

News in brief

OCHA concerned over need for further funding for drought relief

Ethiopia launching New Tourism Strategy

Developments in the energy sector and regional energy integration

A conference on Ethiopia's Textile and Garment Industry

Media reports on Eritrea continue to headline human rights abuse....

...and a Dutch Court rules in favor of an Eritrean human rights advocate

News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon this week launched “One Humanity: Shared Responsibility”, a report for the World Humanitarian Summit due to take place in Turkey in May. The Summit, he said, will be the moment for us to come together to renew our commitment to humanity and implement the commitments in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

President Barack Obama signed into law the Electrify Africa Act on Monday (February 8) aimed at expanding electricity to millions of households in sub-Saharan Africa. It will leverage partnerships with the private sector to bring electricity access to some 50 million people. It will provide investment of about \$7 billion in US funds, largely financed through the US Export-Import Bank, to create 30,000 mw of clean energy generation. **(See article)**

Members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum met in Geneva for the first time this year on Friday (February 5) to discuss the implementation of the Manila-Paris Declaration and the 2016-2018 Road Map adopted at the High Level Meeting of the Climate Vulnerable Forum at COP 21 in Paris. The CVF has 43 members vulnerable to climate change including 16 from Africa: Burkina Faso, Comoros, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Tunisia.

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemaraim Dessalegn inaugurated Ethiopian Airlines its refurbished Aviation Academy on Sunday (February 7). The newly refurbished academy has education centers to provide for the pilot training school, aviation maintenance training school, commercial and ground service school and leadership school. The changes will allow for the Academy to increase its annual intake capacity to 4,000 students.

The State Secretary of Justice and Public Security of Norway, Mr. Joran Kallmyr paid a courtesy visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and held discussions with Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom on Tuesday (February 9).

The 10th Tripartite National Committee meeting of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam was held in Khartoum (February 7-11) to discuss the Updated Technical Proposals of the French firms, Artelia and BRL Group selected to undertake the dam impact studies, and the financial proposals and contracts. The proposals were put to the respective Ministers of Water and Irrigation, and contracts are expected to be signed at the next meeting of the TNC in Addis Ababa after pending issues have been resolved.

A conference focusing on Ethiopia's Textile and Garment Industry with a theme "Towards Increasing Sustainability and Competitiveness in Ethiopia's textile and garment industry" took place in the Hilton Hotel on Monday (February 8). **(See article)**

Ethiopian Investment Commissioner, Fistum Arega, told an "Ethiopia Ease of Doing Business Reform Validation Workshop", organized by the World Bank and the Commission on Tuesday (February 9), that Ethiopia was shortly going to issue revised regulations to improve the flow of foreign direct investment to the country. It had already established an Investment Climate Directorate to improve the overall activities of the commission.

Djibouti

US Assistant Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Djibouti this week for the two-day meeting of the second annual US-Djibouti Bi-National Forum. Initiatives included the plans for a pipeline from Ethiopia, a million dollar USAID grant for community programs for women, young people and vulnerable group, and the launch of Djibouti's first international school of English. Mr. Blinken also met with President Ismail Omar Guelleh.

Eritrea

Italian and German authorities have arrested a suspected human trafficker from Eritrea who had been on the run for months, police in Palermo announced on Saturday (February 6). The man is accused of being the leading member of a gang of traffickers who organized illegal crossings of the Mediterranean for, and of being responsible for the Lampedusa disaster in October 2013, when 366 people, mostly Eritreans, died when their boat caught fire and capsized.

A Dutch court dismissed an attempt to sue Professor Mirjam van Reisen, Professor of International Relations, and a long time advocate for Human rights in Eritrea, for libel. **(See article)**

A Kunama organization has issued the names of 51 Kunama youngsters, 46 of them under 18, which it claimed had been "forcefully conscripted by the Eritrean regime" last month in Eritrea.

Kenya

President Kenyatta presided over a two-day conference of Government officials and the County Governors this week (February 10-11) to discuss reports on public finance management, grants to the counties, health services and capacity assessment. After a warning that next year's budget estimates would be lower than this year, the meeting adopted a policy of austerity to release

resources from recurrent expenditure to development including a commitment to a 50% reduction in travel and allowance expenditure across all government offices.

Somalia

President Mohamud stressed Parliament's importance when addressing MPs on Sunday (February 7). He said the political process was now Somali-led and Somali-owned. "Our politics cannot be guided but you can help us capacitate security sector, and install key facilities. By the way, we can't make politicking out of difficult days in the past." He said the new proposal for the electoral process for 2016 would be put to parliament for discussion.

Prime Minister Sharmarke met with a high-level delegation of the Arab League on Wednesday (February 11) at his office in Mogadishu. The delegation was headed by Ambassador Zaid Al Sabban and he assured Somalia's of the League's continued support for Vision 2016 and the upcoming elections.

The Somali Federal Parliament speaker, Mohamed Osman Jawari, told MPs on Sunday (February 7) that Parliament would debate the constitutional review on February 15. The Federal Justice Ministry and the independent Constitutional Review and Implementation Commission will present the review road map of the constitution to parliament. The Speaker said Federal states and the Somali public will both be asked to participate in the constitutional review. He also invited all the Federal states' parliaments to take part in this review.

Puntland President Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gaas and senior Puntland officials on Tuesday (February 9) met in Garowe with a delegation of international community diplomats led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of United Nations, Michael Keating to discuss the outcome of the National Consultative Forum. Puntland favors district and geographical representation and distanced itself from the Federal Government's decision to use the 4.5 formula for the elections in August. President Abdiweli said after the talks: "no agreement has been reached; however we have agreed to hold further talks and continue negotiations."

Federal Interior Minister Abdirahman Mohamed Hussein "Odowa" on a visit to Galmudug State has called on Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a to settle its dispute with the Interim Galmudug Administration, based in Adado. Ahlu Sunna currently holds the proposed state capital of Dusamareb. He also called on Galmudug president, Abdikarin Hussein Guled, to make fresh efforts to end the differences between the two parties peacefully.

