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News in brief

Africa and the African Union

AU Finance Ministers met last week, Monday to Wednesday (August 7-9) in Addis Ababa to assess the progress made on the decisions of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government to provide for the financial autonomy of the African Union and consider ways to accelerate implementation the Assembly's decisions. (**See article**)

Ethiopia will assume the Presidency of the United Nations Security Council in September, taking over from Egypt. September, of course, sees the annual meeting of world leaders for the UN General Assembly, and major events planned include the 11th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting of the UN Security Council and the African Union's Peace and Security Council at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa on September 7-8, and a High Level Open Debate on the reform of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations on September 20. Ethiopia is one of the leading troop contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping and it attaches great importance to the reform and strengthening of UN Peacekeeping.

Ethiopia's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Tekeda Alemu, at a UN Security Council briefing on the G-5 Sahel Joint Force this week, strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Ouagadougou and in Mali and welcomed the launching of the Sahel Joint Force. He said the international community had a moral and political responsibility to contribute to the efforts of the G-5 Sahel countries' struggle against terrorism.

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn arrived in Kigali, Rwanda on Friday (August 18) to attend the inauguration ceremony of Rwanda's President-elect Paul Kagame. On behalf of the people and government of Ethiopia, the Prime Minister congratulated Kagame on his re-election as President this month. Mr. Kagame won a third, seven-year term on August 4.

Prime Minister Hailemariam made an official visit to the Sudan this week at the invitation of Field Marshal Omar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir, August 15-18. During his visit the Prime Minister spoke in Khartoum's Friendship Hall on "The Horn of Africa: Possibilities of an

Economic Community”, stressing the need for the region to build global competitiveness via economic integration and bilateral relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan. **(See articles)**

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene held a bilateral meeting with Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour on Thursday (August 17) in Khartoum. The talks focused on strengthening bilateral relations and close cooperation and consultations in revamping the revitalized South Sudan peace process.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene, welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Yemen, Abdul-Malik Al-Mekhlafi who arrived on Monday (August 14) for a three day visit. **(See article)**

State Minister Dr. Aklilu Hailemecheal expressed his deep sorrow over the loss of lives in Burkina Faso’s capital following a horrific terror attack on August 13, 2017. Upon signing the Book of Condolence at the Embassy of Burkina Faso on Friday (August 18), the State Minister said, “The attack is not just an attack on Burkina Faso but on all humanity”, adding that Ethiopia strongly condemns terrorism in its all forms and stands by the side of the peoples of Burkina Faso.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Aklilu met Ms. Aida Awel, Chief Technical Adviser of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on Friday (August 18). The two sides discussed on ILO’s newly developed project entitled “Migration governance to protect migrant workers and combat irregular migration in Ethiopia” and explored ways for cooperative engagement.

State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Aklilu met on Thursday (August 17) with Mulatu Tadesse, Chair of the Ethiopian Renaissance Chamber and Renaissance Dam Fund Raising; and Founder and Chairman of the Ethiopian National Consensus Forum and Ethiopian Diaspora Services (EBC) in the United Kingdom. The two sides emphasized on the need to maximize Diaspora engagement and strengthen the national consensus among the Diaspora community in the United Kingdom.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Aklilu met Dr. Belachew Tesfa, Founder and Director of the Ethiopian International Professional Support for Abay (EIPSA) on Thursday (August 17). Commending EIPSA for its efforts in the sectors of energy and water and its contributions to GERD, State Minister Dr. Aklilu said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia would do all it can to support the organization's ongoing projects.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Aklilu held discussions with the UK-based Ethiopian Somali Diaspora Forum on Thursday (August 17). Chairperson of the UK-based Ethiopian Somali Diaspora Forum briefed the State Minister on the role the Diaspora Forum plays in enhancing Diaspora engagement and helping the Ethiopian Diaspora in the United Kingdom understand the practical realities in Ethiopia as well as countering anti-peace elements and disrupting their negative campaigns.

Recently appointed ambassadors were given their assignments this week: Kassa Teklebrhanis appointed Ambassador to Washington, USA; Berhane Ghebre-Christos to Beijing, China; Aster

Mamo to Ottawa, Canada; Dr. Shiferaw Teklemariam to Pretoria, South Africa; Professor Merga Bekana to Stockholm, Sweden; Tebeje Berhe to Abu Dhabi, UAE; Metasebia Tadesse to Doha, Qatar; Professor Admasu Tsegaye to Jakarta, Indonesia ; Lulit Zewde to Kigali, Rwanda; Ali Suleiman to Paris, France; Mulugeta Zewde to Khartoum, Sudan; and Ewnetu Bilata to Brussels, Belgium.

The Government and partners' mid-year review of the Humanitarian Requirements Document for 2017 emphasizes that southern and eastern and eastern Ethiopia continue to battle the impact of the Indian Ocean Dipole-induced drought, disease outbreaks, loss of livelihood assets and displacement. **(See article)**

Ethiopia and Norway signed a US\$80 million agreement to assist in protecting natural forests in Ethiopia and to help transform the forest sector on Wednesday this week (August 16). The grant will be used for forest protection and restoration, and for establishing innovative public-private partnerships in the forestry sector. It will contribute to Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy through the REDD+ project.

Congratulations to Ethiopia's athletes raising Ethiopia to the 7th place in the medals' table of the IAAF World Championships in London. Ethiopia achieved two Gold Medals: Almaz Ayana in the 10,000m Women and Muktar Edris in the 5000m Men; and three Silver Medals: Almaz Ayana in the 5000m Women, Tamirat Tola in the Men's Marathon, and Tirunesh Dibaba in the Women's 10,000m.

Ethiopia earned US\$271 million from exports of flower and horticulture products during the just concluded 2016-17 fiscal year, about 1.5% less than the previous year according to the Ethiopian Horticulture and Agriculture Investment Authority. Of this, US\$218 million came from export of flowers, while other horticulture products, vegetable and fruits, accounted for the remaining US\$53 million.

Eritrea

The latest report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) issued this week has once again classified Eritrea as a Tier 1 Country of Particular Concern for its treatment of religious groups. According to the Catholic World News more than 200 Christians have been detained in Eritrea since May this year, most arrested for holding "illegal" prayer meetings. **(See article)**

The European Parliament voted through a resolution on Tuesday this week (August 15) calling for the immediate release of Dawit Isaak, the Eritrean-born Swedish journalist, who has been imprisoned without trial in Eritrea for more than 15 years. Arrested in September 2001 along with other journalists and politicians, he was released for two days in 2005 to see a doctor. Swedish MEPs welcomed the resolution which they said would help keep up the pressure on Eritrea for Dawit's release.

Mr. Tedros Seium, head of the migration pests control, said this week that army worm infestations in a number of areas, in Gash Barka, Anseba, Southern and Central regions, had

been 95% brought under control through the intervention of the Ministry of Agriculture and the local administrations.

Kenya

Following his victory in the presidential election last week, President Kenyatta appealed for the opposition to accept his olive branch and “work to grow Kenya together”. Opposition candidate Raila Odinga said on Wednesday that the opposition would take their complaints to the Supreme Court. **(See article)**

From September 1, Kenya will only be issuing electronic passports. Holders of current passports will continue to be able to use these for the next two years but after that they will become redundant. The e-passport will have a chip that will contain the holder’s details to match the information on the booklet. The Director of Immigration said applicants would be required to appear in person at the immigration offices for photographs and finger prints.

