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News in brief

African and the African Union

Burundi has become the first country to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC). An ICC spokesperson confirmed that the pullout took effect on Friday (October 27), a year after Burundi notified the United Nations Secretary General of its intention to leave the court. ICC spokesman, Fadi El Abdallah, said Burundi's withdrawal would not affect the preliminary examination of the country's situation already under way by the court's prosecutor.

Experts from IGAD Member States met this week to start the process of developing an IGAD strategy on HIV, TB and Malaria. This will provide an integrated framework for regional cooperation and intervention in line with the four IGAD priority areas of Policy Development, Knowledge and Information Sharing, Capacity Building and Science and Technology. IGAD states have agreed on the need for a strategy based on the current and future global, continental, regional plans, to complement efforts of member states in achieving sustainable development goals and targets that focus on the regional and cross border development.

The AU Peace and Security Council met on October 20 for an Open Session on the theme: "Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in Africa". It was address by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui, and heard presentations by United Nations Under-Secretary General Adama Dieng, Special Advisor of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and representatives of AU Member States, as well as AU partners and other organizations. **(See article)**

The Fifth Nile Basin Development Forum took place in Rwanda last week (October 23-25). At least 500 delegates attended the forum with participants including ministers in charge of water affairs and other government officials from the ten Nile Basin countries, members of parliament, water resource managers, environmentalists, economists, development planners, and researchers. **(See article)**

The World Bank's Annual Report for 2017 underlined Africa's progress over the last decade, in economic growth and poverty reduction. It also emphasized Africa's huge challenges. Growth fell sharply last year though the Bank expects this to recover this year and rise to 3.2% in 2018. It also makes clear it sees this recovery as fragile with external risks for the economic outlook remaining significant. **(See article)**

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn congratulated President Uhuru Kenyatta on his re-election in last week's repeat presidential election: "On behalf of the people and government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and my own behalf, I would like to extend to my brother, President Uhuru Kenyatta, my heartfelt congratulations on your re-election as President of the Republic of Kenya. I have no doubt that your re-election would further strengthen the excellent bilateral relationship between our two sisterly countries, as well as our robust collaboration on regional and international matters of common interest."

Crown Prince Haakon and Crown Princess Mette-Marit of Norway will make an official state visit to Ethiopia next week. The focus of their visit will be cooperation related to health and education, climate partnership, the situation of migration and displacement as well as private sector promotion and development. They will meet representatives of the Ethiopian government, civil society, the United Nations, Norwegian organizations and Norwegian businesses. They will also be accompanied by a business delegation. During the visit, a business forum and a high-level conference on health, research and higher education will take place.

The Sixth Ethio-Canada bilateral political consultation opened in Addis Ababa on Thursday (November 2) with an agenda including discussions of bilateral and diplomatic relations, regional security, multilateral cooperation, development cooperation and investment and trade ties. Those attending included Mrs. Hirut Zemene, State Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Marc-Andre Fredette, Director General for Southern and Eastern Africa Bureau, Sub-Saharan Africa branch, Global Affairs Canada. **(See article)**

Ambassadors of the United States (US), Canada, Japan and Mexico to Ethiopia, visited the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on Tuesday (October 31). They said the dam, allowing fair and reasonable shares of the Nile waters, would boost Ethiopia's economic integration with other countries and would contribute to improving the livelihoods of people. Project Manager Semegnew Bekele emphasized that GERD neither consumed nor diverted, but would maintain a regulated flow of water throughout the year, underlining that it was a regional, continental and global project in terms of benefits. It offered win-win development and contributed to overcoming centuries of mistrust among the Nile Basin.

A high-level Ethiopian delegation, led by Dr Negeri Lencho, Minister of the Government Communication Affairs Office has been in the UK over the last week to obtain experience and examples of best practice in media, communications and management. The delegation includes representatives from Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C. Addis Ababa University and the Addis Ababa City Administration Communications Bureau. They have met with the Independent Press Standards Organization, the UK's Government Communications Service and the UK's

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as well as Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator for the broadcasting, telecommunications and postal industries and MPs from the Parliament's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee.

Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Executive Committee held a meeting from October 28 and 29, to evaluate progress of its "deep renewal program" and the country's current situation. It discussed the conflicts occurring in some areas in the country and noted the serious damage on lives and properties as well as displacing thousands of citizens. **(See article)**

The Indian cabinet meeting last week gave approval to the trade agreement between India and Ethiopia signed during the recent state visit of the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, to Ethiopia. The agreement which provides for all necessary measures to encourage trade, economic cooperation, investment, and technical co-operation with Ethiopia will strengthen and promote trade and economic co-operation.

A 'Humanitarian Requirements Document Status Update', noting new needs since August has been produced to allow partners and Government to scale up the response to changing humanitarian context. The revision takes into account an increase in internally displaced people, changes in the nutrition situation, reports of crop failure and funding for control of Fall Armyworm infestation. **(See article)**

Ethiopia's export sector generated US\$678 million in the first quarter of the fiscal year, up 3% from the same period last year, but missing its projected target of US\$977.2 million. Revenue from oil seeds, tea and power exceeded targets, but dairy products, leather and leather products, live animals, minerals and electronics materials were well below expectations. The country hopes to generate a total of US\$4.63 billion from export this fiscal year.

Djibouti

The Minister of Equipment and Transport, Moussa Ahmed Hassan, signed an immigration and custom agreement on Monday (October 30) with Ethiopia to enhance efficiency in the rail service provided for passengers on the new railway line which will become fully operational this month. This will avoid unnecessary waste of time associated with travel document.

Eritrea

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea told the UN General Assembly on Thursday last week (October 26) that "a continuing stream of young refugees were fleeing the country," and the people of Eritrea were suffering from unending human rights violations. 20,000 people have crossed into Sudan and Ethiopia so far this year. **(See article)**

A student demonstration against the arrest of board members of an Islamic school on Tuesday (October 31) was violently dispersed by security forces and military with claims of deaths and arrests. **(See article)**

Eritrea has established diplomatic relations with Nepal. Their respective permanent representatives to the UN in New York signed a joint communiqué in New York on Tuesday this week (October 31). They said diplomatic ties would help bring the two countries and peoples closer and said this would enable them to take steps to further deepen and widen mutual cooperation in the future.

The Bank of Eritrea has issued a legal notice limiting the amount of nakfa that can be taken abroad. Gazetted on Wednesday Friday (October 25), the notice says no traveler leaving Eritrea can take out more than a thousand nakfa, about 65 dollars, and those under 18 cannot take any at all.

Kenya

President Uhuru Kenyatta was declared President of Kenya on Monday (October 30) after the re-run election on Thursday (October 26). He secured 98.3% of the vote after his main rival Raila Odinga boycotted the vote. The Independent Election and Boundaries Commission said the vote was free and fair. The turnout was 38.8% compared to 79% in the original August 8 vote, annulled by the Supreme Court. Mr. Odinga described the election as a sham and called for fresh elections in 90 days. There were calls for both sides to open a dialogue and for grievances to be addressed through democratic and judicial channels.