Minister Abdirahman "Odowa" and Galmudug State President Abdikarim Gulled on Wednesday (February 10) launched the project for the construction of a seaport at Hobbyo. The Minister asked the Galmudug Diaspora to participate in the construction of the port. President Gulled said this would be a key development project for the region.

The latest food security and nutrition assessment for Somalia, released in Mogadishu this week by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in collaboration with the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, describes the situation as critical, with 931,000 people in crisis and 22,000 more people in emergency across Somalia through June. In total, the assessment reports that

nearly 4.7 million people, 38% of the total population of Somalia, are acutely food insecure and need humanitarian assistance between now and June.

AMISOM denied reports at the end of last week that it had abandoned Merka, describing media reports that its troops has left the town as “falsehood.” In a press release on Saturday (February 6), Ambassador Madeira said AMISOM had moved its base in the town for “tactical considerations” and over “concern for the safety of the local population in case of any combat engagements.” AMISOM troops were again patrolling the city at the beginning of the week.

AMISOM has warned its troops that Al-Shabaab fighters are planning to disguise themselves as AMISOM soldiers using captured uniforms to carry out attacks on Somalis. It said it has information that Al-Shabaab fighters plan to dress in AMISOM uniforms and carry out atrocities in parts of Somalia controlled by AMISOM and the Federal government.

A conference on internal security and ways to create harmony between Federal and Member State police forces and improve the quality of internal security and police force capacity opened in Mogadishu on Tuesday (February 9). Ministers of security from all the Federal member states and officials from the Federal ministry of Security attended.

South Sudan

President Salva Kiir issued a decree on Thursday (February 11) re-appointing Riek Machar as 1st Vice-president in accordance with the power sharing provisions in the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS). The decree also appoints James Wani Igga, previously Vice-president, as 2nd Vice-president. The opposition SPLM-IO said the appointment was welcome.

President Kiir signed a Non-governmental Organization (NGOs) Bill into law on Thursday (February 11). It requires humanitarian organizations to have at least 80% South Sudanese in their employ. Non citizens will loss their jobs to give way for nationals. Humanitarian agencies said such a law would impede the work of reaching to the most vulnerable people in the country.

At least 40,000 people are starving to death in the war zones in South Sudan and conditions are “escalating” said the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, UNICEF and the World Food Program in a joint statement released on Monday (February 8). There were also more than 2.8 million people now needed aid in the country and nearly 25% of the population remains in urgent need of food assistance.

The Council of Elders of Jeing/ Dinka said on Sunday (February 7) it welcomed the IGAD communiqué asking parties to the conflict in South Sudan to form a government of national unity and suspend operationalization of the 28 states. It calls on the Government “to suspend further action on implementing the operationalization of new states until an inclusive, participatory National Boundary Commission comprising all Parties to the ARCSS reviews proposed states and their boundaries, and that this review process occurs, for a period of up to one month.”

Sudan

President Omer al-Bashir said the recommendations of the national political and societal dialogue conference have offered solutions for the country's entire problems. He was presented with the conference's recommendations on Monday (February 8). The conference opened last October but was boycotted by major opposition parties.

President Omer al-Bashir met with the United Nations Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, Haile Menkerios on Wednesday (February 10) to discuss the national dialogue in Sudan and the participation of the armed movements in the peace process. Mr. Menkerios described the dialogue initiative as a positive step. He said the national dialogue had regional and international support, and a "real comprehensive dialogue is the only means to achieve a lasting peace in Sudan."

Sudan has requested the United States Institute of Peace to put pressure on rebel groups in Darfur to join the peace process. It has also asked the German government to exert more pressure on the SPLM-N to seriously engage in the peace talks to end the nearly five-year conflict in the Two Areas.

The UN Security Council on Wednesday (February 10) renewed until 12 March 2017 the mandate of the Panel of Experts monitoring sanctions imposed on those behind instability in Sudan's western Darfur region. It also expressed regret that members of the Government as well as armed groups continued to disregard its demands and signaled its intention to impose measures against parties perpetuating violence. The current sanctions regime involves an arms embargo, an assets freeze and a travel ban.

OCHA concerned over need for further funding for drought relief

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in its latest report on Monday (February 8) noted that El Niño global climactic event wreaked havoc on Ethiopia's summer rains, following failed spring rains. This had driven food insecurity, malnutrition and water shortages in affected areas of the country. OCHA said a well-coordinated response was already underway and expanding rapidly although the scale of the developing emergency exceeded resources available to date. It emphasized that the lead times necessary for the procurement of relief items, meant the Government and its international partners need further urgent action to deal with the danger of a break in the pipeline of supply.

The report stressed that the window for procurement of seeds for the *Belg* planting season closes by end of March, and the number of household requiring seeds for this has almost doubled since December when the Humanitarian Requirement Document for 2016 was launched. The recent Government, Agriculture Task Force and FAO data collection exercise reported an increase from 500,000 households to 900,000 households. The Government will be able to respond to 30% of this need, but there is a funding gap of US\$52.2 million. If funds are not mobilized for the procurement of seeds by late March before the closing of *Belg* planting season, food production will continue to drop. This will have implications for access to food and heightened malnutrition.

Seed procurement and distribution is urgent now to protect livelihood assets, prevent further displacement and avoid increased food aid needs that are already stretched. In addition, with the *Meher* season approaching in a few months, there is urgent need for funds for further procurement for seeds as the *Meher* planting accounts for more than 80% of the crop production in the country.

Humanitarian partners have commended steps taken by the Government to scale up food response with the food it currently has available but food pipeline data reveals projected pipeline break by end of April. The Ministry of Transport's agreement to allow the United Nations World Food program to bring in additional trucks to aid in the massive logistics operation will also help to reduce delivery times from 6 to 4 weeks per round which signals a shift to monthly distributions, and ensures sufficient off take capacity from Djibouti port.

The Humanitarian Requirement Document seeks US\$1.4 billion for the 10.2 million people affected by the current drought. US\$1.2 of this amount is urgently needed for food assistance. So far, the Government and the international community have already mobilized over US\$680m, but the current funding available for food aid will be exhausted by 1 May, and there is a risk of pipeline breaks in other sectors.