Kenya achieved 2nd place in the medals’ table of the IAAF World Championships in London and stood first of African countries, followed by South Africa (6 medals) and Ethiopia (5 medals). Kenya won 11 medals, 5 Gold, 2 Silver and 4 Bronze, taking gold medals in the men’s marathon, the men’s 3,000m steeplechase, and the men’s 1,500m as well as the women’s 5,000m and 1,500m.

Somalia

Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali ‘Abu Mansur’, a former leading member of Al-Shabaab, surrendered to Federal Government officials in the town of Huddur in Bakool region of Southwest State on Sunday (August 13). **(See article)**

The World Health Organization has declared Somalia free of polio for the third year running but warned the country to stay alert as it remains prone to polio virus importation. Sustained vaccination campaigns and commitment by state and non-state actors had kept the polio virus at bay since 2014. President Mohamed Abdullahi hailed the efforts of various stakeholders but also called for continued vaccination campaigns urging parents to ensure all their children are vaccinated. He said the absence of cases of polio was a testament to the commitment and hard work of the government and people of Somalia, the dedication of WHO staff and the effective support of many partners in this country.

The Chief of Defense Forces of the Uganda People’s Defense Forces, General David Muhoozi, arrived in Somalia Tuesday (August 15) on a routine official assessment mission. He met with Ugandan troops and inspected their bases. He also held discussions with AMISOM force commander, Lt. General Soubagleh, and AU Special Representative for Somalia and Head of AMISOM, Ambassador Madeira to discuss the current security situation and measures to support the peace process. Ambassador Madeira lauded Uganda’s contribution to AMISOM and said Ugandan troops had made a major contribution to Somalia’s stabilization.

AMISOM said on Friday (August 11) that it will launch a new phase of training for 1,000 newly recruited police officers to help enhance security in southern Somalia. 600 recruits will come from Belet Weyne and another 400 in Jowhar in HirShabelle state. AMISOM will continue to lobby for more equipment and renovate police stations to ensure that the goals of the Somali Police Force are achieved said the AMISOM Police Coordinator of Reforms, Restructuring and Development. The training involves practical work designed to deal with prevailing crimes in a post-conflict environment.

South Sudan

President Salva Kiir sent a congratulatory message welcoming the re-election of the Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta. He said, “Your victory is a testament of the trust that the Jubilee coalition has earned from the people of Kenya and their appreciation of the efforts made toward the development of your country during the last five years,” adding, “Under your leadership, Kenya has remained a key regional economic, peace and security partner [and] the people of South Sudan are particularly grateful for your contribution to restoring peace in our nation.”

President Kiir has again urged armed and political opposition groups to stop fighting and to prepare to take part in general elections at the end of the transitional period. **(See article)**

The UN announced this week that the number of refugees fleeing into Uganda to escape from violence in South Sudan had passed the one million mark. 85% of the refugees who have arrived in Uganda are women and children. It says another million have fled to Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Central African Republic.

The UNHCR says that the number of South Sudan refugees hosted by Ethiopia had risen to 382,322 at the end of July this year, with over 36,000 arriving since January. 65% of the arrivals in the last year have been children, nearly 20,000 of them unaccompanied.

An IGAD High Level Independent Experts Meeting on the Revitalization of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan was held in Bishoftu, Ethiopia this week for 22 South Sudanese experts from academia, and CSOs. The revitalization process is intended to ensure broad consultation with stakeholders and generate proposals to make the peace agreement viable. The meeting was attended by Festus Mogae, Chairperson of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, the Executive Secretary of IGAD and the IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan as well as representatives of the UN, the AU and the EU.

The head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), David Shearer, emphasized on Wednesday (August 16) that control of the airport and other key installations will be under the mandate of the government and not the Regional Protection Forces now being deployed to Juba. He said the RPF deployment would be based in Juba, allowing UNMISS forces to move out to hotspots that require more in the way of protection.

Sudan

President Omar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir welcomed Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn to Khartoum this week for a three-day official visit. **(See article)**

Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour met a visiting delegation from the U.S. State Department on Wednesday (August 16) to discuss ways to enhance bilateral relations. A statement said the meeting touched on the importance of strengthening relations between the two countries and joint cooperation on issues of common concern. In July, Washington postponed a decision on the permanent revocation of the 20-years economic embargo on Sudan until October.

The governor of South Darfur state announced the completion of all technical and administrative arrangements to launch a disarmament campaign on Tuesday (August 15). He has directed residents to hand over their weapons to the nearest police station or army unit. In the first phase, he said, the arms would be collected voluntarily but regular forces would conduct searches to collect the arms forcibly in a second phase. On a visit to Darfur's five states in April 2016, President al-Bashir said illegal weapons should be collected to put a stop to tribal clashes.

Prime Minister Hailemariam makes an official visit to the Republic of Sudan....

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn, at the invitation of President Field Marshal Omar Hassan Ahmad Al- Bashir, made an official working visit to the Sudan this week, August 15-18, to review the main topics of their bilateral, regional and multilateral agendas. The two leaders shared their views on international and regional issues of mutual concern and discussed the need to collaborate in response to global and regional challenges.

In their discussions, President Omar Al-Bashir, who extended cordial thanks and appreciation to Prime Minister Hailemariam for accepting his invitation to visit his second country, the Sudan, underlined the continuous improvements in Ethiopian and Sudanese people-to-people relations. Such gestures of mutual understanding led to a spirit of co-operation and co-ordination, consolidating the strategic partnership joining the two countries. The President, who praised the constructive and fruitful Parliamentary co-operation between the two countries, stressed the importance of reinforcing their links with continuous exchanges of visits, convening of business fora and the reactivation of the role of public diplomacy. He said their bilateral coordination served their unity of purpose and destiny, and noted that the joint mechanism allowed the two countries to move towards the completion of joint projects notably in railways, banking and economic integration.

Prime Minister Hailemariam who offered his sincere appreciation for the generous and gracious hospitality accorded to His delegation reaffirmed Ethiopia's commitment to the spirit of cooperation established over many years with the Sudan. He described the existing relationship between the two countries as exemplary and said their cooperation enabled the promotion of peace and security in the region. He commended the Government of the Sudan for the successful completion of the process of the National Dialogue and expressed Ethiopia's readiness to support it in any way possible. Prime Minister Hailemariam welcomed the partial lifting of sanctions by

the United States government and underlined Ethiopia's commitment to end any sanctions within the IGAD and the AU framework.

The Prime Minister raised issues concerning the Horn of Africa with special emphasis on peace and security situations. He noted that the region had attracted the attention of different actors and states following the Gulf crisis and stressed that the neutral position taken by both Ethiopia and Sudan to work to seek diplomatic solutions had received approbation from the international community.

Prime Minister Hailemariam welcomed and appreciated the cooperation, understanding and coordination that exist between the two countries regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. He commended the constructive role played by the Sudan in the tripartite process in implementing the recommended studies of the International Panel of Experts. He also emphasized the need to enhance cooperation on development of the water sector through the Ethio-Sudan Technical Advisory Committee (ESTAC). He said their two Ministers of Water Resources had shown exemplary activity in their consultations and cooperation.

