

UN Human rights Chief: Ethiopia on the right path towards ensuring human rights
Former Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn honored at the National Palace
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News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

The Pan-African High-level Conference on Education was held in Nairobi this week (April 25-27) under the auspices of UNESCO and the AU, bringing together African Ministers of Education, and policy and opinion makers on education from the public and private sector to further discuss, understand and exchange comment on how the alignment between the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (which calls for ensuring “equitable inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all” and the Continental Strategy for Education in Africa 2016-2015 (CESA) is influencing current agendas, education legislation, policy, plans, financing and monitoring and information systems/. They also worked to devise mechanisms for consultation, coordination, collaboration and reporting. The conference had two days of technical meetings, with panel discussions on inclusive education, digital technologies, gender equality, and other areas, before the ministerial meeting on Friday (April 27) agreed on key recommendations for developing Africa’s human and social capital through an education and skills revolution emphasizing science and technology.

The 7th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa was held in Bahir Dar city at the end of last week (April 21-22). The Forum, which brought together more than 250 participants including incumbent and former African leaders, representatives of stakeholder groups, and peace and security experts from around the continent, was held under the theme: “Ownership of Africa’s Peace and Security Provision: Financing and Reforming the African Union.” Those attending included Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Foreign Minister, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, former Premier, Hailemariam Desalegn, President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan; former Nigerian President and Tana Forum Board Chairperson, Olusegun Obasanjo; former Ghanaian President, John Dramani Mahama; former South African President, Kgalema Petrus Motlanthe; and former Senegalese Premier, Aminata Touré. **(See article)**

Ethiopia

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome, on a two-day visit to Poland this week, held talks with Polish president Andrzej Duda on Tuesday (April 24), and discussions covered bilateral trade. He said: "Our priority is manufacturing sector. Ethiopia opens doors broadly for investments in manufacturing sectors such as textiles, skin products, pharmaceuticals, food processing, and agriculture" President Duda said it was worthwhile to locate business activity in Ethiopia. During his visit last year, he visited the factory where Polish Ursus tractors were assembled. He said “Ethiopia is a huge market, and a quickly developing country.” President Duda said he hoped Ethiopia would open an embassy in Poland and that direct flights between Warsaw and Addis Ababa could be set up.

Addressing the 7th Tana Forum on Security in Africa on Saturday (April 21), Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed noted that Tana Forum has evolved into a highly successful informal and premier platform to address African pressing peace and security challenges. Reiterating the fact that the African continent had a long way to go in terms of ensuring institutional reform, Prime Minister Abiy underscored the need to work on maximizing self-reliance, sense of ownership and financial independence, which he said, required political will on the part of the leaders of the continent. **(See article)**

Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu received the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein on Wednesday (April 25) and discussions focused on ways of establishing closer cooperation with UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The two sides also touched upon the recent remarkable progresses that are being witnessed in Ethiopia following the appointment of the new Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed. **(See article)**

Ambassador Donald Y. Yamamoto, Acting Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the US State Minister, during his meeting with Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu in Addis Ababa, on Friday (April 27) noted that Ethiopia is a key US ally and a pillar state in the region. On the occasion, the two sides exchanged views on ways of further consolidating the Ethiopia-US relations, particularly in areas including trade and investment, industrialization, the aerospace industry, the maintenance of regional peace and security.

A farewell ceremony for former Premier Hailemariam Dessalegn was organized by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed at the National Palace on Tuesday (April 24). Regional presidents, Ministers, ambassadors of different embassies and representatives of international organizations, higher government officials, religious leaders and other invited guests attended the ceremony at which the Prime Minister acknowledged the successes achieved by the former Premier during his tenure **(See article)**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid bin Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, made a three-day official visit to Ethiopia this week (April 22-25). He came at the invitation of the Government and during his visit he met with Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed; the Speaker of House of People's Representatives, Ms. Muferehat Kamil; Foreign Minister, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu; the Commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Dr Addisu Gebre-Egziabher, and other government officials and stakeholders to discuss the human rights situation in Ethiopia. **(See article)**

As part of the continuing sectoral dialogue under the EU-Ethiopia strategic engagement, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hirut Zemene held discussions with a delegation led by Koen Vervaeke, the Managing Director for East Africa at the European External Action Service (EEAS) on Tuesday (April 24). Mrs. Hirut briefed the delegation on the on-going key reforms in the country that made its central locus on honing Government capacity towards ensuring a broader democratic space, building stronger Government organs free of maladministration and corruption, empowering women, further committing to inter-political party-dialogues and bolstering ties with neighboring countries as well as international partners.

State Minister Hirut received the Director General for Sub-Saharan countries at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mr. Guiseppe Mistretta on

Tuesday (April 24). Mrs. Hirut touched upon the key roles Ethiopia is playing in terms of putting in place enabling platforms for foreign investors including Italian companies; the current political reforms the Government of Ethiopia is undertaking in a bid to advance national consensus within the country as well as the maintenance of peace and security in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Somalia and South Sudan.

State Minister Dr. Aklilu Hailemichael met with a delegation representing the UK-based JM Corporation, an investment firm that capitalizes on agro processing, pharmaceuticals, logistics and providing assistance to governments in the banking and financial sectors on Thursday (April 26). The discussion focused on ways of facilitating a huge investment by the latter in the key areas, including agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, logistics and warehousing as well as the provision of development finance.