Save the Children UK said on Wednesday (February 10) that the emergency food aid will run out at the end of April unless donors provide more funds by the end of this month. In a statement, SCF UK said “The international community has just three weeks to provide \$245 million in emergency food aid to help prevent a potentially catastrophic escalation in severe acute malnutrition cases...”. Country Director, John Graham said, “If these emergency funds do not arrive in time, there is no question that there will be a critical fracture in the food aid supply pipeline.” The \$245 million now being sought is the cost of food aid for Ethiopia for the three months from May to July. It can take four months to buy food aid and transport it into landlocked Ethiopia via Djibouti, “so the window for action is rapidly closing” said SCF. “We only have until the end of February for the international community to pledge and disburse more funds for urgently needed food aid. It can take around 120 days to purchase and transport food into Ethiopia through Djibouti, so we all must step up now otherwise children and families in dire need of assistance could simply not have any food from outside.”

Mr. Graham added: “In 2016, when we have all the right systems in place to prevent a massive humanitarian disaster, it would be absolutely unforgivable if the international community failed to act.” He said the government had shouldered much of the financial burden so far, but if it didn't get more immediate help from foreign donors it might be forced to redirect funding from other vital areas, including education and maternal and child health programs, in order to buy life-saving food aid.”

This week, the Australian Government announced it was providing further humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, and to Somalia, to support those affected by drought conditions, and those affected by the ongoing conflict in Somalia. It will provide an additional \$10 million to Ethiopia to help provide food and nutrition support, and services such as health and sanitation. In addition, the United Nations World Food Program has channeled \$6.4 million of Australia's core funding towards its operations in Ethiopia bringing Australia's total funding for the Ethiopian drought to

\$16.4 million. The Australian Government is also providing a further \$5 million in humanitarian assistance to Somalia, bringing Australia's contribution to the Somalia crisis to \$9 million since the beginning of 2015.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who described the drought situation as severe during his visit last week, called on international agencies to support the efforts of the people and the government. He noted the Government's response had been impressive, calling the leadership and commitment of the Government as 'exceptional' and commending its efforts in mitigating the impacts of El Nino. Indeed, the country's ability to provide emergency relief has improved beyond recognition. Ethiopia today, by comparison with the past, is much more politically and economically stable, capable of self-help and robust action, but there are always limits. As a result, despite all it has achieved, Ethiopia has had to turn to the international community for help. The UN Secretary General said his visit had enabled him to understand the way UN Agencies and the Ethiopian government were working together to respond and help those affected. He said the UN was committed to help the Ethiopian people overcome the problem. There were some 120 million people in the world who were food insecure, of these some 10.2 million people were in Ethiopia, and 1.7 million of these were children and women. The effects of El Nino and the drought will be a major item on the agenda at the forthcoming Humanitarian Conference in Istanbul in May.

Ethiopia launching New Tourism Strategy

Tourism is a large global industry that is expanding rapidly in developing countries. The market share of tourism in developing countries is also increasing significantly and developing countries now account for two-thirds of long-haul destinations according to the World Bank. Tourism in Ethiopia currently generates about US\$2.9 billion annually, close to a million jobs and about 4.5% of GDP. The Government, however, is determined to significantly increase the number of tourists during the 2nd Growth and Transformation Plan (2015–2020). The Ministry of Culture and Tourism plans to triple foreign visitors to more than 2.5 million by 2020. This would make Ethiopia one of the top five tourist destinations in Africa. Last financial year, 770,000 tourists visited Ethiopia and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism hopes to increase this to one million, and the revenue earned to well over US\$3 billion by the end of this Ethiopian budget year, by July 2016. To attain this the Ministry has identified five main focus areas for the GTP 2 agenda. These are: natural and cultural heritage conservation and development; culture and tourism products marketing; service excellence; improve culture and tourism research and information systems; and enhance cooperation and collaboration with development partners. Based on these focus areas, the Ministry now has clearly defined goals for the next five years.

Ethiopia's Minister of Culture and Tourism, Aisha Mohammed Mussa, recently explained some of the details behind the extra impetus the Government is adding to the development and promotion of the tourism sector in order to achieve and indeed surpass the ambitious growth targets it has set for 2020, the end of the Growth and Transformation Plan II. Indeed, she hopes that these aims can be exceeded if tourist sites can be developed quickly enough and promoted accordingly. She admits to being very ambitious in her vision. The Government's interest in the

sector has been underlined by the drawing up of a Sustainable Tourism Master Plan; by the revitalization of the Ethiopian Tourism Organization, to concentrate mainly on destination marketing and promotion, as well as destination development in terms of service, quality and access; and by setting up of the Ethiopian Tourism Transformation Council, chaired by the Prime Minister. Ms. Aisha pointed out the Ministry was now working on different websites to promote Ethiopia as a favorite tourist destination. It was also working on changing the tourism brand and trying to build a completely new communications' campaign. This is going to be launched before March.

Minister Aisha is quite clear about the immense natural, cultural, and historical attractions of Ethiopia. It has eleven registered world heritage sites by UNESCO, with most recently the Konso Cultural Landscape, Meskel Demera Festivities and Fiche-Chambelala, the Sidama people's New Year celebrations, being added to the list. Ethiopia is the origin of humanity, the birthplace of 'Lucy', the world's oldest known almost-complete hominid skeleton, more than three million years old. It is the land of the Queen of Sheba, home of the Ark of the Covenant, the origin of coffee and of the Blue Nile. It is also the home of Erta Ale, a unique active lava lake, in the beautiful Danakil Depression, in part below sea level and the hottest place on Earth. It has beautiful scenery including the Simien Mountains, a spectacular chain of mountains that are sometimes called "the roof of Africa." There are four biosphere reserves registered by UNESCO. There are numerous Rift Valley lakes, hot springs and highland lakes even around Addis Ababa. There are various national and regional parks, such as the Awash National Park and the Simien Mountains National Park, among nine other national parks and two beautiful sanctuaries. It has spectacular sites dedicated to some of the earliest buildings of three great religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; with old cities, beautiful ancient mosques and churches, monuments. Axum, Lalibela and the Nejjashi mosque are major sites that attract many tourists and, indeed academic researchers. There are extensive national archives and a national library with rare and beautiful manuscripts. Ethiopia has its own unique calendar and alphabet. In addition, it has more than 80 nations and nationalities and peoples, all with their own distinct cultures and amazing traditions. On top of this, the Minister underlines, Ethiopia also has dependable peace and stability. Never colonized, it remains a symbol of independence for many in Africa and other continents. Addis Ababa, of course, is the seat of a number of international organizations including the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and more than 100 embassies. Conference tourism is another area of growth potential.

