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News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

The African Union Peace and Security Council was briefed on Thursday last week (October 5), on the activities of the African Members of the United Nations Security Council. The African Members are currently Ethiopia, Egypt and Senegal, A3. (See **article**)

The African Union Commission and the Government of Germany have agreed to strengthen cooperation in areas of infrastructure development, capacity building, peace and security. These are expected to support AU's theme of the year "Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in the youth". At a press conference on Friday last week, the two sides agreed to foster cooperation during their annual bilateral consultation. The German Chancellor's Personal Representative for Africa, Gunter Nooke affirmed Germany's commitment and said "We have agreed with AU and NEPAD to jointly do more in the areas of training, economic growth and digitalization".

Ethiopia took over the chair of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) this week on Thursday (October 12) at the end of the 25th Nile Council of Ministers of Water Affairs (Nile-COM) held in Kampala, Ethiopia will chair both the Nile Council of Ministers and the Nile Technical Advisory Committee of the NBI for the next one year. Nile-COM is the highest decision-making body of the Nile Basin Initiative. The meeting was attended by Ministers in charge of Water Affairs from Burundi, Sudan and Uganda. Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania sent representatives.

Ministers and Heads of Delegation from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) group, currently chaired by Ethiopia, met in Addis Ababa on Thursday last week (October 5) in a High-level Ministerial Meeting to discuss their priorities in preparation for the next session of the Conference of Parties on Climate Change (COP23) in Bonn in November. (See **article**)

A two-day meeting of the Global Environment Facility, the 2nd official meeting for the 7th Refurbishment of the Facility took place in Addis Ababa last week. GEF

funding for projects is contributed by donor countries and is replenished every four years. The GEF – 7 will cover the years 2018-2022. **(See article)**

Twenty defense attachés and diplomats from a number of different African countries have been in Addis Ababa this week on a five-day course at the 6th Orientation Course for Defense Officials at Ethiopia's Peace Support Training Centre in Addis Ababa. The course aims to enhance capacity for multilateral and international cooperation. **(See article)**

Former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, says Africa is witnessing a quiet revolution in agriculture that holds out real hope of banishing poverty and hunger. While African agriculture and smallholder farmers are too often been forgotten, they remain the backbone of Africa's economy, and agriculture must be at the heart of any strategy to end poverty and hunger by 2030. **(See article)**

Fifteen member states in the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) have resolved to abolish roaming charges on mobile calls because the practice contradicts the spirit of regional integration and proved costly for business. Countries that have approved the move are: Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Djibouti, Burundi, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Swaziland, Libya, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Ethiopia

President Mulatu Teshome opened the new session of Parliament on Monday, addressing a joint session of the House of People's Representatives and House of Federation. The President outlined the government's plans and intentions for the 2010 Ethiopian fiscal year (2017/18), and presented details of the socio-economic and political directions that the country will follow. **(See article)**

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn held talks with a US delegation led by Senator James M. Inhofe (Oklahoma) on Thursday (October 12). The meeting was also attended by Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen, Foreign Minister, Dr Workneh Gebeyehu and other high-level officials. They exchanged views on ways to expand ties between the governments of Ethiopia and the US and also discussed issues of regional peace and security.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn met and held discussions with Ambassador Aboubakr Hefny, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Ethiopia this week. The Prime Minister reaffirmed Ethiopia's keenness to strengthen its relations with Egypt and underlined the importance of lifting political will and good intentions to tangible results. Their talks covered ways to enhance cooperation in trade, investment, information technology, health, pharmaceutical industries and prospects of cooperation in industrial zones and agricultural investment, as well as implementation of previously signed agreements.

A delegation including Culture and Tourism Minister Dr. Hirut Woldemariam, Livestock and Fisheries Minister Professor Fekadu Beyene and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mrs. Hirut Zemene attended the first Ethiopian/Botswana Joint Ministerial Commission meeting in Gaborone this week (October 9-12). **(See article)**

Ethiopia's central bank devalued the Ethiopian birr by 15 % as of Wednesday (October 1), its first such move in seven years. The Vice-governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia said, "The devaluation was made to prop up exports, which have stagnated the last five years owing to the birr's strong value against major currencies." Export earnings last fiscal year were US\$2.9 billion as against a target of US\$4 billion. The Bank also announced it was raising the main interest rate to 7%, up from 5% to stimulate savings as well mitigate the inflationary pressure that could arise from the devaluation.

In its 2015/16 Interim Poverty Analysis Report launched on Tuesday (October 10), the National Planning Commission said per capita poverty has declined from 29.6% in 2011 to 23.5% in 2016. In rural areas the figures fell from decline 30.4% to 25.6%; in urban areas it decreased from 25.7% to 14.8%. Getachew Adem, State Minister of the National Planning Commission, said the substantial decline in poverty was attributable to the pro-poor programs implemented in recent years. The report also noted that per capita GDP had increased from about US\$142 in 2003/04 to about US\$794 in 2016.

The Fourth National Housing and Population Census, originally scheduled to be conducted on November 19, has been postponed until February next year. The census is going to be carried out using digital technology and time for preparation is essential. The necessary equipment is being supplied by two IT equipments companies, Lenovo and Huawei.

The International Office for Migration last week joined the Ethiopian Somali Regional Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau in partnership with the Durable Solutions Working Group, to endorse the Durable Solutions Strategy for the Somali Region, the culmination of three years' work. This provides a framework that seeks to solve the widespread displacement of over 570,000 people in Ethiopia's Somali Region. It is a first step to move beyond immediate humanitarian needs and address long term needs of the displaced in their search for self-sufficiency.

A security meeting of representatives of the Amhara Regional State and Sudan's Gedaref State in Bahr Dar has agreed to form "a high committee composed of security forces commanders and border officials from the two sides to assess the scale of violations on agricultural land," along the border. A statement on Monday (October 9) stressed the need to fight the different forms of smuggling, human trafficking, weapons, ammunition and drugs, and to fight outlaw gangs, and to ensure the establishment of security and stability and to make the border areas safe for mutual benefits.

The UNHCR has named Ethiopian singer and songwriter Betty G, as Ethiopia's high profile supporter of the UNHCR. Betty G, one of Africa's fastest rising music stars, rose to stardom following the release of her debut album "Manew Fitsum" in 2015. Accepting her nomination, the singer said she was happy to work alongside UNHCR in raising the voices of refugees in Ethiopia and beyond.

Eritrea

President Isaias in an interview to his local media at the end of last week, Saturday (October 7), said there was no reason for concern regarding this year's low rainfall in July or in terms of harvest failure. **(See article)**

Essel Group, an Indian multinational conglomerate, has signed up the Colonnade Mining Group as drilling contractor for the Bada potash project in the northern Danakil region. Drilling is expected to start this month. Essel said it expected Bada to have significant potash resources and reserves and it would benefit from a favorable geographical location and proximity to both transport infrastructure and key end users.