In conclusion, the two leaders highlighted the historical and traditional people-to-people relations binding their two countries together. They underlined their determination to further strengthen cordial relations, relations they described as anchored in respect, trust and shared values. Emphasizing the important role that the various High Level, Steering and Technical committees play in meeting the aspirations of their two peoples, they agreed that the next High Level Committee meetings should take place as soon as possible. They renewed their commitment to work cooperatively through regional and multilateral institutions to support progress towards the prosperity, peace and security of the region.

The Ethiopian delegation also included Dr. Sileshi Bekele, Minister of Water, Irrigation and Electricity, Ambassador Berhane Gebre-Christos, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, and State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene. Sudan's Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour who held a joint press conference with Ethiopia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene, said Sudan's relationship with Ethiopia went far beyond water issues. Water, of course, was a national security issue for Sudan, Ethiopia and the rest of the Nile Basin countries and it was one of the most important issues under the Nile Basin Initiative, the Technical Committee of the Nile Basin and the water agreement between the three countries, Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, particularly with regard to the Renaissance Dam. He said the other bilateral meetings between ministers covered issues of security, water, economic cooperation and defense.

State Minister Hirut praised Sudan's role in managing of the water issue for the benefit of all, pointing to the existing coordination between the countries of the eastern Nile basin. She also emphasized that the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to promote the partnership between the two countries in all political, economic, security and defense fields. Discussions would be continued in meetings to be held during the first quarter of next year to consolidate joint cooperation, as well as work together to maintain peace and security in the region. She noted that the two countries shared a common concern for the volatile situation in Eritrea and the recent tensions with Djibouti.

During his visit in the Sudan, Prime Minister Hailemariam visited the Bash Pharma Veterinary Drugs Factory and Dal Dairy Farm. Ethiopia's Minister of Government Communication Affairs Office, Dr Negeri Lencho, who accompanied the Prime Minister, told reporters Ethiopia was keen to learn from the best practices of Sudan in the development and effective use of livestock resources. In addition to learning from best practices, Ethiopia was interested to attract Sudanese companies to invest in the sector, he said. Prime Minister Hailemariam also attended the graduation of Sudanese military personnel who had completed military science training on the second day of his visit, and on his final day, he delivered a lecture on the situation in the Horn of Africa at Friendship Hall in Khartoum.

...and reflects on the benefits of regional economic integration

The Prime Minister's speech on "The Horn of Africa: Possibilities of an Economic Community" focused on the potential and the challenges of the Horn of Africa and issues of regional integration and security with particular emphasis on bilateral relations between Ethiopia and the Republic of the Sudan.

The Prime Minister stressed the strategic place of the Horn of Africa, a center of major air and marine traffic routes linking people and commodity markets and adjoining the Red Sea and the Bab-al-Mandeb straits, linking Asia, the Middle East and Europe. It was also the source of the Nile. Its strategic importance explained why it had always been prone to external intervention. It has also attracted the attention and interest of new global powers, notably China, and emerging economies such as Turkey, India and the Gulf states. Indeed, he said, it was now getting even more attention because of the problems of migration, conflict and the global war on terror. He also pointed out the region was endowed with substantial natural resources, huge uncultivated arable lands, abundant water, huge numbers of livestock, minerals, oil and gas reserves, endemic wildlife and significant tourism potential. It included diverse ecosystems and varied climatic conditions, alternative energy resources, rich hinterland and marine resources as well as a long coastline and natural harbors. The economy was predominantly agrarian within which agriculture and livestock contributed more than half of the overall GDP. Primary agricultural commodities still constituted more than 60 percent of export earnings regionally.

At the same time, much remained to be done in terms of moving the subsistence levels of the regional economy to more productive areas: "We need", he said, "to move away from primary commodity dependence in our international trade. We need to transform our economies through value addition." Prime Minister Hailemariam said that with the surge in business transactions, involving foreign direct investment, tourism, remittances, growing passenger and freight and air and water transportation, the region was getting connected with the outside world. The Horn of Africa, home to 170 million people, offered a sizeable market, and had real potential to attract domestic and foreign investors. The export sector had begun to reflect significant growth, but, he underlined, diversification of export items and export destinations had not kept pace.

Certainly, the Prime Minister said, major economic and social development indicators in the region had shown significant improvements. The proportion of the region's population living below the poverty line had fallen significantly. There were promising economic developments

and overall improvement in governance. The region now had the potential for an increase of income, an emerging middle class, for self-reliance and improvement in the quality of life. Current trends in population growth with more than half of the region's population being young and productive offered a real demographic asset.

All this was very encouraging, but the Prime Minister also noted a number of challenges. He pointed out that the region was still portrayed as a region constantly involved in war and conflict, marred by protracted political strife, regional interstate rivalries and a center of global strategic power struggle. It was all-too-often classified as a region suffering from “under-development, recurrent drought and famine.” He stressed the increasing yet unemployed young population offered the potential for social unrest, which he said, could reverse the gains made. The numbers of people still living below the poverty line and widening income gaps could increase the vulnerability of communities, exposing them to extremist ideologies, cross-border crime and transnational threats. In increasing mobility arising from social networking and technological and transport developments, meant hundreds of thousands of people from the region were on the move. Thousands of young people had become victims of human trafficking, illegal mobility and smuggling along the highly dangerous routes to Southern Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. He said: “Throughout our lives we have heard about and witnessed stories of conflict, extreme poverty, inequality and injustice and seen our region labeled for its lack of democracy and governance. The irony is that we unwittingly reinforce stories that we have heard about the region and reconfirm assumptions. Now is the time to challenge these narratives and assumptions and reconfigure our image.”

He went on: “The assumptions that we have heard and read about have definitely played a part. We need to test these assumptions and perceptions: Is our region really poor? Have we harnessed our peoples' full potential? Are we getting the maximum out of it? Who exploited our abundant natural resources? Who benefited from the extractive sector while our people remain trapped in poverty? And how do we get out of this trap?” The answer to these fundamental questions, he said, can be found in the commitment and determination of the region's leaders to produce a safe, stable, peaceful and prosperous region that will in turn give way to the realization of accelerated regional integration. Currently, he noted, countries in the region had embarked on a journey for peace, moving away from conflict, looking to find mutual benefit rather than mistrust and suspicion, working for cooperation rather than confrontation, and regional economic integration than self-defeating competition.

The Prime Minister noted that regional integration had the potential for integrated infrastructural development in transportation, power, energy, water resources, ports and communications. It would provide for gradual harmonization of trade, customs and taxation policies and the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade; for food self-sufficiency; the growth of industry, science and technology; protection of the environment and natural resources; facilitation of free movement of persons, goods, services and capital within the region, and the right of establishment for residence of nationals as well as human and institutional capacity-building on a large scale. Look at the experience of the European Union and the North-East Asian Countries as well as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), he said.

In the Horn of Africa, he said, regional economic integration would provide countries with preferential agreements to link economies with the aim of encouraging peaceful relationships, raise living standards, alleviate and gradually eradicate poverty. It would also help countries successfully repel the menace of neo-liberal prescriptions and resist undue interference of external players. He pointed out that the region was already investing extensively in building transport corridors. These were instrumental in promoting economic efficiency, linking different economic centers through various modes of transport. Ethiopian Airlines, for instance, he said, now linked the region by air. He hoped that the economic contributions of the maritime sector would further increase and enhance the integration process for Ethiopia.