This entire heritage and the associated potential for tourism are at the centre of Ethiopia's plan to quadruple the number of foreign visitors by 2020. The Minister emphasizes that the new strategy of tourism is a central part of the Government's integrated development plans. As the number of visitors increases, the demand for developed infrastructure also increases. Ethiopia has immense and untapped natural resources, a competitive labor force and stability. These attributes make it a major investment destination in Africa, and this creates many opportunities for the tourism sector. Ethiopia's tourist destination sites used to be inaccessible due to inadequate road and air infrastructure, lack of power infrastructure and other facilities. In the past 10 years, the Government has carried out large-scale investments in the construction of airports, road, and railway and the energy sector; she added "power infrastructure is our top priority so as to support this growing economy and we are doing well in this regard."

Overall, infrastructure development remains one of country's top priorities. Now, the Minister said, the Government is investing a lot into these areas. Tourists are accessing these destinations more easily and, equally, investors are keen to invest in building lodges, hotels and restaurants at the tourist sites or operate as tour operators. Potential investors can take advantage of these opportunities through direct investment or joint ventures with local partners. Tourism opportunities exist in the construction of star-rated hotels, lodges and resorts, international and specialized restaurants. The return of investment for government and the private sector is growing. The new strategy focuses on coordinating and communicating the many stakeholders at both the national and sub-national levels effectively in order to improve Ethiopia's image, market presence and penetration.

Along with this, another priority is education to provide the necessary human resources to work efficiently in the hospitality sector. The Minister underlined the importance of providing market-oriented training for young people who want to work in hospitality, invest in the expansion of employment and proper professional training, to encourage entrepreneurship among young people, including women. All this, she said, had to go along more generally with ensuring good governance and democracy in order to use this young workforce most effectively. Also important is minimizing the rate of corruption, ensuring the rule of law, accountability and integrity among stakeholders. All these factors would contribute to the country's growing economy. One element behind this is, of course, the Government's strong commitment to end poverty. Another is the development of clear and appropriate government policies and strategies for each and every sector that is leading us to the eradication of poverty. The Government also works hard for mutual cooperation and win-win collaboration with partners in every sector. The tourism sector has benefited greatly from the stable political arena over the past two decades giving Ethiopia some competitive advantage over other countries. It also works hard to maintain peace and security with neighbors. All in all, it provides a conducive environment for the tourism sector.

The Ministry is now planning to have a new brand and a new slogan to communicate Ethiopia's attractiveness and uniqueness more fully to the rest of the world. It is developing new websites, software and mobile apps to promote Ethiopia. It is participating in different worldwide trade fairs in order to expand promotion and get better market access to tourism products. Equally, "the current stress is on destination development and service excellence in order to sustain current and future customer relationships." During the last Growth and Transformation Plan (2010-2014) the Ministry assessed nearly 400 hotels in collaboration with UNWTO, and in Addis Ababa alone 68 hotels were awarded with stars from 1 to 5. It is also encouraging the diversification of the tourism product offering to include nature-based tourist elements, such as mountain climbing, river tracking, bird watching, and similar areas. The country has ample resources in all these areas.

Whether the Ministry achieves the longer-term aims, revenue and tourist numbers are already both up this year. The country's image is continuing to improve as indeed the international media has noted. The widely acclaimed *Rough Guides* and *Lonely Planet* rated Ethiopia last year as one of the most impressive tourist destinations and the UN World Tourism Organization has highlighted the untapped cultural and natural resources. Last year, Ethiopia was named 'Best Tourism Destination' by the representatives of the 28 countries on the General Assembly of the European Council on Tourism and Trade (ECTT). The judges noted that the Simien Mountains

showed the potential for national parks and offered a model of achieving ecological tourism that should be recognized throughout the world. They described Ethiopia as perfect for safari and adventure tourism, providing safety and peace, making the country one of the world's top adventure destinations. The award is offered to countries that comply with the principles of the UN Tourism Division, UNESCO and ECTT on fair and ethical tourism.

ECTT President, Professor Anton Caragea, said “the Government of Ethiopia is recognizing the importance of tourism as a key facilitator for the country's development, investing in infrastructure, creating a special team under the Prime Minister's leadership for destination promotion and management and protecting the cultural, natural and historical patrimony of the country.” He said the community-based approach, promoted by the Prime Minister was the perfect way of sharing revenue, increasing incomes and supporting marginal and rural community development. “Ethiopia”, he said, “ is a perfect, safe and outstanding place to visit, and all world tourism experts have expressed their confidence in the future of tourism in Ethiopia”. Dr Ray Muntida, Advisor to IGAD's Sustainable Tourism Master Plan for the region, believes that if Ethiopia fully implements its Sustainable Tourism Master Plan by 2020, it really can become one of the five leading tourist destinations in Africa. Minister of Culture and Tourism, Aisha Mohammed, agrees.