Kenya

Opposition leader, Mr. Odinga announced on Tuesday (October 10) that he and his running mate Kalonzo Musyoka, would not take part in the repeat election scheduled for October 26: the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission announced the following day that all the eight candidates involved in the annulled presidential election would be included in the fresh polls scheduled for October 26. **(See article)**

President Kenyatta said on Saturday (October 7) that he would do everything in his power to protect lives and property and "ensure there is peace and Kenyans can elect their president in a free, fair and credible process." He was speaking at a prayer rally organized by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops who had expressed concern that the stance taken by both the Jubilee and NASA parties might lead to political violence. Archbishop Okoth of Kisumu said "Political leaders must embrace peace, dialogue, mutuality and conviviality for the country to move forward together as a family."

The United Nations World Food Program says it will have to cut food rations for refugees currently living in Kenyan camps by 30% due to insufficient funds. There are an estimated 400,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan and Somalia in the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps. This comes only six months after it resumed full rations for the refugees.

Somalia

President Mohamed Abdullahi telephoned President Abdul Fattah El-Sisi of Egypt on Monday (October 9) to thank Egypt for its support to assist Somalia in achieving stability. President El-Sisi said Egypt was keen to activate aspects of bilateral cooperation and confirmed Egypt would continue to provide technical support.

Following the three-day leaders' conference in Jubaland President Mohamed Abdullahi called for unity and cooperation with the regional states for prosperity of the peoples of Somalia on Thursday (October 12) **(See article)**.

Information Minister Abdurahman Omar Osman said on Thursday (October 12) that Defense Minister, Abdirashid Abdullahi Mohamed, and the army chief, General Mohamed Ahmed Jimale, had both submitted their resignations at the government's

weekly cabinet meeting. The Information Minister said President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo had nominated General Abdi Jama Hussein as head of the army.

Donald Yamamoto, acting US Assistant Secretary for African affairs in the State, testifying to a U.S. congressional committee on Wednesday (October 11) on the US foreign assistance budget request for FY2018, said “the US wanted to target its assistance in Somalia to bolster the effectiveness of AMISOM and the Somalia National Security Forces to drive out al-Shabaab and support further efforts to strengthen the Somali state.

A three-day meeting in Mogadishu has launched a Drought Impact Needs Assessment to identify the drivers and impact of recurrent drought, and outline long-term solutions. The meeting which ended on Monday (October 9) brought together technical experts from the government and member states, the World Bank, EU and UN. The assessment will be followed by the development of a Recovery and Resilience Framework to address the identified needs.

IGAD launched a five-day training workshop in Nairobi for Somalia policymakers drawn from key ministries on Monday (October 9). The workshop, attended by officials from key ministries like planning, foreign affairs, mining, health, education and agriculture, aims to provide senior policymakers with enhanced skills in policy formulation and implementation.

AMISOM and the United Nations handed over a new police headquarters and a vehicle to Jubaland state to help boost security on Monday, (October 9). Jubaland Police Commissioner Ahmednasir Guled Hassan welcomed the support provided by AMISOM and the United Nations Office for Project Support, describing it as a positive gesture.

The Somaliland National Electoral Commission said in a press conference on Tuesday (October 10) that there were 704,089 registered and eligible voters in Somaliland. The presidential election will be held on November 13 with voting at 1,642 polling stations in 21 constituencies. The candidates, from the three political parties, are Muse Bihi of the incumbent Peace, Unity and Development party (Kulmiye), Faisal Ali Waraabe of the For Justice and Development party (UCID) and Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi “Irro” of the Wadani party.

South Sudan

IGAD’s Special Envoy for South Sudan, Ambassador Ismail Wais, has confirmed that the program for the pre-High Level Revitalization Forum consultation phase has been concluded in Khartoum. The IGAD Council of Ministers’ delegation, led by Ethiopia’s Foreign Minister, Dr. Workneh arrived in Juba on Friday (October 13) for meetings and discussions with the Transitional Government of National Unity.

Sudan

The US State Department announced on Friday last week (October 6) that the United States was revoking the economic sanctions with respect to Sudan and the

Government of Sudan that had been issued under Executive Orders 13067 and 13412, in 1997 and 2007. (See article)

President Omer al-Bashir extended a unilateral cessation of hostilities for another three months in Blue Nile and South Kordofan states on Sunday (October 8). It is intended to "create a conducive environment for negotiations on the two regions, and within the framework of the government's keenness to achieve peace and stability in the country". The efforts of African Union mediators to continue peace talks have been complicated by the split in the SPLM-N into the al-Hilu and Agar factions

Defense Minister Awad Ibn Ouf met with visiting Egyptian Military Intelligence Chief Mohamed Faraj El Shahat on Wednesday (October 11). Discussions covered ways to control and monitor the joint border between the two countries. The visit was in line with the agreement reached by the two defense ministers to hold regular meetings for the joint military committee to promote cooperation and coordination on border control. General Gamal al-Din Omer Mohamed Ibrahim, head of Sudanese military intelligence also attended.

A delegation from the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, including four senior ambassadors, started a four-day visit to Khartoum on Monday (October 9). The visit is part of a consultation program with the Sudanese Council for Foreign Affairs. The delegation is setting up a working group to draft a paper on Sudan-Egypt relations within the guidelines of the strategic partnership document signed by the two presidents in October 2016.

In a statement released on Monday (October 9), the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), said Sudan and South Sudan had resumed border air patrols as part of the resumption of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mission (JBVMM) operations. The joint reconnaissance between 16 and 22 September provided verification and monitoring of the situation on the ground.

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome opens the new Session of Parliament

The third year of the fifth parliamentary of Parliament opened on Monday (October 9). President Dr. Mulatu Teshome addressed the opening joint session of the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of Federation. The session, attended by members of the diplomatic corps in Ethiopia, as well as Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn, members of the two Houses of Parliament was televised. The President, as usual, outlined the government's plans for the coming session and the Ethiopian fiscal year, 2017-2018, and presented details of the socio-economic and political direction of the country during the next year.

The President announced major focus areas of the government for the current year, mentioning a range of issues including the economic progress the country had made since the beginning of the second GTP, the efforts to clampdown on corruption, elections and political party negotiations, and possible financial reforms as well as current problems. He stressed that the anti-corruption would continue at all levels as one of the top priorities of the government during the year and it would make every

effort to ensure that measures taken against these practices were irreversible. These included consolidating efforts on democratization through the ongoing intra-party dialogue and other initiatives as well as ensuring good governance by strengthening the executive power of the government and enhancing public participation. It would continue to work to improve the executive capacity of officials to boost the political and democratic participation of the people. He urged all civil servants to be cooperative and respond effectively and efficiently to peoples' demands.

President Mulatu underlined that achieving rapid, broad-based, sustained and equitable economic growth to eradicate poverty has been and remains the key objective of the government of Ethiopia. To this end, he said, the government has been implementing policies, strategies and development plans to guide and manage the overall socioeconomic development process of the country. Infrastructure and social service development needed increased government intervention, he said. He highlighted the fact that the fiscal policy of the government had also been aimed at generating the required budgetary finance to support Ethiopia's rapid, sustainable, inclusive and equitable development. This, he added, meant that the country's tax revenue collection system needed to be further strengthened. The amount of tax revenue was not commensurate with the growth of the economy even though the amount collected had shown an increase last year. The government, he said, was preparing tax reforms aimed to increase tax returns. This year's budget deficit would be covered by domestic resources.

