

The 61st Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers

.... Council urges South Sudanese parties to engage in a spirit of compromise

IGAD issues Statement on the ongoing political tension in Somalia

The AfCFTA offers significant opportunities to Ethiopia

Ethiopia-Djibouti railway winning hearts of passengers

News in Brief

Africa and the African Union

In a press briefing on Thursday (March 29), Chairperson of Tana Forum and Former President of Nigeria Olesgun Obasanjo said the 7th Tana High-Level Forum on peace and security in Africa is scheduled to deliberate on ownership of Africa's peace and security as well as financing and reforming the African Union. He said, the forum would deliberate strong solutions on how to finance and reform the AU in peace and security agendas, adding that the upcoming forum would generate ideas and views on promoting African-led solution on peace and security provision in the continent by Africans. He added, the main agenda of the forum has aligned with the African Union ambitious to reform itself through reformation process, which he said, had been implementing between 2017 and 2018.

African Ministers gathered for the First Ordinary Session of the Sub-Committee of Energy from in Nouakchott, Mauritania at the end of last week and adopted the energy action plan approved in July 2017 by the First Specialised Technical Committee Bureau and called for accelerated energy access on the continent. The Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy at the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Amani Abou-Zeid said that increasing energy access, improving energy security and developing a vibrant and competitive energy market resonate deeply with the African Union Commission's values and principles. He added, "In this regard, the AUC in collaboration with various partners is leading several ambitious programmes and we recognize that the continent cannot develop and compete in the global market if its energy supply remains inadequate, inefficient and unreliable; and out of reach for the majority."

A three - day training on Disability Mainstreaming and Implementation of the Continental Plan of Action on the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2010-2019) for Regional Economic Communities' Officials, AUC Departments and Directorates, AU Regional Offices and AU Organs was concluded this week on Thursday (March 29) in Addis Ababa. The training which was themed: "Mainstreaming Disability in Development Policy and Programming" mainly targeted AU policy and decision makers and equipped them with skills and knowledge to mainstream disability for inclusive development in their respective organizations.

Ethiopia

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome bade farewell to the outgoing Ambassador of Serbia to Ethiopia, Ambassador Dragan Mraovic on Tuesday (March 27) at the national palace. The President

emphasized the need for Ethiopia and Serbia to work more closely in a bid to further strengthen their bilateral cooperation, and more importantly enhance their trade and investment ties.

Speaking of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement, which Ethiopia signed last week, Minister of Trade Bekele Bulado said, “Given Ethiopia’s historical attachment to the Continent and the AU there should be no reason not to sign the agreement.” Pointing to a future filled with so many socio-economic possibilities, Dr. Bekele further stated that “the free trade deal will help Ethiopia to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI), once it goes fully operational.” As a nation that strives to attract more FDI, through its unrelenting endeavors in the facilitation of foreign investment as well as in the enhancement of its foreign trade, the AfCFTA could help Ethiopia draw a significant sum of ForEx that could, in turn, help develop its infrastructural facilities. He underscored the burgeoning of intra-Africa trade could help much in the alleviation of conflicts in different parts of the Continent by the creation of a massive employment opportunity for the youth, as the youth are the principal fodder of so many sporadic and at times, seemingly never-ending conflicts in Africa. **(See article)**

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene chaired the 61st Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers on Monday (March 26), during which, South Sudan was high on the agenda. Mrs. Hirut commended all colleague Ministers and International Partners for not giving up on South Sudan and for their commitments to find a lasting solution to the country. She stressed, “Before the continuation of the next Forum, we need to conduct a rigorous shuttle diplomacy to specially solve the problem on responsibility sharing and ascertaining permanent cease-fire that is key to reach into a new time line for transition and democratic election.” She said, “IGAD stands at a critical stage that needs the wisdom of its members not to look at violations of cease-fire idly-by.” he State Minister further urged the South Sudanese parties not to squander such an opportunity to inclusive governance that their people long desired, adding: “We need to reflect on how we can help the South Sudanese parties to reach into a win-win solution.” **(See article)**

State Minister for Business and Economic Affairs, Dr. Aklilu Hailemichael received the Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic of Greece, Professor Georgios Katrougalos on Tuesday (March 27). The two sides discussed on ways of further exploring mutual possibilities in a plethora of areas including trade, investment, education, aviation diplomacy, agriculture as well as migration. They also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on “The Recognition of Training and Certification of Seafarers for Service Onboard Vessels Registered in the Hellenic Republic,” which offers job opportunities to Ethiopians aboard Greek Vessels.

In an exclusive interview with the weekly ‘Capital’ newspaper, State Minister Dr. Aklilu said Ethiopia is working hard to attract investors to take part in the country’s various investment sectors, including textile and garment, transport and manufacturing industry. He added, investors are encouraged to invest in the manufacturing industry, which he said, is the country’s priority area of investment. To this end, he said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, is laying enabling conditions to facilitate foreign direct investment.

