

AfDB: Economic growth in East Africa will continue robust in 2018 and 2019
AU, IGAD welcome President Kenyatta and Odinga agreement to work together
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South Sudan: still caught in the middle of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis
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Africa and the African Union

Rwanda is set to Host the Extraordinary Summit on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) on March 21, 2018, and the leaders of Africa's 55 countries would sign an agreement that will launch the African Continental Free Trade Area (the AfCFTA). The AfCFTA will make the continent the largest free trade area created since the formation of the World Trade Organization. Moussa Faki, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission said the African Continental Free Trade Area will also strengthen Africa's position in global trade, adding: "AfCFTA will make Africa one of the largest economies in the world and enhance its capacity to interact on equal terms with other international economic blocs." The launch will take place at an Extraordinary Meeting of the Heads of State of the African Union convened by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, the new Chairperson of the AU who said of the AfCFTA: "This is a historic pact which has been nearly 40 years in the making, and it represents a major advance for African integration and unity."

The African Development Bank (AfDB) issued its "Economic Outlook" this week on Wednesday (March 14); and the report noted that economic growth in East Africa had been robust in 2017 and this was forecast to continue in 2018 and 2019. The Bank's "East Africa Economic Outlook" reviewed economic performance in 2017 and provided forecasts for the next two years, highlighting the region's key drivers of growth, opportunities, and challenges. It covered the major macroeconomic developments in the region's 13 countries, while also pointing out structural issues affecting future growth, poverty, and inequality. **(See article)**

The UN Human Rights Council heard the presentation of the annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein on Wednesday last week (February 7). The report also covered countries in the Horn of Africa region. **(See article)**

Ethiopia

Speaking at the Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of the Ogaden War (1977 – 1978) on Thursday (March 16), and of Cuban soldiers who lost their lives defending Ethiopia at the Ethio-Cuba Friendship Park, State Minister Mrs. Hirut Zemene, expressed the profoundest gratitude of the people of Ethiopia "for the determination of the hero and heroine Cuban soldiers, who gave their precious life to defend our country's sovereignty." Mrs. Hirut echoed, "They were great comrades who thought us the pursuit of humanity and sacrifice for the betterment of others." After paying a warm tribute to the fallen Cuban soldiers, she recalled the four decades of close

friendship and cooperation between Ethiopia and Cuba, both through their peoples and governments.

State Minister Hirut held discussions with members of South Sudan's National Dialogue Forum on Friday (March 16). The State Minister underlined that Ethiopia supports the ongoing National Dialogue Forum, and further called upon the delegation to do all they can to support the IGAD-led South Sudan's peace process. Members of South Sudan's National Dialogue Forum expressed their support to the ongoing Revitalization Forum and commended Ethiopia for its significant role in seeking a lasting peace in South Sudan.

State Minister Hirut bade farewell to the outgoing ambassador of Serbia to Ethiopia, Mr. Dragan Mraovic, on Thursday (March 15). During their discussion, State Minister Hirut thanked Mr. Mraovic for his efforts at promoting the longstanding relations between Ethiopia and Serbia, which she said, go all the way back to the Former Yugoslavia years, at the times of Emperor Haile Sellasie I and Marshal Josip Broz Tito. The two sides touched upon the key roles the two countries have played in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Ethiopia's pivotal role in the establishment of the Organization of African Unity, and ways of further cooperating in the areas of technological transfer, trade and investment. Speaking of Ethiopia's crucial role in the establishment of the OAU, Ambassador Mraovic said, "Ethiopia has been exemplary to the whole of Africa."

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Aklilu Hailemichael met with State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina, Daniel Raimondi, at the sideline of an all-women functioned inaugural flight of Ethiopian Airlines to Argentina, Buenos Aires that coincided with the International Women's Day (March 8) last week. The two sides discussed on ways of strengthening bilateral relations and exchanged views on furthering cooperation in areas, including agriculture, Agro-processing, biotechnology, livestock and medical nuclear technology. The two sides further noted that the launching of an Ethiopian Airlines flight to Argentina will play a significant role in advancing tourism, business, and people-to-people ties between the two countries in particular, thereby connecting Argentina with the African continent.

Dr. Aklilu met a Finnish business delegation led by Anne-Mari Virolainen, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development of Finland on Monday (March 12), and the two sides agreed to deepen and diversify the nature and scope of the longstanding bilateral cooperation between Ethiopia and Finland, especially in areas of trade and investment.