The President said that the country's economy had been growing steadily with service, industrial and manufacturing sectors showing growth though the agriculture sector, due to the unprecedented drought, had fallen short of targets. Indeed, the industry, manufacturing, and service sectors had exhibited record growth, exceeding the previous year. This year, overall, the country's economy was expected to grow by 11.1%. The government had managed to keep inflation down to single figures by adjusting fiscal policies. It would continue to work to increase the share of export and build up import substitution. He noted that major efforts would continue to be made to ensure adequate agricultural input supply. He highlighted the various mechanisms that have been implemented to strengthen agricultural extension services, to increase agricultural productivity and commercialization. Agriculture, he pointed out, would continue to be a major source of growth and poverty reduction. Lack of foreign currency remained one of the more pressing problems and he urged the need to increase both quality and quantity of exports, including sesame, coffee and livestock.

President Mulatu noted that the government plans last year had focused heavily on empowerment of women and youth. This would remain a major aim and would be further strengthened in this fiscal year, to attain sustainable development and ensure the inclusivity of these major sections of the population. On the empowerment of youth, the President stressed the continuing implementation of the government-designed and reviewed youth reformation strategy package, which was ensuring the participation and benefit of youth in registered developments in various sectors of the economy.

The President's speech sent out a strong message that the Government stands ready to open the door for a dynamic Ethiopia, responsive to the wishes, interests and concerns of its peoples. He also noted that Ethiopia's recent impressive growth had not been

free of challenges, recalling the problems and deficits that had emerged in various fields. The President unequivocally condemned the recent border clashes between Somali and Oromia region of Ethiopia, which he said had claimed dozens of life and displaced thousands of people living in these two regions. The President said that border conflict “should be absolutely condemned”; border issues anywhere in the country should be addressed peacefully. He noted the government’s efforts to arrest the “rabble-rousers” who had triggered violence in both regions, and urged the people of two regions to work towards restoring peace.

The next day, Tuesday, (October 12), the House of Peoples Representatives held its first ordinary session. It approved the establishment of two new standing committees to enhance the parliamentary mechanisms of checks and balance and unanimously endorsed the establishment of standing committees that would enable it oversee activities related to Democracy and Human Rights as well as Customs and Revenue. The House endorsed the establishment of these committees with an amendment to the Rules of Procedure and Members' Code of Conduct Regulation. This increases the number of from 18 to 20. The House also forwarded 14 agreements signed with different governments and international organizations to the relevant standing committees for further scrutiny.

1st first Ethio-Botswana Joint Ministerial Commission meeting in Gaborone

Ethiopia and Botswana have enjoyed long standing relations that date back to the struggle to liberate Africa from the yoke of colonization and their links in the anti-apartheid struggle based on the spirit of brotherhood and Pan-Africanism; but they only open meaningful bilateral discussions only when a General Cooperative Framework was agreed in 2012 and the first Ethiopia-Botswana Joint Technical Committee meeting was held in Gaborone the next year. This allowed senior technical experts to identify areas of cooperation in trade and industry, agriculture (animal husbandry and livestock), mining and minerals, energy, transport and communications, tourism, finance and health and culture.

To re-fashioning and deepen these ties and raise them to a new level, Ethiopia and Botswana this week launched their first Joint Ministerial Commission meeting. An Ethiopian delegation that included Culture and Tourism Minister Dr. Hirut Woldemariam, Livestock and Fisheries Minister Professor Fekadu Beyene and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mrs. Hirut Zemene was in Gaborone, October 9-12, to attend the inaugural meeting.

One essential prelude to the inaugural session of the Joint Ministerial Committee meeting was the working group of experts from both countries who met in Gaborone on Monday (October 9) to consider the minutes of the 1st session of the Joint Technical Committee, launched back in 2013. This considered the progress made in the implementation of the commitments made then. Ethiopia’s Co-Chair of the meeting, Director General of the African Affairs Directorate in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Lulit Zewdie, in her opening remarks underlined that important areas of cooperation, including agriculture, trade, investment, culture and tourism among others, had not been fully exploited. Mr. Gaemelwe Goistemang,

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of International Affairs and Cooperation of Botswana noted such meetings would allow both countries the opportunity to best explore areas of mutual advantage in different areas.

At the Joint Ministerial Commission session on Tuesday, the Ministers underlined the historic relations between the two countries and stressed the need to further bolster ties through the adoption and implementation of programs in areas that would mutually benefit both countries. Ethiopia's Minister of Livestock and Fishery, Professor Fekadu Beyene and Botswana's Minister of Agricultural Development and Food Security, Thamasanqa Silitshena, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of livestock and fisheries. Representatives of the sides also initialed an agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in criminal matters. The two sides agreed to sign another five agreements on public service administration, gender and woman empowerment, culture and tourism, health and mutual legal issues in January during the AU Summit in Addis Ababa. The Ministers also agreed to convene the second session of the Joint Ministerial Commission meeting in Addis Ababa at a date to be agreed upon later through the normal diplomatic channels.

Ethiopia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene met with Botswana's Minister of International Affairs and Cooperation, Dr. Pelonomi Venson-Moitoi, on Monday (October 9). Commending the recent endeavors by Governments of the two countries to put their historic ties in high gear in areas deemed mutually profitable, Dr. Pelonomi urged the swift need for their implementation. State Minister Hirut emphasized the need for mutual deliberations on common issues of economic cooperation and collaboration both in regional as well as continental in matters of peace and development. In this context, she referred to the launch of the South Sudanese Peace Revitalization Process under the auspices of IGAD, and praised the work of the former President of Botswana, Festus Mogae, and his unrelenting efforts to bring peace and tranquility to South Sudan as IGAD's Chairman of Joint Monitorial and Evaluation Commission (JMEC). The State Minister also expressed Ethiopia's interest to have a concrete exchange of experiences in agriculture and tourism.

Members of the delegation also made visits to look at sectors identified as venues for future cooperation. The Minister of Livestock and Fisheries, Professor Fekadu Beyene and State Minister Hirut Zemene went to the Botswana Meat Commission and the Lobatse Meat Processing and Packaging Plant, in a suburb of Gaborone. The meat industry is both a significant contributor to Botswana's GDP and its Economic Diversification Drive initiative. It accounts for 30% of the country's direct and indirect employment, and with its world class facilities, Botswana exports meat products to a significant number of African, European, Far East and Middle East countries. State Minister Hirut said this was an area in which offered Ethiopia substantial prospects. The Ethiopian Government is determined to set up globally competitive livestock management and meat production. Given Ethiopia's success story in the leather industry, the Ethiopian delegation noted the mutual advantage for both countries if they could reciprocate their experiences in the related meat and leather industries. Ethiopia is home to one of the largest livestock populations in Africa. According to government statistics, there are approximately 50 million cattle, 50 million goats and sheep, and an assortment of horses, donkeys, camels and chickens. Dr. Hirut Woldemariam, Ethiopia's Minister of Culture and Tourism held

talks with her Botswana counterpart, Mr. Tshekedi Khama during which the two sides agreed on the need to further expand bilateral ties in the field of tourism.