Ethiopia and Japan signed grant agreement amounting to 27.5 million US dollars for the construction of the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) human resource development center. State Minister for Finance and Economic Cooperation, Admassu

Nebebe and Akira Uchida, Charge d'affaires. ad interim, Embassy of Japan in Ethiopia signed the agreement on Friday (March 30)

The Council of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) elected Dr. Abiy Ahmed as its new Chairperson this week on Tuesday (March 27). The Council also deliberated on various issues including the report of the Executive Committee and other documents prior to the election. A number of leaders including from Djibouti, Rwanda, China, the State of Qatar extended their congratulatory messages to Dr. Abiy Ahmed.

Ethiopian Airlines launched flights to Kisangani and Mbuji- Mayi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Nosy-Be in Madagascar on Tuesday (March 27). The launch of the flights was announced by Group CEO of Ethiopian Airlines, Tewolde Gebremariam, at an inaugural ceremony attended by Prof. Alain Tehindrazanarivelo, Ambassador of the Republic of Madagascar, Victor Mwanja, First Secretary of the DRC and other invited dignitaries. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Tewolde said, "Kisangani and Mbuji Mayi will be two additional points to the already three points we fly in the DRC; so we are now flying to Kinshasa, Goma, Mbuji Mayi, Kisangani and Lubumbashi."

According to the latest Africa Investment Index 2018 (AII) by Quantum Global Research Lab, an independent research arm of Quantum Global, Ethiopia is ranked among the top 10 most attractive investment destination in Africa in 2017. Morocco ranks first on the Index, followed by Egypt and Algeria in the second and third places. Ethiopia's manufacturing industries and export-oriented sectors are already attracting a significant number of FDIs, which is ascribed to the extensive infrastructural development and the all-round government's support to investors.

Djibouti

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Djibouti, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf opened AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) Induction session on Monday (March 26) in Djibouti. Other speakers included Ambassador Smail Chergui, AU's commissioner for Peace and Security and Ambassador Zackariaou Maiga of the Republic of Niger, Chairman of the Peace and Security Council for the month of March 2018.

Eritrea

The Ministry of Health in cooperation with the WHO and other stakeholders had launched a 5-year National Action Plan for Health Security on Tuesday (March 27), and Minister of Health, Ms. Amina Nurhussien said Eritrea's 5-Year National Action Plan was aimed at preventing and detecting any epidemic infectious disease early and responding rapidly at its moment of birth--before it has any chance of becoming a national or an international threat.

A former rebel official who is now part of the Sudanese government accused Eritrea of continuing to support two armed groups from Darfur region: Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement led by Abdel Wahid al-Nur (SLM-AW). Mohamed Abdallah Herio the political secretary of JEM-Dabajjo, a former rebel faction signatory of a peace agreement with the government said the group has a military camp in Eritrea, adding that Asmara provided Eritrean passports to the two factions.

According to a report by the World Watch Monitor (WWM), Eritrean police had arrested 32 Christians in Asmara, this month, including a newly married couple and 10 of their guests. The report added twenty of these individuals were arrested on Sunday (March 25) all of whom remain in detention.

Somalia

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Mr. Ahmed Issa Awad met with Kenyan Foreign Minister, Monica Juma over the week, and the two sides discussed on bilateral relations and a number of issues in the region and beyond, with a particular focus on the conditions of the construction of the wall being built between Mandera and Beled Hawo.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) issued a statement on the ongoing political tension in Somalia this week on Monday (March 26). While reaffirming its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia, IGAD noted that it was closely following the evolving new political tension in the country, which it said, threatened to derail the significant progress registered in the past year. More specifically, the statement said the standoff within the country's legislature that threatens to impede efforts by the current Government towards reforming security and justice institutions, increasing opportunities for economic growth as well as providing basic services to its citizenry. **(See article)**

The UN Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) until 31 March 2019. The Council underscored the importance of the Mission's support to the Somali government-led political process as well as the importance of its support to the federal government of Somalia on preparations for the delivery of inclusive, credible and transparent elections. It also requested continued support for the government's efforts to implement the country's National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in order to strengthen Somalia's capacity to prevent and counter terrorism.

A two-day conference to review the existing strategy ended in Mogadishu this week with calls for the involvement of key sectors, in the development of the new national action plan. The meeting aimed at developing an inclusive National Action Plan to prevent and counter violent extremism in the country. Deputy Prime Minister Mahdi Mohamed Guled said, "The only way we can combat extremism is to listen to different perspectives, particularly the religious leaders and address this problem from a Somali perspective," further stressing that countering violent extremism through military means should be the last resort.

South Sudan

The 61st Extraordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers was held this week on Monday (March 26), chaired by Mrs. Hirut Zemene, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia. South Sudan was high on the agenda. IGAD Executive Secretary, Ambassador Mahboub Maalim took the opportunity to recall that there was a long way to go for the lasting implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) Agreement between the parties to the

conflict in South Sudan and for the humanitarian relief of the affected populations. Amb Maalim successively called on the representatives from the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism (JMEC), IGAD South Sudan Office, the United Nations, the IGAD Partners Forum, the European Union, the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the USA), China, South Sudan, the African Union, and the State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and Chair of the Meeting to the podium to deliver their respective statements on the crisis in South Sudan. (See **article**)

Sudan

President Omer Hassan al-Bashir on Wednesday (March 28) extended the unilateral cessation of hostilities for three months. The President extended the cease-fire declared in the operations areas until June 30, 2018.