Dr. Aklilu on Thursday (April 26) conferred with a Saudi business delegation that seeks to explore the plethora of investment opportunities in Ethiopia, particularly in agriculture and manufacturing sectors. He said Ethiopia offers enabling environment for foreign investors, adding that the presence of tax holidays, accommodative government policies, and the expansion of industrial parks in different parts of the country as well as the presence of about 75 million hectares untapped land offer makes the country a favored investment destination.

The first international conference aiming to realize the construction of Adwa Pan-African University was held this week (April 23-24) in the historic city of Adwa, Tigray Regional State, Ethiopia. The conference, under the theme of “Institutionalizing Pan-Africanism”, gathered prominent people from Ethiopia and elsewhere, including Ethiopia’s former Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn and the Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission, Thomas Kwesi Quartey; the Vice-President of Tigray Regional State, Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael, and State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Aklilu Hailemichael, ambassadors, religious fathers and scores of other high ranking officials. **(See article)**

The Ethiopian Airlines Group has announced an expansion project for Bole International airport in order to resolve the growing air traffic congestion, to provide for an additional air strip built both inside and outside the existing Bole International Airport facility. This was disclosed during a nine-month performance report presented to the Transport Affairs Standing Committee of the House of Peoples’ Representatives. The Group has also requested the Addis Ababa City Administration to secure additional land to be used for local private air service operators. Standing Committee members urged the Group to finalize urgently airport construction at Robe, Dembi Dolo and Nekemte, and to start immediately construction at Mizan Aman, Yabello, Negele Borena, and Debre Markos.

The government of Japan is providing US\$500,000 support for Ethiopia’s Peace Support Training Centre (PSTC) under an agreement signed on Wednesday this week (April 25) between Ethiopia and the United Nations Development Programme. The fund will be used for capacity building for the center. Brigadier General Habtamu Tilahun, Head of PSTC, and Ms. Louise Chamberlain, Country Director of UNDP, signed the agreement, with Ambassador Shinichi Saida, Ambassador of Japan to Ethiopia, as a witness.

Djibouti

Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Ambassador Donald Y. Yamamoto led the US delegation to Djibouti for the U.S.-Djibouti Binational Forum April 24-25 in Djibouti. This

was the annual US-Djibouti dialogue on political, economic, assistance, and security cooperation. Ambassador Yamamoto was US Ambassador to Djibouti 2000-2003.

Eritrea

The US Congress' Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission held a hearing on "Eritrea: Root Causes of the Refugee Crisis", last week. Testimony was given by experts from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; Human Rights Watch; and PEN Eritrea. Representative McGovern, who noted as much as 10% of Eritrea's population had left the country since 2000, said the authorities restricted freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion, internal movement and foreign travel and people had been detained for years without trial. **(See article)**

The official US view of human rights in Eritrea was given a few days later when the US State Department's 2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Eritrea was published. This described Eritrea as "a highly centralized, authoritarian regime" under the control of President Isaias and it listed a comprehensive and devastating list of what it called the most significant human rights issues. **(See article)**

A US delegation led by Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa, Ambassador Yamamoto, paid a three-day visit to Asmara this week. The delegation met with President Isaias Afwerki and other officials. According to the Government of Eritrea, they discussed prospects of bilateral ties and cooperation on regional issues. No further details of the talks were released.

Kenya

The 5th Annual Devolution Conference has been held in Kakamega County this week under the theme: "Sustainable, productive, effective and efficient government for results delivery". The conference allows County Governments to assess their achievements and explore economic, social and political development. It provides an opportunity to share challenges and forge a way forward to ensure that devolution is a success. It was attended by Governors and Deputy Governors, Senators, Cabinet Secretaries, Members of Parliament, Members of County Assemblies, Private Sector, Media, Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations, Academia, and International delegates. The conference was opened by President Kenyatta, and Raila Odinga, leader of the opposition National Super Alliance and former Prime Minister.

Outgoing US Ambassador to Kenya, Ambassador Robert Godec, has expressed support for the unity pact between President Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga. He said "the US is very strongly supportive of the handshake that took place between President Uhuru Kenyatta and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga. This was a very important step forward for Kenya." He also recommended stakeholder involvement in the implementation of good governance, justice for civil society groups and dealing with corruption.

Somalia

The voting for a new parliamentary speaker will take place on April 30. Among the candidates to replace Mohamed Jawari who stepped down early this month are several ministers including Defense Minister Mohamed Mursal Abdirahman and Water and Energy Minister Salim Ibrow, as well as Trade and Industry State Minister Abdi Aziz Hassan Mohamed and Deputy Minister for Interior Ibraahim Isaaq Yarow. All had to resign their posts to stand as candidates.

The Defense Ministry on Saturday (April 21) officially took over the military training centre in Mogadishu previously run by the UAE. The UAE disbanded its military training for the Somalia National Army last week. The Deputy Commander of Somali National Army General Abdullahi Ali Anod who presided over the handover, thanked the UAE for equipping the army and building the facility.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) issued a report at the weekend on the humanitarian impact of the heavy *Gu* rains which started in March and continued in flood-prone areas of southern and central regions throughout April. Middle and Lower Juba regions received the highest amounts of rainfall of more than 100mm in mid-April alone, and water levels along the Juba and Shabelle rivers continued to rise. OCHA said there was a high risk of flooding in the middle and lower reaches of the rivers. This would enhance opportunities for crop cultivation where crop land had not been inundated, especially in riverine area of Hiiraan, Middle Shabelle and parts of Lower Shabelle. The effect, however, was worsening conditions in overcrowded Internally Displaced Persons settlements and displacing more people from flooding, with hundreds of thousands more at risk of displacement. OCHA noted that funds were insufficient to support on-going operations and are inadequate to support the robust flood response a required.