AU Peace and Security Council commends African members of UNSC

The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union held its 723rd meeting on Thursday last week (October 5), and was given a briefing on the activities of the African Members of the United Nations Security Council. The African Members of the Security Council are currently Ethiopia (President of the SC last month) Egypt and Senegal, referred to as the A3. Egypt and Senegal's term as non-permanent members of the Security Council finishes at the end of the year, and the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea have been elected as non-permanent members for 2018-2019. Ethiopia's membership as a non-permanent member finishes at the end of 2018.

At the 26th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in January last year, the Assembly reiterated that the African Members of the UN Security Council had a special responsibility to ensure that the decisions of the AU's Peace and Security Council were effectively reflected in the decision making process of the Security Council with reference to peace and security issues of concern to Africa. The AU Assembly also requested the African members of the Security Council, working with the AU Commission, and the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations in New York, to present reports, through the Peace and Security Council to the Assembly, on their efforts within the UN Security Council and on the extent to which they would be promoting African common positions as articulated by the Peace and Security Council;

In accordance with this, the Peace and Security Council was briefed by the Permanent Representatives of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, in its capacity as Coordinator of the African Members of the UN Security Council (A3) for the period May 2017 to August 2017. It also heard statements from the Permanent Representatives of Senegal and of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

The Peace and Security Council commended the A3 for their closely coordinated collective efforts in defending and promoting common African positions within the Security Council. The PSC stressed the importance of the A3 continuing to work "as a coherent and coordinated group, speaking with one voice." It also underlined the importance of further strengthening their consultations with other members of the UN Security Council and with the Africa Group in New York. It was important that the A3 also continued to continue to keep the Peace and Security Council regularly informed of the results of these efforts.

In its communiqué of its meeting the AU Peace and Security Council commended in particular Ethiopia for its effective coordination of the A3. It encouraged the next A3 coordinators to maintain and build on the momentum set by Egypt and then Ethiopia. The PSC also welcomed the commitment of the A3 Group to continue to promote and defend African common interests and positions on peace and security issues under consideration by the UN Security Council. It also took the opportunity to congratulate

both, the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, on their election as African non-permanent members of the UN Security Council for 2018/2019. It said it looked forward to their contribution towards fostering the AU's common interests and concerns in the UN Security Council, and it urged them to "build on the positive trend set by the outgoing A3 members".

US economic sanctions on Sudan lifted

The US State Department announced on Friday last week (October 6) that the United States was revoking the economic sanctions with respect to Sudan and the Government of Sudan that had been issued under Executive Orders 13067 and 13412, in 1997 and 2007. State Department Spokesperson, Heather Nauert, said this was in recognition of the Government of Sudan's "sustained positive actions to maintain a cessation of hostilities in conflict areas in Sudan, improve humanitarian access throughout Sudan, and maintain cooperation with the United States on addressing regional conflicts and the threat of terrorism." The decision would take effect on October 12. It had come about through "a focused, 16-month diplomatic effort to make progress with Sudan in these key areas," and it acknowledged Khartoum's serious cooperation with the U.S. on a number of issues.

The press statement noted that Washington would continue efforts to improve bilateral relations with Sudan but it also said much more progress was needed "to fully and sustainably achieve peace in Sudan and to cooperate with the United States on a range of Administration priorities, including further expanding humanitarian access, improving the Government of Sudan's human rights and religious freedom practices, and ensuring that the Government of Sudan is committed to the full implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on North Korea." It also said the US was prepared to use additional tools to apply pressure if the Government of Sudan regressed on progress in the five areas originally itemized by former President Obama as necessary for lifting of sanctions. These were: co-operation on counter-terrorism; resolution of the conflicts in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur; improving access to humanitarian aid; ending support to armed opposition groups in South Sudan; and addressing the threat of the Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army.

The US has not lifted all the sanctions it has imposed on Sudan over the years. Sudan remains on the Department of State's list of state sponsors of "terrorism", alongside Syria and Iran, until further review. The US Charge d'affaires to Sudan said at the weekend that conditions had to be "right" for holding talks with Khartoum on removing Sudan from the list of state sponsors of "terrorism". He said: "This is something that both sides are keenly willing to discuss, but we have to be certain that conditions are right for discussions to remove Sudan from the list," adding that "we hope that those conditions will come soon." The continuing sanctions means Sudan remains barred from receiving arms sales and faces restrictions on US aid. The sanctions still in place include those against individuals with arrest warrants related to the conflict in Darfur. Sudan was originally also one of the countries included under President Trump's ban on travelers earlier this year, but its name was removed when the revised list was published last month.

Sudan welcomed the move. A foreign ministry statement said: "The leaders of Sudan, the government of Sudan and the people of Sudan welcome the positive decision taken by American President Donald Trump of removing the economic sanctions completely." It is, of course, a positive step in terms of overall US Sudan relations, but it is also important in allowing for Sudan to link up again with international financial institutions and become involved once more in the global network of business. It will allow Sudan to benefit from debt relief and other mechanisms of development assistance from the IMF and the World Bank. It will also facilitate the whole process of international grants and loans and encourage international investors who have previously been concerned about getting involved in major projects in Sudan because of the inability to transfer funds in or out of the country. It will now be possible to make transfers easily. It can be expected to ease the country's unemployment levels and there has already been an immediate improvement in Sudan's exchange rate.

The government also reiterated its call for the removal of Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, pointing to its well-publicized cooperation in counterterrorism efforts. The AU echoed this. The Chairman of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, issued a statement welcoming Washington's decision, adding that the rapprochement between the two countries should "pave the way for further progress towards addressing other issues of concern". He expressed the hope that "sooner rather than later, the United States will also remove Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism in view of the widely acknowledged cooperation Sudan has been extending to international efforts to curb terrorism."

The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it had long been apparent that the sanctions had caused unnecessary problems to the Sudanese people, limiting the country's development progress. It said the removal would be welcomed both in the Sudan and in the region as a step to support and encourage further regional development. It added that it had no doubt that Ethiopia/Sudan relations would benefit greatly from the decision, as would regional stability and development. It also noted that this underlined the efforts that the Government of Sudan had made in recent years to bring an end to conflict in the country, to expand humanitarian access and cooperate in counter-terrorist activities.

The UN/AU hybrid peacekeeping force for Darfur, UNAMID, issued a statement on Sunday saying it hoped the decision would help development in Darfur. UNAMID's Joint Special Representative and Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur, Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo, said, "On behalf of the Mission, I would like to congratulate the people and the Government of the Republic of Sudan on the lifting of the American sanctions. We are hopeful that this decision shall be significant progress towards improving the lives of the population we serve in Darfur, in terms of creating livelihoods, and raising of education and health standards." He also hoped the decision "would constitute a positive step forward on the way of realizing permanent peace, stability and sustainable development in Darfur," and called on all Sudanese parties to take advantage of "this window of opportunity to speed up the finalization of the peace process and use it as a catalyst for achieving permanent peace in Darfur".

