

A week in the Horn, 25.03.2016

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Africa and the African Union

Chairperson of the African Union Commission Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, on (March 24, 2016) welcomed the signing of the Roadmap Agreement by the Sudanese government and urged the opposition groups to sign it within five days.

Ethiopia

Humanitarian partners this week (March 24, 2016) launched a 90-day campaign to raise awareness on the urgent need for an additional funding for the El-Nino induced drought in Ethiopia in an effort to address the humanitarian resource gap in the country. **(See article)**

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Taye Atske-selassie on (March 25, 2016) received copies of letters of credence of the newly appointed Ambassador of DRC to Ethiopia, Mr. Claude Nayamugabo and the new Ambassador of Fiji to Ethiopia, Mr. Moses Tikotioga.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, has met with the newly elected FIFA President Gianni Infantino (March 24, 2016). During his stay, Mr. Infantino held talks with H.E Redwan Hussein, Minister of Youth & Sports and Mr. Juneydi Basha, President of Ethiopian Football Federation (EFF), and also visited the Ethiopian sports academy.

Mr. Mitiku Kassa, Commissioner of National Disaster Risk Management Commission, on (March 24, 2016) said the Ethiopian government has been distributing seeds for Belg season to areas affected by the El Nino induced drought at a cost of 520 million birr.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn on (March 22, 2016) held discussion with members of Joint Council of Political Parties.

Dr. Mulatu Teshome, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia received the credentials of fourteen newly appointed Ambassadors to Ethiopia (March 24, 2016). These include ambassadors from Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Greece, Turkey, Brazil, Gabon, Rwanda, United Kingdom, Namibia, United Arab Emirates, Burundi, Mauritania, Chile and the Philippines

Ato Demeke Atnafu, Director General of the Diaspora Affairs at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a Mozambican delegation on (March 23, 2016), wherein the two sides exchanged views on enhancing Diaspora engagement.

A statement issued on (March 23, 2016) by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the Government of FDRE on behalf of the people of Ethiopia strongly condemns the Brussels attacks and offers its deepest sympathy to all the families of the victims and to the people of Belgium

Foreign Minister Dr. Tedros Adhanom held discussions with Faith Ulusou, Ambassador of Turkey to Ethiopia, (March 22, 2016). Noting that the business environment in Ethiopia has been significantly improving, and now that the country is one of the world's favored investment destinations, Ambassador Ulusou expressed Turkey's interest to sponsor a gathering of Turkish and African think tanks in Addis Ababa.

A High Level Ethiopian delegation, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen has been on a working visit to the Russian Federation over the week, wherein discussions focused on ways of enhancing the bilateral relations between the two countries and expanding cooperation on continental and global issues of mutual interest.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn on Monday (March 21, 2016) held discussions with representatives of Troika countries (United Kingdom, United States and Norway) on the progress of South Sudan's peace deal.

In his exclusive interview at the end of last week (March 19, 2016) with the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) remains to be a symbol of cooperation among riparian countries. **(See article)**

According to a statement issued on (March 22, 2016) by the US Embassy in Addis Ababa, the United States government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has launched a new water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activity.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT), Ethiopia has secured more than 1.7 billion US dollars revenue from tourism in the first half of this fiscal year. **(See article)**

Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) on (March 22, 2016) said the 5th year anniversary of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam's (GERD) commencement will be marked with various arrangements,

The Ministries of Finance of Ethiopia and Sudan (March 22, 2016) have agreed to strengthen economic cooperation between the two countries.

Eritrea

In a joint oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project urged the Council to pay close attention to human right violations in Eritrea (March 14, 2016). **(See article)**

Kenya

Kenya yesterday lodged a diplomatic protest to Tanzania after Energy Cabinet Secretary Charles Keter was denied entry to the Port of Tanga on (March 23). Reports claim the government had instructed Kenya's High Commission in Tanzania to get an explanation of the incident.

Somalia

The United Nations Security Council on (March 25, 2016) extended the mandate of UNSOM's work until 31 March 2017.

Puntland Defense forces chief General Saeed Mohamed Hirsi on (March 24, 2016) said that the high intensity operations against Shabaab ended successfully, with over 200 militants killed and others captured alive.

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Shaikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan received on (March 21, 2016) Shaikh Mohamoud, President of Somalia at the Beach Palace.