Kismayo's Second Annual Book Fair was officially opened by the deputy president of Jubaland, Mohamud Siyad Adan, at the beginning of the week. The three-day exhibition of literary works attracted scholars, playwrights, intellectuals, poets and book enthusiasts as well as ministers.

South Sudan

The Chief of the Defence Force, General James Ajongo Mawut, appointed in May last year replacing General Paul Malong, died last week in Cairo where he was being treated for a kidney ailment. This death was described as "a sad loss for the army."

Sudan

Sudan's Presidential Assistant Faisal Hassan Ibrahim and the French Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, Stéphane Gruenberg on Wednesday (April 25) discussed on Sudan's peace process and issues of common concern including the Horn of Africa refugees.

UN Human rights Chief: Ethiopia on the right path towards ensuring human rights

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid bin Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein who made a three-day official visit to Ethiopia this week (April 22-25) noted that Ethiopia has been on the right path towards ensuring human rights. He came at the invitation of the Government and during his visit he met with Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed; the Speaker of House of People's Representatives, Ms. Muferehat Kamil; Foreign Minister, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu; the Commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Dr Addisu Gebre-Egziabher, and other government officials and stakeholders to discuss the human rights situation in Ethiopia. High Commissioner Zeid last visited Ethiopia in May 2017, when he met the then Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn and other high-ranking Ethiopian officials and civil society members to discuss the human rights situation in the country. On that occasion he also visited the UN Human Rights East Africa Regional Office based in Addis Ababa. The Government earlier this year invited the Commissioner for a follow-up visit. In a statement at the end of his visit the Commissioner said: "Inviting a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights once already shows that a Government is willing to openly discuss the human rights challenges in the country. Inviting me twice demonstrates real sincerity." He said in all his meetings, in the Oromia region and in Addis Ababa, he heard clear expressions of optimism and hope that the new Government would deliver on the heartening and inspiring speeches Dr. Abiy had made.

During his stay in Ethiopia, the High Commissioner held talks with Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed on Wednesday (April 25). They discussed on the human rights situation in Ethiopia and exchanged views on the recent reform agenda. After considerations on ways to work together on human rights protection and human rights institution-building, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed underlined Ethiopia's commitment to work with the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

Prince Zeid Al Hussien noted that during his visit to various parts of the country, he has been able to witness a new chapter unfolding in the development of human rights and democracy in Ethiopia. The High Commissioner said, following the inaugural speech of the Premier, he was "deeply impressed" by the renewed interest, hope and commitment that all Ethiopians have demonstrated. This renewed feeling of the People, he added, would give further impetus to Government's ongoing efforts to bring about social justice in the country.

The High commissioner also reiterated that he had taken pleasure with the idea that the speech by Prime Minister Abiy fully embraced the basic Declaration of Human Rights. The Commissioner expressed his contentment for being able to visit areas outside Addis without any restrictions, and noted his talks particularly with Aba Gaddas and Officials of Bishoftu confirmed the longstanding Ethiopian culture of democracy that has transcended millennia. The High Commissioner pledged to support the Government of Ethiopia in its commitment to fulfil the high demands of the wider public for a fast-paced transformation, giving due emphasis to technical and institutional capacity building, particularly in the field of human rights protection.

The UN Rights Chief also met with Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu on Wednesday (April 25). Their talk focused on ways of establishing closer cooperation with the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner and the United Nations Security Council. The two sides also touched upon the recent remarkable progress being made following the election of the new Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali. Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu

underlined Ethiopia's commitment to its international obligations and briefed the Commissioner on details of the country's political reforms of governance, the widening democratic space, and its effective commitment to issues of human rights. He also mentioned the ongoing government reform measures in the country, ranging from the ongoing efforts to pardon political leaders to its encouragement of an all-inclusive political dialogue among various communities and organizations. Commending the previous High Commission report on Ethiopia, Dr. Workneh also expressed his view that this would make the country work for better commitment to its international obligations.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein welcomed the recent political reforms and mentioned the continuous progresses made in Ethiopia in terms of promoting democratic rule of governance and dealing with related challenges. Praising the warm hospitality accorded to him, he noted his meetings with the Abba Gaadas and described his visit as quite a success. He commended the openness of the government's stance and its commitment to transform the country. The two sides reaffirmed their respective readiness to work together and inked a Memorandum of Understanding to host the establishment of Human Rights Regional Hub for the Eastern and Southern Africa sub-regions in Addis Ababa.

During his visit, the Commissioner also participated in the African Union-United Nations High-Level Dialogue on Human Rights on Tuesday (April 24). He said upholding the rights of peoples is the whole purpose of government. Any government which fails to respect and promote human rights is failing its people and damaging its own efficacy. Human rights and justice were also essential to establish and sustain peace. Sustainable peace was not assisted by "business as usual" approach which allowed perpetrators of severe violations to escape justice. He said: "Human rights are not an afterthought. They are not a second-stage, which countries can begin to construct after development is well underway. Human rights are not a project which unfolds after peace has been established. Rights are the drivers of development. Rights are the constructive elements of peace." He urged the AU to strengthen the role as well as the independence of African human rights institutions, especially the African Commission on Human and People`s Rights.

AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat said the fight for human rights was an integral part of the agenda of the African Union. "It is an essential component of the effort that we are making for the development of African people". He admitted there was still a long way to go in order to fully attain the aspirations with regard to promotion and protection of human rights, `adding that there was an obvious gap between the commitments made and the reality on the ground, and he urged member states to redouble efforts to implement all their previously made commitments.

Former Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn honored at the National Palace

A farewell ceremony for former Premier Hailemariam Dessalegn was organized by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed at the National Palace on Tuesday (April 24, 2018). Regional presidents, Ministers, ambassadors of different embassies and representatives of international organizations, higher government officials, religious leaders and other invited guests attended the ceremony at which the Prime Minister acknowledged the successes achieved by the former Premier during his tenure

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy thanked Hailemariam for enabling a peaceful transition of power, which he said, marked a new and remarkable development in the country's history. The

former Premier transferred power peacefully to the newly elected Prime Minister Dr. Abiy on April 12, weeks after his resignation from his posts as Chairman of EPRDF and Prime Minister of Ethiopia in February, in order to be part of a solution for the reforms underway in the country. Ato Hailemariam succeeded to the post of Prime Minister in September 2012 following the sudden death of the great leader Meles Zenawi the previous month.

Dr. Abiy praised Hailemariam for the astute leadership he exercised during his premiership. He described him as a respectful, cooperative, resolute, and intellectual leader. He acknowledged his predecessor for his role in achieving the impressive broad-based economic growth that Ethiopia had witnessed for the last two decades. He said Hailemariam had been an exemplary leader for Ethiopia and Africa for his efforts to deal with rent-seeking behavior. Dr. Abiy also appreciated Hailemariam's firm stand that power should be used to serve the public and his insistence that it should not be abused for personal and narrow interests. He took note of Hailemariam's contribution to the process of democratization, respect for human rights and his efforts to ensure good governance in Ethiopia. He said Hailemariam was a decisive leader in the efforts to ensure peace and security in the Horn of Africa and emphasized that he had been a key figure in enhancing the role of Ethiopia and Africa in international fora.

The former Prime Minister thanked Dr. Abiy for organizing such a ceremony in recognition of the achievements during his tenure. He paid tribute to his former cabinet colleagues, parliamentarians, the security apparatus, public servants and all Ethiopians who had supported him in the efforts to make Ethiopia peaceful and prosperous. The former Prime Minister warmly thanked his family for their unreserved patience and the support they had given him.

In his response Ato Hailemariam also noted that attitudes to power should be changed; power should not be seen as an instrument to enrich the power holder, he said. It should rather be used properly to serve the people. He called upon all concerned bodies to help the current Premier's activities to address popular demands. He said that the Premier should be given time and support for his steps towards the realization of the reform process, adding, advice should precede criticism. Ato Hailemariam described his successor as intellectual, farsighted, diplomatic and committed. This, he said, made him the right person to lead the country at this crucial time.

On the occasion, Hailemariam Dessalegn was presented with a medal for his outstanding service as Prime Minister. He was also awarded the country's highest Diploma of Honor for his dedicated service. Former First lady, Roman Tesfaye was also given a medal and a Diploma for her contributions to the social sector. The Premier further thanked former First Lady Roman Tesfaye for her contributions in support of her husband. The awards were presented by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed. The Prime Minister expressed his admiration for the former prime minister as a family man who loved and cared for his family, following Hailemariam's firm belief that a good family is a foundation for a better country. In turn, the former prime minister commended the Premier's philosophy, practical love and his respect towards the institution of the family.

7th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa held in Bahir Dar

The 7th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa was held in Bahir Dar city at the end of last week (April 21-22). The Forum, which brought together more than 250 participants including incumbent and former African leaders, representatives of stakeholder groups, and peace and security experts from around the continent, was held under the theme: "Ownership

of Africa's Peace and Security Provision: Financing and Reforming the African Union." Those attending included Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, Foreign Minister, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, former Premier, Hailemariam Desalegn, President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan; former Nigerian President and Tana Forum Board Chairperson, Olusegun Obasanjo; former Ghanaian President, John Dramani Mahama; former South African President, Kgalema Petrus Motlanthe; and former Senegalese Premier, Aminata Touré.

The theme of the Forum reflected the urgent need to discuss, debate and establish a thorough understanding of the principle of ownership by the AU in delivering its mandate, particularly for peace and security. The Forum explored innovative proposals on the practical realities of implementing the AU's new reform agenda and considered possible implementation problems and how to overcome them, as well as how to secure effective compliance by AU Member States. It also considered what more needed to be done to ensure that AU Member States own their security agenda and effectively address the continent's peace and security challenges. Currently, much of the budget to address these issues come from external funding. In fact, much of the AU's budget comes from international donors, with 30 out of the member states failing to pay their contributions, either partially or completely. In 2017 alone, 73% of the AU's \$782 million budget came from international partners, with member states contributing \$212 million, or a total of 27%. To increase self-reliance and support peace operations, the AU has suggested a 0.2% import levy on eligible goods, which officials hope, will raise up to \$400 million by 2020.