Prime Minister Hailemariam also considered the peace and security dimension of regional economic integration. Realization of security and stability, democracy and development, both within countries and across the wider region, was, he said, a necessary condition for the establishment of peaceful, stable, prosperous, connected and integrated Horn of Africa. He said: “Our activities should be anchored on promoting and pursuing regional diplomacy for achieving peace, stability, democratic governance, economic development and regional interconnectedness.” He stressed cooperation in a whole range of issues: the promotion of regional peace and stability, and in conflict prevention, management and resolution, in mediation, in conflict early warning and response mechanisms, in the fight against terrorism and extremism, in dealing with cross-border crimes and migration as well as supporting regional economic development. It was against this backdrop, he said, that the region had an important legacy in mediation and peace support operations, and fighting illegal transnational crimes. It was still playing a crucial role in mediation and peace processes and in peacekeeping, in Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and beyond.

In conclusion, Prime Minister Hailemariam also reflected on the excellent bilateral relations between Ethiopia and the Republic of Sudan and the various projects for regional integration to which they were committed in terms of interconnectedness through the ever-growing infrastructure schemes, roads, ports, electricity and telecommunications. A public transport service had recently been launched between the two capitals. Equally, he said: “We still need to further enhance and enrich our relations by delineating Special Economic Zones to integrate our private sector actors and our working class citizens.” Referring to the increasing volume of trade and enhanced co-operation in investment, the strong cooperation to fight organized crime, human trafficking, and illegal trade, he said Ethiopia and the Republic of the Sudan were also pillars of regional peace, security and stability.

Sudan and Ethiopia were tied closely together by a multitude of common interests and a shared destiny, said Prime Minister Hailemariam. Joining hands together to fight terrorism, extremism and radicalization, this went far beyond political contacts, deeply rooted as these were in history and people-to-people interactions. It amounted, he added, to a clear demonstration of the political will and readiness for meaningful integration.

President Kenyatta calls for unity following his re-election

Kenya's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) announced the result of the presidential voting on Saturday (August 12). It said: President Kenyatta received 8,203,290 votes (54.27%) and having attained at least 25% per cent of the vote in 35 counties, was elected to serve for a second five-year term as President; Mr. Odinga polled 6,762,224 votes (44.74%) and attained at least 25% of the vote in 29 counties.

In his acceptance speech on Saturday after being declared winner, President Kenyatta called on Mr. Odinga, his supporters and MPs elected under his coalition to accept his olive branch and "work to grow Kenya together." "As I said to my worthy opponents, especially my brother, the Right Honorable Raila Odinga I reach out to you; I reach out to all your supporters... I reach out to all who are elected on the Opposition benches. We shall work together, we shall partner together, we shall grow together, we shall develop this nation together. We are there, ready to dialogue, to discourse and engage so that we can build this nation together," he said. "As in any competition there will be winners and losers, I extend a hand of partnership."

President Kenyatta equally promised to serve all Kenyans without any bias, favor or discrimination. He said: "I want to thank the people of this great and wonderful Republic of Kenya for the confidence they have shown in me and my administration ... [we] pledge that we shall continue the work we have already started and re-dedicate ourselves even more towards serving this Nation and our people,." Mr. Kenyatta urged Kenyans to co-exist peacefully: "Please reach out to your neighbor; say this election is over. Let us be peaceful, share with one another. Politicians also come and go." He added, "I take this opportunity once again to call upon all Kenyans to exercise the same peace and tranquility we have seen before and during these elections. Your neighbor will always be your neighbor and we cannot fight over an election. Let us shun violence and let us refuse to be used for short term political gain that will cost our country pain and grief in the longer term."

Speaking again on Monday, President Kenyatta tried to draw a line under the election and its aftermath. "Kenyans have said that the election is behind them, the majority have returned to work," he said. He offered the "hand of peace" to Mr. Odinga, urging him to use legal means to express any grievances, including peaceful demonstrations if he chooses not to go to court. In fact, the presidential candidate of the opposition National Super Alliance, Raila Odinga, announced on Wednesday (August 16) that the Alliance was taking its complaints about the election to the Supreme Court, to contest President Uhuru Kenyatta's victory in the presidential election.

Regional leaders, including Uganda President Yoweri Museveni, Rwanda President Paul Kagame and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn have congratulated Mr. Kenyatta. Prime Minister Hailemariam congratulated Uhuru Kenyatta on his re-election for a second term as President of Kenya and the people of Kenya on the successful conclusion of their democratic exercise. He anticipated a bright future for the longstanding Ethiopian-Kenyan friendship, which, he said, was based on a firm foundation. IGAD's Executive Secretary, Ambassador Mahboub Maalim, also congratulated Mr. Kenyatta on his successful election for a second term as the President of the Republic of Kenya. Noting that democracy and good governance were critical elements to the enhancement of peace, security and stability in the region, Ambassador Maalim said, "As a Kenyan national and a citizen of this region, I am very proud in the peaceful, orderly

and transparent manner in which the 2017 general elections have been conducted in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Kenya.” The IGAD Secretariat called on all political parties and candidates to respect the will of the people of Kenya and to refrain from any act disruptive to the peace and stability of the country. It urged any objections to use the proper and legal channels provided by the Constitution of Kenya and the laws of Kenya.

Overall, the reports on the election process were positive, and observers said it was largely a free and fair election. More than 5,000 foreign observers, drawn from all major regional and international organizations observed the election. In the end, all of these missions, including the African Union, the East African Community, the Carter Center, the European Union (EU), the National Democratic Institute and the Commonwealth expressed confidence in the electoral process and praised it as broadly credible. The expensive electronic system designed to curb cheating, which many feared would not hold up, appears to largely have functioned well. However, Mr. Odinga insisted that the IT system of the electoral commission had been hacked and Kenya was witnessing the worst “voter theft” in its history. The electoral commission said that while there had been an attempt to hack its system, it had failed.

US President Donald Trump also strongly endorsed the election and appealed to the opposition to use the courts instead of turning to mass demonstrations. A White House statement called on all Kenyans to reject violence and resolve disputes in accordance with the Kenyan Constitution and the rule of law. The statement said: “The United States congratulates the people of Kenya on the successful conclusion of elections, and President Uhuru Kenyatta on his re-election. We commend the dedication of candidates, officials, and the public to upholding a peaceful, fair, and transparent contest, and we welcome the statements by international and domestic observer missions affirming the credibility of the election.”

The surrender of Sheikh Robow, last surviving founder member of Al-Shabaab

Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali ‘Abu Mansur’, a former leading member of Al-Shabaab, surrendered to Federal Government officials in the town of Huddur in Bakool region of Southwest State on Sunday (August 13). He was flown to Mogadishu the same day where he met with Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre at the Presidential Palace. Prime Minister Khayre praised Sheikh Robow for his “bold decision” to surrender to the government. Officials said Sheikh Robow would talk to the media about his defection from Al-Shabaab and his future plans after he had had a medical check-up. On Tuesday, meeting journalists, and reading from a prepared statement, said he had left Al-Shabaab five years and seven months previously and that he was not a member of the group. He said “I left Al-Shabaab because of misunderstanding, and I disagreed with their beliefs which do not serve Islamic religion, Somalia, and its citizens.” He said for the last five and a half years he lived in the Bakool region where he repelled several Al-Shabaab attacks. "I was living in Bakool and they attacked me there and they tried to kill me but I defended myself, by the grace of God I lived." During the press conference, Sheikh Robow, who urged others to leave Al-Shabaab, thanked the Federal Government of Somalia and its people for welcoming him to Mogadishu. "I thank the Federal Government of Somalia and its people for warmly welcoming me in Mogadishu; I hope that we will pursue a path of peace." He

promised that his talks with the government would be productive and fruitful. He did not answer any questions and was escorted away by security forces immediately after reading his statement.