Somalia's Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke on (March 23, 2016) joined more than a million others on Wednesday in signing an online petition to end female genital mutilation (FGM) in the country

South Sudan

Festus G. Mogae, Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) on South Sudan opened JMEC Meeting this week (March 24, 2016) in Juba. He said, "The patience of the international community – as is my own – is being tested." **(See article)**

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir on (March 23, 2016) sacked the country's foreign affairs minister Barnaba Marial Benjamin, a day after he allegedly referred to people from Abyei as foreigners.

South Sudanese first vice president designate, Riek Machar (March 24, 2016) had been to the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on peace implementation consultations with stakeholders and regional leaders.

Sudan

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Sudan's defence minister Awad Ibn Ouf on (March 22, 2016) discussed with a visiting senior military delegation from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the prospects of the joint cooperation between the two nations.

Sudan's foreign ministry (March 24, 2016) said that President Omer al-Bashir has received an invitation to participate in the inauguration of Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou.

Drought in Ethiopia: humanitarian partners call for more action

Humanitarian partners this week (March 24, 2016) launched a 90-day campaign to raise awareness on the urgent need for an additional funding for the El-Nino induced drought in Ethiopia in an effort to address the humanitarian resource gap in the country.

While Ethiopia's 2016 1.4 billion US dollars appeal has received over 758 million US dollars from the Ethiopian government and the international community, significant life-saving gaps remain across all sectors. The four months lead time to get relief commodities to people in need means that action is required now. Ms.Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onuchie, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia said, "Ethiopia is currently contending with one of the most serious climatic shocks in recorded history with ten million people facing lost harvests and livestock as well as severe water shortages and health risks," "We are launching this campaign to advocate for increased funding commensurate with the scale and severity of this crisis," she added.

The El Nino has significantly impacted weather patterns in Ethiopia for the past several months, limiting agricultural production, straining livelihoods and exacerbating food insecurity among vulnerable households. **In Ethiopia the government estimates that 10.2 million people, on top of the 8 million that will receive support through the governments' safety net programme, will need humanitarian assistance this year at a cost of \$1.4 billion, due to a drought that has been exacerbated by El Niño.**

So far, the government has allocated 381 million US dollars and the Productive Safety Net Programme, run by the government in partnership with the World Bank, is aiming to assist about 8 million people. The government of Ethiopia has also rushed forward the opening of its new railway line—the countries only one—just to bring food supplies from Djibouti on the Horn of

Africa coast. Nevertheless, the government is also urging other donors to support the drought mitigation efforts.

Despite the challenges that Ethiopia faces, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator commended the Government of Ethiopia for its efforts of reaching those who needed food aid. She noted that the government is one of the largest financial contributors to the crisis so far and also leads in the coordination of a complex inter-sector response, which uses government systems and relies on national capacity. She added, “The Government’s vision for development, enshrined in the second Growth and Transformation Plan, promises to steer Ethiopia further down its already remarkable path of progress.”

The United States’ Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) has recently released a report on its assessment of the current drought in Ethiopia.. At a media briefing held on (March 19, 2016), the Director of USAID’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Jeremy Konyndyk also commended the impressive drought response activities by the Ethiopian government and said “We have far better capability to manage such kind of situation we had 13 years ago. We have also seen a clear leadership by the government of Ethiopia to tackle this drought.”

Ethiopia right from the early days of the drought has been working to tackle the situation more on its own capabilities. This has been much due to the country’s extensive food security network, Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), a welfare-for-work initiative that employs seven million people in public infrastructure projects in return for food or cash, and its national food reserve and early warning systems.

James Jeffrey, journalist and writer on the Horn of Africa, in his reflections published in Foreign Affairs Magazine this week (March 23, 2016) said Ethiopia’s ability and means for providing emergency relief has changed beyond recognition since 1984. Over the last decade, it has grown at about ten percent annually, giving the government enough cash to mitigate the crisis. He further said “initially, Ethiopia tried what many in the West complain developing countries don’t do enough of: tackling the situation at the route. Ethiopia employed a sophisticated food security network developed over the decades since the images of the 1984 famine came to typify the country.” Although today’s Ethiopia by comparison is a much more politically and

economically stable country, capable of self-help and robust action, he added — “but there are always limits.”

