ensure the continuity of the initiative.

The conference concluded with a statement by participants highlighting the urgent need to change the focus of relations between Eritreans and Ethiopians, and move from border security to human security. They unequivocally denounced any negative propaganda that might impinge on the efforts of ‘citizen diplomacy’ by the nationals of the two countries.