In a keynote address, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, noted that "the only viable responses to the challenges we are facing will be endogenous". Following the adoption of proposed reforms by the AU Assembly in January 2017, Mahamat created the Institutional Reforms Unit within his own office in September 2017 to oversee the implementation of the reforms plan between 2017 and 2018. In an update to Forum participants on the current status of the reform plan, he said: "\$41.6 million has been paid into the Peace Fund, with the target, for the current year, of mobilizing \$65 million. This is the highest level of contribution ever made to the Peace Fund since it was established in 1993". He said; "Experience has shown too often the futility of solutions that ignore the contexts in which they are supposed to be implemented". He also spoke of the role of the AU partners: "Their role must not be belittled or neglected. Independence means constructive engagement with different stakeholders interested in Africa on an equal footing"

Opening the forum, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed thanked the Tana Forum Secretariat and Institute of Peace and Security Studies of Addis Ababa University "for bringing us together" to such an important platform. He said Tana Forum has evolved into a highly successful informal and premier platform to address African pressing peace and security challenges. The Prime Minister added that the Forum, under the patronage of the African Union, was now a key venue to generate great ideas and African solutions to the challenges that the continent was currently facing.

Reiterating the fact that the African continent had a long way to go in terms of ensuring institutional reform, Prime Minister Abiy underscored the need to work on maximizing self-reliance, sense of ownership and financial independence, which he said, required political will on the part of the leaders of the continent. The Prime Minister expressed his hope that "the current Forum would provide further impetus to ensure self-reliance through institutional reforms." Prime Minister Abiy expressed his thanks to the outgoing Board Chairman of the Tana Forum and former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, for his great leadership and guidance in the course of the Tana Forum's establishment. He also extended his thanks to

his predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn for his wisdom and support for the Forum. The Prime Minister further welcomed the incoming Board Chairman of Tana Forum, former Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama, and wished him success in the years ahead.

The outgoing Board Chairman of the Forum, former Nigerian President Obasanjo, recalled the early years of the establishment of the Tana Forum, the peace and security challenges evident in the African continent across the years and the efforts made to address them down the road, as well spoke on the way forward. The First Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, held in 2012, was held on the theme “Managing Diversity and State Fragility”. The following year, when the annual Meles Zenawi Lecture Series was established, the theme was “Security and Organized Crime in Africa”. Subsequently the Forum has considered: the “Impact of Illicit Financial Flows on Peace and Security in Africa” (2014); “Secularism and Politicized Faith” (2015); “Africa in the Global Security Agenda” (2016); and last year, the theme “Natural Resource Governance in Africa”, broadened the scope beyond the extractive sector to include governance of other natural resources, land, water, the seas, and forests and biodiversity.

This year’s Meles Zenawi lecture was on the former Egyptian president, Gamal Nasser. Ms. Samia Nkrumah, the daughter of the late first Prime Minister and President of Ghana and a key advocate of Pan-Africanism, Kwame Nkrumah, presented a paper on the legacy of former Egyptian president, Gamal Nasser. In her presentation, Ms. Nkrumah touched upon Nasser’s contribution to Pan-Africanism, the fostering of greater ties between Egypt and North Africa and the rest of the continent as well as establishing strong Arab-African solidarity. Former South African president Motlanthe said the efforts to end apartheid in South Africa was partly a product of Pan-African activism and that this success should be complemented by inspiring today’s youth to work together for Afro-Arab unity and the unity of the whole African continent. He called for a free- visa system across the continent to strengthen Afro-Arab unity and in general African unity. He added: "The Arab-Africa leaders’ summit which started during Nasser's time and was continued by the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi need to be revived if Afro-Arab unity is to become a reality."

The 7th Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa concluded on Sunday (April 22) following panel discussions and lectures focusing on this year’s theme: “Ownership of Africa’s Peace and Security Provision: Financing and Reforming the African Union.” At the closing ceremony, speaking on behalf of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene thanked the organizers and all other stakeholders, including the host, the Amhara Regional state, the Outgoing Chairperson of the Board of Tana Forum and former Nigerian President Obasanjo for his leadership and guidance, and Michelle Ndiaye, Head of the Tana Forum Secretariat, Director, Africa Peace and Security Programme Institute for Peace and Security Studies. Mrs. Hirut particularly commended Ms. Ndiaye for her “down-to-earth-leadership” and thanked her and her team for the “fantastic collaboration and organization.”

The State Minister also took the opportunity to recognize the “dedicated services that the outstanding youth made to the forum,” in terms of organization, facilitation and ensuring active involvement in the event. Recapping the keynote remarks of Prime Minister Dr. Abiy, Mrs. Hirut underlined that this year’s theme: : “Ownership of Africa’s Peace and Security Provision: Financing and Reforming the African Union” was both timely and necessary. She also emphasized the need to strike a balance between how much money an individual member state contributes and on how this would address the life of the people as well as help establish connections between the African citizenry and the African Union.

Mrs. Hirut also reminded her listeners of yet another key African event, the 1st International Conference of the Adwa Pan-African University, being held the next week, April 24-25. She

noted the Adwa Pan-African University was “a major hub and center of excellence for Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance.”