Somalia

President Mohamed Abdullahi chaired the National Security Council meeting this week, attended by the state presidents and army commanders. Discussions focused on the planned offensive against Al-Shabaab, cooperation between the government and Federal member states. Agreement was reached on the committee to organize force integration and the Ministry of Defense's national defense plan was approved. **(See article)**

President Mohamed discussed enhancing joint ties and promoting bilateral cooperation in fighting terrorism and extremism in a telephone call with President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt on Wednesday (November 1). President el-Sisi emphasized Egypt's firm stance for the unity and sovereignty of Somalia. President Mohamed expressed keenness to continue high-level coordination and consultations with Egypt over combating terrorism and bolstering joint cooperation.

The director-general of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), Abdullahi Mohamed Ali, and the head of police, General Abdihakim Said, were sacked on Sunday (October 29), after an attack at the Naso Hablod Two hotel on Saturday (October 28) where 28 people died.

Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre paid a three-day official visit to Turkey last week. He held talks with the Turkish Prime Minister and also visited the hospital where some of those wounded in the October 14 bombing attack. He said the two countries had agreed on strategic cooperation on security, fighting terrorism, economic growth and economic development on infrastructure and businesses. **(See article)**

AMISOM convened a two-day workshop this week in Mogadishu to review AMISOM's five year gender strategy plan, formulated in 2012. It aimed to formulate a gender mainstreaming architecture to include all components of AMISOM and ensure its effective implementation. The workshop was attended by gender officers from AMISOM and the Somali National Security Forces and members of the civil society.

China will continue to participate in escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and waters off Somalia to protect international sea lanes, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said on Friday last week, after UN Secretary-General Guterres praised China in a report to the UN Security Council, saying that China's escort missions played an important role in coping with the pirate threat. The Chinese navy started escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off Somalia in December 2008.

Major General Charlie Stickland, from the UK, has been appointed as Operations Commander of the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Operation Atalanta. He will take up his post next week. Operation Atalanta contributes to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast as well as protecting vessels of the World Food Program and other shipping, monitors fishing activities and supports other EU missions and programs.

Somaliland and the World Bank launched the first round of funding of the Bank's Somali Business Catalytic Fund (SBCF) this week. The fund will support 150 to 200 businesses, with one third of the grants going to businesses in Somaliland. The first round will provide grants to 35 enterprises in Somaliland, creating 946 jobs. A previous World Bank program, the Somaliland Business Fund, operated between 2012 and 2015

South Sudan

President Salve Kiir arrived in Khartoum for a two day visit to Sudan for talks with President Omer Al-Bashir of Sudan on Wednesday (November 1). Discussions covered included bilateral relations, resumption of oil production in the former Unity State, trade and border issues. Despite earlier speculation, Abyei was not on the agenda. **(See article)**

The UNCHR said this week that some 47,000 refugees had fled from South Sudan into neighboring countries in September, compared to 30,000 in August and 40,000 in July. The majority fled to Ethiopia following increased conflict near the South Sudan-Ethiopia border. The UNHCR says its operations in South Sudan itself continue to face severe funding shortfalls, with funding only covering 31% of activity.

David Shearer, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) said this week that UNMISS was looking at ways of extending its presence in Akobo, a town near the border with Ethiopia where some 71,000-displaced people are currently living. There was an UNMISS base there until December 2013. UNMISS mandate is to protect civilians and help create an environment conducive for delivery of humanitarian aid.

Sudan

Sudan and South Sudan have agreed to reactivate the bilateral security agreement that calls for the establishment of a demilitarized zone along their shared borders. Sudan Defense Minister, Awad Mohamed Ahmed bin Awaf, said both sides would redeploy their forces away from the border to allow for the establishment of a 20-kilometer-wide DMZ. They also agreed to open four crossing points along the border to facilitate the free flow of commercial goods.

Finance Minister, Mohamed Osman Al Rikabi and South Sudan Finance Minister, Stephen Dhieu Dau, meeting in Khartoum on Monday (October 30) agreed to work together to convince the international community to write off their joint foreign debts and to extend the zero-option agreement that expires on October 2018. Mr. Al Rikabi said Sudan would provide training and capacity building for personnel at South Sudan Ministry of Finance and pledged all arrears of former employees and pensioners before South Sudan independence would be settled.

Sudan and South Sudan concluded a Joint Political and Security Committee meeting in Khartoum on Tuesday (October 31). The respective Defense Ministers, Lt. General Awad Mohamed Ahmed bin Awaf and General Kuol Manyang Juuk discussed issues related to revitalization of the Joint Political and Security Committee and the Border Verification and Assessment Committee. They agreed to implement, within a month, previous agreements on opening up corridors, following arrangements by the joint technical committee on the joint borders. The committee will meet in Juba in January next year to review progress.

President Donald Trump renewed the US sanctions on individuals considered responsible for fueling conflict in Darfur on Tuesday this week (October 31). At the beginning of the month, he repealed the economic sanctions of 1997, and talks are expected later this month between Sudan and the US over the remaining sanctions including Sudan's presence on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and the barring of transactions related to oil, gas and Sudan's petrochemical industries.

The U.S. Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Counter Threat Finance and Sanctions, Sandra Oudkirk, arrived in Khartoum on an official two-day visit on Saturday (October 28). The visit fell within the framework of the new approach in the U.S. policy towards Sudan following the lift of the economic embargo. She said her meetings with the Sudanese officials were fruitful, and they discussed the post-sanctions era and ways to attract U.S. companies to invest in Sudan.

Sudan's Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour started an official visit to Hungary on Monday (October 30) to promote bilateral relations, political understanding and cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the field of research and establish a number of agricultural production projects. He signed a technical and economic cooperation agreement between the two countries. The Deputy Foreign Minister of Hungary will visit Sudan later this year.

The Sixth Ethio-Canada Political Consultation in Addis Ababa

The Sixth Ethio-Canada bilateral political consultation opened in Addis Ababa on Thursday (November 2) with an agenda including discussions of bilateral and diplomatic relations, regional security, multilateral cooperation, development cooperation and investment and trade ties. Those attending the consultation included Mrs. Hirut Zemene, State Minister for Foreign Affairs; Mr. Marc-Andre Fredette, Director General for Southern and Eastern Africa Bureau, Sub-Saharan Africa branch, Global Affairs Canada; Ambassador Tebege Berhe, Director General for the Americas; Mr. Legesse Geremew, Deputy Head of Mission, Ethiopian Embassy in Canada; Ambassador Philip Baker, Ambassador of Canada to Ethiopia, representatives from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation, the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority, Ministry of Transport, Ethiopian Investment Commission and the Ministry of Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas.