Dr. Aklilu received a business delegation from Rohto Pharmaceuticals, one of Japan's multinational fast-moving consumer goods and OTC Pharmaceutical Corporation on Tuesday (March 13). Dr. Aklilu briefed the delegation on potential investment opportunities and prospective manufacturing possibilities in Ethiopia, and took note of Ethiopia's huge potentials and the already established platforms for investments in the manufacturing sector. The company's General Manager for Global Business Development Division Suna Yan expressed her company's readiness to engage in the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals, skin care and eye care products as well as collaborate with local eye care centers and companies in Ethiopia.

In an exclusive interview with Fana Broadcasting Corporation over the week, Dr Aklilu noted that Ethiopian Airlines has contributed a lot in linking Ethiopia with African countries and the rest of the world, adding that the airline has been playing instrumental role in contributing its share towards attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and promoting tourism as well as building the country's image.

Ambassador Woinshet Tadesse, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa presented letters of credence to the UNECA Executive Secretary, Ms. Vera Songwe on Monday (March 12). Ambassador Woinshet expressed her gratitude to the UNECA for its continued support to the AU. She said, the UNECA is uniquely positioned to contribute to Africa's Development agenda, particularly supporting Africa's integration agenda and implement Agenda 2063.

The 24th Ethio-Djibouti joint Border Administrators/ Commissioners meeting took place in Semera, the capital of Afar Regional State this week (March 13-15). Ambassador Mohamoud Dirir, Director General for Neighboring Countries and IGAD Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the meeting was vital to reinforce the people-to-people relations between the two countries and it offered a platform for the two countries to share ideas beneficial to improve the livelihoods of their peoples. Sulieman Umer Abdulkadir, head of Djiboutian delegation, said the two countries would discuss border trade and human trafficking, identify common challenges, and come up with solutions.

The 27th meeting of military units along the Sudanese-Ethiopian border opened on Wednesday (March 14) in Kassala. The meeting is held every three months in Sudan and Ethiopia alternately. The meetings assess performance and resolve border issues and problems pertaining to farming and grazing as well as offering the opportunity for military commanders and border security committees to tackle human trafficking, illegal drug and commodity smuggling and cross-border crimes. Last year, the joint Sudanese-Ethiopian military commission agreed to develop a five-year plan including all aspects of cooperation contained in their 2009 military protocol. Sudan and Ethiopia last October signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance joint security and military cooperation to fight terrorism.

The Ethiopia National Disaster Risk Management Commission and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia have launched the Ethiopian Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan (HDRP) for 2018. The document primarily focuses on immediate response requirements for 2018 and lays out the basis for a three-pillared model that will allow for further planning and development investments, in line with Ethiopia's disaster risk management approach. Given the recurrent nature of climate-driven humanitarian crises in Ethiopia, the Government and partners have agreed the significance of a shift in approach and of working to establish vision and strategy for resilience and recovery in many of the recurrent drought-prone areas. **(See article)**

China provided US\$6 million in financial support on Tuesday (March 13) to the United Nations World Food Program's emergency response for drought-hit and refugee populations in Ethiopia. This is the fourth round of emergency aid provided by the Chinese government. China's Ambassador to Ethiopia, Tan Jian, said the financial donation was made in a bid to show China's solidarity as Ethiopia strives to mitigate the refugee influx from neighboring countries.

Japan has provided assistance worth US\$22.8 million for Ethiopia through its partnership programs with various international organizations. A press release on Monday (March 12) said the Government of Japan considered this assistance as a form of capacity building, leading to a more resilient Ethiopia.

The Irish government announced a three million Euro in humanitarian assistance for Ethiopia on Tuesday (March 13); and the fund will be used to deliver vital nutrition, safe drinking water, and sanitation for people most affected. Irish Ambassador to Ethiopia, Sonja Hyland, said the Irish Aid has so far contributed over 12 million Euros to the Ethiopian Humanitarian Fund (EHF) since 2015, which she said, has come as part of an overall cooperation program with Ethiopia totaling 130 million Euro between 2014-2018.

Djibouti

Air Djibouti carried out its first flight to Aden International Airport on Wednesday (March 14) after a three-year gap due to the conflict in Yemen.