In his closing remarks, the Outgoing Chairperson of the Board of Tana Forum and former Nigerian President Obasanjo extended his gratitude to the Forum organizers, partners and supporters. Former Ghanaian President and Incoming Chairman of the Tana Forum Board, John Mahama noted the “void Baba [his predecessor-Obasanjo] is leaving and the job required from the incoming team at Tana Forum,” and congratulated Obasanjo for his extraordinary leadership and commitment to Tana Forum, describing it as “yet another distinguished service to the people of Africa.” The incoming Chairperson also thanked the Government of Ethiopia for hosting the Forum and the deliberations on Africa’s peace and security challenges in “this beautiful city of Bahir Dar.” While taking note of the fact that the current theme “Ownership of Africa’s Peace and Security Provision: Financing and Reforming the African Union” resonated well with the needs of the people of Africa, Mr. Mahama stressed the need for African leaders and all other stakeholders to take note of the reports and findings of the Forum and put in place the necessary measures.

Also speaking at the closing ceremony, former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn took note of the significant progress that Tana Forum had made over the years, and the “global repute it has now attained.” Mr. Hailemariam extended his thanks to the late Meles Zenawi for “his timeless efforts, good will and vision of able African institutions taking the continent’s peace and security challenges.” He also thanked Mr. Obasanjo for his “astute leadership”, which he said, had been evident in chairing the Board of Tana Forum since its inception seven years ago.

The Tana Forum is an independent platform, an informal gathering of African decision-makers, peace and security stakeholder groups, and their larger constituencies for an open discussion of security issues and challenges faced by the continent. It promotes African-led solutions by holding discussions on the strategic and pro-active management of African peace and security issues. It combines the worlds of academia and research with real-world, real-time experience, and provides a unique opportunity for decision-makers and institutions to exchange experiences and insights on peace and security issues among themselves and take home inspiration and practical lessons. It also gives opportunities to political decision-makers to interact and consult with a broad-based African constituency as well as with key global actors. It allows for the chance to listen to “profound African voices on the ground” on various elements of peace and security and facilitate an inclusive dialogue among governments and other African security stakeholder groups.

The first international conference for the Adwa Pan-African University

The first international conference aiming to realize the construction of Adwa Pan-African University was held this week (April 23-24) in the historic city of Adwa, Tigray Regional State, Ethiopia. The conference, under the theme of “Institutionalizing Pan-Africanism”, gathered prominent people from Ethiopia and elsewhere, including Ethiopia’s former Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn and the Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission, Thomas Kwesi Quartey; the Vice-President of Tigray Regional State, Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael, and State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Aklilu Hailemichael, ambassadors, religious fathers and scores of other high ranking officials.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael, welcomed the participants to the international conference, stressing that the victory of Adwa over the Italian colonial army was symbolic that “generations have to learn from their fore-fathers.” He noted that the new University would be “a center of research and a center to magnify Africanism,” as well as a “center of excellence for Africa's history and pan-Africanism.” He emphasized that the regional government was committed to support the realization of the university.

Former PM Hailemariam speaking at the conference said that Adwa was exceptional and unique. It was an African victory and a victory for all black people: “we won because we were united, organized and well prepared,” he said. He called on all Africans to be partners in building the Adwa Pan-African University. Deputy Chairperson Thomas Quartey indicated that the victory of Adwa inspired other African countries to struggle for independence and freedom. Recognizing the Ethiopian government's initiative in the cause of the University, he said that the Adwa Pan-African University signified the battle of Adwa, which he said had helped other African countries to strengthen their struggle for freedom.

Ato Bitew Belay, Chairman of the University Coordinating Committee emphasized the significance of the university and gave a brief account of the progress made the project inaugurated in May 2016. Dr Ayele Bekerie, from the department of History and Heritage Management at Mekelle University, detailed the conception, rationale, vision, mission and objectives of Adwa Pan-African University. He said it would initially focus on humanities, social sciences, informational sciences and technology. The Deputy Director general of UNESCO, Dr. Getachew Engida promised that “UNESCO stands to support this unique project”, adding “long live the unity of Africa”. Architects also presented the University's master plan, designed within an African context and based on indigenous African architecture.

It was just a year ago, on April 23, 2017 that the ceremony to lay the cornerstone of the Adwa Pan-African University took place. The ceremony was attended by many African leaders including Ethiopia's then Premier Hailemariam Dessalegn, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, and the former president of Nigeria, South African, Malawi, Liberia, and Burundi. Others attending included the Vice-president of Botswana, and other dignitaries from all over Africa.

The then Prime Minister Hailemariam, speaking at a conference held at the Sheraton Addis, said the federal government had allocated more than US\$7 million (around 200 million Birr) for the building of the University and that preparations were already underway to begin construction. He said the Ethiopian government would also work to garner global diplomatic support for the project. According to the committee formed to coordinate and manage the construction of the university, the initial concept of the Pan-African University was first presented at the 29th African Union Summit last year in Addis Ababa and was warmly welcomed by the attending Heads of State and Government.

The Adwa Pan-Africa University is named after the battle of Adwa held in 1896, in which less-equipped Ethiopian forces scored a major victory against the colonial Italian forces. It became a symbol for all Africans under the yoke of oppression to encourage them to defend themselves and fight for freedom and initiated other freedom fighters in Africa to struggle for independence. The Pan-African University is being established to encourage and energize the ongoing struggle against Africa's continuing and emerging challenges in an African way.