Opening the consultations, Mrs. Hirut said “the special friendship and cooperation we have, and which has existed for over a half a century is based on a firm foundation of mutual assistance and genuine respect”. The State Minister noted that exchanges of high level visits, including the Deputy Prime Minister of Ethiopia and Foreign Minister of Canada, were important milestones providing an impetus for the growing cooperation between Ethiopia and Canada. Ethiopia, she said, is determined to make every effort to strengthen and further deepen their unique relationship. Reiterating the need for sustaining the fast growth of Ethiopia’s economy, Mrs. Hirut called for more investment from Canada. She highlighted the need to finalize the Investment Promotion and Protection and Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreements which are in the pipeline. Mrs. Hirut also noted that Ethiopia would like to tap into the huge opportunities that Canada can offer in agro-processing, manufacturing, energy, mining and extraction industries. Noting Canada had always been at the side of Ethiopia in times of emergency, such as the recent El-Nino-induced drought, Mrs. Hirut said: “I would like to thank the people and government of Canada for their valuable support”

Mr. Marc-Andre Fredette, who noted that Canada had been the first partner country in Ethiopia’s decentralized health extension system, lauded the overall development the country had achieved. Canada and Ethiopia have identified such areas as aviation, education, the Productive Safety Net program, agricultural growth, sustainable land management, and women’s economic development programs as major prospects their partnership and cooperation.

This consultation is being held between Ethiopia and Canada on the basis of the Political Consultation Agreement signed in 2010. It aims to evaluate implementation of existing bilateral agreements, identify new areas of cooperation and coordinate positions on matters of common interest.

Two years ago, the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Canada was celebrated in 2015, and the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, pledged the determination of Ethiopia to make every effort to ensure the success of the Ethiopia -Canada Strategic Partnership. He stressed the special friendship and cooperation that had existed between Ethiopia and Canada for over half a century was based on a firm foundation of mutual assistance and genuine respect. Ethiopia, he said, was and remained deeply grateful for Canada’s

support over so many years: in setting up the College of Addis Ababa, later Addis Ababa University, in founding Ethiopia's public-school system, in rebuilding the Ethiopian Air Force and in providing the leadership for the genesis of banking services in Ethiopia.

The re-opening of the Ethiopian Embassy in Ottawa was a visible sign of Ethiopia's engagement with Canada. Canada's development assistance program in Ethiopia began in 1967 and still continues. Ethiopia is a priority country for Canadian development assistance and has been the single largest recipient country of Canadian development assistance. Canada participates in major Ethiopian food security and agricultural growth programs, including the Productive Safety Net Program, the Agricultural Growth Program, the Sustainable Land Management Program, and the Women's Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Development program. Canada, like Ethiopia, also follows a federal and democratic path to development, and the two countries have much in common, not least a common interest and commitment to deal with the increasing global challenges of terrorism and refugees.

Among recent examples of the growing and multifaceted commercial relations between Canada and Ethiopia was the Ethio-Canadian Business Forum, jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ethiopian Embassy in Canada and the Canadian Embassy in Addis, in June last year. Canadian Ambassador Philip Baker said then that the Forum underlined the growing relationship between Ethiopia and Canada through "a growing partnership and cooperation on development, trade and investment." He reiterated then the importance of the role of trade and commerce in boosting relations. Ethiopia is one of the largest recipients of Canada's global development assistance in various fields of cooperative intervention among including maternal and child health.

Ethiopia also participated in the first ever Canada-Africa Business Summit 2014 held in September 2014, in Toronto, This identified Ethiopia as one of the African Countries of Focus for Canada and an Ethio-Canada Business and Investment Summit was held alongside the Summit, displaying the positive operating business and investment landscape available in Ethiopia, and showcasing the value of doing business and investing in Ethiopia. It brought together representatives of their two business communities as well as high-level government officials with the aim of building stronger, more comprehensive and closer bilateral ties based on mutual benefit and common prosperity, as well as deepening business-to-business ties through success stories.

The 5th Nile Basin Development Forum in Rwanda

Delegations from member states of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) arrived in Kigali, Rwanda for the Fifth Nile Basin Development Forum. It was opened on October 23 by Vincent Biruta, Minister of Environment of Rwanda. At least 500 delegates attended the forum with participants including ministers in charge of water affairs and other government officials in Nile Basin countries, members of parliament, water resource managers, environmentalists, economists, development planners, and researchers.

Ethiopia's State Minister of Foreign Affairs Mrs. Hirut Zemene participated in the Forum held under the theme of "Investing in Nile cooperation for water secure future". During the three-day forum, experts and policy makers presented research papers and climate change, investments, sustaining water ecosystems, ensuring water availability and governance in the Nile Basin and related topics. Mrs. Hirut highlighted the importance of the "the visionary leadership of the region that initiated and realized the establishment of the Nile Basin Initiative-NBI in 1999". She stressed the need to be "We should be forward-looking to enhance our cooperation in the Nile Basin".

Dr. Seleshi Bekele, Ethiopia's Minister of Water, Irrigation, and Electricity said that "in the past nineteen years, the Nile Basin Initiative as a transitional institution with its subsidiary action programs has brought us a long way". He reminded participants: "We have also negotiated with the Cooperative Framework Agreement which has continued to create a platform to interact with each other". Minister Seleshi added that "We have to mitigate & respond to climate change together. We can do this by cooperating with all Nile Basin countries." He also stressed the prominence of maintaining the momentum of a collaborative approach. He said, for example, there was a lot of discussion around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, but "very little is said about its positive impact."

Water resource experts called on Nile Basin countries to increase investment projects along the Nile waters for sustainable social and economic development. Abdulkarim H. Seid, head of the Water Resources Management Department at the Nile Basin Initiative, said, "When governments in the Nile Basin talk about benefits accruing from Nile waters, they should consider increasing investment projects like energy, agriculture and fisheries, tourism and culture along the Nile waters." He said these investments would create jobs, raise people's incomes and contribute to social and economic growth.

A former executive director of the Murray-Darling River Basin Authority in Australia, Don Blackmore said the waters of the Nile River were a vital economic lifeline for millions of people living in the basin: "The Nile waters bear great potential for social and economic development, but at the moment, the inability to explore investment opportunities along the Nile River due to disagreements on equitable sharing of benefits presents a huge livelihood challenge to surrounding communities." Professor Seif Abdala noted: "Signing or establishing a commission is not going to solve problems. The issue of cooperation is not just a paper we sign". Sudan Water Minister, Mutaz Musa said the "Nile river will never be a source of genuine conflict unless we create it with our own hands"; South Sudan Water Minister, Sophia Gai, said, "We have to acknowledge the fact that we are all bound together by this river". Other participants stressed the importance of Egypt and Sudan signing the CFA in order to move forward, and the Forum ended with a call to continue transboundary cooperation.