Kenya

President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga, in a joint statement on Friday last week (March 9), announced they had reached an agreement to work together. The African Union Commission and Inter-Government Authority on Development were both quick to welcome this joint decision to resolve their political differences peacefully. **(See article)**

Somalia

Ambassador Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, in a meeting with the President of HirShabelle State stressed the need to speed up Somalia stabilization process. He called on regional forces to contribute to and intensify the war against Al-Shabaab in conjunction with AMISOM and with the Somali National Security Forces.

Army Chief General Abdiweli Jama Hussein Gorod met with Qatar's Defense Minister Khalid Bin Mohamed Al Attiyah in Doha this week to discuss Qatar's offer to fund the construction of Somalia National Army military bases. The army chief was accompanied by the Commander of the Somali Navy Forces and chairman of the Parliamentary Defense Committee.

The River Shabelle started flowing again at the weekend after nearly a month in which it had dried up in various parts of the country, though residents in Hiiraan region said the water levels remained very low.

WHO, UNICEF, national and local health authorities are continuing their nationwide campaign to protect more than 4.7 million children aged from 6 months to 10 years from measles. This week, the campaign targets 2.7 million children in the southern and central states, along with 1.1

million children in Somaliland. Over 2800 cases of suspected measles have been reported since the start of the year and in 2017 there were more than 23 000 suspected cases of measles, 6 times as many as in 2016.

The Somali National Army killed seven al-Shabaab fighters on Wednesday (March 14) in Kismayo, Puntland state. Somali military commander in Kismayo, Mukhtar Abdi said, "We got prior information that they were planning to attack us in Wirkoy area. We moved in fast and killed seven Al-Shabaab fighters."

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) on Saturday (March 10) signed a deal with the Somali parliament to go ahead with the construction of a modern National Assembly building in Mogadishu. The new assembly building will comprise of an assembly hall for the sessions, and 329 offices for each of the members in the lower and upper houses.

South Sudan

President Salva Kiir on Tuesday (March 13) admitted that his country has run out of cash and that there was nothing that could be done to fix the economy unless the war stops and peace and stability is restored. He said, "I want you to work together with other colleagues and institutions to do whatever you can to minimize the current situation. I know we have lost the value of our currency, and there is nothing we can do soon to regain our currency's value unless we produce, but we should not fold our hands and allow the situation to go out of hand like that. We must try whatever we can."

President Kiir met Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukry to discuss South Sudan joining the Arab League on Monday (March 12). Information Minister Michael Makuei Luet said the Arab League had asked South Sudan to join the League. A Foreign Ministry statement said they also discussed means of enhancing South Sudan-Egypt relations and "regional issues of common concern". They also agreed on establishing a "mechanism for political consultation" between Cairo and Juba. Mr. Shukry also delivered a message from President El-Sisi to President Omer Al-Bashir.

President Kiir sacked Finance Minister Stephen Dhieu Dau on Monday (March 12). He is replaced by Salvatore Garang Mabiordit Wol, a former technical advisor in the trade ministry. On the same day, Kiir also sacked Bol Wek Agoth, the chief of state protocol, and the acting chief administrator at the Office of the President.

The United Nations Security Council on Thursday (March 15) renewed the mandate of UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for another year and demanded that all parties involved in its ongoing conflict immediately end the fighting. With the unanimous adoption of a resolution on the mandate extension until 15 March 2019, UNMISS is charged with performing tasks like protecting civilians, creating the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, monitoring and investigating human rights violations, and supporting the peace process.

South Sudan remains in the midst of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis driven by five years of brutal civil war. Nearly half of the population are facing extreme hunger and are in need of

urgent aid. Civilians across the country continue to suffer from hunger, disease and displacement. Nearly 4.3 million people, one in three of the people of South Sudanese have been displaced, more than 1.8 million internally displaced and about 2.5 million who are now in neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan and Kenya. **(See article)**

Sudan

Sudan and Qatar have agreed to set up a joint political consultation committee on Sunday (March 11). This will meet every six months to follow up on the implementation of joint projects. Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani on a visit to Khartoum, at the weekend to discuss bilateral relations delivered a message from the Emir of Qatar to President Omer al-Bashir. He also met with Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour. The two ministers also discussed implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and the reconstruction efforts in the region.

