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News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

The 30th Summit of the African Union (AU) starts on Monday next week (January 22) with the opening of the Permanent Representatives' Committee. This will be followed by the Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of Foreign Ministers on Thursday and Friday (January 25-26), and the 30th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union will take place on Sunday and Monday (January 28-29). The theme of this year's Summit is: "Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa's Transformation". (**See article**)

Ambassadors and Representatives of Member States of IGAD held an informal consultation meeting on Thursday (January 18) at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chaired by Ethiopia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene, the emphasized disappointment at violations of the Ceasefire Agreement, but underlined the next phase of the Revitalization Process, covering power sharing and transitional security arrangement would continue at the beginning of February. (**See article**)

The Executive Board of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) announced on Wednesday (January 17) that it had elected Dr. Tekeda Alemu, Ethiopia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, as one of its four Vice-Presidents for 2018. The other three were Mr. Durga Prasad Bhattarail, Mr. Miloš Vukašinović, and Mr. Rubén Armando Escalante Hasbún, the Permanent Representatives of Nepal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and El Salvador respectively. The Executive Board reviews UNICEF activities and approves its policies, country programs, and budgets. It has 36 members, representing the five regional groups of Member States at the United Nations.

Ethiopia

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome concluded a state visit to Cuba on Friday last week (January 12), heading a delegation that included the Ministers of Science and Technology, and Health. The President held talks with President Raul Castro and visited a number of government institutions

and well as underlining the bonds of brotherhood and collaboration between Ethiopia and Cuba at a ceremony at the Pantheon of the Fallen. **(See article)**

President Dr. Mulatu on Wednesday (January 17) appointed two ambassadors to represent Ethiopia abroad: Ambassador Woinshet Tadesse appointed as Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the African Union (AU), and Abay Woldu, for whom no post has yet been announced.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn visited Egypt this week at the invitation of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to attend the 6th Ethio-Egypt Joint Commission Meeting. During his visit the Prime Minister held talks on Thursday (January 18) with President el-Sisi to discuss bilateral issues of mutual interest, including the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. At a press briefing, Prime Minister Hailemariam emphasized that GERD was as much a development for Egypt as for Ethiopia; President el-Sisi underlined that “the Nile should serve as a source of solidarity and not a source of conflict.”

Prime Minister Hailemariam met with Sharan Burrow, Secretary-General of International Trade Union Confederation on Wednesday (January 17). He underlined Ethiopia’s efforts to create conducive work environment for the labor force to benefit from the increasing flow of investment, and the government’s support for workers constitutional right to organize and negotiate on wages and other benefits. The ITUC Secretary-General, stressing the importance of building the capacity of workers to get organized and negotiate with employers and of a social dialogue between government and workers, welcomed the balance of development using the opportunities of investment potential.

Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, arrived in Cairo on Tuesday (January 17) to attend the 6th Ethio-Egypt Joint Ministerial Commission meeting, **(See article)**

Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh paid a one-day visit to Khartoum on Sunday (January 14) for talks with Sudan’s Foreign Minister Professor Ibrahim Ghandour within the framework of the strategic relationship between the two countries. Dr. Workneh also delivered a message from Prime Minister Hailemariam to President Omar al-Bashir. **(See article)**

The recently elected President of Somaliland Muse Bihi Abdi arrived in Addis Ababa for an official visit on Tuesday (January 16). During his visit, he met with Prime Minister Hailemariam and Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh and other senior officials. He said his visit was aimed at strengthening the longstanding ties between Ethiopia and Somaliland. **(See article)**

Foreign Minister Dr, Workneh met the newly appointed South Korean Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Hoon-min LIM and received a copy of his credentials on Tuesday (January 16). Noting the longstanding and historic relations, Dr. Workneh warmly welcomed Ambassador LIM who highlighted the good working relations between the two countries and noted his keenness to further cement and enhance the already cordial bilateral relations.

The Council of Ministers of Ethiopia proposed a 14 billion birr (approximately US\$518 million additional budget for this Ethiopian fiscal year (2017/18). This would be used to deal with

natural and man-made disasters, cover the remaining payments for the youth revolving fund, increase students' enrollment capacity at 11 universities and accelerate moves towards digitization of TV transmission. This been referred to the House of People's Representative for approval. The Council also discussed loan agreements signed with the World Bank, French Development Agency and the African Development Bank and now referred to the House of Representatives.

The Minister of Public Enterprises, Girma Amente, heading a delegation on an official visit to Morocco has called on the two countries' public sector to take advantage of investment and business opportunities to further strengthen relations and cooperation. He has held talks with the Moroccan Secretary of State in charge of Foreign Trade, Rkia Derham, when the two sides pledged to boost bilateral trade ties; and with the Moroccan Minister of Equipment, Transport, Logistics and Water, Abdelkader Amar. The delegation visited Tangier-Med port on Monday this week.