Others who approved the decision included two members of the Troika of Norway, the UK and the US. A joint statement from Norway and the UK described it as "an

historic decision that will pave the way for more inclusive economic development for Sudan's people." It said: ""We congratulate the Government of Sudan on this decision, which reflects their efforts to make improvements in a number of areas, such as cessation of hostilities, improved humanitarian access and cooperation on counter-terrorism." The move was welcomed in Saudi Arabia which has been active in publicly supporting calls for the removal of the sanctions, and the United Nations Country Team in Sudan issued a statement that said: "The UNCT recognizes all the collective efforts exerted by all parties, especially the Government of Sudan who in the past nine months has demonstrated through concrete progress the country's interest in improving humanitarian access throughout the country."

Opposition leader withdraws from the Kenyan poll

In a new twist to the Kenyan election, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) announced on Wednesday this week (October 11) that all the eight candidates involved in the annulled presidential election would be included in the fresh polls scheduled for October 26. This decision followed a High Court ruling ordering the inclusion of the Thirdway Alliance Party candidate Ekuru Aukot who obtained less than 1% of the votes in the annulled August 8 elections. In a statement, the Commission said this meant the fresh presidential election scheduled for October 26 should include all candidates who participated in the cancelled August 8 Presidential Election. The Commission said it appreciated "the anxiety across the country following the numerous legal interpretations in this matter. We appeal for calm and dialogue among all players to ensure that elections are successfully held and for the country to move forward".

The Commission also said that it had received a letter dated October 10 indicating that Mr. Odinga and his running mate had decided to withdraw, but added that they had not yet submitted the statutory Form 24A. It said it could not compel a candidate to participate in an election and the law allowed a candidate to withdraw his/her candidature by delivering to the Commission a duly filled Form 24A. It said once it had received this it would "process the same in accordance with the requisite provision of the Law."

Mr. Odinga announced on Tuesday that he and his running mate Kalonzo Musyoka would not take part in the repeat election scheduled for October 26. He said: "After deliberating on our position in respect of the upcoming election, considering the interests of the people of Kenya, the region and the world at large, we believe that all will be best served by NASA vacating its presidential candidature in the election scheduled for 26 October 2017." NASA officials have called for restarting the whole electoral cycle with all parties allowed to participate in fresh elections within 90 days, after a number of senior officials at the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission have been replaced and sweeping reforms of electoral management carried out.

Meanwhile the US on Friday last week (October 6) warned all political camps to reject violence and respect electoral law. A US Department of State spokesperson, Heather Nauert, said, "The United States Government is deeply concerned by the

deterioration in the political environment in Kenya.” Ms. Nauert added: “Kenyan leaders and citizens must reject violence and call on others to do the same; security services should use the utmost restraint in handling demonstrations, and any response must be proportionate and appropriate.”

Somalia’s President pledges closer ties with regional states

Following a regional state leaders’ conference in Jubaland earlier this week, and their call for more bargaining power with the central government, Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi on Thursday (October 12) called for unity and cooperation with the regional states. The President said he had been keenly following the concerns of the leaders of the federal member states and underscored the need for closer cooperation between the Federal Government and the Federal Members States to achieve Somalia’s hope for peace and prosperity. He said: "I want to remind you all that we must acknowledge that our country is on the path of recovery, and the only way we can achieve full recovery is through cooperation.”

The four-day conference of the Presidents of Puntland, Galmudug, HirShabelle, Southwest, and Jubaland States had been meeting to discuss ways to boost cooperation among the regional states, security, federalism, reconciliation and other issues. In a sixteen point communiqué they called for proper consultation with the Federal government on issues affecting the regional states and for disputes to be resolved in a way that took cognizance of public interest. They expressed concern over the status of the federalism process in Somalia, pointing out that they controlled 90% of the country and faced 80% of the problems in their regions, but claimed they only received less than 5% of the international assistance arriving in the country. The meeting was also aimed at resolving the differences between Somalia's central government and federal member states over the Gulf diplomatic crises.

The meeting stressed the importance of an article in the Provisional Constitution that called for consultation with the federal states on matters that had a direct impact on the states. Article 53 (1) reads in part: “In the spirit of intergovernmental cooperation the Federal Government shall consult the Federal Member States on negotiations relating to foreign aid, trade, treaties, or other major issues related to international agreement.” In their communiqué called for suspension to all efforts on the constitutional review process organized by the Federal Ministry of Constitutional Affairs until a comprehensive agreement is reached on resource sharing.

In order to encourage coordinated negotiations with the Federal Government the state leaders announced the formation of a Council of Interstate Cooperation, of which Galmudug, Puntland, Jubaland, South West and HirShabelle would be members. Puntland President, Ali Gaas, was elected first chairman and HirShabelle President Mohamed Waare as deputy chair. The Council will rotate annually, with the deputy chair becoming the next chairperson. The conference also called for the creation of a de facto commission to address underlying issues between the federal and regional governments ahead of the formation of their Interstate Cooperation Council.

In a statement after the close of the Kismayo meeting, the President stressed that the country was moving forward and any challenges must be addressed through dialogue

while remaining faithful to the constitution”. He said: “We must therefore all strive for the good of this country, and be truthful to the oath that we all took, to put the country first,” The president further said he remained confident that all concerns will be resolved and that leaders would remain true to the pledge of putting the interest of our country before anything else.” Prime Minister Hassan Kheyre also emphasized that “criticism should not be based on personal interest. I am telling all Somalis, Somalia is moving forward and will not go back again.

President Isaias says no concerns over food security in Eritrea

President Isaias gave an interview to the country’s official local media at the weekend at the end of last week on Saturday (October 7). According to official accounts of the interview President Isaias stated that there was no reason for concern regarding this year’s low rainfall, in July, and the concern this had initially created in terms of total harvest failure.

However, the account of what the President said hardly seemed to bear out this optimism. The account, although somewhat opaque and certainly difficult to understand, seemed indeed to suggest the opposite conclusion. It said: “The objective of food security transcends linear targets of adequate cereal production commensurate with annual national demand and export of cash crops. Food security must indeed be viewed in broader terms to incorporate other programs so as to bring quality improvement in people’s lives.”

The President went to say efforts had so far have focused on harnessing enough water through construction of dams and water catchment schemes, land preparation for cultivation, putting in place basic infrastructure and introduction of irrigation technology. This multi-layered approach hinged on building the necessary infrastructure to harness water as a foundation in order to incrementally expand irrigation by marshalling the necessary capital and technical investment. He added that although much remained to be done, “the experience accumulated in the past 25 years should not be viewed lightly. It will be crucial as a stepping stone for channeling the capacity gleaned so far for better outcome in the period ahead.” This would hardly seem to be reassuring for his listeners. It does not suggest this year’s harvests will be sufficient to satisfy everybody’s needs. Various international bodies expressed concerns over Eritrea’s potential food supplies earlier in the year.