Ethiopia, the oldest independent country in Africa, has always been involved in the struggle for African independence. The establishment of such a university will assist the country in improving and expanding its Pan-African role and encourage better linkages between the African Union and its member states and the UN system. Ethiopia has allocated some 150 hectares of land for the construction of the Adwa Pan-African University and this week's conference reviewed the progress of the preparations made for the establishment of the university as well as discussed the design, cost and public participation in the construction of the university. At the end of the conference, various fund-raising programs were announced to raise the 10 billion birr needed to build the university and achieve its vision. These include a continental fund-raising program, soliciting funds from passengers of African airlines and involving the private sector as well as organizing sport competitions and international music concerts.

The US Congress Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing on Eritrea...

US Congressmen, James P. McGovern, (Democrat-MA-02) and Randy Hultgren (R-IL-14) co-chaired a hearing of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on Wednesday, April 18. Opening the hearing, entitled "Eritrea: Root Causes of the Refugee Crisis", Representative McGovern said, it was "shocking to hear about the human rights situation in Eritrea" in part because Eritrea was not in the headlines but also "because I cannot think of another country not at war where people are fleeing at such a high rate - as much as 10% of Eritrea's population has left the country since 2000. It's a huge percentage."

Representative McGovern noted Eritrea was one of the world's top sources of refugees. The regime was authoritarian, "a "one-man dictatorship" that has not held elections since the country gained independence in 1993." The authorities, he added, restricted freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion, internal movement and foreign travel and people had been detained for years without trial. He quoted the UN Commission of Inquiry's allegation that crimes against humanity, including enslavement, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, persecution, rape and murder, had been committed in Eritrea in a "persistent, widespread and systematic" way since 1991. He mentioned Dawit Isaak, a prisoner of conscience in the Commission's Defending Freedoms Project, calling for his immediate and unconditional release. He referred to the policy of indefinite forced conscription, amounting "to a form of enslavement," and the norm of impunity for government officials. He said there was likely to be food insecurity and hunger, but too little data to measure the extent, and noted that in 2017 "UNICEF reported national data suggesting that half - half! - of Eritrean children exhibited stunted growth, indicating malnutrition."

So, he wondered, what could the US Congress do about this. He pointed out diplomatic relations were restricted; there had been no U.S. ambassador in the country since 2010; the US no longer provided aid, and several Eritrean officials were subject to U.S. sanctions, though not on human rights grounds. He asked for recommendations from the panellists at the hearing for steps that could increase protections for the Eritrean people.

Representatives from the United Nations and international NGOs participating in the hearing as the United States Congress and its Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission focused on the drivers behind high rates of Eritrean migration. The Commission said migrants from Eritrea made-up a disproportionate number of those included in the global refugee crisis; and noted

that many of the asylum seekers were exploited by smugglers, and traffickers, or found themselves “in Libyan slave markets enduring detention, torture, and forced labor.”

Among those providing expert testimony were Jana Mason, Senior Advisor, External Relations & Government Affairs, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Father Thomas Reese, Commissioner, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; Maria Burnett, Director, East Africa and the Horn, Human Rights Watch; and Abraham T. Zere, Executive Director, PEN Eritrea

Ms. Mason underlined UNHCR’s serious concern about the half a million Eritrean refugees who have left their country in search of international protection, particularly the high numbers of unaccompanied and separated Eritrean refugee children who are particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Refugees fleeing Eritrea were also exposed to extortion and the horrors of kidnapping for ransom, imprisonment, torture, rape, trafficking, and even death at sea. Ms. Mason said the UNHCR, together with a range of partners, including governments, UNICEF, the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, the IOM, and others, was increasing its efforts to combat trafficking and smuggling of refugees and asylum seekers. Activities included awareness-raising campaigns for refugees and asylum seekers; efforts to support the criminalization of smuggling and trafficking; capacity building for local authorities; and offering support to victims of trafficking and smuggling. She underlined the distinction between refugees and migrants: migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve their lives. refugees were forced to flee to save their lives or preserve their freedom. Equally, both were at risk of trafficking and related human rights violations. Ms. Mason said long-term solutions in the case of Eritrea would ideally take the form of resolution of the domestic challenges that had led so many to flee the country in the first place. Failing this, Eritrean refugees needed more resettlement and family reunification, legal pathways to improve their lives without having to turn to human smugglers. She noted such life-saving protection efforts remained severely underfunded by the international community.

Father Reese spoke of the persecution of non-registered religious groups, of the oppression of State-authorized religious groups, of the censorship of the press and religious communities in Eritrea. He said his Commission recommended stronger U.S. engagement on religious freedom issues and called for re-designating Eritrea as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, maintain the existing, ongoing arms embargo, and use diplomatic channels to urge the government of Eritrea to unconditionally and immediately release all detainees held on account of religious activities, including Orthodox Patriarch Antonios. He called for an end to all religious persecution of unregistered religious communities, for Jehovah’s Witnesses to be granted full citizenship rights, the provision of conscientious objection by law, and for national laws and regulations, including those for prisoners, to be brought into compliance with international human rights standards. He also wanted to see unrestricted visits to Eritrea by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and the International Red Cross. He encouraged the African Union to establish an accountability mechanism to investigate, prosecute, and try individuals accused of committing crimes against humanity in Eritrea, and suggested the sponsoring of an UN General Assembly resolution denouncing Eritrea’s gross religious freedom and human rights violations.