In fact, there are limits to what Ethiopia can prepare for.

Accordingly, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in his recent interview (March 17, 2016) with The Associated Press, has urged the international community to donate more toward emergency food aid for millions of people. He said, “Ethiopia should not be neglected by any means despite all the other crises that are going on elsewhere in the world; My country deserves more support because we are also sheltering some 750,000 refugees from neighboring countries that need food aid,” “If something goes wrong,” the Premier added, “ it is the international community who has not come in. The aid provided to us so far is very little and it often came very late. I urge organizations like UNICEF to come in if they think this is a worst case scenario. Just talking is not a solution.”

In connection Ms. Ahunna observed that drought response is not just about saving lives it is about protecting development gains - gains which the government and its development partners have worked tirelessly to build up over decades. “We need to rally urgently to protect the development gains of Ethiopia over the past decade and ensure the country remains on its remarkable development trajectory. Urgent and substantial investment in the humanitarian crisis response this year is the only way to ensure this and we must act now,” she concludes.

HRC Urged to pay close attention to human right violations in Eritrea

In a joint oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project urged the Council to pay close attention to human right violations in Eritrea (March 14, 2016). At the "Human Rights Council 31st Session Individual Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea on (March 14, 2016), the joint statement underlined that large number of Eritreans are fleeing the country to escape lifelong military service and denial of their fundamental rights. Even worse, it was noted that Eritrean authorities tolerate no independent media outlets and have been holding dozens of journalists and activists incommunicado for years.

Although the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea has recently assured the UN Council of his country's commitment to human rights and human dignity as a "top priority" and of its full engagement in the Universal Periodic Review, a process which offers the international community an opportunity to inspect how well individual states are complying with international human rights obligations, the Joint Statement made it clear that genuine commitment was lacking from the regime in Eritrea. Indeed, ongoing practical realities remain far from what the Eritrean foreign minister attempted to sketch. In fact, the two rights groups expressed their concern of the gap between the minister's bogus claim in the description of the situation in his country and the systemic, widespread and grave human rights violations documented by the Special Rapporteur and the Commission of Enquiry on Eritrea.

The fact that human rights violations are rampant in Eritrea is now an open secret. In fact, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project are not the only ones to witness. A day after the Joint Oral Statement, United Nations rights Envoy on (March 15, 2016) made it clear that unaccompanied children are fleeing Eritrea to avoid conscription, putting them at risk of abduction and abuse as they seek shelter in places including Europe.

As noted in their oral update, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project stressed, "Eritreans flee to avoid endless military service in a country where fundamental rights are nonexistent, where there is no independent media and where the Universal Periodic Review recommendations are repeatedly ignored, a country where civil society activists and journalists are held incommunicado for years with no access to lawyers."

While noting that cases are squarely emblematic, the Joint Oral Statement mentioned particular instances, including Dawit Isaak, a Swedish-Eritrean journalist, arrested and held incommunicado since 2001, and Seyoum Tsehaye, former head of the national television, whose films on the independence struggle continue to be screened regularly on Independence Day while

he languishes in jail. Their families and the families of many others have not heard anything from their loved ones, nor do they know whether they are alive or dead.

In fact, in 2014, the UN established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate rights abuses in the East African nation and assigned Sheila Keetharuth of Mauritius as its Special Rapporteur. The Commission of Inquiry was meant to pave the way to establish accountability for the gross rights violations. However, that was difficult as Eritrea closed its doors and authorities declined to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur. The UN council's special Rapporteur accuses the Eritrean government of ignoring the Council's demand for unrestricted access to visit the country and provide information necessary for the fulfillment of its mandates. The United Nations Monitoring Group and the UN Human Rights Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations in Eritrea also issued a report showcasing the Eritrean government's systematic use of extrajudicial killing, torture, rape, indefinite national service and forced labor, which it said may amount to crimes against humanity.

Indeed, the report provides substantial and detailed evidence of longstanding patterns of human rights violations in Eritrea, concluding that abuses remain pervasive, systemic, and the product of deliberate government policy. The report reveals arbitrary arrests are rampant, detainees are rarely charged or brought to trial, and scores of people have been victims of enforced disappearances. The commission said that prisoners are being kept in "extremely harsh" conditions of confinement; some are held incommunicado indefinitely. People practicing any religion other than the four approved by the government are usually subject to arrest, harassment, and mistreatment. Citizens are also regularly prone to constant surveillance and of violations of privacy. Freedom of movement is restricted, with permits required for mobility beyond where a person works or lives. Political parties are prohibited; there is no independent media, and Eritrea has not held an election since independence; and no constitution was developed to date.