In the interview, broadcast live on television and radio, the President explained government policies and programs. He elaborated in great detail the efforts exerted to stabilize the exchange rate of the Nakfa and to control contraband as well as the opportunities and challenges that must be addressed “to encourage domestic private investment in the country’s productive sectors.” He said illicit capital flows and speculation inevitably trigger inflation and currency depreciation, unless properly regulated and controlled. He stressed the benefits that accrue to the individuals concerned and to the nation as a whole when the purchasing power of the Nakfa was maintained through appropriate policy and regulatory measures.

Referring to national capacity building, President Isaias underlined the need, indeed the urgency, to further consolidate and expand the investment of the government in human capital over past decades. This, he said, was the indispensable multiplier for the country's development and nation-building drive. The resilience of the Eritrean people and their organizational capacity, he said, developed and stimulated during the decades of struggle and adversity, were vital assets that must be reinforced. This, he emphasized, would enhance dividends when further equipped with knowledge.

The President's insistence on the importance of human capital is at odds with numerous reports on the treatment of national service conscripts. A recent book, "The Eritrean National Service: Servitude for "the common good" & the Youth Exodus", by noted Eritrean scholar Professor Gaim Kibreab, details how the "noble idea" working for the "common good" of the country degenerated into forced labour and a modern form of slavery. Far from positive or profitable investment in the human capital of the country national service has "exhausted the country's major resource, its labor force, and drained the social capital accumulated throughout the years of the liberation struggle." It is this that has set the stage for the country's youth to flee and risk their lives for a new opportunity, livelihood and life as well as reclaim their lost dignity and freedom outside. Professor Kibreab also shows how the impact of unending national service has permeated and seriously damaged the traditional survival and livelihood systems of Eritrean society. It has helped bring about the politics of despair, sapping the youthful dreams and values of the liberation war, driving hundreds of thousands of conscripts and draft evaders to "vote with their feet," and leave the country.

Professor Kibreab's conclusions fully support the horrific details provided in last year's report of the UN Human Rights' Council's Commission of Enquiry into human rights abuse in Eritrea, and in other international reports, including this year's US State Department's Report on Human Trafficking. This reached similar conclusions, noting Eritreans continued to be subjected to indefinite national service and that "Conscripts are drafted for an indefinite duration of service in often abusive conditions, and used as forced labor." The report said working conditions "are often harsh and sometimes involve physical abuse," and despite the official policy of banning persons younger than 18 from military conscription, children younger than 18 are often detained and sent to the national conscription training center. There is no doubt that the thousands fleeing the country every month, to Sudan and to Ethiopia, are largely drawn from the youth, the future of the country.

The details of the President's "investment in human capital" certainly seem to leave a lot to be desired. Indeed there appears to be very little that can be classified as 'profit' from the government's actions in the operation of national service and other such "human capital" investment.

African defense officials and diplomats receive capacity skills' training

Twenty defense attachés and diplomats from a number of different African countries have been in Addis Ababa this week to attend the 6th Orientation Course for Defense Officials at Ethiopia's Peace Support Training Centre in Addis Ababa. The five-day

course aims to enhance capacity for multilateral and international cooperation, increase understanding of the role of defense officials, and how to implement the interests of their respective governments, as well as develop the skills and expertise of defense officials working in a multilateral environment on aspects of international security. The course is being run in collaboration with the Geneva Center for Security Policy.

Opening the week-long training, the Commander of Peace Support Training Centre, Brigadier General Habtamu Tilahun, said the training would create an important platform for participants to share experience and knowledge on defense and diplomacy. He pointed out Ethiopia was key player in enhancing regional security and a leading contributor to the peacekeeping operations of both the African Union and the United Nations, AU and UN. The training would help to strengthen effectiveness of such missions. He also said that running the course in collaboration with the Geneva Center would help the Peace Support Training Center to become a center of knowledge, one of the envisioned regional centers of excellence for peace support operations.

The Military Advisor of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Major General Andreas Bolsterli, stressed the importance of collaboration in the efforts to tackle major security challenges. He said the training marked a new step in the existing excellent relationship between the two countries and added: “I can assure you of our sincerest will to provide the best support possible for the development of your ability to conduct your institutional services.”

This is the sixth year of the GCSP’s orientation course for military officers, diplomats and senior officials involved in defense and diplomacy and it has become an internationally recognized addition to national training. It emphasizes that defense and diplomacy are complementary instruments for a state to use and together they make up a vital part of a country’s in the hand of a state. Together they are part of a nation’s security policy. Defense attachés, after all, operate at the intersection of diplomacy, strategy, economics and public relations, and as their roles and missions evolve, it is important for new defense attachés to be properly prepared.

Ethiopia’s Peace Support Training Center, built at cost of over 123 million birr, was inaugurated in June 2015 in Addis Ababa. From the beginning it has been intended to benefit not only Ethiopia but also peace and security institutions both in the sub-region and more widely in Africa, and to serve as a training facility for peacekeeping organizations in and around the Horn of Africa. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, President Dr Mulatu Teshome said the Center would have a vital role to assist preparation for international peacekeeping missions. It would help to equip peacekeeping forces and military institutions with the necessary advanced skills in conflict analysis through applied research, training design and even peace building innovations.

The President praised the Ministry of National Defense for its remarkable achievements in strengthening Ethiopia’s ability to secure peace and stability in the country and the region, emphasizing that the country’s political stability, socio-economic development and friendly relations with neighbors over the last two decades had enabled the it to position itself as a factor for peace and stability. He

noted that Ethiopia was playing an active role in regional peace and security issues through diplomatic engagement, mediation and peace keeping activities and well as being able to drive regional peace and security issues forward through IGAD and the AU. The Minister of Defense also underlined the importance of the center's future role in helping provide training in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation to experts from other countries, as this week's training course underlines.

LDCs call for increased support at UN Climate Change negotiations

Ministers and Heads of Delegation from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) group met in Addis Ababa on Thursday last week (October 5) in a High-level Ministerial Meeting to discuss their priorities in preparation for the next session of the Conference of Parties on Climate Change (COP23) in Bonn in November. The Least Developed Countries are 48 nations that are especially vulnerable to climate change and which work together in the intergovernmental negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to demand that wealthier nations act in accordance with their responsibility for creating the problem.