Developments in the energy sector and regional energy integration

President Barack Obama signed into law the Electrify Africa Act on Monday (February 8) aimed at expanding electricity to millions of households in sub-Saharan Africa. It will leverage partnerships with the private sector to bring electricity access to some 50 million people. The act was passed a week earlier by the U.S. House of Representatives. This was the culmination of nearly two years of trying to get the measure through both chambers of Congress. The Act provides a framework for a major public-private partnership between the United States and sub-Saharan African countries to help millions of people gain access to reliable electricity.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman, Ed Royce of California, said the Electrify Africa Act is a “direct response to the fact that today 600 million people living in sub-Saharan Africa — that is 70 percent of the population — do not have access to reliable electricity”. It seeks to address the massive electricity shortage that affects the everyday lives of millions of people. The bill directs the President to establish a multi-year strategy to assist countries in sub-Saharan Africa in implementing national power strategies with a mix of energy solutions, including renewable energy sources. During the debate, bi-partisan members of Congress emphasized that without reliable electricity millions of people in Africa cannot use tools necessary for modern life, such as lights, cell phones and computers, nor did they have access to refrigeration for foods or medicines. Others pointed out that the lack of electricity forces people to use charcoal and other toxic fuels that cause more deaths than HIV/AIDS and malaria combined. Equally, the high cost of energy in much of sub-Saharan Africa makes producing goods for export almost impossible. Congressman Royce emphasized that it was in the United States' interest to help Africa become one of the world's great trading partners. The Electrify Africa Act will help make that a reality by providing a framework for companies to invest in

promoting energy solutions in Africa.

It was back in 2013 that President Obama outlined his Power Africa Initiative, which aims to grant first-time access to electricity to 50 million people by the year 2020. Power Africa is a project launched to support economic growth and development in Africa by increasing access to reliable and affordable energy. Ethiopia is one among the six nations selected for the scheme, together with Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Liberia, and it is now finalizing a national action plan to utilize the Power Africa initiative properly. Ethiopia is, of course, endowed with abundant potential for renewable energy production and the Water, Electricity and Irrigation Ministry has announced that the action plan will put in place mechanisms that guarantee the benefits from Power Africa; allowing for the generation of 30,000MW of clean, sustainable, energy and add 60 million new interconnections which will also increase access to electricity across the continent. USAID stated that Power Africa will support Ethiopia's energy development strategy through technical assistance to the Government in negotiating its initial landmark Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) and facilitating the financing of private-sector-led geothermal, solar and wind projects. In this context, the Eastern Africa Power Pool (EAPP), seeks to facilitate the cross border trading of renewable energy power supplies to the region at the lowest possible cost. The EAPP is working towards efficiently managing an integrated system and Power Africa will assist the EAPP to develop common grid codes and structural transmission interconnection projects that will facilitate integrated development as well as the operations of national power systems in East Africa.

Other recent developments in Ethiopia's energy sector included the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopian Electric Power and the United States Trade Development Agency (USTDA), the commencement of the Kenya-Ethiopia power line, and the visit of various Ambassadors resident in Addis Ababa, including the US Ambassador to Ethiopia, visited the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam to see progress. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed on Friday last week. Azeb Worku, CEO of the Ethiopian Electric Power, said this was to help "Ethiopia to get standardized electric materials, supplies and equipment from the international market". USTDA has pledged over \$400,000 to improve access to electric equipment and other related elements of cooperation.

The Kenya Electricity Transmission Company announced last week that the construction of high voltage transmission lines covering 612 kilometers to the Ethiopian border at Moyale would begin in May. Kenya's plans to buy cheap power from Ethiopia are reaching an advanced stage with the preliminary engineering and design elements of the project complete. The Kenya-Ethiopia transmission line will traverse Marsabit, Samburu, Isiolo, Laikipia, Nyandarua and Nakuru and the total cost of the project is an estimated Kenyan Sh129.12 billion. This is one of a number of planned regional projects with neighboring countries now in progress.

Overall, the country's energy project developments are keeping up to schedule, but with Ethiopia one of the world's fastest growing the need for power continues to grow. New agreements and partnerships and regional power integration projects development are needed and are well underway to support and maintain a decade-long rapid development and growth rate. The plans require expanding electric power supply at a rate of more than 14% per year.

To meet this demand, Ethiopia is primarily aiming to exploit its vast potential for sustainable power: hydro, geothermal, solar and wind power. There are plentiful renewable energy resources, including a potential of 45,000 MWs in hydropower. When adequately captured, the projected power supplies will far exceed the growing domestic demand, opening major avenues for the possibility of export of energy and for increased infrastructure integration with neighboring countries. Ethiopia, as its policies underline, is already beginning to establish regional energy infrastructure and power lines links. The country's Climate Resilient Green Economy strategy, for example, specifies sustainable green economy developments and energy sector vision. The basic pillars of this approach include agriculture, forestry and sustainable power, as well transport, industrialization and construction. Within these, the power sector is specifically based on expanding electricity and power generation from renewable energy for domestic and regional markets. The regional energy infrastructures are implementation of Ethiopia's recognized policy of regional integration, mutual growth and development within the framework of the Regional Economic Community. In the same way, in reference to transport, industrial and construction sectors, the national strategy aims to jump into modern and energy-efficient technological deployment.

The newly launched Growth and Transformation plan (GTP II) sets out, ambitious targets for infrastructure, energy generation and economic growth, and gives an even stronger focus on the promotion of industry. It also requires further expansion of the energy sector to fuel up industrial activities on a wide scale and the electrification of rural areas. The Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity announced this week that preparation of a legal framework to allow Ethiopia to benefit from the "Power Africa" initiative was nearing completion. The only element left is the approval of the framework by the national parliament. This is also needed to deal with problems arising from the laying of power transmission cables and for the power export program. The target for increasing electricity coverage to 75% in the first Growth and Transformation Plan period was not fully met as the increase achieved was only 55%. The aim now is to virtually complete coverage during the current GTP II.

Rural electrification across the country is a major element of focus for the energy sector. Currently some 5,554 towns have been connected in the country. During GTP II (2015-2020), using local, private investment and international cooperation, the plan is to connect a total of 10,205 towns to the national grid, raising the current 54% rural access to electricity to 90% by 2020.

Other major power sector development projects under construction besides the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam include the Genale Dawa III (254 MW) and other renewable projects including the Aluto Langano Geothermal expansion, Repi Waste-to-Energy, and the Melka Sedi Biomass project. The Gilgel Gibe III hydropower project, which will eventually have capacity to produce 1870 MW, started operations some weeks ago.