Sudan's Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour met with Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), William Lacy Swing on Monday (March 12), and discussed on a number of issues pertaining to migration along with Sudan's efforts to combating human trafficking and illegal migration.

The Central Bank announced on Tuesday (March 13) that Sudan has received a deposit of some 1.4 billion U.S. dollars from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). A statement said: "The leadership of the United Arab Emirates announced its support for the foreign exchange reserves at the Central Bank of Sudan by depositing about 5 billion dirhams (\$1.4 billion)." The Sudan News Agency said overall UAE investments and funds in Sudan amounted to 28 million dirhams and that 17 UAE companies operate in various economic sectors.

The Sudanese Committee for the Administration of Abyei Area said a joint delegation from the African Union and the UN Security Council would visit Abyei on Thursday (March 15) to inspect the situation and the performance of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). UNISFA was set up by the UN Security Council in June 2011 after Sudan's government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) reached an agreement in Addis Ababa to demilitarize Abyei and let Ethiopian troops monitor the area.

Sudan will host the next meeting of the Foreign and Water Ministers and heads of intelligence services from Egypt and Ethiopia and Sudan in Khartoum next month, April 4-5. The meeting, originally due to take place on February, was postponed following the resignation of Prime Hailemariam Dessalegn on February 15.

AfDB: Economic growth in East Africa will continue robust in 2018 and 2019

The African Development Bank (AfDB) issued its “Economic Outlook” this week on Wednesday (March 14); and the report noted that economic growth in East Africa had been robust in 2017 and this was forecast to continue in 2018 and 2019. The Bank’s “East Africa Economic Outlook” reviewed economic performance in 2017 and provided forecasts for the next two years, highlighting the region’s key drivers of growth, opportunities, and challenges. It covered the major macroeconomic developments in the region’s 13 countries, while also pointing out structural issues affecting future growth, poverty, and inequality.

The report noted the agriculture sector generally remains the main driver of East Africa’s growth, followed by industry. It said the former grew 5% in 2017, while the latter showed a rise 10.5%, adding that the role of the mineral sub-sector in driving growth was also increasing. On the demand side, the report noted household consumption had been the main driver of growth, followed by public investment in infrastructure, mineral exploration, and construction.

The report further showed global opportunities in the region included the recovery in commodity prices and a continuing flow of foreign investment and finance from both traditional and non-traditional sources. The regional opportunities included ongoing public spending on infrastructure and mineral exploration and exploitation, the rebound of agriculture from last year’s drought, and strong domestic demand from a growing middle class.

The report said inflation in the region stood at 13.1% in 2016, and 14.4 % in 2017, which it said, was the highest in the continent, but there were expectations that it would slow down to 8.9 % in 2018 and 7.8% in 2019. The exchange rate was generally stable in 2017 and would continue to remain so in the coming two years. On the whole, the report emphasized that inflation and exchange rate trends showed that the region was tackling macroeconomic stability, reflecting appropriate fiscal and monetary policies and a stable macroeconomic environment for growth.

The AfDB also pointed out that all the countries in East Africa had relatively high fiscal deficits, which were projected to decline in 2017 and remain at the 2017 level in 2018 and 2019. This, it said, had been partly ascribed to weak domestic resource mobilization in addition to high public investment spending; and with average regional domestic saving at 12.8% of GDP and the investment-to-GDP ratio at 24.2%. The domestic resource gap in 2017 stood at about 11 percentage points. The domestic resource gap widened the current account deficit, and to address resource gaps, the report added, countries generally resorted to external borrowing: “External debt ranges from 21.2% of GDP in Burundi to about 50% in Ethiopia and Somalia. Although these debt levels are not very high, they could be burdensome in relation to the countries’ capacity to repay.” It underlined these would be “extremely high and unsustainable in conflict-ridden and post-conflict countries.”

Overall, the report said East Africa’s high growth had led to only limited poverty reduction, a challenge the region shared with the rest of Africa, and growth had generally not been accompanied by a commensurate reduction in unemployment or poverty, but rather by persistent inequality. These features, it said, were not projected to change much in 2018 or 2019.

As for the way forward, the report underlined that policy makers should make a concerted effort to create jobs and reduce poverty, undertake economic structural transformation, and address economic imbalances with the view to minimizing the risk of conflicts associated with inadequate growth and persistent inequality.