Gebru Jember Endalew, current chair of the LDC, said it had been a very successful meeting, with Ministers discussing all the key issues of the negotiations and expressing their countries' dedication to ambitious climate action. "Ministers from across the world's poorest countries have demonstrated how LDCs are continuing to take the lead on ambitious climate action, pursuing sustainable, low carbon and climate resilient pathways to protect our people and our planet." He said it was clear LDCs faced unique and unprecedented challenges in working to lift their people out of poverty while achieving sustainable development. Ministers at the meeting in Addis Ababa had identified the need for global solidarity and the support of the international community to help LDCs achieve their ambitious climate plans. They had also highlighted that the global response to climate change must be fair and equitable, with countries acting in a manner that was consistent with their responsibility for climate change and capacity to respond." Ato Gebru noted that under the Paris Agreement the world had laid out a vision for achieving a greener, healthier and brighter future for all. He said the LDCs hoped that the upcoming negotiations would generate finance and other support to ensure that all countries of the world could make this vision a reality. The meeting made it clear the LDC group was fully committed to supporting Fiji, the first island nation to hold the presidency of the Conference of the Parties, to reach successful outcomes in November.

Opening the meeting, Ethiopia's Minister for the Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Dr. Gemedo Dalle, said the LCD group must work to ensure the Paris Agreement delivered its full potential. He emphasized that despite the fact that the LDCs were not the cause for climate change, they were working particularly hard to confront the challenge. Climate change had had a disproportionately negative impact on the LDCs and their people and they were at the forefront of the catastrophic results. It was, he said, necessary that the design of the Paris Agreement, its rules, processes and review mechanisms, should benefit the poorest and most vulnerable. Together we can demonstrate, he said, that "development and progress can be made without undermining the environment and our climate."

The focal points of the discussion covered issues of adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building as well as setting strategies and positions for COP23 and the meeting endorsed the key messages of the LDC Group in the context of COP23. These covered Mitigation, Adaptation, Loss and Damage and on Climate Finance – the “key to the implementation of the Convention, Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement”. The Convention and the Paris Agreement recognize the special circumstances and needs of the LDCs and the LDCs are very clear this must be adhered to in the delivery mechanisms of climate finance. Developed countries must fully implement their commitment to mobilize US\$100 billion per year by 2020. Other key messages cover Technology, Capacity building, Gender, Transparency of Action and Support, Facilitating Implementation and Promoting Compliance, and Global Stocktaking which it identifies as an important component of the Paris Agreement’s mechanism to scale up fair and ambitious action consistent with equity and the best available science. It must also lead to Parties taking the necessary actions to put the world on track to limit the increases in global average temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and address the adverse impacts of climate change.

In their communiqué, the LDC Ministers’ meeting affirmed the need for the global response to climate change to be fair and equitable in order to advance the interests and aspirations of poor and vulnerable countries and peoples. It noted with serious concern that the adverse impacts of climate change continue to worsen, as demonstrated this year through severe droughts and unprecedented rainfalls, storms and flooding, particularly in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, resulting in great loss of life and tens of billions of dollars in damage. It emphasized that this decade and the last four years had been the hottest in recorded history, and noted with continued concern the large gap between ambition needed to reach the long-term goal of efforts to limit warming to below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and the current projections of an increase of at least 2.8°C in global temperatures by 2100, even with the full implementation of current emission reduction pledges and commitments.

The meeting re-emphasized the need for higher climate ambition by all countries in order to close the emissions gap to avoid further devastating climate change impacts. It emphasized that the Least Developed Countries faced the unique and unprecedented challenge of lifting people out of poverty while achieving sustainable development without relying on fossil fuels, and global solidarity and the support of the international community were critical to achieve their ambitious climate plans. Indeed, LDCs must be supported to deliver and implement the climate commitments in their Nationally Determined Contributions and other climate plans. It welcomed the mid-century, long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies suggested by some Parties, and called on all to implement similar actions by 2020. It underlined its commitment to developing long-term climate strategies, and called for developed countries and international partners to support this process.

The meeting underlined again that adaptation and loss and damage were crucial components of the global response to climate change, especially for LDCs. There was a need to support developing countries in addressing current and future climate change impacts. It said integration of NDCs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into national economic planning was a priority. It urged all developed country Parties to support LDCs in implementing their national climate change

policies, measures and strategies, by fully implementing commitments relating to financial, capacity building and technological support. It pointed out that over US\$ 200 billion alone is needed for the LDC adaptation actions that have been costed so far, and some have only partially costed their needs or not yet done so.

The limited resources available under the Least Developed Countries Fund for immediate climate adaptation actions are of serious concern and the meeting called for urgent contributions to the fund. It was important to facilitate access to climate finance by further streamlining and simplifying the application, approval and disbursement processes of the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility. In this context, the meeting said a decision must be taken at COP23 to fully integrate the Adaptation Fund into the Paris Agreement architecture.

It expressed the readiness of all LDCs to formulate National Adaptation Plans by 2020, and it called upon developed country Parties and all international partners to provide support to the LDCs to formulate these and to implement them.

The meeting expressed concern over the lack of progress in phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, particularly in countries that have pledged to eliminate these as part of the transition to net zero emissions by mid-century that is required to achieve the long-term temperature goal. It urged all international partners to provide support to LDCs in the spirit of the Istanbul Program of Action for the Least Developed Countries to ensure all LDCs engage effectively in low emission and climate resilient development. It reasserted the urgent need for technology development and transfer to enable developing countries, and in particular the LDCs, to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change. There was a similar requirement for capacity building to enhance knowledge and awareness. The LDC group supported adoption of a robust gender action plan at COP23.

It recognized that the global uptake of renewable energy and energy efficient technology needed to happen more rapidly and developing countries needed greater financial and technical support to benefit from these technologies in the context of low emission sustainable development. It welcomed the progress on the LDC Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiative for Sustainable Development and urged the global community to support its implementation.

In conclusion, the meeting also underlined its commitment to make progress in the negotiations on the work program of the Paris Agreement and to the adoption of the rules of the Paris Agreement, and called on all Parties to the Kyoto Protocol to urgently ratify the Doha Amendment to bring the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period into force and to ratify the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol.

Global Environment Facility fund-raising meeting in Ethiopia

A two-day meeting of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the 2nd official meeting for the 7th Refurbishment of the GEF took place in Addis Ababa last week. The Global Environment Facility Trust Fund was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, to help tackle the most pressing environmental problems. GEF funding

to support projects is contributed by donor countries, and these financial contributions are replenished every four years. The funding for GEF – 5 (covering the years 2010 – 2014) and for GEF – 6 (2014-2018) amounted to US\$4.34 billion and US\$4.43 billion respectively. The GEF – 7 will cover the years 2018-2022. GEF funds are available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to meet the objectives of the international environmental conventions and agreements. The World Bank is the GEF trustee, administering the GEF Trust Fund made up of contributions by donors.

The replenishment meetings provide an opportunity for contributing participants to review GEF performance and evaluate progress, assess future funding needs, and agree on a financing framework. The first meeting for the 7th Replenishment of the GEF was held in Paris in March, and this second meeting in Addis Ababa (October 3-5). Those invited to this meeting included both existing and potential contributing participants, representatives from non-donor recipient countries representing Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as representatives of NGOs and CSOs, the private sector and GEF agencies.