A conference on Ethiopia's Textile and Garment Industry

A conference focusing on Ethiopia's Textile and Garment Industry with a theme "Towards Increasing Sustainability and Competitiveness in Ethiopia's textile and garment industry" took place on Monday (February 8) at the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa. The conference was organized by the relevant government ministries, including the Ministry of Trade, the Ethiopian Textile Industry Development Institute, GIZ, and the Ethiopian Textile and Garment Manufacturer Association ETGAMA. ETGAMA's mission is to create a vibrant textile and garment sector to play a leading role in the growth and development of manufacturing industry. Senior government officials, leaders from Ethiopian and international textile and garment manufacturers, and professionals from partner organizations participated in the conference.

The government is now working towards the development of cotton, textile and garment sector as a priority within the planned industrial development. It is a sector that touches a wide spread of other sub-sectors maximizing production and creates substantial sources of employment. It also offers the prospect of significant foreign export earnings. The aim is to enable the industry to develop rapidly and become internationally competitive. The Government has underlined its commitment to develop this industry and aspires to export more than a billion dollars worth of apparel by 2016. In fact, in response to government's policies, investors from different countries and major global brands are now investing in the country or are opening branches in the country. Currently a number of garment industrial companies from Turkey and India and also European high-street stores have started production in the country.

The overarching objective of Monday's conference was to help improve the competitiveness of the Ethiopian textile and garment industry as a contributor to sustainable employment generation and to the economic development in the country. It aimed at promoting awareness of the importance of social and environmental standards with a view to drawing attention to key sustainability challenges within the Ethiopian textile and garment industry. It also intended to provide inspiration for practical action, as well as set the stage for a continuous dialogue and joint action amongst stakeholders from the private, public and citizens sectors in Ethiopia including local manufacturers and international buyers.

The conference had a number of sessions, including a discussion forum on "Inputs: sustainability and competitiveness from field to fashion", assessing the current state of sustainability standards and compliance in Ethiopia, and a plenary session: "Practitioner perspectives on sustainability". There were also breakout sessions on practical approaches and best practices with applicability to Ethiopia with particular reference to social and environmental standards for increased competitiveness, as well as training approaches for effective skill development: "Social and environmental standards for increased competitiveness and best practices from Bangladesh" and "Training approaches for effective skill development". Another plenary discussion focused on opportunities and the way forward to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of the Ethiopian textile and garment industry.

The Director General of the Ethiopian Textile Industry Development Institute, Sileshi Lemma, launching the conference, emphasized that the Ethiopian cotton, textile and garment sector was one of the key manufacturing industries prioritized by the government. There was, he said,

substantial anticipation of its contribution to the success of the Growth and Transformation Plan II. Dr. Axel Klaphake, Country Director of GIZ for Ethiopia, noted that there were three areas that were important for creating the backbone of a strong textile and garment industry: investment in the implementation of social and environmental standards across value chains, strengthening skill development for qualified personnel and promoting local and sustainable cotton production. Sustainability, he said, was an issue that needs to be considered in the whole textile value chain from field to fashion. The President of the Ethiopian Textile and Garment Manufacture's Association, Fassil Tadesse, emphasized that the association was working to create a vibrant textile and garment sector which could play a leading role in the growth and development of the manufacturing industry by bridging the gap through capacity building, market link and policy advocacy.

The industry is currently growing rapidly. Exports have increased substantially over the past ten years. The Ethiopian government has set the sector as a focus for the Growth and Transformation Plan II (2015-2020), aiming to boost exports to reach one billion USD by the end of the Plan period, and to create close to 350,000 jobs. Investment incentives, capacity building and skill upgrades, competitive salaries and EU/US tax regulations and export agreements in Ethiopia as well as growing production costs and insufficient social standards in some Asian countries have been encouraging buyers to look for opportunities in Africa. Ethiopia has the potential to serve as a benchmark for sustainable textile industries for a number of reasons including the relatively high status of social and environmental standards in some export-oriented Ethiopian industries, and the large trainable labor force that can provide for the needs of the labor-intensive textile and garment industry. In addition, the sector, with some 130 companies, is still small enough to help implement a system based on sustainability principles from the beginning.

The conference was intended to be a starting point for initiatives to catalyze sustained and sustainable development of the textile and garment sector in line with international social and environmental standards. It aimed to help improve the competitiveness of the Ethiopian textile and garment industry as contributor to sustainable employment generation and economic development of the country, and promote awareness on the importance of social and environmental standards. It drew attention to key sustainability challenges within the Ethiopian textile and garment industry; and emphasized the importance of organizing continuous dialogue and joint action amongst stakeholders. As part of the process, the 2nd Ethiopian International Textile and Apparel Expo, designed to promote the textile and apparel industries and serve as a platform for local and international suppliers and producers, was organized at the time of the conference, at Addis Ababa's Millennium Hall, from February 6 to 9. The Expo provided another example of the Government's emphasis on the importance of expanding textile production through foreign direct investment and high textile export performance.

In addition, the major Swedish firm H&M, together with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), on Monday this week announced the launch of an industrial relations project aiming to improve the development of a socially sustainable textile and garment industry in Ethiopia. In a statement, H&M said that promoting a well-functioning dialogue between partners on the labor market was a fundamental and important part of the company's fair living wage strategy. The ILO highlights the importance of promoting freedom of association and collective bargaining as necessary for workers and

employers to negotiate wages and working conditions, and H & M said it shared this view and that was why its strategy was focused on improving industrial relations. The firm said “this three year project will assist the Ethiopian government, social partners and major industry stakeholders in their efforts to promote social dialogue and improve productivity as well as improve wages and working conditions through nurturing sound labor relations practices and promoting collective bargaining.” The project is funded by SIDA and H&M and implemented by the ILO in collaboration with the Ethiopian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Industry, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions and Ethiopian Employers Federation. The Head of Sustainability at H & M said: “Well-functioning relations and social dialogue on the labor market is key to improve working conditions and establish fair living wages. We are engaged in projects which have the aim of strengthening employees' rights and their ability to negotiate on their own behalf on their terms and conditions through trade unions and or democratic elected employee representatives. Our goal is for all of our strategic supplier factories to have democratically elected and functional workplace representation in place by 2018 at the latest.”