Closing the forum, which also featured a number of side events to raise awareness of the latest trends in integrated water resources management, including an exhibition showcasing water-related innovations and policy solutions, Minister Biruta said the recommendations agreed in Kigali would inform the regional and national agendas for water resources management and development for the coming years. They mirrored the Nile Basin Initiative's 10-year strategy and its aspirations, he said.

The Nile Basin Initiative is an intergovernmental partnership of 10 Nile Basin countries, Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, The Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Eritrea participates as an observer. It was established in February 1999 providing an all-inclusive basin-wide institution for the first time in the Basin's history, as a forum for consultation and coordination for the sustainable management and development of the shared Nile Basin water and related resources. The NBI aims are to develop the Nile Basin water resources in a sustainable and equitable way to ensure prosperity, security, and peace for all its peoples, to ensure efficient water management and the optimal use of the resources, to ensure cooperation and joint action between the riparian countries, seeking win-win gains, to target poverty eradication and promote economic integration and to ensure that the program results in a move from planning to action. The highest decision and policy-making body of NBI is the Nile Council of Ministers (Nile-COM), comprised of Ministers in charge of Water Affairs in each NBI Member State. Ethiopia is the current chair. Nile-COM is supported by the Nile Technical Advisory Committee (Nile-TAC), comprised of 20 senior government officials, two from each of the Member States.

The Second National Security Council meeting in Mogadishu...

President Mohamed Abdullahi opened the National Security Council meeting at the beginning of the week in Mogadishu. A key meeting with the Presidents of the HirShabelle, Jubaland, Puntland, Galmudug and Southwest States and army commanders, the high-level forum focused on security, the war on Al Shabaab, the political situation in the country and cooperation between the government and Federal member states. Discussions covered settlement of the differences between the federal and the state leaders and development of a coordinated strategy to fight Al-Shabaab. Information Minister, Abdirahman Yarisow, said agreement was reached by the Federal Government and the Federal Member State to unite in the war against Al-Shabaab and on the force integration committee that comprises of members from the Federal government and regional administrations. The national defense plan prepared by the Ministry of Defense was also approved.

The major focus of the deliberations was planning for a joint counter-offensive strategy against Al-Shabaab and other extremists. Opening the conference, President Mohammed Abdullahi said federal and state leaders would seek to expedite the integration of security forces to build a strong unit to confront Al-Shabaab. He said the aim was forge a common front ahead of a major offensive against Al-Shabaab. He said: "The most important thing in this meeting is to integrate forces from the regional and federal government so that we can attack Al-Shabaab from all fronts," adding, "And I hope this will be finalized before the end of this meeting." The President said the leaders would also explore the role of religious leaders and the media to support the war against extremism in the country: "We have enough people but what we need is mobilization. I believe we can mobilize the public who are ready."

The previous administration of President Hassan had started the building of a unified national army based on proportional contributions from the regional states. In the National Security Architecture presented for funding during the London conference in May, the Government

proposed the formation of a 22,000 strong military supported by 32,000 federal and state police. The states would contribute an average of 4,000 troops each. Funding for the National Security Architecture was supposed to begin this month, Donors promised in May to make financial commitments in October after resolution of issues between the federal government and the states but the donor's conference was postponed. President Mohamed visited Uganda, Ethiopia and Djibouti last week to look for increased support for the offensive against Al-Shabaab. He said, on his return, that the response had been encouraging.

The President's call for an offensive against Al-Shabaab has been given added emphasis both by the October 14 truck bombing in Mogadishu in which killed 358 people and injured several hundred more, and the attack at the Naso Hablod Two hotel on the eve of the conference, on Saturday (October 28) when 28 people were murdered. Five gunmen, dressed in intelligence service uniforms, entered the hotel after a truck bomb demolished the entrance of the hotel, popular with government officials. A mother with her three young children, including a baby, was among those murdered. Unlike the earlier attack on October 14, Al-Shabaab this time was quick to claim responsibility. Al-Shabaab claims to strike only military or official targets and its failure to admit responsibility for the October 14 attack was because it killed so many civilians and failed to reach its intended target, thought to have been the airport compound. Following the attack on Saturday, the Mayor of Mogadishu announced a daytime ban on trucks and tankers entering the city with the aim of increasing security.

The President also fired two top security officials to help restore public confidence following the attack. A statement from the prime minister's office on Sunday said Abdullahi Mohamed Ali, the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) director general, and General Abdihakim Said, the head of police, had been sacked after a cabinet vote. Mr. Ali had recently written an article in the New York Times, criticizing the international community for failing to provide sufficient help for Somali security forces.

Under the title "Somalia Doesn't Need Tears; Help Us Fight Terrorism", Mr. Ali called for "a new paradigm of cooperation between Somali security services and international partners." He said Somalia did not have the necessary facilities to use intelligence from crime scenes. International partners offered to provide technical assistance," but only shared fragments of post-blast investigations with the intelligence services. He noted that in May, the Minister of Internal Security had assigned high priority to the detection and disruption of the bombers' network and production cells. The National Intelligence and Security Agency was given responsibility for analyzing the collected evidence, developing a strategy to disrupt bombing operations, and preventing attacks. He said it had tightened the security cordon around Mogadishu to curb the flow of fighters, weapons and explosives. It had identified the most common bomb components and ways to restrict or regulate access to them. The NISA had also approached international partners, for the training and technical assistance. He said it had received no reply to this and other requests.

...the Somali Prime Minister Khayre's visit to Turkey

Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre paid a three-day official visit to Turkey in the second half of last week during which he held talks with Turkish Prime Minister and other officials, and

attended celebrations of the 94th anniversary of the independence of the country. He also visited the hospital where some of those wounded in the October 14 bombing attack were being treated. Thirty-five were airlifted Ankara for full medical treatment. Prime Minister Khayre said that the condition of some had improved but others remained in a critical condition.

It was, the Prime Minister said, a very successful visit. He noted on his return to Mogadishu that the government had reached a trade cooperation deal with Turkey. The Somali Federal Government would now form two committee tasked with working on the export of Somali domestic products to Turkey. He said the Somali government was committed to strengthening bilateral ties between Somalia and Turkey, and was quoted as emphasizing that the strengthening of bilateral relations extended to the security sector where Turkey, he said, would assist local security forces in the battle against Al-Shabaab.

Earlier, before leaving Ankara, the Prime Minister told the Anadolu news agency that the two countries had agreed on enhancing bilateral cooperation to defeat terrorism and improve security in Somalia. He said: "the outcome of my visit is that Turkey and Somalia have agreed to have a strategic cooperation between our two countries on security, fighting terrorism, economic growth and economic development on infrastructure and businesses." The Prime Minister went on: "We also agreed on a project to create jobs in Somalia through investment in infrastructure", adding, "we hope that this will lead to increase business activity in the country." Prime Minister Khayre said that Turkish contractors and investors had invested more than \$350 billion in more than 118 countries but only \$75 million of this had gone to Somalia. He and Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım had agreed on their strategic business alliance and that Turkish investment in Somalia would increase in the future.