Referred by right groups as the North Korea of Africa, Eritrea is now seen as one of the world's most repressive nations. Currently there are close to 10,000 political prisoners in atrocious conditions in different prison facilities across the country where they remain prey to different forms of torture and abuse. The government uses arbitrary arrest and detention without charge to crush all opposition and to silence any sort of dissent.

The two rights group hailed the Special Rapporteur for her continued attention to the “plight of ordinary Eritreans who continue to flee in droves,” and called for a renewal of her mandates. The Joint Oral Statement said, “We also urge the Council to renew the Special Rapporteur’s mandate, and to demand that the Government provide proof of life of those arrested and release all journalists, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.”

“The international community and the Government of Eritrea need to address to tackle the country’s damning human rights record, “it added.

Premier reflects on Ethiopia’s overall development

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn made an exclusive interview with the Ethiopian News Agency at the end of last week, in which he touched upon a range of issues, including Ethiopia’s economic growth, regional integration, the country’s bid for a non permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council and the progress of the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Responding on whether the government’s projected double digit economic growth was attainable; the Premier said the estimate for the fiscal year was based on the assumption that there would be a good rain and agricultural productivity will increase and that agricultural production would grow by at least 11% annually. Despite the possible slowdown on the growth, he said, “the economy will continue to register growth, if not a double- digit fast economic growth. When we say fast economic growth, it means that it should be above 7% of annual GDP. So it will be between 11% and 7%. So I think any growth that goes beyond 7% is said to be accelerated fast economic growth.” The Premier added, “We will have a fast economic growth that will continue but there will be a slowdown from our estimate.”

On efforts being undertaken to enhance regional integration among East African nations through the construction of roads, railway networks and the development of Energy, the Premier mentioned series of ongoing regional integration projects with neighboring countries and particularly noted that the integration between Ethiopia and Djibouti as exemplary. He said, “The first and best example in terms of economic integration is the integration between Ethiopia and Djibouti. If you see we have launched something like 800 kms of railway between Djibouti and Ethiopia that railway construction has been completed to above 97% the remaining little

issues will be addressed with the coming two to three months and so it will be fully completed by then. So that means there will be a fast railway for both freight as well as human carriage and so that transport facility is one of the best in Africa. May be in this decade or so it is the first in its kind which connect the two countries in 800 kms of bridge. So I think this is the best example.”

The Premier also noted Ethiopia has been connected to Sudan and Djibouti in terms of power interconnection. He said, “We are constructing a 400MW, it can go to 1200MW, but for now to lease 400MWs power to Kenya, to Nairobi. But the line can cater for more than 1200MWs. It can even be upgraded to 2000MWs in the future. So I think these are the major landmarks that the integration process and construction in terms of infrastructure is concerned.”

The regional integration has also been channeled through the construction of road networks. The Premier said, “If you see our road construction to our neighboring countries, Sudan we have already completed, with Djibouti you can see that we have a number of lines not only to Djibouti port but to Tadjoura port and we have even constructed road connections to Berbera port up to our border. We are now trying to secure fund for Somaliland to construct more road towards Berbera port.” He also raised the Kenya- Ethiopia line has been upgraded and that the construction of the line from Nairobi to Moyale will be completed this year. The Kenyan highway, he said goes up to South Africa and the connection with Sudan go up to Egypt which is part of the Cairo-Cape town interconnection. He also mentioned ongoing and proposed road links to South Sudan and the recent agreements with Somalia on road and power interconnectivity. He added, “After peaceful engagement starts then we can also connect with Eritrea in the future.”

Beyond infrastructural connectivity, the Premier noted Ethiopia is also keen to work hard to integrate its economy with its neighbors. In this regard he highlighted the trade integration and the special border trade agreements with Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan. So I think we have all those views to have economic integration as a first step to have political integration in the long term. In such line, he said, “So I think we have all those works to have economic integration as a first step for a political integration in the long term.” Furthermore, he described the people to people relations as excellent.