Ethiopian Orthodox Christians celebrated *Ketera* on Thursday taking the Tabots, which symbolize the Ark of the Covenant, out from churches to sites for celebration of *Timkat*, The Ethiopian celebration of Epiphany, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, takes place on Friday this week (January 19).

The newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to Canada, Ambassador Aster Mamo presented a copy of her credentials to the Chief of Protocol of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development of Canada on Tuesday (January 16).

The US Embassy in Addis Ababa on Tuesday (January 16) welcomed the announcement that charges against 528 suspects had been dropped. It said: "We are encouraged by the Ethiopian government's decision to drop charges and pardon detainees, including political leaders, as a tangible step toward its stated goal of widening political space for all Ethiopians." It added: "We are aware that reviews of additional cases are underway, and hope they will be conducted in the same spirit."

The British Embassy in Addis Ababa hosted an event for the UK's Cranfield University Alumni in Ethiopia on Saturday (January 13). Cranfield University, academic partner of the UK Defence Academy, offers an Executive Masters program in Security Sector Management. The event brought together former students of the University and academic speakers. UK Defence Attaché Colonel Munro said Ethiopia was one of the UK's strategic partners in global peace and security and the UK was keen to continue, helping improve the capacity of our partners. The UK supports Ethiopia's peacekeeping capability through the Peace Support Training Centre based in Addis Ababa, helping to strengthen UN and AU peace operations both in the Horn and globally.

Ethiopian Airlines announced on Tuesday (January 16) that it has finalized a shareholder agreement with the Government of Zambia to re-establish Zambia Airways. The airline will initially serve national and regional destinations before embarking on international flights. The Government of Zambia will be the major shareholder in the airline with 55%, and Ethiopian Airlines will hold 45%.

A Chinese company, Wuxi Textiles is building a textile factory in Dire Dawa City with an investment of US\$220 million. The cornerstone was laid on Tuesday this week on a site adjacent to the Dire Dawa Industrial Park.

Work is to start later this year on the construction of a railway training academy in Bishoftu, the Ethiopian Railways Corp announced on January 13. When fully operational, the academy is expected to employ around 250 teachers and administrative staff, training up to 1000 students at a time in seven different railway-related disciplines.

Ethiopia received \$143 million from exports of oilseeds during the first five months of the current fiscal year, the Ministry of Trade announced. This was earned from the export of 128,399 tonnes of oil seeds, a 4.3% increase over the target. Then Ministry said an increase in the price of sesame in the global market, and a strong monitoring and support mechanism were responsible. In the last fiscal year which ended on July 8, 2017, Ethiopia earned \$345.29 million from the export of 323,755 tonnes of oil seeds.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism says over a hundred and thirty hotels in Addis Ababa have met the required standards for participants to the 30th African Union Summit later this month, January 22-30, attended by Heads of State and other leaders as well as representatives of continental and international organizations.

Eritrea

President Isaias gave one of his lengthy interview to Eritrea's government radio and television on Sunday (January 14) to deny Al-Jazeera's "fabricated news stories" about alleged deployment of Egyptian troops in Eritrea, to claim Khartoum and Addis Ababa were seeking to push Eritrea into war and accuse the US of responsibility, as well as instruct Turkey on its national security issues.

The Eritrean ambassador to the Netherlands, Ambassador Tekeste Ghebremedhin Zemuy, has been declared persona non-grata and asked to leave the country. The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs said the reasons for this decision related to the evidence that Eritrean refugees were being forced to pay a Diaspora tax in order to access consular services at the Eritrean embassy in The Hague. The Minister in a letter to Parliament on Wednesday (January 17) said: "This is an exceptionally severe measure, meant as a signal to the government of Eritrea...to make clear that we don't tolerate these unwanted practices."

Kenya

Following the laying of the foundation stone by President Uhuru Kenyatta, construction has begun on 'The Pinnacle' in Nairobi, which at a height of 300m will be the tallest skyscraper in Africa. It is a US\$200 million project of two glass-facade towers, one of 70 floors for office and residential accommodation, and the other of 45 floors for a 5 Star Hilton Hotel.

Somalia

President Mohamed Abdullahi concluded his ten day “reconciliation” tour of Puntland and Galmudug States in Dhusamareeb, where the agreement reached between the Galmudug administration and Ahlu Sunna wal Jama’a is being implemented.

A new report says Somalia's Al-Shabaab militants in Bay region are forcing rural communities to hand over children as young as 8 years old for indoctrination and military training. **(See article)**

Al-Shabaab has denounced its former deputy leader, Mukhtar Robow Abu Mansur, as an apostate who could be killed. Sheikh Mukhtar withdrew from Al-Shabaab in 2013 and retired to his own home area, before defecting to the Federal Government in August last year. This week an Al Shabaab spokesperson said Mukhtar Robow had left his religion and joined the disbelievers. He was, therefore, “an apostate who can be killed.”