Prime Minister Khayre told the news agency that "the Somali people are forever grateful to the Turkish people for their support." He said the government was particularly pleased with the progress of the Turkish military training facility in Somalia which would contribute to the building of the Somali National Army." He said: "We are very happy with our cooperation with Turkey both in military and social economic cooperation. We hope, in the next year or two, more than 1,000 or 2,000 soldiers will graduate from that Military Academy." Turkey's largest overseas military training academy, in Mogadishu, was opened on September 30, inaugurated by Turkey's Chief of General Staff, General Hulusi Akar and by Somali Prime Minister Khayre. The facility, located south of Mogadishu, has the capacity to train more than 1,500 troops at a time.

South Sudan's President Kiir on a two-day official visit to Khartoum

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir Mayardit made a two-day official visit to the Sudanese capital, Khartoum this week. He was received by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on arrival at Khartoum airport on Wednesday (November 1). Ahmed Bilal Osman, Sudan's Information Minister and Government Spokesman, expressed his confidence that the visit would be fruitful and the two sides would work together for the prosperity of the two peoples and for stability, security and peace in both Sudan and South Sudan." He added: "We are confident that the visit

will solve all pending issues between our two sides.” Michael Makuei, South Sudan's Information Minister said “this visit intends to improve the relations between the two countries, to achieve the interests of the people in the two countries.” Among the issues discussed in the bilateral talks was the resumption of oil production in the former Unity State; the issues concerning the border for trade between the two countries, and trade itself.

Speaking at the opening session of their joint talks President al-Bashir said that Sudan looked forward to fraternal and fruitful bilateral talks to push forward their bilateral relations in a positive direction. President al-Bashir reaffirmed the keenness of Sudan to settle outstanding issues and to the implementation of cooperation agreements assigned earlier. He pointed out that the purpose of Sudan’s hosting consultations on the IGAD High-Level Revitalization Forum for the South Sudan peace process and its participation in the preparatory phase of the Forum was to support the ongoing efforts to reach a peaceful settlement in South Sudan. He affirmed the support of Sudan for the national dialogue in South Sudan, and to maintain its security and stability. President al-Bashir said the peace agreement signed in August, 2015 represented the best option for realizing peace between the parties in conflict. “Sudan, he said, “has extended and is still extending support to the citizens of South Sudan affected by the war and is still opening its territories for the passage of humanitarian aid to South Sudan. He hoped and expected South Sudan to overcome its current crisis.

President al-Bashir also stressed the importance of reactivating the Joint Committee on Abyei, so it could create an enabling environment to achieve interim arrangements concerning the setting up of the administration, the legislative council and the joint police force for the Abyei region. In fact, prior to the visit, South Sudan Presidential spokesperson, Ateny Wek Ateny, emphasized that the issue of the disputed region of Abyei would not be on the agenda. The spokesperson emphasized the purpose was to discuss ways to rejuvenate the 2012 cooperation agreements as well as forging stable and strong relations on the basis of joint interests. He said: “This visit is aimed at normalizing the relations between the two countries which have been tense, and the two leaders will decide on a roadmap to improve bilateral ties.”

President Kiir congratulated the Sudanese government and people on the lifting of the economic sanctions imposed by the US. He expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the government of Sudan in extending humanitarian aid to South Sudan refugees. President Kiir pledged his country would not host any opposition groups that threaten peace and security in Sudan. He reaffirmed his country’s desire for good neighborliness with Khartoum, and he also affirmed the commitment of his government to the implementation of the various agreements signed between the two countries since 2012. He said he would personally supervise implementation of these agreements. Referring to the successful national dialogue experience of Sudan, President Kiir underlined the efforts of his government to bring together the elements of the opposition in Southern Sudan through the call for a national dialogue.

Before President Kiir arrived in Khartoum, the Joint Political and Security Committee met on Tuesday (October 31). The meeting concluded with the signing of agreed minutes on points relating to the revitalization of the Joint Political and Security Committee and the Border Verification and Assessment Committee. It pointed to the previous agreements signed by the two sides, including the demilitarized zone and opening of agreed corridors, following arrangements

by the Joint Technical Committee. Sudanese Minister of Defense, Awad Ibn Alouf, said “we have agreed to redeploy the forces to allow the establishment of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone”, and open four crossing points that had been closed to traders for several years. The two Defense Ministers said they would begin to implement the military agreements and activate the Joint Security Committee and direct communication between their officials, resolve outstanding problems and ensure the acceleration of what was agreed upon. Troops would be withdrawn outside the demilitarized border zone, which would extend for 10 km either side of the 1956 border. Awad Mohamed Ahmed bin Awaf said: "The talks underscored the keenness of the armed forces of the two countries to put their joint relations in their proper framework to open the door wide to create an integrative relationship that is positively reflected on the two peoples, especially on the border." "South Sudan Defense Minister Kuol Manyang said this would allow the two sides to focus on other aspects of bilateral cooperation, adding “We have reached good understandings and progress on many issues that concern the two countries and the defense ministries of the two countries." The two sides said they would implement their decisions within a month from the signing of the minutes. The Joint Political and Security Committee will meet again in Juba on January 8, 2018, to review and assess the situation.

Although Abyei was not apparently a subject of the talks between the two Presidents, Misseriya leaders, earlier in the week, called on the Sudanese government to include it in the bilateral talks. They pointed to the need to form the Abyei joint administration institutions in line with the agreement of June 2011, adding: "We insist on resolving the issue of Abyei and to launch the formation of a joint government in the (disputed) region that will implement what has been agreed in the deal."

Abyei was, however, raised at the UN Security Council on Thursday last week when Alexander Zuev, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions, told the Security Council that the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee had not convened in the last week of July, as agreed, and a meeting for August 16 in Addis Ababa had also been postponed after South Sudan cited the need to await the outcome of the current meeting between the Presidents of South Sudan and Sudan. No date for a meeting of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee has yet been announced. In these circumstances, Assistant Secretary-General Zuev recommended the Security Council extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) for another six months. He pointed out UNISFA had clearly played a stabilizing role in Abyei, and urged both Governments to consolidate the local gains it had won by engaging in discussions to resolve the deadlock over establishing temporary arrangements that should lead to the determination of Abyei’s final status.

Nicholas Haysom, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, said that thanks to UNISFA’s sustained efforts, the risk of Sudan and South Sudan relapsing into conflict was low. Its stabilizing role should inform any decision the international community might be considering regarding Abyei and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. UNISFA’s enabling role was crucial for any future progress towards the implementation of transitional agreements and the resumption of talks on Abyei’s final status, he added.