Maria Burnett of HRW noted that the abuses in national service were long standing and well-documented, and recent interviews revealed that nothing had changed in recent years. She also noted that while national service might be the leading cause of the Eritrean exodus but there were many other reasons: Citizens could not express their views or question government policies; no legislative representation, no independent press, no independent NGOs, the judiciary was tightly controlled by the government and President Isaias refused to implement a constitution approved by referendum in 1997. Suspicion alone could be enough to lead to arrest; indefinite imprisonment was a usual punishment, sometimes accompanied by physical abuse and relatives of those that speak out were also punished; and Eritreans were punished for having the “wrong” religious beliefs. Abuses did not stop when people leave Eritrea and fleeing Eritreans were often victimized by smugglers. She said the Eritrean government could take steps to stem migration and address the human rights crisis. It could end indefinite national service; it could end the immunity for military commanders; it could unconditionally release political prisoners; it could stop interference with all forms of peaceful religious expression; it could allow establishment of an independent press; it could allow rights to freedom of expression, opinion, religion, association, and movement. “Unfortunately,” she concluded, “the Eritrean government has steadfastly refused to change.”

Abraham T. Zere, Executive Director of PEN Eritrea in exile said countries concerned by human rights abuses of Eritreans and their efforts at migrating, should work to undercut the Eritrean government’s public excuses for repression and protect the Eritreans who have fled from being repatriated to suffer further abuse. He gave a vivid account of the way he was forced to leave and the government’s attempts to silence him after he left. He also emphasized the condition of state journalists inside the country. If journalists commit the slightest mistake they were disciplined not as journalists, but as soldiers.

The bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission was established unanimously by the United States House of Representatives in 2008. Its mission is to promote, defend and advocate internationally recognized human rights norms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights instruments, both within and outside of Congress, raise Congress’ awareness of human rights issues, provide expert human rights advice, advocate on behalf of individuals or groups and collaborate closely with the Executive Branch, as well as recognized national and international human rights entities, to promote human rights initiatives.

...and the US Country Report on Human Rights in Eritrea for 2017

The official US view of human rights in Eritrea can be found in the just published State Department’s 2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Eritrea. This describes Eritrea as “a highly centralized, authoritarian regime” under the control of President Isaias who heads the sole political party. The report says there have been no national-level elections since the country’s independence from Ethiopia in 1993. The government had twice scheduled elections in accordance with the unimplemented constitution but cancelled them without explanation. An official declaration in 2003 asserted, “In accordance with the prevailing wish of the people, it is not the time to establish political parties, and discussion of the establishment has been postponed.”

The State Department report listed what it calls the most significant human rights issues. These include: “arbitrary deprivation of life; disappearances; torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment by security forces, including for political and religious beliefs; harsh prison and detention center conditions; arbitrary arrest; denial of fair public trial; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, or home; restrictions on freedoms of speech and press; restrictions on internet freedom, academic freedom, and cultural events; restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly, association, and religion; limits on freedom of internal movement and foreign travel; inability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair elections; corruption and lack of transparency; restrictions on international nongovernmental organizations; violence against women and girls, including in military camp settings and national service positions; human trafficking; criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct; and forced labor, including forced participation in the country’s national service program, routinely for periods beyond the 18-month legal obligation.

The 18-page report elaborates on all these, noting extrajudicial killings, “before the border war with Ethiopia, of veterans with disabilities and political opponents, including Muslim scholars and others; extrajudicial executions of political opponents, smugglers, and others for less serious or “speculative” crimes; mass killings of members of certain ethnic groups; and systematic execution by the armed forces of soldiers accused of cowardice or desertion during the border war.” It points out the COI found the government had a shoot-to-kill policy to prevent its citizens from crossing the border into Ethiopia and that it had “reliable evidence” that the policy still existed though it also added that it was “not implemented as rigorously as it was in the past.” It added that Doctors without Borders reported during the year it was common for Eritreans crossing the border to Ethiopia to be shot at or to witness others being targeted.

The report detailed the use of metal shipping containers and underground cells without toilets or beds to hold detainees incommunicado and said “The government did not provide adequate basic or emergency medical care in prisons or detention centers. Food, sanitation, ventilation, and lighting were inadequate, and potable water was sometimes available only for purchase.” On the judicial system, it said the Special Courts had jurisdiction over both corruption and national security cases. Special Court judges were predominantly military officials and the Special Courts reported to the Ministry of Defense and the Office of the President. Trials in the Special Courts were not open to the public, and the Court’s decisions were final, without appeal. The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively, and officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.

The report noted that the government used an extensive informer system to gather information, that it restricted academic freedom and cultural events as well as peaceful assembly and association. The law and the unimplemented constitution provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, but the government restricted all these rights. It did not respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and the authorities did not allow nongovernmental meetings of more than seven persons.

It was clear forced labor occurred. Despite the 18-month legal limit on national service, the government did not demobilize many conscripts from the military as scheduled and forced some to serve indefinitely under threats of detention, torture, or punishment of their families. Persons performing national service could not resign or take other employment, generally

received no promotions or salary increases, and could rarely leave the country legally because authorities denied them passports or exit visas. Those conscripted into the national service performed standard patrols and border monitoring in addition to labor such as agricultural terracing, planting, road maintenance, hotel work, teaching, construction, and laying power lines.

The report also drew attention to the government's refusal to allow the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI), the UN Special Rapporteur or the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea to visit the country. International civil society organizations focused on human rights were not able to operate in the country and the government "generally did not cooperate with such groups or with investigations into human rights abuses." In May last year, the United Nations established a human rights advisor position to work with the government on its framework of action in response to the 2014 Universal Periodic Review.