Sheikh Mukhtar Robow is the highest level Al-Shabaab leader to sever his links with Al-Shabaab. He is the only survivor of Al-Shabaab's original founding group, all of whom received training in Afghanistan with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. He served as Al-Shabaab's spokesman and deputy military commander at various times. He was once a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. He was accused of being responsible for the planning and execution of deadly attacks that targeted Somali government and AMISOM troops. The US\$5 million bounty was removed by the US government in June at the request of the Somali government, a move that is likely to have encouraged his decision to turn to the government.

The Federal Government issued a statement on Tuesday this week thanking those who participated in facilitating "the current discussion with Sheikh Robow, in particular all segments of the society and our international friends and partners." The US Mission in Somalia also welcomed the defection of former Al-Shabaab deputy leader and commended the Somali government for facilitating this. In a statement on Monday, the US said it supported the efforts aimed at further defections and degrading of Al-Shabaab. It said, "The United States supports a Somali-led process of degrading Al-Shabaab's influence using a comprehensive approach, including through high-level defections, reconciliation, and improved governance and service delivery." Sheikh Robow's surrender was the culmination of months of talks with Somali government officials, with Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, the President of Southwest playing a significant role in encouraging his surrender. Sharif Hassan said on Wednesday this week that Sheikh Robow's surrender was a victory "for peace" in the Bay and Bakool regions in Southwest State. He hoped it would also serve as the end of Al-Shabaab in the region. He praised the Bakool authorities, Somalia's National Army, National Intelligence Agency, Ethiopian forces and the Southwest police force for their role in facilitating the surrender of Robow. Both Sharif Hassan and Sheikh Robow are members of the Rahenweyne clan.

Sheikh Robow first came to prominence as one of the leading figures at the training camp established by Al-Shabaab for the Islamic Courts Union in Mogadishu in 2005, together with Al-Shabaab's first Emir, Aden Hashi Ayro, killed in a US airstrike in May 2008, and Abdulahi Ma'allin Nahar, who died in Mogadishu in January 2007. Sheikh Robow was also one of the five Al-Shabaab members of the ICU Executive Council in 2006. After Aden Hashi Ayro's death, Ahmed Muktar Abu al-Zubayr 'Godane' took over as Emir, and disagreements between Godane and Sheikh Robow rapidly developed over Al-Shabaab's strategy particularly after Al-Shabaab's disastrous Ramadan offensive in August 2010 in which it lost hundreds of fighters, many from Sheikh Robow's own Rahenweyne clan. Godane had insisted that these should play a major role in the offensive. A year later Al-Shabaab was forced to withdraw from Mogadishu. Another area of disagreement was over Godane's treatment of Sheikh Hasan Dahir Aweys, who originally initiated the creation of Al-Shabaab in 2005. Sheikh Aweys was head of Hizbul Islam when it merged Al-Shabaab in 2010 but his treatment by Godane subsequently forced Sheikh Aweys to surrender to the Federal Government in June 2013.

While Sheikh Robow's original disagreements with Godane were largely over Al-Shabaab's strategy and clan issues, they later focused on Godane's efforts to make himself undisputed

leader of Al-Shabaab, with a purge of all possible rivals and the killing of his critics. He removed his critics from Al-Shabaab's Consultative Council and then dismissed the Council. In 2013, Sheikh Robow and others, including other founding Al-Shabaab members, Ibrahim Afghani and Mu'allim Burhan, went public, criticizing Godane's leadership, his treatment of foreign fighters, and the violence he encouraged in suppressing dissent both in the organization and in areas under Al-Shabaab's control. In June 2013, Godane captured and executed two leading founder members of Al-Shabaab, Ibrahim Afghani and Mu'allim Burhan.

Sheikh Aweys accused Godane of authoritarianism, hijacking the group to expand his powers and blindly disregarding other al-Shabaab leaders' opinions. He said: "We have been weakened militarily and have retreated from large cities and towns and our forces are still rebellious and breaking away into different factions. All of this is because the leader of the group has unilaterally made fateful decisions." He went on: "We disagree among ourselves, sometimes fight and have ideological differences that have confused our Mohammedan principles with Machiavellian methods and wrong policies that this leader is following based on killing, wounding, starving and throwing [foreign fighters] in secret prisons." Sheikh Aweys said that under the leadership of Godane Al-Shabaab had resorted to shedding the blood of innocent Muslims, hunting down opponents and critics, and assassinating prominent Somali clerics, killing of innocent civilians, executing its own members and targeting other al-Shabaab leaders. He added: "I declare that we will renounce the authority of a tyrant and dictatorial emir who makes self-serving decisions that go against Islamic *sharia*".

Sheikh Aweys surrendered to the government and remained under house arrest in Mogadishu, while Sheikh Robow retired to his home area in Bakool region and went into hiding. Although Godane was killed in a US airstrike in September 2014, he was succeeded by Abu Ubayda Ahmad Omar, a protégée of Godane, who continued Godane's policies, preventing Sheikh Robow from returning to Al-Shabaab even had he wanted to do so. Abu Ubayda had also been Al-Shabaab's governor of Bay and Bakool regions previously and been critical of what he claimed was Sheikh Robow's clan links. He also launched efforts to try to find and kill Sheikh Robow who after parting company with Al-Shabaab, retained the support of hundreds of fighters who helped him resist all Al-Shabaab's efforts to capture him in the last two or three years.

In the last few months Al-Shabaab has continued to be affected by disagreements between potential supporters of ISIS and the leadership which remains faithful to its previous links with Al Qaeda. These have broken out into actual conflict on a number of occasions. This, in turn, has led to a number of fighters surrendering to the government. Al-Shabaab has lost a great deal of territorial control in the last few years, but it does retain several thousand fighters and capacity to launch bombings against both military and civilian targets in Mogadishu and other towns.

AMISOM has made no secret of the fact that it is planning new offensives against Al-Shabaab as part of its preparations to build up the security structures of the Somali government and the Somali National Armed Forces in preparation for AMISOM's draw down, due to being next year. US President Donald Trump has also approved expanded operations, including airstrikes by US forces. The surrender of such a prominent figure in Al-Shabaab as Sheikh Mukhtar Robow provides the government of President Mohamed Abdullahi with a major milestone in his stated intention to defeat Al-Shabaab within two years.

South Sudan's President Kiir urges opposition to prepare for elections

President Kiir has once again urged hold-out armed and political opposition groups to stop fighting and to prepare themselves to take part in the general elections at the end of the transitional period. The President was meeting with the traditional leaders of two communities and he took the opportunity to call on all South Sudanese to embrace peace, reconciliation, forgiveness and unity. He stressed it was because of these needs that he had launched the national dialogue process. He said "We are now calling on the people who are still advocating for war to denounce violence, stop fighting and come back to participate in the dialogue process so that people go for elections after the end of the transitional period. Elections will give people an opportunity to make their own choices."