Media reports on Eritrea continue to headline human rights abuse....

The Eritrean Government has recently been publishing a series of articles in its “Eritrea Profile” reviewing events of the last year and Eritrea’s “many successes” during 2015. The first of these articles, on January 20, was entitled “‘Curbing’ Migration”. Given the international concern with the flood of refugees and migrants from Eritrea, this was not surprising. The refugee issue has taken center stage in the international media since the tragic drowning of 360 Eritreans off Lampedusa in October 2013, a disaster which highlighted “the truth about the brutal and ugly repression in Eritrea”

Nor, given the source, was it surprising that the article welcomed the report of the Danish Immigration Service, the earlier report of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and the subsequent report of the UK Home office. All of these, originally at least, suggested that “claims of political repression and ground realities in Eritrea may have been misinformed and that Eritreans were largely leaving Eritrea due to economic migration rather than repression.” The article in “Eritrea Profile” did not mention that the main source of the Danish Report disassociated himself from its conclusions and that two of its three authors resigned from the Immigration Service because of criticism of the methodology and disagreement with the conclusions. The report had been withdrawn from use in immigration cases.

The report of the UK Home Office has also been the subject of a highly critical and detailed comment by Dr. John Campbell in a report released last month by the British Immigration and Independent Advisory Group on Country Information. The report strongly criticized the UK Home Office’s use of “misleading and biased” information to reject Eritrean asylum seekers from the UK. The report says two official documents, the Country of Origin Information and the Country Guidance Information, issued by the UK Home Office in March last year, were largely based on the findings of the Danish report despite the fact that it has been largely discredited. In effect, the report claims that the Home Office has distorted evidence in order to reject Eritrean asylum seekers. Dr. Campbell said the Home Office could not rely on the Danish

report because its findings are simply “not credible”. He noted, in particular, that despite claims in the Danish report, there is still no evidence that a decision to limit national service to 18 months has been decided. Government officials have made statements to this effect in private that the system has been changed, but nothing has been formally announced by the Government and there has been no indication that any such policy has been implemented. Nor is there any indication that those returning to Eritrea are safe from prosecution or persecution

Those immigration reports were, of course, wildly at variance with almost all other reports from a wide range of other sources, including the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur and the UN Human Rights Council’s Commission of Enquiry into Human Rights in Eritrea which quoted from the testimony of hundreds of those who have fled from Eritrea in the last year or so, as well as a number of detailed media reports over the last year. The amount of media coverage on Eritrea in 2015 showed a considerable increase, as the government allowed some media outlets to visit the country in an apparent attempt to improve its image. If this was the reason, it failed. Eritrea Profile claimed that until 2010 there were “a number of correspondents from foreign newspapers and agencies present in Asmara, including BBC, Deutsche Welle, Agence France-Presse, Al Jazeera, Voice of America and Reuters” but then, it claimed that they all decided, with the exception of AFP, to leave “of their own accord.” In March 2015, a BBC visit was categorized as providing a string of “lies and misrepresentations” over its claims of peoples’ reluctance to talk and the amount of “minding” to which the journalists were subject. However, according to Eritrea Profile, the BBC also had “to affirm the positive ground realities in Eritrea, admitting that there was significant health care progress and that there was no censorship of the internet.”

In October, the Wall Street Journal (“Thousands flee isolated Eritrea to escape life of conscription and poverty,” 20.10.2015), noted that more than half a million Eritrean refugees were residing in the neighboring Sudan and Ethiopia, in addition to the hundreds of thousands making their way to Europe. At the center of its story is a boy, Binyam Abraham, turning 16, who made a 19 hour journey to neighboring Ethiopia to escape the “forced conscription that had trapped his father for decades; for as long as I’ve known, he’s been a soldier.... Each year I saw him once, when he was allowed leave”. The Government claims the service is limited to only 18 months and the age limit starts at 18, but the fact remains that thousands leave to avoid the indefinite national service characterized by harsh treatment. From 16 on, there is always the possibility of being rounded up in one of the Monday night “*gifa*”, round-ups to catch anyone trying to avoid conscription. The article which quotes describes Eritrea as “one of the world’s fastest-emptying nations: a country of about 4.5 million on the Horn of Africa, governed by a secretive dictatorship accused of human-rights violations, that is playing an outsize role in the biggest global migration crisis since World War II.” From the start of 2012 to the middle of this year [2015], it is calculated that 1 in 50 Eritreans sought asylum in Europe, nearly twice the ratio of Syrians. “On the rickety smuggling boats crossing the Mediterranean, Eritreans comfortably outnumber other nationalities...Eritreans accounted for a majority of the 3,000 people who have drowned in the Mediterranean this year, humanitarian agencies say.” And the numbers continue to grow. The Wall Street Journal concludes “Eritrea is seeing its future walk away. Relative to its population, Eritrea has the biggest group of refugees who are unaccompanied minors.”

The Council on Foreign Relations published an article "Europe's Migration Crisis," in September. This quotes the International office of Migration, describing the situation of Eritrean refugees, making up one of the three largest groups with Syrians and Afghans, and their main reason for leaving being "fleeing forced labour." Another article "Authoritarianism in Eritrea and the Migrant Crisis" three months later, concludes that "conscription in the national-service program is the factor most commonly cited by [Eritrean] asylum seekers who have fled their country." The Guardian, in an article "Giving Money to Eritrea to stop refugees is almost Satire" (13.11.2015), describes what it calls the futile exercise of the EU to provide Eritrea with a quick concession, amounting 200 million Euros. It is based on "a deeply flawed logic" that ignores the reasons behind people fleeing from home. The article suggests that if any meaningful solution is to be achieved, the EU should put pressure on the regime in Asmara to end the indefinite military service, which it notes as characterized by harsh treatments and forced labor.