At the UN Security Council briefing, Ambassador Omer Dahab Fadl Mohamed (Sudan) reaffirmed Sudanese commitment to cooperation with UNISFA. He called on the Government of

South Sudan to increase cooperation in that regard and implement the Abyei institutions, in particular, the joint security and administrative arrangements, for lasting peace to take hold. He called for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism to continue so that the gains won would not be lost. Ambassador Akuei Bona Malwal (South Sudan) reiterated his Government's commitment to engaging Sudan in renewed efforts towards an agreed solution. He noted South Sudan had granted the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism full freedom of movement. Both parties had accepted UNISFA's proposal to establish four temporary observation sites within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, and sent their respective monitors to start joint reconnaissance missions to identify those sites. However, such activities could not realistically replace the final resolution of the Abyei issue, he said, and called for final settlement of the matter on the basis of the African Union High Implementation Panel proposal of 21 September 2013.

Eritrea's Special Rapporteur says the country's future is "walking away"...

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, Sheila B. Keetharuth told the UN General Assembly on Thursday last week (October 26) that Eritrea's future was quite literally "walking away"; a continuing stream of young refugees were fleeing the country. Speaking to the 32nd meeting of the Third Committee of the General Assembly's 72nd session, Ms. Keetharuth said the people of Eritrea were suffering from unending human rights violations, and thousands walked for days in a desperate bid to reach the borders of neighboring countries. Recent figures from the International Organization for Migration show that 20,000 people have crossed into Sudan and Ethiopia so far this year, almost as many as in the whole of 2016. Nearly 50% of those seen by the IOM are aged between 18 and 24.

She pleaded with the international community to show compassion to those who risked death to cross the border, along which the military have orders to shoot-to-kill. She appealed to the international community "not to turn their backs on Eritrean refugees for short-term political gain in response to populist electoral demands or promises, which can translate into actual restrictions, harassment and human rights violations." She added: "At best, efforts to reduce the number of Eritrean refugees arriving will lead only to a temporary drop in numbers, but they will not stop people crossing deserts and seas in search of safe havens. No barrier will be insurmountable for someone fleeing human rights violations." The Special Rapporteur said that, rather than trying to reduce the number of Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees they were receiving, other countries should try to ensure that human rights in Eritrea were protected. She said the international community: "needs to restore the rights and dignity of Eritrean refugees by closing human rights protection gaps in national refugee policies."

The Special Rapporteur listed multiple, severe and continuing violations of people's human rights in Eritrea. She said there had been no apparent changes in policies in Ethiopia and citizens were still dying in custody or enduring indefinite detention with no access to their families and lawyers. Rights to freedom of expression and religion were regularly violated, quoting reports that followers of both recognized and non-recognized religious denominations were being detained in Asmara. She said: "Arrest and detention are used to punish, intimidate, create an

atmosphere of fear, or to ‘disappear’ those who are deemed dangerous because they do not toe the line.” Ms. Keetharuth said many arrests followed the same pattern. Detainees were not told why they were being held, were not taken to court, and were denied access to lawyers and visitors. Even close family members could only hand food and clean clothes to prison guards. Detainees were not told whether or when they would be freed, and no information was made public on specific cases. She urged the Government of Eritrea to end its long-standing practice of arbitrary detention and to respect the rights of all prisoners, many of the most prominent of whom are believed to have died in custody.

Ms. Keetharuth said: “Eritrea still has no constitution to provide protection for fundamental human rights, no independent judiciary, no legislative assembly - in fact no institutions that could ensure checks and balances or protect against the misuse of power by the state.” She also highlighted the point that Eritreans were still being forced into indefinite national service, despite a maximum of 18 months being set by the country’s laws, and this also involved what amounted to forced labor. The result was that tens of thousands of Eritreans sought to leave to find somewhere their rights would be respected, but even that was fraught with risks, not least because of the shoot-to-kill policy along the borders.

Ms. Keetharuth also pointed out that previous calls by the UN Commission of Inquiry to ensure accountability for past human rights violations and crimes against humanity had not resulted in any new measures in Eritrea. Referring to her previous proposals for a series of benchmarks to assess Eritrea’s progress in human rights, she urged the Government to show its “genuine commitment and serious determination” by taking concrete steps to improve people’s lives.

...and violent dispersal of a student demonstration in Asmara

The demonstration began on Tuesday morning (October 31) in Asmara’s largely Muslim Akriya neighborhood after several board members of a private Islamic school, Al-Dia, and of the of the school’s administration were arrested. Radio Erena, an Eritrean radio station in Paris said the arrests prompted students and others, sympathetic to the protests, to take to the streets to demonstrate. More than 100 students from the school marched towards the president’s office. Within an hour, government forces armed with sticks and firearms dispersed the crowd. This seems to have brought other people out on the streets. Videos on Facebook and Twitter and YouTube show demonstrators fleeing along Asmara's downtown streets with sounds of gunshots audible. The US Embassy reported hearing gunshots and issued an advice to US citizens to “avoid areas where demonstrations are taking place and exercise caution when in the vicinity of any large gatherings, protests, or demonstrations.”

The opposition Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization claimed on its website that 28 people had been killed and a hundred wounded. Following the dispersal of the demonstrators, the military are said to have carried out round-ups and further arrests of youngsters in the area of the school and elsewhere. There were claims that demonstrations and protests then spread to Keren, Assab and Aqordet as well as other towns outside Asmara, and that the government had shut down the Internet. Eritrea's Minister of Information, Yemane Gebremeskel, said on Twitter that the protests were no more than a "small demonstration by one school in Asmara dispersed without any casualty, hardly breaking news."

The protest was triggered by the arrest of Haji Musa Mohammed Nur, the nonagenarian honorary president of a private Islamic school, Al-Dia, in the Akhriya area of Asmara. The government had earlier issued a circular outlining plans to turn all schools into community schools, administered and financed by the public. Under these plans the school, run by parent committees as a private Islamic school, was to become a non-denominational public school run by the 'local community. The ministry of education's attempt to regulate the school was met by strong criticism by members of the school's board, parents and students. At a meeting on October 15, Haji Musa Mohamed Nur, a highly respected nonagenarian, spoke out strongly against the ministry's plans which were said to have included demands that the school drop religious teaching, ban the wearing of the hijab and stop separation of sexes. Haji Musa, and a number of others from the school's board and administration, were then arrested. It was this that appears to have triggered the protests and demonstration. There have also been reports that the government has also closed at least one Catholic School and imprisoned two of its staff as part of the same policy to restrict religious education.

The 'Freedom Friday' underground network in Asmara, Arbi Harnet, issued a statement on Wednesday calling for national unity against government actions against religious schools. It said the regime was trying to present the protest as a religious move aimed at asserting Moslem dominance in the country, but Arbi Harnet said neither the actions of the government in closing religious schools nor the protests were about one religious group. It pointed out there Christian protestors on the streets and some were now in prison alongside their Moslem brothers. It pointed out the issues were freedom and liberty, not confined to religion or one religious group. It appealed to all "to continue to stand in solidarity and reject any attempts to divide and play us against each other."