The previous day addressing another group of traditional leaders, he underlined that peace and political stability should be achieved through two tracks. He said he, and First Vice President Taban Deng Gai, had developed two ways to end the conflict and return the country to peace. He said the national dialogue was one way to end the war; the other was the reconciliation and reunification of the SPLM leaders, with the IGAD regional revitalization Forum "providing a supplementary role." The President urged the armed opposition groups to stop fighting and join the national dialogue, saying the country and the people deserve peace, security and stability in order to rebuild their lives after years of destruction. He said: "When you look at the current situation and look at the cause of the liberation struggle, you wonder why people should continue to suffer after fighting to gain independence. These are the questions we get and this is the reason why this senseless war should stop. And indeed it must stop."

The President stressed that his government was implementing the peace agreement and the current situation would be overcome. He said, "The formation of the government has been completed and the cooperation of the ministers in the government has been encouraging. We want this spirit of cooperation to extend to all the states so that peace and harmony are realized at the grassroots level." He urged the tribal leaders to promote peace among their communities and to brief their people about the government efforts to end the war and bring stability in the whole country. He called on them to help the state government in sensitization and mobilization efforts to enlighten the people about the importance of peaceful dialogue. The President insisted: "As the Transitional Government of National Unity, we have decided that stopping this war is the priority and we have clear plans to stop it." A South Sudanese presidential adviser this week reportedly suggested that mandate of the Transitional Government of National Unity might have to be extended as some key provisions within the 2015 peace agreement were yet to be fully implemented. Tor Deng Mawien, Presidential Adviser on Decentralization and Intergovernmental Affairs said the government wanted full implementation of the peace agreement so elections could take place but "the way the implementation processes have been conducted, gives you an impression that the transitional period could end without fully implementing key provisions" .IGAD, of course, had underlined that the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan remains the only viable solution to the conflict in the country.

Meanwhile, on Tuesday this week, Eugene Nindorera, Director, UNMISS Human Rights Division at United Nations Development Program, at the end of a five-day visit to Wau state, said that lack of accountability for the various crimes perpetrated during the ongoing conflict in South Sudan remained one of the biggest challenges the country faced. He noted that the UN Human Rights Division was collecting information about alleged human rights violations perpetrated by government forces and aligned armed groups in Wau town in April. UNMISS confirmed last week that the protection of civilians' site adjacent to the UNMISS base in Wau had registered some 17,000 new arrivals, mainly women and children, while around 5,000 people had also sought sanctuary inside the compound of the Wau Catholic Church. The influx of newly displaced people has been leading to over-crowding and pressure on humanitarian services and the provision of food and water.

Yemen's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs visits Ethiopia

Yemen's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Abdulmalik Abduljalil Al-Mekhlafi, headed a delegation on a visit to Ethiopia this week. The delegation arrived in Addis Ababa on Monday (August 14) for a three-day visit. It was welcomed by State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene and in discussions, the State Minister mentioned the long-standing ties between Ethiopia and Yemen, which she said, spread through religious, economic and political engagement as well as age-old people-to-people ties. She added the governments of the two countries have had a long-standing partnership and a number of venues for cooperation, including the Sana'a Forum. The State Minister said the Government of Ethiopia welcomed the efforts being made to bring peace and stability to the people of the Republic of Yemen. Mrs. Hirut took the opportunity to thank the Government of the Republic of Yemen for the orderly repatriation of Ethiopian nationals from Yemen.

The Yemen Deputy Prime Minister noted the historic relationship between the peoples and governments of the two countries. He briefed the State Minister on the current situation in Yemen and the efforts being made to bring peace and stability through a national dialogue, which was bringing together all stakeholders, including women and the youth. He also commended the Government of Ethiopia for the role it played in the UN Security Council and the support it extended to Yemeni refugees who settled in Ethiopia. He emphasized that his country was keen to draw lessons from Ethiopia's federal system of governance.

Mr. Abdulmalik Abduljalil met with Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn and briefed the Prime Minister on the current situations in Yemen. According to Office of the Prime Minister, the Yemeni Deputy Prime Minister also sought Ethiopia's all-round support to help bring peace to his country and to the region in general. He said Yemen wanted to learn from Ethiopia's federal system to provide a sustainable solution to its problems.

Prime Minister Hailemariam, who also underlined the historic people-to-people, cultural and religious ties between the two countries, said Ethiopia would do all it can to bring peace to Yemen as the problems there were affecting all the people in the region, including Ethiopia,

directly and indirectly. Equally, as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Ethiopia had the responsibility to voice its concerns and positively contribute to maintain peace and find ways to bring a peaceful end to conflicts. The Prime Minister said that once the current crisis in Yemen was resolved, the two countries needed to work together to transform the livelihoods of the people in both countries.

In November 2011, an uprising forced long-time President Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand over power to his deputy, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Al-Hadi, his deputy who was elected as president the next year. President Hadi was faced with a variety of problems, including attacks by the extremist Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula, a separatist movement in the south, the continuing loyalty of many military officers to Mr Saleh, as well as corruption, unemployment and food insecurity. The Houthis from the north seized control of the capital Sana'a in January 2015, forcing the internationally recognized government of President Hadi to flee to the southern port city of Aden and then abroad. As the Houthis and forces supportive of Mr Saleh attempted to take control of the entire country, Yemen's neighbours, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates launched their Coalition to restore President Hadi.

The fighting has yet to achieve the desired result. Thousands of civilians have been killed and injured, and with just under half of the population under the age of 18, children constituted a third of all civilian deaths during the first two years of the conflict. Much of the civilian infrastructure has been destroyed and restrictions on food and fuel imports have pushed Yemen to the brink of famine. The UN says some 17 million people are food insecure and 6.8 million severely food insecure. About 3.3 million children and pregnant or breast-feeding women are acutely malnourished, including 462,000 children under five who face severe acute malnutrition. 2 million Yemenis are internally displaced and 180,000 others have fled the country. This year, cholera has become a major concern.

According to the World Health Organization, the total number of suspected cholera cases in Yemen has reached half a million mark, and at least 2000 people have died since the outbreak began to spread rapidly at the end of April. Since early July, the spread of cholera has slowed significantly in some areas but the disease is still spreading fast in more recently affected districts, which are recording large numbers of cases. Yemen's cholera epidemic, currently the largest in the world, has spread rapidly due to the deteriorating hygiene and sanitation conditions and disruptions to the water supply across the country. Millions of people are cut off from clean water, and waste collection has ceased in major cities. WHO says the country's collapsing health system is struggling to cope. More than half of all health facilities have been closed due to damage, destruction or lack of funds. There are persistent shortages in medicines and supplies and 30 000 critical health workers have not been paid salaries in nearly a year.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said recently after a visit: "Yemen's health workers are operating in impossible conditions. Thousands of people are sick, but there are not enough hospitals, not enough medicines, not enough clean water." WHO and partners are working around the clock to set up cholera treatment clinics, rehabilitate health facilities, deliver medical supplies, and support the national health response effort. Dr. Tedros said, "To save lives in Yemen today we must support the health system, especially the health workers. And we urge the Yemeni authorities, and all those in the region and elsewhere who can play a role, to find a

political solution to this conflict that has already caused so much suffering. The people of Yemen cannot bear it much longer. They need peace to rebuild their lives and their country".