The Premier also touched upon Ethiopia’s bid for a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. He said, “Ethiopia is very keen to see that our region especially the Horn of

Africa is peaceful and stable. That helps to bring more investment, more tourism and also to engage in economic activities in a very stable way. So we feel that peace is very important for any kind of economic development and prosperity. Even for democratization and good governance. So the Ethiopian government is trying to achieve this objective through IGAD process to pacify our region. You know that we are paying sacrifices; you know our boys and girls are in Somalia they are in Sudan, South Sudan. So they are sacrificing. This all shows that Ethiopia is keen to see, given all the sacrifices we are making in the region, that the region becomes peaceful and stable.” According to the Prime Minister, this is because the next five years hold a determinant portion of the growth narrative in Ethiopia. He added, “if in the coming five years, we achieve the goals we have set for ourselves in terms of growth and transformation, and it all means that this will continue for the coming 10 years so that Ethiopia become a middle income country. So I think this is a very important season in the history of Ethiopia and we want to be in the United Nations Security Council to influence members of the Security Council to understand the Horn of Africa and to understand better the African Continent and to understand also better the economic and social miracles that these countries are engaging this time.” On the progress so far, he mentioned that a huge majority of Latin America, most of the countries in Europe, and countries, like China and South Korea are supporting Ethiopia’s candidacy.

On the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the Premier noted that this was a flagship project, one which was historic. He said, “This is one of the monumental projects the country has and one of the few agenda items that our people have had consensus.” Through the years, Ethiopia, he said has progressed and the progress it has made has helped the country build such a mega project with its own resources, adding that the construction of the Dam is well underway according to the plan. Noting that Ethiopia’s relations with Sudan and Egypt have been very smooth, the Premier stressed the relationship has been evolving through social, economic and political platforms, which he said demanded a political commitment. “I believe that there is political commitment from all of us, all the three countries specially the leaders. So I think this will take us for a long period of time to have not only a consensus on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam but also to create a common economic platform that helps us to move forward in our engagement,” he added.

Head of JEMEC on South Sudan: “The patience of the international community – as is my own – is being tested”

Festus G. Mogae, Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) opened JMEC Meeting this week (March 24, 2016) in Juba. The meeting aimed at reporting the further concrete action taken by the Government and the SPLM-IO in accordance with Chapter III of the Agreement, and further to earlier discussions, to facilitate the humanitarian response; hearing the progress made by the parties in implementing the transitional security arrangements for Juba; appraising the progress made by CTSAMM in its investigations of ceasefire violations, and reporting to the UN Security Council on progress in implementation of the Agreement.

The head of JEMEC said, “Let us be reminded that the formation of a new government will not in itself be a panacea. The term of the transitional government, which should have begun months ago, is rapidly elapsing. Therefore, once more, I urge the Parties to be dedicated in every respect to the task of forming the new government, and consider what will be the plan of action for the first months in office”

As the two warring parties continue to trade blame over protracted delays in forming a transitional government, apparently, the international community is beginning to lose patience with the repeated failure of parties to implement the peace agreement. JEMEC’s Chairperson added, “Ladies and Gentlemen, let me be frank and tell you that the patience of the international community – as is my own – is being tested. While I remain optimistic, as must we all, now is the time to prove that the commitments that have been repeatedly made by the Parties are genuine and sincere. The country cannot afford any more delays. I implore you to heed this message.”

Earlier on Tuesday (March 22, 2016), the United States Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Donald Booth has urged South Sudan’s rivals to quickly form a transitional government. Donald Booth made the remarks during a meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and representatives of Troika countries (United Kingdom, United States and Norway) in Addis Ababa, on the progress of South Sudan’s peace agreement. In the occasion the Premier

and Troika representatives are reported to have reviewed the progress of South Sudan's peace deal.

Taking note of Ethiopia's continued efforts in the process of ensuring peace and stability in South Sudan; the Prime Minister Hailemariam reassured the Troika representatives that Ethiopia is committed to strengthening its partnership with the international community to make sure that south Sudan's political stakeholders commit themselves to ensure peace and stability in the country.