Speaking at the launch of the Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan in Mogadishu on Wednesday (January 18), Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre asked the international community and donor agencies for their help to deal with the threat of further drought and potential famine. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) says 5.4 million are still in urgent need, and Peter de Clercq, the UNOCHA humanitarian coordinator says the figure needed is \$1.6 billion. The response plan includes preplanning for further drought as well as other humanitarian activities, many to be carried out by the recently instituted Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management Ministry.

Deputy Prime Minister, Mahdi Ahmed Gulaid, and Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Recep Akdag signed a cooperation protocol during the inaugural meeting of the Somali-Turkey Joint Economic Commission on Monday (January 15) in Ankara. This aimed to boost economic cooperation and Mr. Gulaid stressed Mogadishu was open to foreign investment and ready to boost trade cooperation with all friendly countries. Mr. Gulaid said the objective of the JEC was to translate the memoranda of understanding signed between the two countries into reality. The two countries have previously signed trade agreements in energy, mines, electricity, higher education, agriculture, and fisheries. Turkey's investment in Somalia is over US\$100 million.

Fisheries and Marine Resources Minister Abdirahman Mohamed Abdi Hashi and Turkey’s Food, Agriculture and Livestock Minister Ahmet Esref Fakibaba, also signed a memorandum of understanding on fishing and fisheries in Ankara. Under the deal, Turkish fishermen will be able to fish in Somalia’s territorial waters.

South Sudan

The Cease-fire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) on Tuesday (January 16) released four reports of violations of the cease-fire which came into effect on December 24. It said both government and opposition forces had committed multiple violations; both sides denied the accuracy of the reports and blamed each other for the violations. **(See article)**

In a joint statement issued on Friday (January 12), the AU Commission Chair and the UN Secretary-General "strongly" condemned recent violations of the Cessation of Hostilities agreed at last month's High-Level Revitalization Forum. They called on "South Sudanese fighting parties to immediately cease all hostilities, desist from undertaking any further military operations, and uphold their commitments to the 21 December 2017 Agreement. They also affirmed their support for imposition of consequences should the parties continue to violate the agreement.

Troika members, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States issued a statement "strongly" condemning breaches of the humanitarian truce, calling on all parties to "ensure humanitarian access throughout the country". The Troika said it was determined to hold to all who obstructed the realization of lasting peace. It called on IGAD partners to investigate all violations rapidly and hold those responsible to account immediately.

Sudan

M. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, briefed the Security Council on Sudan's Darfur region on Wednesday last week (January 10), presenting the joint assessment of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on UNAMID's phase one reconfiguration and recent developments in Darfur in the context of the Secretary-General's latest report on UNAMID. Ambassador Tekeda Alemu, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the UN, noted that Ethiopia was very encouraged over the progress in Darfur's security situation and the consolidation of state authority there. **(See article)**

The AU Representative in Khartoum has said the Joint Political and Security Committee between Sudan and South Sudan will meet on February 3 in Addis Ababa. The meeting will be held under the auspices of the African Union High Implementation Panel (AUHIP). It will discuss implementation of the outstanding issues contained in the cooperation agreements signed between the two countries in September 2012, and the implementation matrix for these agreements signed in March 2013.

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome's State Visit to Cuba

President Dr, Mulatu Teshome made a state visit to the Republic of Cuba last week (January 9 – 11), at the invitation of the President of the Republic of Cuba, President Raúl Modesto Castro Ruz. Dr. Getahun Mekuria, Minister of Science and Technology, and Professor Yifru Berhan, Minister of Health, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accompanied the |President on a very successful visit that has moved In general, the state visit was very successful and moved bilateral relation forward.

On the first day of his visit, President Mulatu attended a wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of Cuban soldiers who died alongside Ethiopians during the Ethio-Somalia War of 1977-78. President Mulatu said Ethiopians would always remember the noble cause that the Cuban people and Government stood for during the war; he thanked the

people of Cuba, and especially the families of fallen soldiers, for the sacrifices they made in Ethiopia. He emphasized it was the responsibility of the two countries to uphold the legacy of brotherhood and move their existing friendship and cooperation forward in different areas. President Mulatu also met with the Vice President of the Association of Combatants of the Cuban Revolution, Brigadier General Delsa Esther Puebla Viltres and some of the Cuban soldiers who fought in Ethiopia. Mrs. Viltres noted Ethiopia's engagement in regional and international peacekeeping missions, reflecting a commitment to their common cause.

President Mulatu and President Raúl Castro had a bilateral meeting after the official welcoming Ceremony. President Mulatu stressed that the diplomatic relationship over more than four decades and the sacrifices made by the Cuban soldiers had laid the foundations for the strong bond between the two countries. They agreed that this historic relation tied by blood needed to be strengthened through economic cooperation in the future, and discussed existing cooperation in health, science and technology. President Casto Raul pledged Cuba would continue to work with Ethiopia in health and technology transfer.