AU, IGAD welcome President Kenyatta and Odinga agreement to work together

President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga, in a joint statement on Friday last week (March 9), announced they had reached an agreement to work together. The African Union Commission and Inter-Government Authority on Development were both quick to welcome this joint decision to resolve their political differences peacefully.

The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, said he applauded "the leadership shown by President Kenyatta and Mr. Odinga. The joint statement is a very encouraging step towards national reconciliation. I urge all Kenyan leaders to build on this development to strengthen their country's unity, consolidate its democratic institutions and respond to the aspirations of their people. A stable and prosperous Kenya is in the interest of the region and indeed the entire continent." Alluding to the potential implications of Kenya's political situation for the sub-region as well as the continent, the Chairperson, underscored the fact that, "A stable and prosperous Kenya is in the interest of the region and indeed the entire continent."

The Executive Secretary of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development, Ambassador Mahboub Maalim, conveyed IGAD's commendation of this exemplary political gesture in an orderly and compromising manner. He said: "On behalf of the Inter-Government Authority on Development, I wish to commend President Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga for their historic meeting that will herald a new dawn for Kenya. This is unprecedented in the African Continent and demonstrates statesmanship." He reiterated that, President Kenyatta and Mr. Odinga's combined initiative to bring about peace in the nation "will create a roadmap for building bridges which will stimulate nation-building and prosperity." Praising the common agreement that both parties had arrived at after serious reflections and mutual compromises, the Executive Secretary expressed IGAD's continued support to the fruition of this national project. He stated: "On behalf of the IGAD Family I wish to pledge our total support for this initiative and commit to fully support the programs that the two leaders have outlined for implementation."

Speaking after a meeting at Harambee House, President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader for the Orange Democratic Movement, Raila Odinga, told the media that they had arrived at an agreeable accord to bury the hatchet, once and for all and to ameliorate the ending predicaments of the nation. During the joint media briefing, President Kenyatta said "we have a responsibility as leaders to find solutions. Elections come and go but Kenya remains." Mr. Odinga, on his part stated, "The time has come for us to confront and resolve our differences."

President Kenyatta said that for the country to come together, leaders should discuss their differences freely and openly to end ethnic divisions. He emphasized that as leaders, they had a

responsibility to discuss and find solutions that will bind, unite the country and free it from a life pegged on a five-year electioneering cycle. “Elections come and go but Kenya remains; so we must plan for the future – a future that will not be dictated by the forthcoming elections. Our future must be dictated by the prosperity, stability of our nation and the well-being of our people,” President Kenyatta said.

Mr. Odinga said Kenyans “cannot remember why and where they disagreed in the first place”. He said: “As we fight ostensibly to save ourselves from each other, the reality is that we need to save our children from ourselves. My brother (President Kenyatta) and myself have, therefore, come together today to say this dissent stops here.” He emphasized that Kenyans must refuse to allow their diversity to kill their nation. He said: “We refuse to be the leaders under whose watch Kenyans lead into a failed nation. This is a call to self-reflection. We have to look into ourselves and challenge our readiness to make the changes that will allow our institutional reforms to work,” adding that that as long as the country remained divided, acrimonious, selfish and corrupt, no amount of institutional reforms would improve the lives of Kenyans. He said: “The reform process will become an exercise in diverting all attention from our own failing and taking refuge in the blame game. We, therefore, seek your partnership in this initiative. Fellow Kenyans, we are sailing in this one ship.”

President Kenyatta and Mr Odinga said their meeting kicked off a process that would now address the causes for divisions and bring the country together. They said democracy allowed Kenyans space to differ in terms of political alignments, but they must always remain steadfast and united in matters of national interest. President Kenyatta said: “We look forward to the support from every single Kenyan so that we can build together a united, harmonious and stable nation where no individual feels left out or left behind.” They agreed to roll out a program to help in the implementation of their shared objectives in an initiative to be co-led by Ambassador Martin Kimani and senior Odinga aide Mr. Paul Mwangi.

In their joint statement the two leaders said they were standing together to urge every Kenyan, every political leader and formation to compete without using ethnic profiling or by promoting disdain for any group. The statement said: “The two leaders respect one another. They have been competitors and even used hard language at times, but they have always been friends and respected one another.”