Ethiopia's Humanitarian situation and response in drought affected areas

According to the Government of Ethiopia and Humanitarian partner joint mid-year review of the Humanitarian Requirements Document (HRD) for 2017 as of 8 August 2017, Southern and eastern Ethiopia continue to battle the impact of the Indian Ocean Dipole-induced drought, exacerbated by disease outbreaks, large scale loss of livelihood assets and displacement. The situation has been further compounded by below average spring *belg* rains, the third consecutive poor/failed rains in the southern drought belt. The national hotspot classification was updated in early July, with a slight increase in the number of priority *woredas* from 454 to 461.

Overall, the assessment found that poor *belg* rains affected household food security in the *belg*-dependent *woredas* of Oromia and SNNP regions. In pastoralist areas of Somali region and pocket areas of other spring rain dependent areas, there was also an increase of livestock mortality and deteriorating body condition of remaining animals, normally a key source of nutrition and livelihood in these areas.

This means there are at least 8.5m people who will be in need of basic food assistance through the year, up from 7.8 million in April. Some US\$ 487.7m is urgently required for the multi-sector response for the remainder of the year. Separately, some 4 million people involved in the Public Works element of the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) will also require sustained assistance to the end of 2017, at a cost of \$300m. A well coordinated and managed Government-led humanitarian response is already underway across affected areas of the country. International donors have contributed close to US\$800 million while the Government of Ethiopia has of far added another US\$147million. The combined Government and partners' efforts have already helped save countless people's lives and averted a major humanitarian catastrophe with the humanitarian response focused on support to major relief pipelines, for food, emergency nutrition and health supplies and technical capacity support to national service providers in the areas of greatest need.

Meanwhile, at the weekend, the Food and Agricultural Organization, which is urgently appealing for US\$20 million between August and December, underlined concerns over the pastoral areas. In a statement on Saturday (August 12), it stressed that supporting pastoralists and preventing further livestock losses was crucial. Drought-hit pastoralists faced reduced milk production, rising malnutrition, and had limited income-earning capacity and severely constrained access to food. For livestock-dependent families, animals mean the difference between life and death, especially for children, pregnant and nursing mothers, for whom milk is a crucial source of nutrition. So, FAO said, with large scale animal losses, it is focusing on providing emergency livestock support to the most vulnerable pastoralist communities through animal vaccination and treatment, supplementary feed and water, rehabilitating water points, and supporting fodder and

feed production. This is particularly important, FAO said, between now and October, when rains are due, to prevent further loss of animals and begin the recovery process. It was providing supplementary feed and water for livestock, while simultaneously supporting fodder production, to protect core breeding animals and enable drought-hit families to rebuild their livelihoods as well as supporting destocking and cash-for-work programs to provide cash for families.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS) also issued a report on the status of recent seasonal rains last Saturday. It said that during the past month, rainfall had been persistently heavy and well above average over eastern Sudan, western Ethiopia, and northeastern South Sudan. This was favorable for agricultural, but also threatened flooding in flood-prone regions of western and eastern lowlands of Sudan. The average to above-average rainfall extended into Yemen, southern Eritrea, northern South Sudan, Uganda, and western Kenya. However, rainfall was below average in the Afar and parts of Tigray Regional States of northern Ethiopia, as well as in parts of southwestern South Sudan and northern Uganda. The eastern Horn remained seasonally dry and vegetation conditions remain below average in much of the eastern Horn as well as eastern Equatoria in South Sudan. FEWS said estimates from satellite imagery suggested water resources were continuing to decline at surface water points in the Mendera triangle, the predominantly pastoral areas of eastern and southern Ethiopia, northeastern Kenya, and southern Somalia. This is expected to continue until the Deyr/Hageya short rains, which normally starts in October.

FEWS notes that in Ethiopia, the June-September seasonal rains are currently well established across the country. The seasonal rains began on time in Afar and Tigray, though at below-average levels. Cropping conditions are generally favorable in most western areas and central areas due to the good performance of seasonal rainfall since the start of the season. It warned, however, that persistently above-average rainfall over western Ethiopia highlands could result in flooding during coming weeks. Equally, continued rains could reduce the impact of Fall Armyworm. Rainfall for the coming weeks is forecast to be moderate to heavy, helping to erase rainfall deficits in some northern areas. For Somalia, FEWS says pasture and water resources have continued to decline in much of central and northern Somalia, though southern regions have benefited from localized coastal rains for the past month. In Kenya, the delayed onset of seasonal rainfall, coupled with long dry spells and below-average rainfall is resulting in below-average production prospects in large parts of the eastern, central, and southern Rift Valley.

AU Finance Ministers agree a roadmap for progress on AU funding

AU Finance Ministers met last week, Monday to Wednesday (August 7-9) in Addis Ababa to assess the progress made on the decision of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government to ensure the progressive financial autonomy of the African Union by 2020 and to consider ways to accelerate implementation the decisions on this matter, taken at Johannesburg (2015) and Kigali (2016) and Addis Ababa (2107) After a plenary session on Wednesday (August 9), the Ministers issued a communiqué committing them to a road map to make further progress. The communiqué recalled that at Johannesburg in 2015 it had been decided that Member States would assume responsibility for 100% of the operating budget, 75% of the program budget, and

25% of the peace support operations budget, and also strengthen budget oversight of African Union funds. It underlined that the Ministers fully understood the importance of their meeting in light of continental and global economic developments. They agreed on the urgency to accelerate these decisions.

Meeting the financing targets and timelines established by the African Union in 2015 was, the communiqué said, a strategic imperative for Africa. The Ministers fully agreed on the importance of moving in the direction of reducing the dependence of the African Union. They agreed on ways to “faithfully, effectively and speedily implement the three Assembly Decisions while bearing in mind the varying national legislative procedures, constitutional obligations, regional and international trade agreements on the one hand, and the differences in structure, nature and levels of economies on the other hand.” The Ministers agreed to keep under review the mechanisms to consolidate the financial management of the African Union to ensure rigor in priority setting, budget choices, and division of labor, accountability, transparency and value for money. In this respect, they said they would agree on a “set of ‘golden rules’ to guide the budget of the Commissioner and its Organs.

The Finance Ministers also took note of the expansion of the Committee of Finance Ministers (the F10) to include the Kingdom of Morocco and the Federal Republic of Nigeria, following a Decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government at the 29th in Addis Ababa in July this year as well as the request of the Republic of Cameroon to be part of the F10. The F10 should now be referred to as the F10+, and the Ministers have recommended that the number of F10+ members should be expanded to 15. The original ten members of the F10 were Algeria and Egypt – representing the Northern Region; Kenya and Ethiopia for the Eastern Region; Chad and Congo Brazzaville for the Central Region; Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire, representing the Western Region; and South Africa and Botswana for Southern Africa.

The F10 first met in September last year. They have since adopted their Terms of Reference and the Guidelines for the implementation of the AU levy and established a technical Committee of experts, drawing one representative from the ministries of Finance to assist them with the technical aspects of the process. Their duties of the FG10 are to review and evaluate the annual budget of African Union before submission to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union; to propose implementation mechanisms for financing the African Union Import Levy; define a roadmap for the implementation of the Decision; review the status of implementation and compliance and adopt policies for enhancement; and to propose various resource mobilization strategies for the African Union.