During the visit, the delegation visited various scientific centers: the Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center, Biocubafarma, Finlay Institute, Immunoassay center, Rosafé Signet Artificial Insemination Provincial Center, Pradera Roja (Red Prairie) ranch, National Institute of Oncology and Radiobiology, and Business Group of Biopharmaceutical and Chemical Productions LABIOFAM. These organizations showed their latest developments and expressed their interest in sharing their knowledge and expertise with their Ethiopian counterparts. Besides the official program, side events were organized for the Ministers of Science and Technology and of Health. Both Ministers met their Cuban counterparts and discussed on the ongoing cooperation. Dr. Getahun, Minister of Science and Technology met with Mrs. Elba Rose Perez Montoya and expressed Ethiopia's need to acquire and develop technology especially in the Agricultural Development sector. Mrs. Montoya said her Ministry was ready to cooperate and it was already working on a proposal for the livestock improvement program. The Ministers agreed to speed up the progress of the projects. The two Ministers of Health agreed to finalize negotiations on a draft agreement on the health sector and continuing cooperation in capacity building for Ethiopian health institutions by Cuban medical professionals.

The Sixth High-level Ethiopian-Egyptian Joint Ministerial Commission meets in Cairo

The Sixth High-level Ethio-Egyptian Joint Ministerial Commission meeting was held this week (January 16-19) in Cairo Egypt for the first time at the level of Heads of State. This followed the decision of the previous Joint Ministerial Commission meeting held in Addis Ababa in 2014, when ministers of the two countries agreed to have the next meeting as leaders' summit.

The delegations were led respectively by the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, and the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn. The two leaders witnessed the signing of Memoranda of Understanding on Political and Diplomatic Consultation, and Cooperation on Industry by Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. The

leaders' summit of the Joint Ministerial Commission underlined the need to hold frequent consultations in a bid to further strengthen the bilateral relationship in different areas of common interest and enrich their common understanding and cooperation as well as work more closely on aspects of regional peace and security.

Earlier on Wednesday (January 17), Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry addressed the Joint Ministerial Commission attended by relevant ministers from both countries. Dr. Workneh, mentioning the historic, cultural and economic ties as well as the shared values between the peoples of the two countries, said Ethiopia and Egypt were two nations that had existed and interacted for millennia. He noted that their bilateral cooperation had come a long way and underlined the frequent consultations the two governments have maintained in recent years. This, he said, was a clear manifestation of their common resolve not only to strengthen bilateral cooperation but also to enhance their cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Minister Workneh noted that the two countries had laid a solid foundation in recent years under which both could jointly benefit through exchanges in trade, investment and knowledge transfer, adding: "We have numerous comparative advantages that will afford us a win-win partnership." The Ethiopian government was investing heavily on infrastructure projects, including roads, railways and power generation as well as expansion of high quality industrial zones with a view to strengthening its economy and enhancing its attractiveness to investors. A significant number of investors were operating in Ethiopia's industrial parks to produce goods and products destined both for export and local consumption. Some had invested in agriculture-related manufacturing and others were taking part in leather, textile and garment manufacturing. The Minister called on Egyptian companies to take advantage of opportunities that were available.

Dr. Workneh also noted that both Ethiopia and Egypt had created a good foundation for the conduct of public diplomacy between the peoples of the two countries. This would encourage the building of mutual confidence and promote cooperation in cultural and business exchanges. Dr. Workneh expressed his appreciation to Egypt for the support extended to Ethiopia's medical institutions, including the Kidney Dialysis Center at Saint Paul's Hospital in Addis Ababa. He also noted the increasing number of young Ethiopians receiving capacity building training in Egyptian institutions.

Touching upon aspects of peace and security in the region, Minister Workneh said that Ethiopia and Egypt, as two of the most populous countries in Africa, recognized that peace, security and development were quite essential to build stable and prosperous nations. So, the Minister noted that both countries had managed to forge close coordination and collaboration as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council and fully discharge their responsibility of representing the African continent. Taking note of the fact that the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region had become a global security hot spot and a region of significant importance, the Minister emphasized the need to consolidate cooperation to ensure that elements of instability, including terrorism, human trafficking, and religious extremism were effectively rooted out.

Speaking of the Nile River and more specifically the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Dr. Workneh said, "I want to say once again in a clear and loud voice that the people

and Government of Ethiopia do not have the intention or the interest of causing significant harm to the brotherly people of Egypt." Legitimate concerns from Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sudan should be, and were being addressed through brotherly dialogue and consultation, he added. Dr. Workneh took note of the additional steps the two countries had taken to strengthen their bilateral cooperation, and in this regard, he welcomed the decision to hold the current Joint Ministerial Commission at Heads of State level. This, he said, was a step in the right direction.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said Ethiopia and Egypt also underlined their longstanding relationship, referring to the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1927, describing it as one of the oldest diplomatic ties in Africa. Minister Shoukry noted that the current High-level Joint Ministerial Commission would give significant impetus to the bilateral relations. He said Egypt had taken a strategic decision to forge strategic cooperation with Ethiopia, adding that this would benefit the peoples of both countries.