Expressing concerns that South Sudan's peace agreement was already far behind schedule, the US special envoy urged both the South Sudanese government and the opposition to form the "transitional government of national unity as quickly as possible. He said, "We will continue to work closely as Troika countries with IGAD to try to bring about an implementation of South Sudan's peace agreement."

Ethiopia's tourism industry moves on with fresh impetus

With a view to transforming the Ethiopian Tourism sector in order that it contributes appreciably to the economic development of the country and creates far-flung opportunities of investment, a number of notable initiatives and new programs are being undertaken in recent years and councils and institutions were established by the Government of Ethiopia. Since then, the industry has gradually been on the rise.

In an exclusive interview on (March 20) with the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), Mr. Gezahegn Abate, Public and International Relations Director at the ministry disclosed 478,890 tourists have visited Ethiopia during the first half of the current fiscal year, which showed a rise by 108,136 visitors as viewed against the performance witnessed during the same period of the previous year; thereby generating 1.7 billion dollars, a figure way over last year's performance by 404, 842,160 dollars. The reliable peace and security in the country, infrastructural development and the expansion of hotels at tourist destinations, and the undertaking of active promotional packages by the Ethiopian embassies and consuls have contributed a great deal to the new impetus evident in the industry.

In an effort to enhance the competitiveness of the tourism sector and enable the industry to generate increased returns, create more jobs and help the country's GDP growth and social development, Ethiopia has been harnessing potentials and resources in a transformational manner. Consequently, a couple of institutional platforms had been established in August 2013: the Ethiopian Tourism Transformation and the Ethiopian Tourism Organization Council. The Ethiopian Tourism Transformation Council, chaired by H. E Hailemariam Dessalegn, and the Ethiopian Tourism Organization. In a bid to support the sector with the highest possible leadership, the Ethiopian Tourism council which is led by Prime Minister Hailemariam is composed of 68 council members, including all the ministers, regional leaders, and tourism bureaus of each region state, Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral associations, hotel and restaurant and other sector representatives. Noting that the tourism is one of the key drivers of development, the sector is given due attention in the country's second growth and Transformation Plan (GTP2) following which the government and a task force which included the private sector and other stakeholders have begun forging new initiatives that are being well underway. A Sustainable Tourism Master plan (STMP), is also being formulated in collaboration with different stakeholders and with the technical support provided by the sub-regional office for Eastern Africa (SRO-EA) and the division for Regional Integration and trade (RITD) of United Nations in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. In the previous weeks as well, a new national Brand has been launched and the new website of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is now operating. Minister of Culture and Tourism, Engineer Aisha Mohammed in a statement about the launch of the new website of the Ministry said, "Ethiopia, with its impressive tourism potentials, is truly a land of contrasts and extremes, a land of remote and wild places, and of spectacular alpine terrain – including the Semien Mountains National park with its 4261 meters peak at Ras Dashen of the nine UNESCO world heritages sites; and at the other end of the spectrum, the danakil depression 121 meters below sea level is among the lowest places and extremely hot."

The new national brand is strap-lined "Ethiopia, Land of Origins" and has the aim of leading the sector into new avenues and transforming Ethiopia's tourism industry into a new chapter. Noting that the newly defined Ethiopian brand, "Ethiopia, Land of Origins" is set to transform Ethiopia's tourism industry into a new chapter, the Director said, "The brand has its logo, slogan and icons

drafted in a blue background and the tree with full of green, yellow and red colors and its full root simply to show Ethiopia has its original identity and strong ties among the nations, nationalities and peoples." The new brand, the director said would be instrumental in encouraging scientists, researchers and other interested foreign visitors to discover Ethiopia and see its unique features. Reminding that Ethiopia is the land of ancient civilization, the cradle of mankind; origin of coffee, rich history, culture and source of Blue Nile, the new brand "Ethiopia, Land of Origins" was unveiled at the Berlin International Tourism Trade Fair in early March, 2016, he added. Indeed the extraordinary achievements of ancient civilizations of Axum, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the castles of Gondar, the colorful holy Islamic city of Harar are all among the World Heritage Sites found in Ethiopia. In fact, the General Assembly of the European Council on Tourism and Trade (ECTT) has rated Ethiopia as the number one World Best Tourist Destination and Favorite Cultural Destination for 2015. By the end of the second five-year Growth and Transformation Plan Period (GTP2), the country's tourism sector is expected to generate seven billion dollars.