Ethiopia and partners launch Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan for 2018

The Ethiopia National Disaster Risk Management Commission and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Ethiopia have launched the Ethiopian Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan (HDRP) for 2018. The document primarily focuses on immediate response requirements for 2018 and lays out the basis for a three-pillared model that will allow for further planning and development investments, in line with Ethiopia’s disaster risk management approach. Given the recurrent nature of climate-driven humanitarian crises in Ethiopia, the Government and partners have agreed the significance of a shift in approach and of working to establish vision and strategy for resilience and recovery in many of the recurrent drought-prone areas.

The document represents a first step towards the development of a multi-year planning framework that aims to increase the quality and predictable delivery of required multi sectoral humanitarian response, mitigate future needs in areas that experience recurrent climate-induced shock, support the strengthening of national service provision to address chronic and acute needs and recovery for communities affected by drought and conflict.

The HDRP includes some description of suggested longer-term investments in resilience and recovery, and highlights the complementarity of ongoing development programs. It is presented around a three-pillared framework primarily highlighting immediate humanitarian plans and requirements, along with actions that will enable the current and future response, and reduce humanitarian requirements over the course of 2018 and in years to come.

As the Plan underlined, 2017 saw severe drought conditions continuing in most lowland pastoral areas because of the underperforming of southern autumn rains which resulted in food insecurity. Meteorologists, including the Ethiopian National Meteorological Agency (NMA), are now predicting that the current La Nina phenomenon may lead to reduced performance of spring rains again this year, particularly over southern and eastern lowland areas.

The Humanitarian and Disaster Resilience Plan therefore suggests the need for a well-managed, Government-led, lifesaving response to be sustained through much of 2018. It proposes US\$1.66 billion to provide 7.88 million people with emergency food or cash and non-food assistance, mainly for the southern and south-eastern parts of the country. The document presents prioritized plans in water and sanitation (WaSH), agriculture, relief food, nutrition, health, education, protection and shelter and non-food items in the affected areas. Out of the \$1.6 billion sought for the 2018 response, \$1.036 billion is required for relief food, \$198.3 million for nutrition, \$99 million for WaSH needs, and \$94.9 million for shelter and other material assistance for the displaced.

The Ethiopian National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC) commissioner, Mr. Mitiku Kassa said “In the last two years, the Government of Ethiopia, with the support of international donors and humanitarian partners, was able to mount a robust drought response operation. Today, we need that partnership once again as continuing drought, flooding and conflict-related displacement has left 7.88 million vulnerable people in need of urgent assistance”. He said the Government of Ethiopia had already committed \$138 million for drought response and rehabilitation of IDPs, and further noted: “The Government of Ethiopia is also committed to changing the recurrent requirements for large-scale humanitarian assistance through the implementation of a disaster risk management approach.”

Indicative modeling and projections in the plan show that humanitarian needs and financial requirements are likely to remain similarly high for the following two years (2019-2020), though these might well be mitigated through the introduction of some of the shifts in strategic and operational approaches described in the Plan.

The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie said “The Government of Ethiopia and partners are hopeful that through highlighting the need for longer-

term investments, while advocating for timely response to current urgent needs, affected and vulnerable communities can get the support they need to build back their lives following three years of back-to-back droughts.”

South Sudan: still caught in the middle of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis

South Sudan remains in the midst of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis driven by five years of brutal civil war. Nearly half of the population are facing extreme hunger and are in need of urgent aid. Civilians across the country continue to suffer from hunger, disease and displacement. Nearly 4.3 million people, one in three of the people of South Sudanese have been displaced, more than 1.8 million internally displaced and about 2.5 million who are now in neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan and Kenya.

A recent report analyzing food security in the country projects that more than seven million people, almost two thirds of the entire population of South Sudan, could become severely food insecure between May and July this year unless they can obtain sustained humanitarian assistance and access to aid.

Another recent report, by the Food Security Cluster underlines earlier reports. It indicates that if the current drivers of food insecurity worsen through to the end of 2018, and in the absence of humanitarian assistance, there is a seriously heightened risk of famine in areas where large populations are already experiencing severe food insecurity. To prevent populations falling into Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), sufficient and sustained multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance, unhindered humanitarian access and close monitoring of the worst-affected areas is now and urgently required. In this context, ending conflict and providing sustained peace is critical to prevent continued disruption of livelihoods. In order to prevent further deterioration of an already severe food security situation in the country peace is mandatory.