The two ministers held bilateral discussions prior to the Joint Ministerial Commission meeting. Dr. Workneh underlined that the Ethio-Egyptian ties transcend the Nile and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and covered their legacy of historical ties as well as addressing potential for future meaningful cooperation between the two countries. He emphasized that this visit was not only about the past. It was also about the present and most importantly about the future of the two countries and their peoples. The Minister said the 6th Joint Ministerial Commission meeting would be instrumental in reviewing existing agreements and exploring new areas of cooperation.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry also noted that the current visit would enhance cooperation in culture, education, trade and investment, mining and industry. He stressed cooperation between the two countries would have significant importance for regional peace and stability and to the potential of wider cooperation with the whole of Africa. He said the fact that the current joint ministerial commission was being held at the level of Heads of State for the first time showed the commitment of both sides for further cooperation and mutual understanding.

The Joint Ministerial Commission's Senior Officials Meeting had its first day session on Tuesday (January 16). This brought together a working group of senior officials and experts drawn from the two countries to review the implementation of previous agreements, and discuss the different proposals and draft agreements as well as explore new venues for cooperation.

Opening the Experts' session, Ethiopia's African Affairs Director-General, Ato Ayele Lire noted that Ethiopia and Egypt had common interests in diverse areas, adding that the Joint Ministerial Commission offered an important platform to review previous cooperation agreements and jointly explore the potential for further meaningful cooperation. Ambassador Mohammed Idris, Assistant Minister for African Affairs at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also noted relations between the two countries had great potential for further growth and consolidation. He stressed the joint ministerial commission would provide new impetus to bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh's visit to Khartoum

Ethiopia and the Sudan have long-standing ties dating back to the shared ancient civilizations of Axum and Meroe nearly two thousand years ago. As neighboring member states of IGAD they have also enjoyed strong ties in more recent years. Both have been working together to enhance their economic relationship through the mechanisms of a High-Level Committee; Steering and Economic Committees; and a Joint Border Development Commission as well as the planned Free Economic Zone along their common border.

Dr. Workneh's visit to the Sudan on Sunday (January 14) was part of the series of High-Level Visits which have helped cement relations. He presented a verbal message from Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn to President Omar Al-Bashir. The message related to bilateral relations and ways to enhance joint cooperation in different areas. During the meeting with the President, the two countries reaffirmed commitment to strengthen their bilateral relationship and enhance the social and economic benefits for the two peoples. President al-Bashir underlined that the two countries should work more closely to strengthen bilateral cooperation. He also noted that the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) would benefit not only Ethiopia but also countries in the region. Dr. Workneh emphasized the importance of holding regular consultations to strengthen economic and political ties between the two countries.

A session of official talks co-headed by the respective Foreign Ministers, Professor Ibrahim Ghandour, and Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu was held on Sunday at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Khartoum. The talks included discussion of the opportunities and fields for cooperation between Sudan and Ethiopia in various economic, technical and cultural fields. The two sides have a shared vision on the importance of positive dealing with developments in the region aiming at maximizing common benefits for the two sister nations. They also share the importance of continuing coordination and cooperation at the regional and international levels.

At the outset of the opening session, Professor Ghandour underlined Sudan's appreciation of the level of the relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia in all areas, especially in economic and political areas. Dr. Workneh expressed his pleasure at his visit and the satisfaction of his ministry over the close communication between the official and peoples' institutions in both countries. This has bolstered the positive outcome and achieved significant progress in bilateral cooperation in all spheres. He emphasized that his visit to Sudan came within framework of strategic relations between Sudan and Ethiopia and was following up previous discussions between the two countries.

At a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Ghandour, Dr. Workneh pointed out that his visit came within the framework of the strategic relationship between the two countries, and emphasized relations between the two countries were based on an exchange of benefits, particularly in political and economic fields. He said that in his talks with Professor Ghandour he had reiterated his Government's readiness to maintain close contact with Sudan to boost security and stability in the region. He underlined his belief that any problems raised in the region could be resolved through negotiation and dialogue. Dr. Workneh strongly affirmed the strength of the Ethio-Sudanese relations, stressing the two countries would continue to work to enhance peace and security efforts in the region. He said that Ethiopia and Sudan would work for sake of peace

and that any escalation of tension in the region would be faced by their call for dialogue, negotiations and a peaceful solution.

On the issue of the Nile water and the Renaissance Dam, Dr. Workneh strongly emphasized that this remained a tripartite issue. Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia had a tripartite agreement and Ethiopia would continue to work within that framework. He pointed out that the visit of the Ethiopian Prime Minister to Egypt this week came within the framework of these bilateral relations. He emphasized that the visit would promote joint political and economic issues between the two countries.