AU Peace and Security Council discusses peace, justice and reconciliation

The AU Peace and Security Council dedicated its 726th meeting (October 20) to an Open Session on the theme: "Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in Africa". The meeting heard a statement from AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Smail Chergui, and presentations by United Nations Under-Secretary General Adama Dieng, Special Advisor of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, and representatives of AU Member States, as well as AU partners and other organizations.

Participants underlined the reinforcing link between justice, peace and security and the importance of building trust between state institutions and societies, as well as reconciling and healing societies divided by violent conflict. They emphasized the importance of a comprehensive transitional justice and reconciliation process, a key to effectively preventing a relapse and lay a strong foundation for sustainable peace in countries emerging from violent conflicts.

The meeting acknowledged the AU had an advanced compendium of normative instruments for the holistic promotion of peace, justice and reconciliation, as enshrined in the AU Constitutive Act, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African

Union and the Protocol Establishing the Criminal Jurisdiction of the African Court of Justice, as well as the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court on Human and People’s Rights. The 22nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government declared the decade 2014-2024 the “Madiba Nelson Mandela Decade of Reconciliation in Africa”. Significant progress is expected in the promotion of peace, truth-telling, justice, reconciliation, healing, restoration of social cohesion, reconstruction and resilience, in particular within the framework of the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020. The meeting commended all Member States that had already signed, ratified and domesticated relevant AU and international instruments relating to the promotion of human rights and urged Member States, which had not done so, to do so as a matter of urgency.

It acknowledged that peace, justice and reconciliation processes were usually complex and politically sensitive. It underlined amnesty should not be used to subvert justice and condone impunity. It said the International Criminal Court should be complementary to, not a substitute for, national and regional justice systems. The primary responsibility for promoting peace, justice and reconciliation rested with Governments and this underlined the importance of building the capacity of local, national and regional justice systems. It encouraged Member States to raise public awareness about the critical importance of justice and reconciliation, as well as of management of diversity, to build sustainable peace and stability. The PSC congratulated some AU Member States for their national reconciliation processes, in particular Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Africa. In this context, the meeting underlined the imperative of inclusive post-conflict reconstruction and development, as well as peace building and national reconciliation processes, to include civil society, traditional leaders, leaders of various religious groups, women and youth.

The meeting expressed deep concern over the persistence of violent conflicts with the attendant human rights violations and abuses, and underlined the imperative of comprehensively addressing the underlying causes of violent conflicts. It emphasized the need for the AU Commission, the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and relevant civil society organizations to regularly provide the Peace and Security Council with comprehensive early warning briefings. It emphasized the need for all Member States, RECs, the United Nations, AU partners and all relevant international institutions to collectively work towards the goal of “Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020”. The meeting, which commended AU partners for their continued support to post-conflict reconstruction and development, as well as peace-building efforts in Member States emerging from violent conflicts, also requested the AU Commission to expedite the development of a Draft AU Policy Framework on Justice and Reconciliation for consideration and adoption by the relevant AU Policy Organs, as soon as possible.

UNOCHA’s Humanitarian Bulletin for Ethiopia in October

The Government and its partners have developed a ‘Humanitarian Requirements Document Status Update’, underlining the requirements of the outstanding Humanitarian Requirements Document Mid-Year Review against revised sector requirements to address new needs since

August. Partners and Government, have been scaling-up the response, adjusting sector requirements, programs and staffing in line with the rapidly changing humanitarian context since the review, though the strategic objectives and other content of the Mid-Year Review remain the same.

The revision has taken into account new needs since August, including deterioration of the nutrition situation requiring the introduction of a Blanket Supplementary Feeding Program for 45 critically drought-affected districts in seven zones of Somali region; reports of crop failure in eastern Amhara, most parts of Oromia and SNNP regions due to frost and failed rains and the need to provide seed support for replanting; and funding for the prevention and control of Fall Armyworm infestation.

In the health, agriculture, nutrition, Emergency shelter and WaSH sectors, needs were revised upwards by US\$103.5 million to enable partners to respond to new needs. The updated requirements in the food sector were lower than anticipated due to the changes in the National Integrated Food-Cash Relief Plan. There still remains funding gap of US\$248.7 million against the revised requirements of \$1.4 billion, up from \$1.259 billion.

OCHA notes that following clashes along the Oromia and Somali border in early September, 43,587 displaced households (23,507 in Oromia regional state and 20,080 in Somali regional state) were in urgent need of shelter and non-food items (NFI). In line with the response plan of the National Disaster Risk Management Commission the Shelter/NFI Cluster continues to map the needs in both regions, and respond accordingly where access allows. By the middle of the month, the cluster mobilized assistance in-kind and in cash for 22,000 households, leaving 21,500 households unassisted. UNOCHA says response activities are ongoing following recent verification exercises. A cash-based response by several agencies, targeting 10,000 households, is also underway. UNOCHA also noted that some 110,000 school children had been affected by clashes, 65,228 in Oromia and 44,350 on Somali regional states.

The UNOCHA bulletin also noted that the government had begun civil registration of refugees for the first time as the number of refugees in the country nears the one million mark. Starting on Friday (October 27), all refugees in Ethiopia are able to register vital events, including birth, death, marriage and divorce, directly with the national authorities.

Babar Baloch, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, described this as: “an historic first and a ground-breaking development for refugee protection in Ethiopia. Civil registration for refugees has been made possible following an amendment to existing legislation, and UNHCR and the UN’s Children Agency (UNICEF) collaborated with the Government in preparation of the amendment. This was one of the nine pledges made at the Leaders’ Summit held in New York in September 2016, Mr. Baloch said, adding, “Other commitments included to grant work permits to refugees, strengthen access to education, to allow a significant number of refugees to reside outside of refugee camps and to locally integrate long-staying refugees.”

At the launch, eleven refugees were issued with certificates in Addis Ababa. Civil registration offices have also been established in each of the 26 refugee camps in the country, as well as in

seven locations with a high concentration of refugees. Until now, the more than 70,000 refugee children born in Ethiopia over the last decade have not had their births registered. In future any refugee children born in Ethiopia will be issued with birth certificates; children born before the new law came into force can also obtain a birth certificate retroactively. The UNHCR emphasized that birth registration was an important protection too, helping ensure basic human rights, particularly in situations of displacement. It would establish a child's legal identity and help prevent statelessness. The UNHCR also noted that civil registration was also important for policy development and planning for Ethiopia's Development Agenda, in line with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, which aims to enhance refugee self-reliance and inclusion, provide refugees with better possibilities to solve their plight; and ease pressure on host countries. Ethiopia currently hosts more than 883,000 refugees, mainly from Eritrea, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

EPRDF Executive Committee discusses current issues

Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Executive Committee held a meeting from October 28 and 29, last week, to evaluate progress of the ongoing "deep renewal program", launched earlier by the EPRDF, and of the country's current situation. The Committee deliberated on the nature and reasons for the conflicts occurring in some areas in the country. It noted last month's conflicts between the Oromia and Somali Regional State had inflicted very serious damage on lives and properties as well as displacing thousands of citizens. These incidents should not have happened, the Committee said, adding the problems occurred due to a failure to overcome rent seeking.