Last week, Alain Noudehou, UN Deputy Special Representative in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and UN Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in South Sudan, led a high-level delegation of donors, heads of humanitarian agencies and partners to Leer in the Unity region of South Sudan to see firsthand the situation on the ground. During their visit, they met the Governor of Leer, community leaders and the aid agencies currently assisting tens of thousands of people across the region. Leer was one of two counties affected by famine in 2017. However, although the famine problem was relieved by intensive humanitarian intervention, the situation remains very fragile. Aid agencies predict that about 85% of the population of the region will reach crisis and emergency food insecurity conditions by the end of next month, April.

Relief Coordinator Noudehou said: “Due to seasonal time pressure, we need early funding now to reach millions of people with multi-sectoral assistance during the dry season through road transport and repositioning of life-saving aid supplies.” He noted these same activities would be

many times costlier if done by air transport during the rainy season. Analysing food security across the country Mr Alain Noudehou again underlined that more than 7 million people in South Sudan could become severely food insecure between May and July, if there was no provision of sustained humanitarian assistance and access. He said: “Once again, I strongly urge all parties to the conflict to stop the fighting and to ensure that humanitarian agencies are given free, safe and unhindered access to all areas of South Sudan, and for all bureaucratic impediments to be removed.”

High Commissioner Zeid's annual report to the UN Human Rights Council

The UN Human Rights Council heard the presentation of the annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein on Wednesday last week (February 7). The report also covered countries in the Horn of Africa region.

The High Commissioner spoke about the situation of human rights in different countries in the world. On Ethiopia, he noted: “I welcome the release of more than 7,000 detainees in January and February, including several high-profile figures.” Commending these and other actions, he stressed ongoing reforms could only be carried out successfully through truly inclusive dialogue and political processes. Two weeks ago, on the margins of the UN’s 37th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Ethiopia’s State Minister for Foreign Affairs Mrs. Hirut Zemene and High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein held fruitful discussions. The High Commissioner expressed his appreciation of Ethiopia's efforts in opening up political space for dialogue. He also noted that he mentioned Ethiopia's significant ongoing reforms as a good model for others. At the time, State Minister Hirut also underlined the Government’s resolve that the purpose of the state of emergency was to curtail anarchy and lawlessness in the country. It was not in any sense intended to restrain the basic principles of the rights of the people. She also emphasized to the Commissioner that all the Government actions are carried out under a constitutional framework and aligned with the Constitution.

The Commissioner also spoke of other countries in the region. On South Sudan, mentioning fighting continues unabated, despite the signature of another ceasefire agreement in December, the Commissioner said that he was alarmed by the suffering of the civilian population, including the more than 200,000 people who remain in the UNSMISS Protection of Civilian sites. This, he said, was clearly an unsustainable situation.

The Commissioner also stressed that he was concerned about the very serious lack of progress on human rights issues in Eritrea. His comments were underlined this week on Wednesday (March 14) when the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth, deplored the arbitrary arrest and detention of hundreds of people who have challenged the Government’s restrictions at a school, and expressed concerns about continued human rights violations across the country. She told the Human Rights Council in Geneva that security officials had arrested hundreds of people, mainly males, after the death in custody of Haji Musa Mohamednur earlier this month. He was 93. Haji Musa, a director of a private Islamic

school in the capital Asmara and a respected elder, was arrested in October last year following his refusal to accept government orders to stop religious teaching. Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth said: “Reports reaching me from credible sources point to the arrest of hundreds of people, mainly males, some of them children as young as 13 years, after the burial of Haji Musa.” She said the arrests were continuing and fitted a pattern: “The indiscriminate mass arrests in October 2017 and during the past week were carried out to quell any kind of protest or resistance.”

Indeed, these latest cases of arbitrary arrests and detention are similar to practices well documented by the 2014-2016 Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea. The Commission reported extensively on such cases of arbitrary detention, stating that almost all of those arrested were detained in violation of fundamental rules of international law without any form of judicial proceeding and no official information was provided to the families of those detained about the fate of their relatives.

The High Commissioner also expressed deep concerns on migration policy, and the current overriding focus of European Union countries on preventing migrants from reaching Europe, as well as the rush to deport many who did. He said the European Union and its members needed to review the approach they were taking in the Mediterranean, to ensure that they were not indirectly supporting the return of migrants to Libya, where, he underlined, they faced a real risk of torture, sexual violence and other serious abuses.