The 30th African Union Summit starts next week

The 30th Summit of the African Union (AU) is scheduled to take place next week, January 22-29, in Addis Ababa under the theme “Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation”. The Summit starts with the meeting of the Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives’ Committee on Monday and Tuesday (January 22-23), followed by the Ordinary Session of the Executive Council (of AU Foreign Ministers) on Thursday and Friday (January 25-26). The 30th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union will take place on the Sunday and Monday (January 28-29).

President Paul Kagame was elected to chair the Union for this year at the Summit last July, succeeding Alpha Condé of Guinea. His first task will be to see through the institutional reforms agreed within the AU and the AU Commission to make the organization financially self-sustaining. He was given this task in July 2016 and he has then worked with a group of experts to identify key areas of reform. Continuation of the reforms he has proposed and the adoption of a Protocol of Free Movement to further encourage integration of the continent will be two of the critical issues addressed by the Summit. The AU Commission set up its Reform Implementation Unit (RIU), chaired by former Cameroon Foreign Minister Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo, as the coordination body for the implementation of the reforms. Now, one year after the endorsement of the Kagame report by the AU Assembly, the reform plan is intended to progress to the next level of implementation at this Summit.

A meeting of the AU's Committee of Ten Ministers of Finance (F10) responsible for consideration of the financing of the AU was held on Saturday (January 13) in Kigali to consider progress on implementing the 0.2% levy on eligible imports for financing the union. 20 member states are at various stages of implementing this and 14 (Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Chad, Djibouti, Guinea, Sudan, Morocco, Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Gabon, Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire) have started collecting the levy and have deposited funds at a dedicated AU account. The F10 members are Algeria and Egypt (North Africa); Kenya and Ethiopia (East Africa); Chad and Republic of the Congo (Central Africa); Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire (Western Africa); and South Africa and Botswana (Southern Africa). The AU’s self-financing decisions, adopted during the organization’s Summit held in Kigali in 2016, will become a mandatory requirement for all member states starting from 2018. In this regard the upcoming Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government is expected to discuss the technical documents, the relevant recommendations and draft decisions presented concerning the self-financing issue.

During the first year of his tenure, the Chairman of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, has been praised for his work in response to the challenges the Union faces, he has also laid out strategy to make the organization more effective and relevant. He has made it clear he sees his most pressing work as the reform of the Union. He has reiterated the need for financing the African Union agenda if the regional body is to become self-sustainable and effective in guiding the continent's transformation. He has regretted that said unfortunately the majority of its programs and projects are financed by outside partners, and noted that any organization worth its salt should be able to take care of itself.

Other major issues to be discussed will include matters of security, peace and stability including the situations in South Sudan and Somalia, and the prolonged political disputes which pose problems, including the electoral issues in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as well as the problems of Libya. The Heads of State and Government will deliberate on these and other critical agenda items at the Summit.

IGAD Revitalization to continue despite concern over at ceasefire violations

Ambassadors and Representatives of Member States of IGAD held an informal consultation meeting on Thursday (January 18) at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chaired by Ethiopia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene, the meeting focused on current developments in South Sudan. Participants emphasized their disappointment at violations of the Ceasefire Agreement, and said violators should be identified and made accountable. It will not be business as usual. Equally, participants underlined, these incidents would not be any impediment to proceeding to the next phase of the Revitalization Process that will cover such issues as transitional governance and transitional security arrangements. Phase Two of the Revitalization Process is scheduled to be held in the first week of February. The State Minister later met the AU High-level Ad-Hoc Committee on South Sudan and the Office of the High-level Representative of the African Union for South Sudan during which they agreed to work together to fast-track the peace process and decided to commit more resources to the process.

The Cease-fire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) on Tuesday (January 16) released four reports of violations of the cease-fire which came into effect on December 24. It said sixteen people had been killed, including three children, and both government and opposition forces had committed multiple violations, according to four separate investigations. The Mechanism also said child soldiers continue to be recruited and sexual violence remains prevalent. Both sides denied the accuracy of the reports and blamed each other for the violations.

In a joint statement issued on Friday (January 12), the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, "strongly" condemned recent violations of the Cessation of Hostilities agreed at the South Sudan High-Level Revitalization Forum last month. They called on "all South Sudanese fighting parties to immediately cease all hostilities, desist from undertaking any further military

operations, and uphold their commitments to the 21 December 2017 Agreement." The AU and UN affirmed "their intent to support the imposition of consequences, consistent with the African Union Peace and Security Council Communiqué of 20 September 2017, should the parties continue to violate their own Agreement."