The Committee extended its gratitude to elders, religious leaders, teachers, women, youth and members of the security force for their life-saving interventions during the conflict. It appreciated the ongoing efforts of people to rehabilitate and return displaced people back to their homes. The Committee also urged the government to facilitate conditions for the return of the displaced to their villages and former situation. In addition, the Committee stressed the need to carry out special activities rapidly at all levels to further build trust and strengthen the unity of the people in the federal system.

With regard to the performance of the country's economy, the Committee evaluated it as essentially healthy and successful, with the exception of the export sector. It said the recent devaluation of Ethiopian currency was timely and appropriate. After looking into the possible impact of the devaluation on people's livelihoods, the Committee welcomed the government's decision to keep prices of commodities such as fuel, sugar, wheat and edible oil as they are. It welcomed the government's decision to set out directions for the public/private sector to avert possible unreasonable price hikes on imported commodities.

In concluding its meeting, the Committee set out directions for rapidly addressing the causes of the conflicts, including rent seeking, corruption, maladministration, and contraband trade. It also gave directions to halt any illegal activities associated with such problems and stressed the need to ensure rule of law.

World Bank: Africa's progress in Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction

The World Bank Annual Report 2017 underlines Africa's progress over the last decade, both in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction, yet it also emphasizes the continent is still facing huge challenges. Overall, growth in sub-Saharan Africa fell sharply last year (2016) to 1.3%, though the Bank expects this to recover to an average of 2.6% in 2017 and rise to 3.2% for 2018. At the same time, it regards this recovery as fragile with external risks for the economic outlook of the continent remaining significant. These include a stronger than expected effort to tighten global financial conditions, poor performance of commodity prices and the resulting impact on exports, and promotion of protectionism. Domestic risks reinforce the problems facing the current recovery. These include inadequate pace of reforms, unnecessary and ambitious economic and political changes, increasing security threats, and political volatility prior to elections in a number of some countries. Although the proportion of people in Africa living on US\$ 1.90 a day or less, has been falling, from 43% in 2012 to 41% percent in 2013, 389 million people in Africa live in extreme poverty - more than any all other regions combined.

The World Bank approved US\$11.8 billion in loans for 145 projects in fiscal year 2017. This includes US\$ 1.2 billion of the IBRD loan and \$ 10.7 billion IDA commitments, of which \$ 2.3 billion is from the IDA Scale-up Facility. The Bank also signed seven Reimbursable Advisory Services agreements with six countries offering technical advice on issues such as administration, trade and competition, and finance and markets. The World Bank also made important contributions to data gathering in Africa. It works with national statistical offices and NGOs to encourage the use of mobile phones collect information on living conditions. The Listening to Africa initiative combines face-to-face surveys with follow-up mobile phone interviews to collect data. It currently operates in six countries, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Senegal, Tanzania, and Togo, where it says it finds a strong demand for data, capacity for implementation, and sufficient network coverage.

Key focus areas of Bank activity include raising agricultural productivity, building resilience to climate change, increasing access to affordable and reliable energy, promoting good-quality education, and supporting stability in fragile and conflict-affected places.

The Bank is clear that increasing agricultural production has the potential to ensure food security and provide gainful employment for the entire continent. The Bank-supported West Africa Agricultural Productivity and East Africa Agricultural Productivity Programs are raising incomes and improving food security for millions of Africans, a majority of whom are women. The programs also provide smallholders with new crop varieties, food-processing tools, and other agricultural technologies. The Bank also promotes climate-smart agriculture to help build climate resilience. For example, support from the Bank-administered Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Fund, a multi-donor trust fund, has financed agricultural research by the CGIAR global partnership. In Uganda, this research has helped smallholder coffee farmers to learn better farming techniques and introduce climate-resilient coffee plant varieties, which have helped to improve crop quality and raise incomes.

One of Africa's greatest infrastructure obstacles is inadequate energy supplies. The Bank sees boosting the generation and distribution of sustainable energy as one of its primary objectives. It has been working to connect new consumers to energy networks and financed expansion of existing networks in fast-growing areas, including new transmission and distribution lines. It has also invested in off-grid renewable solutions, such as solar panels. The Bank supports comprehensive policy studies and engages governments in systematic discussions to identify key policy barriers and mitigation strategies.

The Bank's report notes that each year in Africa and for the next decade, 11 million youth will enter the job market. They need the right skills and training for what employers are seeking. The Bank has launched initiatives to boost science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education across the region. The Eastern and Southern Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence, financed by a \$140 million IDA credit, is creating synergies in higher education by optimizing limited resources and deepening cooperation between countries while equipping young people with highly relevant skills and knowledge. It is a project that will strengthen skills in five clusters of regional priorities: industry, agriculture, health, education, and applied statistics.

Other areas of interest include fostering women's and youth's economic empowerment. In Ethiopia, for example, the Women Entrepreneurship Development Project provides access to financing and business development services to women entrepreneurs. Over 14,000 women entrepreneurs have registered for the program, and new donors and local financial institutions are now using their own funds to sustainably expand the program. In the Central African Republic, an innovative cash-for-work program, the LONDO Project, is providing short-term employment to 35,000 workers. These temporary jobs aim to reduce vulnerability and contribute to stability in this post-conflict country.

The Bank also builds resilience to climate shocks and promotes food security. Its Social Safety Net Project launched in February 2016 provided last year for a response to the humanitarian emergency in southern Madagascar where a million people were food insecure as a result of repeated El Nino activity. The project provided an effective response to this crisis for most of the population by scaling up cash transfers and community nutrition services. The project aimed to increase the access of extremely poor households to safety net services and lay the foundations for a social protection system

In its report, the Bank also lists a number of projects under the title "Committed to results", giving a good idea of the projects it has committed itself to in Africa. These include under Ethiopia: Agricultural productivity increased an average of 10 percent, and yields for major crops increased in 45 districts between 2008 and 2013. Under Kenya it notes: As of 2015, 2.6 million individuals were benefiting from cash transfer support through the national safety net program, up from 1.7 million in 2013. Central African Republic: Emergency food crisis support provided livelihood assistance to over 720,000 people, and helped to increase the crop production of 140,000 farmers between 2014 and 2016. In Côte d'Ivoire: Between 2012 and 2015, some 27,500 people had benefited from a job creation and skills training program to provide better opportunities for youths. In Democratic Republic of Congo: Between 2008 and 2016, over 1,600 km of priority roads were rehabilitated, and in Tanzania: Internet bandwidth

coming into the country increased more than 1,300 times since 2008; Internet connections now reach 34% percent of the population, up from less than 1 percent in 2008.