With 150 participants from 40 countries, the meeting was opened by Ethiopia's Minister of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Dr. Gemedo Dalle, who noted that the unsustainable utilization of natural resources and eco-system degradation contributed to conflicts and displacements of people. Dr. Gemedo emphasized that national governments needed therefore to develop and implement strategies and projects that included the three objectives of sustainable development: economic growth, environmental protection and social progress. Claus Astrup, GEF Adviser to CEO Naoko Ishii underlined the importance of funding within the context of development, and for GEF to donate substantial funds to biological diversity, combating desertification, tackling climate change and resolving problems of persistent organic pollutants.

GEF regards the current situation as a defining moment; "business as usual will guarantee disaster. Incremental change will not suffice to avoid it: the challenge is just too great for that. The only solution is transformational, systems change." The threat, not just to the environment but to global aspirations for economic growth, prosperity, jobs and security, risks escalating out of control. Then need is to work together on common and systemic solutions, and to address the drivers of environmental degradation. GEF has outlined three global megatrends leading to further major degradation of the global environment if nothing is done: a growing population, which will exceed nine billion by 2050; a rapidly rising global middle class resulting in a major shift in consumption and diet patterns; and rapid urbanization, expected to add one billion new residents to the world's cities.

This means key economic systems must be fundamentally transformed. We need to change the systems that support how we live, how we eat, how we move and how we produce and consume. In other words, implement revolutionary shifts in social and economic life: transform cities, re-think food and agriculture, decarbonize energy systems, and invest in the circular economy. The Global Environment Facility GEF has a unique mandate across multiple multilateral environmental agreements, and with its financing, holistic approach and wide network of partners, it is particularly well placed to help catalyze the required transformation. Its diverse and expanding

network of partners includes 183 governments, together with civil society organizations, academia and private companies, as well as implementing and executing agencies. It has accumulated a vast body of experience and knowledge and plays a key role in bringing together multiple stakeholders and in catalyzing the private sector to form sustainable partnerships.

Equally, GEF believes that it, together with the rest of the international community, is failing to reverse the sharp downward trend in the global environment. Its projects, too often fragmented and isolated, are not bringing about transformational change. It is increasingly clear it is time for the GEF to change. Three years ago its Council agreed on GEF2020, its first-ever long-term strategy, which it is now implementing. This involves switching the focus of operations to address the underlying negative drivers of environmental degradation, rather than just the effects, and support innovative and scalable activities that cost-effectively deliver the highest impact. The current replenishment of the Facility's Trust Fund allows participants to assess what works and what does not.

The emerging overall programming architecture of the Trust Fund is aimed at advancing the 2020 vision by addressing the drivers of environmental degradation and contributing to systems change in key areas that impact GEF's mission. GEF emphasizes it is increasingly evident that it is no longer possible to address a particular environmental issue in isolation. Complex challenges must be addressed in an integrated manner. Recent activities provide clear evidence of the need to go deeper into the fundamental causes of environmental degradation. Protection of biodiversity, for instance, requires integrated investments in reforming land use and food systems, the major drivers of biodiversity loss, and not merely investment in protected areas. Only this approach will meet the goals of multiple conventions and deliver increased and necessary global environmental benefits, with greater impact.

GEF says the world is responding to the threats we face, but not fast enough. The Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement provide direction and offer momentum that must be seized. There is a growing recognition from business of both the risks and the economic opportunities that exist. Equally, this is only a start. Much more is needed, and it must happen fast – we are at the tipping point for the world's environment and prosperity.

Kofi Annan underlines the importance of smallholder agricultural development

Former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, founder and Chair of the Kofi Annan Foundation, believes Africa is witnessing a quiet revolution that holds out real hope of banishing poverty and hunger and driving economic growth. This is not something involving sectors like oil and gas, minerals or tourism that so often make the headlines, but it is happening in agriculture, which, he underlines, remains the backbone of the Africa's economy. Writing for Al Jazeera, Mr. Annan notes that agriculture still accounts for more than a third of Africa's GDP. It might be urbanizing rapidly but agriculture still employs two-thirds of the workforce. In addition, evidence shows that growth in agriculture is up to eleven times more

effective in reducing poverty than growth in any other sector. To end poverty and hunger in Africa by 2030, agriculture must be at the heart of the strategy.

Mr. Annan emphasizes that African agriculture and smallholder farmers have too often been forgotten. The continent does not grow enough to feed its own people. One in four of the population is undernourished, a huge barrier to better health and development. It costs US\$35bn to import food annually, and this figure could almost triple by 2025 unless Africa increases its agricultural productivity. Political failures and violent conflicts compound this, putting millions at risk of starvation. Earlier this year, the UN warned that 20 million people across northeast Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen were at risk of starvation, and Mr. Annan points out, this humanitarian crisis that is almost entirely man-made.

There are, he believes signs of progress. Over the last decade, agriculture has received growing attention from governments and investors. At last year's African Green Revolution Forum, US\$30bn worth of political, financial and policy pledges were made, the largest-ever commitment to the continent's agriculture. Smallholder farmers are becoming recognized for the small businesses they are. Initiatives like the Farm to Market Alliance, which help smallholder farmers secure long-term buyers for their produce, are gaining momentum. This gives them the confidence to invest and grow their businesses knowing they have a market when they harvest. In addition, the way we work together is changing. New partnerships are emerging, like the recently launched, multimillion-dollar Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa (PIATA). This aims to increase incomes and improve the food security of 30 million smallholder farm households across Africa by 2021. It is the first time some of the largest funders of agricultural development have begun to pool resources and efforts towards a common goal. It represents a new way of doing business.

Fourthly, with climate change threatening food production as never before, efforts to help farmers adapt are becoming a priority. Embracing such solutions as drought and heat-tolerant crops, modern weather information systems, and efficient irrigation systems, help farmers cope with changing weather conditions. A much bigger emphasis is being placed on the quality of diets, rather than just focusing on quantity. In sub-Saharan Africa, millions lack the nutrients needed for proper health and development. Efforts are being made to make crops more nutritious. New varieties of the orange-fleshed sweet potato, for example, provide increased amounts of vitamin A for children. When children do not get enough vitamin A, their growth is slowed, immune system weakened, and they risk going blind. The result is not only better health, but better economies. Experts estimate that under-nutrition costs African economies around 11% GDP every year.

Mr. Annan notes these signs of progress rarely make the global headlines, but, he says, they are slowly and surely transforming economies and improving the lives of millions. Africa is taking control of its own agricultural transformation. This, he argues, is essential if it is to ensure African farmers and companies enjoy the full benefits of its growing food market, projected to be worth \$1 trillion by 2030. He also stresses that this progress will only continue if Africa focuses on agriculture as the path to prosperity, monitors progress and hold itself to account. In fact, he points out, at the request of African heads of state, a review of progress is being carried out right now, and will be presented at the African Union summit next January. Mr.

Annan says he believes this will register considerable progress over the last few years; but this is only the start. He concludes: “We shall reap what we sow. By supporting Africa's smallholder farmers, we can build an Africa free from hunger. We can build an Africa free from poverty. We can build an Africa proud to be economically strong and able to feed itself. That is the bountiful harvest that together we can and must achieve.”