The Troika members, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States also issued a statement "strongly" condemned the breaches of the ceasefire and of the humanitarian truce, and called on all parties to "ensure humanitarian access throughout the country". The Troika said: "We remain committed to holding to account all those who obstruct the realization of lasting peace for the people of South Sudan, whether or not they are participating directly in the Forum." It called on its IGAD partners to rapidly investigate all violations and to immediately hold those responsible to account.

The Troika said it shared the concerns expressed by Dr. Workneh, Chairperson of IGAD Council of Ministers, when he expressed his deep concern and disappointment over violations of the Ceasefire Agreement at the end of December. Dr. Workneh said violations undermined the genuine efforts of the IGAD Council of Ministers, the AU Commission, the IGAD Partners Forum, the UN, the Troika and the International Community who had been tirelessly working to help South Sudanese Parties address the root causes of the conflict in South Sudan through an all-inclusive dialogue that would pave the way for national reconciliation; and the building of effective State institutions through a democratic process.

Al-Shabaab continues to recruit 8-year-old children as fighters...

A new report says Somalia's Al-Shabaab militants in Bay region are forcing rural communities to hand over children as young as 8 years old for indoctrination and military training. Al-Shabaab fighters are descending on communities hit hard by drought, and seizing children either directly from school classrooms or taking local elders hostage and refused to release them until villages agree to hand over a certain number of children. The report, by Human Rights Watch, says hundreds of children have been affected. Al-Shabaab has been increasing its threats and abductions of civilians in recent months to force communities to hand over their children for indoctrination and military training. Since September last year, Al-Shabaab has ordered elders, teachers in Islamic religious schools, and communities in rural areas in the region to provide them with hundreds of children as young as 8 or face attack. Its increasingly aggressive child recruitment campaign in Bay started in the middle of last year with reprisals carried out against communities that refused to cooperate.

The report quotes elders and parents in several districts who gave details of the threats against their communities and the way Al-Shabaab forcibly took children from schools. In one school in Burhakaba district they demanded children between 8 and 15, and took 25 of them; at another town they seized 50 boys and girls from two schools. They were apparently taken to Bulo Fulay where Al-Shabaab runs a number of religious schools and a major military training center. In some areas, Al-Shabaab fighters abducted elders who refused to hand over children and only released them they were given the youngsters. Residents said that their only option to protect

their children has been to send them, often unaccompanied, to areas outside Al-Shabaab control. Community elders and local monitors said the recruitment campaign had forced around 500 people, often unaccompanied children, to flee from their homes to the nearest protected town, Baidoa. This was a difficult and dangerous journey with the threat of Al-Shabaab abducting the children along the road.

This Al-Shabaab activity is not been confined to Bay region nor to recent months. Officials in neighboring Middle Shebelle region said communities there were hosting several hundred children, aged 10 to 15, in various districts of Galgudud, Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle. They had fled from different areas to avoid forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab. Some children have fled to towns where they had relatives, others ended up in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The UN Security Council Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group reported in June that Al-Shabaab had earlier detained 45 elders in El Bur who refused to provide them with 150 children it had demanded. They were only released on the condition that the children would be handed over. The Monitoring Group found that 300 children were abducted from the area during this period and taken to an Al-Shabaab school.

The Somali government endorsed the Safe Schools' Declaration in 2016. This is an international commitment by countries to do more to ensure that schools are safe places for children, even during war. Somalia has also signed but not yet ratified the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict, which states that armed groups "should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years." Human Rights said the Somali Federal government, with the help of international donors, should wherever possible identify Al-Shabaab recruitment drives, including their location, scale, and use of educational institutions, to provide information to assist in providing protective measures. This would also help to assist displaced children, addressing their health, shelter, and security needs and providing them with free primary education and access to secondary education, as well as appropriate social support.

Al-Shabaab has, in fact, a long record of sending very young children to the front line, as young as 8 or 9 years old: "very much being used as a cannon fodder ...right at front lines during the fighting in Mogadishu 2010 and 2011 and more recently the large-scale offensive in Puntland in 2016." Over the past decade, Al-Shabaab has recruited thousands of children for indoctrination and to serve as fighters. It has opened its version of Islamic religious schools in areas under its control, strengthened indoctrination methods including by bringing in younger children, and pressured teachers to retrain and teach Al-Shabaab's own curriculum. Now, under increasing pressure from Somali National Forces and AMISOM it is trying to step up its efforts at recruitment of young children especially in districts that still remain largely under its control.

...and the President of Somaliland in Ethiopia for a three-day working visit

The President of Somaliland, Muse Bihi Abdi, elected in November last year, arrived in Addis Ababa on Tuesday (January 16) for a three-day official visit to Ethiopia. Upon arrival he was welcomed by Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, and at a joint press conference President Bihi stressed his visit to Ethiopia was a mark of the longstanding relationship and close friendship Somaliland has maintained with Ethiopia and its people. Dr. Workneh said the people and Administration of Somaliland had strong ties with the people and Government of Ethiopia.