A Photograph and Video report "Desperate Crossing", depicting the story of over 700 refugees who had crossed via tiny fish boats to Italy, noted that "most of them were from the impoverished and despotically ruled Northeast African Nation of Eritrea." Dozens of other reports during the year made the same points time and again: those arriving in Europe from Eritrea were refugees and their reasons for leaving were the repression they faced in their home country. It was clear that no amount of money going into Eritrea would curb this movement of people.

Last year, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea stated categorically that "systematic, widespread and gross" human rights violations have been and were being committed under the authority of the Eritrean Government. It said that some of these abuses might constitute crimes against humanity. The Commission found that Eritrean citizens live under constant fear in a controlled state and are subject to abuse, exploitation and slavery. Other human rights bodies have documented similar abuses over many years.

This is why the current efforts, as exemplified by the EU's decision to provide 200 million euros of aid will make no difference to the issue that underlines European interest: interrupting the flow of refugees. The aid package is intended to support development endeavors in the energy sector and improve governance. Some will also go on education. Neven Mimica, the EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, said the package would help to tackle the root causes of migration from Eritrea. In fact, it is most unlikely to have any impact on the numbers of refugees, as all the evidence is that they are leaving Eritrea because of political repression. Their exodus will continue. It will not be affected by increased aid for education – all that can do is provide for "more educated refugees", nothing else. It is most unlikely to limit even numbers of migrants, let alone refugees. The flow of refugees will only be reduced when Eritrea actually makes changes in policy and reduces repression, and implements major changes in policy.

There have been a number of suggestions, by European ministers and others, that Eritrea is changing policies. However, as all reports from media and others demonstrate, there appears to be no change on the ground in Eritrea. Nor is there any indication of changes in the operation of the Special Military Court under which political prisoners are sentenced, usually without charge or trial. The Government refuses to respond to repeated international demands for news of the

G15, arrested in 2001, along with a number of journalists, and held in such atrocious conditions that there are reports that most may well have died. Both the G15 and the journalists used to be a concern of the European Union. They now appear to be forgotten, victims of the refugee crisis. Nor has there been any indication of any change in Eritrea's foreign policies, or the continuing pattern of attempts to destabilization of its neighbors, in particular Ethiopia. The Eritrean regime is still continuing to support armed opposition which makes no secret of its intent to try to overthrow the Ethiopian government by force.

Given the damning report on the human rights situation in Eritrea by the UN Human Rights Council's Commission of Enquiry, and the failure of the regime in Asmara to make any change in its policies of regional destabilization, it is no surprise that in October last year the UN Security Council decided to extend the mandate of the Somalia-Eritrea Monitoring Group, and retain existing sanctions on Eritrea for another year. The Commission's report and the reports of the UN Monitoring Group, both long term and comprehensive accounts of the nature of the government in Asmara, provide authoritative and detailed information based on a wide variety of sources. The UN sanctions resolution imposes an arms embargo on the regime and prescribes assets freeze and travel ban on some of its political and military leaders.

The Commission's report was accepted by both the UN Human Rights Council in June and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in October 2015.

Given the poverty in Eritrea and the lack of development, no one can argue against the provision of aid, but if the EU believes that this will limit the flood of refugees, it is certainly mistaken. It is also surprising, given the long history of difficulties that the EU has had with Eritrea's autocratic regime over the last twenty years, marked by abruptly alternating periods of cooperation and confrontation. The EU is fully aware of the lack of justice, democracy or the rule of law. The treatment of the G15 and of journalists arrested and held in solitary confinement under appalling conditions without charge or trial, for example, has frequently been raised by EU officials, and, as frequently, totally ignored by Eritrean Government officials. EU leaders have witnessed time and again that promises, of dialogue and cooperation, of change or reform, made by the regime have been consistently broken. The surprise was that the EU made no effort to ensure that any aid package should include conditions for introducing democratic reforms or respecting human rights or any concrete steps to demonstrate any changes of policy, internal or external. There was not even a demand that the regime should allow the Commission of Enquiry access to Eritrea, something that has been repeatedly requested.

...and a Dutch Court rules in favor of an Eritrean human rights advocate

Mirjam van Reisen, Professor of International Relations, and a long time advocate for Human rights in Eritrea, was sued for libel earlier in the year by Meseret Bahlbi, former chairman of the youth movement of Eritrea's single and ruling party, the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice in the Netherlands. In an interview, Professor van Reisen said that she was concerned that the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service was using interpreters who were siblings of the "centre of the Eritrean intelligence in the Netherlands". Interpreters are in a position to twist the meaning of what is being said and they are supposed to be screened to prevent employment

of people with links to the Eritrean regime. If asylum seekers discovered that interpreters had ties to the regime from which they fled, this would undermine their confidence in the Dutch government, said Professor Van Reisen. Although Mr. Meseret was not mentioned by name he felt it was clear the statement referred to him.

At the hearing this week, the judge dismissed the claim. He found Professor van Reisen not guilty of libel and slander and added that the youth party of the Eritrean regime could be seen as a means of collecting intelligence abroad. When the case came to court two weeks ago, the focus was on the nature of the regime in Eritrea, and the role played by its supporters in Europe. On Wednesday (February 10) the judge ruled that van Reisen had no case to answer and awarded damages against Bahlbi in her favour.

The judge declared that van Reisen's statements were warranted and that she had provided sufficient evidence of the facts. Her lawyer demonstrated that the YPFDJ was the "eyes and ears" of the Eritrean regime, gathering intelligence for the government in Asmara and being responsible for attempts to intimidate UN personnel, journalists and Professor van Reisen herself because they have drawn attention to the human rights abuses perpetrated by the regime and its supporters.

After the hearing, Professor van Reisen expressed her relief that the judge ruled in her favour, but she also underlined her continued concern for those fleeing from and suffering in Eritrea. She told the Dutch press "I now know what it feels like to be Eritrean" having witnessed the legal and less than legal attempts to silence her. She posted a message on Facebook: "victory to all justice seekers. Together we will continue to pursue the truth."