In their sessions last week, the Ministers agreed on the necessary processes to enable them to fully engage, through the F10, with the entire budget process of African Union, taking into account the role of existing Policy Organs with existing budget oversight functions. They said they had put forward a set of proposals to inform the forthcoming revision of the Scale of Assessment in line with the principles of equitable burden sharing, ability to pay, solidarity, equity, ownership and sustainability. The Ministers also proposed that a new and more robust sanctions and incentives regime should be adopted at the forthcoming January 2018 AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in order to encourage Member States to effectively comply and pay their contributions on time. In this connection, the Ministers welcomed the

F10's recommendation that after funding the budget of the African Union and the Peace Fund, Member States should retain any balance of the proceeds from the 0.2% levy on eligible imports for their own development projects.

The Ministers expressed their sincere thanks to the Committee of Ten (F10) and their experts for the work they done so far. They instructed the Commission, in the context of the AU's Institutional Reform process, to facilitate their mandate, in particular, deepening and consolidating the work around the budget, financial reforms and oversight. They also commended the AU High Representative on AU Financing the Union and the Peace Fund, Dr. Donald Kaberuka, for his tireless efforts. They asked him to further pursue his support to Member States as well as his advocacy at the continental and global level for both the Peace Fund and the overall financing of the Union. They requested the AU Commission to provide all necessary support for this purpose.

In conclusion, the Ministers proposed that the AU Commission, through its Reform Implementation Unit, should take these suggestions forward. They should keep the Finance Ministers regularly briefed on a bi-annual basis prior to the Ordinary Sessions of the AU Assembly. They reaffirmed their commitment to working closely with the AU Commission, the Permanent Representatives Committee and the Executive Council in the implementation of the decisions of the Assembly. They stressed they were determined to make progress on this matter and said they would have reconvene to review progress immediately before the January 2018 AU Assembly of Heads of States and Government.

Religious Freedom: Eritrea remains a 'Country of Particular Concern'

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson introduced the latest report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) on Tuesday this week (August 15). He was critical of a number of countries which did not uphold principles of religious freedom in 2016 and categorized ISIS as carrying out "genocide" against religious minorities. One of the 16 countries that fall into the category of Countries of Particular Concern (Tier 1) is Eritrea, first given this designation in 2004 and ,most recently, again last year.

The report's introduction emphasizes that religious freedom in the world remained under "serious and sustained assault" during the previous year, quoting the plight of new and longstanding prisoners of conscience, a dramatic rise in the numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, continued acts of bigotry against Jews and Muslims in Europe, and other abuses. It emphasized that the incarceration of prisoners of conscience, remained "astonishingly widespread, occurring in country after country, and underscores the impact of the laws and policies that led to their imprisonment." It said there were between 1,200 to 3,000 people imprisoned on religious grounds in Eritrea and reports in the last year of new arrests. It said religious prisoners were routinely sent to the harshest prisons and noted the barbaric treatment of the government-deposed Eritrean Orthodox Patriarch Antonios who had protested government interference in church's affairs. It pointed out that the "Eritrea's dictatorship controls the internal affairs of the state-registered Orthodox Christian and Muslim communities and also bans public

activities of non-registered groups. Religious freedom conditions are grave especially for Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses." The report also underlined: "In addition to the significant number of people imprisoned on the basis of religion, the horrific global refugee crisis also worsened during the past year, with 59.5 million people worldwide displaced forcibly as of the end of 2014, the highest on record." In this connection, the report noted that Eritreans, "seeking refuge from a dictatorial government...also fled by the thousands each month, with an estimated half a million escaping one of the world's most closed nations."

In its 'key findings', at the beginning of the country report on Eritrea, the Commission on International Religious Freedom notes: "The Eritrean government continues to repress religious freedom for unregistered, and in some cases registered, religious communities. Systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations include torture or other ill treatment of religious prisoners, arbitrary arrests and detentions without charges, a prolonged ban on public religious activities of unregistered religious groups, and interference in the internal affairs of registered religious groups. The situation is particularly grave for unregistered Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses. The government dominates the internal affairs of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Eritrea, the country's largest Christian denomination, and suppresses the religious activities of Muslims, especially those opposed to the government-appointed head of the Muslim community." It, therefore, concludes: "USCIRF again finds in 2017 that Eritrea merits designation as a "country of particular concern," under the International Religious Freedom Act.

The report goes into detail of the way the Eritrean government strictly controls the activities of the four state-registered and recognized religious communities: the Orthodox Church of Eritrea; Sunni Islam; the Roman Catholic Church; and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. They are required to submit activity reports every six months, not allowed to accept funds from coreligionists abroad and have had religious leaders appointed by the government officials. Both the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and the Mufti of the Eritrean Muslim community, as well as many other lower-level religious officials, are government appointees. Government officials also monitor religious services. The report does note that the Catholic Church is allowed a little more freedom, including funding from the Papacy, some travel for religious purposes and training in Italy and exemptions for seminary students and nuns from national service. Since 2002, all other religious groups have been required to register if they wanted to operate; they were also told they would have to register annually with the Office of Religious Affairs. In fact, no others have been registered. Four did submit applications in 2002, the Baha'i community, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, and the Seventh-day Adventists, but they are still waiting for any response.

The Commission's report notes that people detained on account of religious activities are not formally charged, not permitted access to legal counsel, not accorded due process of law, nor allowed family visits. Prisoners are not permitted to pray aloud, preach, to have religious books and, if released, are frequently forced to sign statements that they will no longer gather to worship. The Commission also said it received confirmation of dozens more arrests in 2016 of followers of these faiths for participating in clandestine prayer meetings and religious ceremonies. Jehovah's Witnesses have been one of the groups most severely affected, having had their citizenship revoked by President Isaias and barred from obtaining government-issued

identity and travel documents, government jobs, or business licenses and even in some cases being denied water and gas services. The Commission lists the names of 54 Jehovah's Witnesses currently known to be detained, three for over 22 years.

The Commission's Country Report on Eritrea also offers a comprehensive list of recommendations to improve the situation for religious and others imprisoned in Eritrea. These include a call for the US government to continue to designate Eritrea as a Country of Particular Concern and to maintain the existing, ongoing arms embargo, and for the US to continue to use bilateral and multilateral diplomatic channels to urge the government of Eritrea to: release unconditionally and immediately detainees held on account of their religious activities, including Orthodox Patriarch Antonios; to end religious persecution of unregistered religious communities and register such groups; to grant full citizenship rights to Jehovah's Witnesses and provide for conscientious objection by law; to bring national laws and regulations, and conditions and treatment of prisoners into compliance with international human rights standards. It calls for the Eritrean government to allow unrestricted visits by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and the International Red Cross. It also wants to see any US development assistance directed to programs that contribute directly to democracy, religious freedom, human rights, and the rule of law; and for the US to support renewal of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Eritrea, encourage efforts to resolve the current impasse between Eritrea and Ethiopia regarding implementation of the boundary demarcation, encourage unofficial dialogue with Eritrean authorities on religious freedom by promoting visits by U.S. and international religious leaders, and expand the use of educational and cultural exchanges.