He expressed his appreciation for the cooperative role of Somaliland has played in the maintenance of peace and stability in its adjacent regions. He noted that Ethiopia and Somaliland cooperated in the economic sphere and the visit could make a significant contribution for Somaliland to cooperate with Ethiopia in economic, political and people-to-people sectors.

Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn received President Abdi on Tuesday. The meeting focused on ways to strengthen cooperation between Ethiopia and Somaliland in peace and security, economy, education and trade. Prime Minister Hailemariam emphasized that Ethiopia considers the development of its neighbors as part of its own development. He said Ethiopia would continue offering scholarships for Somaliland youth. The Prime Minister also indicated Ethiopia's interest in the mutual benefit to be gained from the port of Berbera and said it would capitalize on development of the transport routes that connect Ethiopia to the port." He said Ethiopia would provide support for Somaliland in the fight against Al-Shabaab. President Abdi expressed Somaliland's readiness to further bolster the longstanding good political, economic and people-to-people relations between Ethiopia and Somaliland. He emphasized Somaliland's interest to work on matters of economic cooperation and peace and security with Ethiopia.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene, also met with Somaliland Foreign Minister, Dr. Seid Shire. Dr. Seid expressed Somaliland's interest to contribute its part to ongoing efforts towards ensuring peace and security in the Horn of Africa. He reiterated Somaliland's ambition to enhance its ties with Ethiopia through trade and infrastructure development. State Minister Hirut noted that Ethiopia was committed to supporting the development efforts of Somaliland.

President Musa Bihi Abdi was accompanied by delegation including Dr. Saad Ali Shire, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Mohamad Hassan Sa'ad, Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism; Professor Yassin Haji Mohamoud Xeer, Minister of Education and Science; Mohamed Kahin Ahmed, Somaliland Minister of Interior; and Major General, Noah Ismail Taani, National Army Commander.

A UN Security Council briefing on Darfur

M. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, briefed the Security Council on Sudan's Darfur region on Wednesday last week (January 10). He presented the joint assessment of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on UNAMID's phase one reconfiguration and outlined recent developments in Darfur in the context of the Secretary-General's latest 60-day report on UNAMID, issued on December 27, 2017.

M. Lacroix noted the continuing humanitarian emergency situation, with some 2.7 million displaced persons, of whom 2.1 million are in need of assistance, and 1.6 million were living in a range of camps and settlements. He pointed out that progress towards achieving a negotiated political settlement to the conflict remained elusive. He told the Security Council that the first phase of UNAMID reconfiguration had been completed before the deadline of 31 December, and

the Government had been cooperative in facilitating the repatriation of contingents and the timely closure and hand-over of team sites. 11 team sites had been closed and handed over to Darfur state governments.

He also updated the Council on UNAMID's work on state-specific stabilization plans in cooperation with the Darfur state governments and the UN country team. As UNAMID moved towards the implementation of phase two, M. Lacroix recommended the Council to consider a new mission concept in the context of the renewal of the Hybrid Operation's mandate in June. He also called for prioritizing the consolidation of peace building efforts in Darfur in order to safeguard achievements and avoid any relapse into conflict.

In the discussion, Ambassador Tekeda Alemu, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the UN, noted that Ethiopia was "very encouraged that the security situation in Darfur continues to show marked progress and the government is consolidating state authority across Darfur." He said, "We commend the government for extending the unilateral ceasefire and there has not been fighting with one of the rebel groups since around the beginning of 2015 and with the second one since the beginning of 2016." Ambassador Tekeda also noted that humanitarian access had continued to improve in Darfur and the operating environment for the movement of humanitarian personnel across Darfur has been reliable and open since December 2016.

Ambassador Tekeda also referred to the weapons collection program launched by the government. This was helping consolidate the prevailing relative peace and stability in Darfur, including contributing to a significant decrease of the inter-communal conflict. The process had gone without incident in the IDP camps, and an agreement had been reached to establish a tripartite committee with the participation of UNAMID, the government and IDP representatives to conduct collection of weapons in the Kalma camp. The weapons campaign, said Ambassador Tekeda, would contribute to further reducing the level of armed violence as well as an improvement of the necessary conditions for the return of IDPs to their original homes.

No new displacements occurred in the reporting period of the last two months, but Ambassador Tekeda underlined that the high number of IDPs remained one of the biggest challenges for the attainment of sustainable peace in Darfur. The support of the international community was fundamental as the government had limited capacity to fully address this enormous challenge. He urged all armed groups to lay down their arms and join the Doha Declaration for Peace in Darfur without delay.

Sudan's representative, Ambassador Omer Dahab Fadh Mohamed said that the changes in Darfur should be adapted to, as the only remaining crises now were problems of development and of internally displaced persons, issues directly linked to the peacekeeping agenda. While the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur had not been implemented in its entirety, it remained the constitutional basis for the peacekeeping operation. The United Nations and the international community should work with his country's Government to address those challenges.