Sudan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Abdallah Idriss said the founding meeting of the Economic Community of the Horn of Africa (ECHA) is scheduled to be held in Khartoum on April 12. He added that the ECHA which includes Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti aims to achieve political coordination and economic integration in areas of investment, trade and exchange of information and expertise.

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IGAD Executive Secretary, Ambassador Mahboub Maalim took the opportunity to recall that there was a long way to go for the lasting implementation of the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) Agreement between the parties to the conflict in South Sudan and for the humanitarian relief of the affected populations. Amb Maalim successively called on the representatives from the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), IGAD South Sudan Office, the United Nations, the IGAD Partners Forum, the European Union, the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the USA), China, South Sudan, the African Union, and the State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia and Chair of the Meeting to the podium to deliver their respective statements on the crisis in South Sudan.

While extending her gratitude to all colleague Ministers and International Partners for not giving up on South Sudan and for their commitments to find a lasting solution to the country, State Minister Hirut Zemene stressed, "Before the continuation of the next Forum, we need to conduct a rigorous shuttle diplomacy to specially solve the problem on responsibility sharing and ascertaining permanent cease-fire that is key to reach into a new time line for transition and democratic election."

Certainly, one of the achievements of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was the fact that a strong mandate is given to CTSAMM so that it would have better been positioned to identify violations in the country. Unfortunately, noted Mrs. Hirut, the cease-fire Agreement was notably violated a number of times. She said the violations of the COHA around Nasser on 12th February 2018 were clear sign of undermining the efforts of IGAD and the International Community to bring peace and stability to the People of South Sudan. She added, the CTSAMM Report had investigated the case and clearly identified the perpetrator of the wanton act of violation in which 22 Civilians including Women, Children and the Elderly were killed; and 72 others wounded. Consequently, added the State Minister, at this very moment, “IGAD stands at a critical stage that needs the wisdom of its members not to look at violations of cease-fire idly-by.” The State Minister further urged the South Sudanese parties not to squander such an opportunity to inclusive governance that their people long desired, adding: “We need to reflect on how we can help the South Sudanese parties to reach into a win-win solution.”

IGAD Special Envoy to South Sudan, Ambassador Ismael Wais presented a brief overview of the various efforts underway in bringing peace to South Sudan since the 12th June 2017 IGAD Session of Heads of State and Government held in Addis Ababa, that “took a historic step to revitalize the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS)”, tasking the IGAD Council of Ministers with undertaking the High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF).

Ambassador Ismail noted all parties agreed on key provisions of Chapter I and II, which he said, had already been initialed and revitalized. Ambassador Wais also urged all Parties to the process to continue to adhere to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and make necessary compromises; and seize what he called “this historic opportunity to bring peace to South Sudan.” Speaking on behalf of the Chairperson of the JMEC, Festus Mogae, Ambassador Berhanu Kebede, noted JMEC has no doubt that the Parties can reach agreement on all outstanding issues, if only they put the interest of the South Sudanese people first. He stressed, mandate of HLRF is wide enough and sufficient enough to accommodate any proposal deemed pertinent for full and inclusive implementation.

Nicholas Haysom, UN Special Envoy to South Sudan, said, “Compared to what we were just six months ago, this is no small achievement. The efforts of IGAD Special Envoy, Ambassador Wais, High Level Facilitators, and Ethiopia- as a Chair of IGAD must be applauded for putting in place this inclusive political process.” He added, “We must at the same time, however, share our disappointment at the continuing violations in the country. We would also have to realistically confront the fact that the position between the parties remain very wide and very far apart. It is important for this reason alone that the Parties focus on what this process needs to necessarily deliver.” Christ Trott from the Troika called for clear accountability for violations of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities signed on December 2017.

The ministers further commended the progress made by the South Sudan parties during the last sessions of the revitalization forum and endorsed the reconvening of the second phase to continue in Addis Ababa from 26 to 30 April 2018.

.... Council urges South Sudanese parties to engage in a spirit of compromise

In a communiqué issued following the 61st Extra-Ordinary Session of the IGAD Council of Ministers, the Council urged the South Sudanese parties taking part in the peace forum to engage in a spirit of compromise with the view to resolving all outstanding issues to achieve peace.

The Council also decided to release South Sudan's exiled rebel leader Riek Machar from house arrest soon once he agrees to denounce violence and work for peace. Under the new conditions, according to the communiqué, Machar will be allowed to relocate to any country outside the region, but not neighboring to South Sudan. The IGAD ministers said they would propose and decide a possible location for the prominent South Sudanese rebel Chief Riek Machar. Ahead of the release of the Communiqué, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene in her remarks said one of the points that IGAD had to make to support its next effort was that the issue of the isolation of the leader- one of the major parties to the conflict, Dr. Riek Machar.

Mrs. Hirut added that not only Machar's party, but all the opposition parties and other stakeholders are questioning why he is still not being allowed to actively participate in the negotiation Forum. She underlined parties and stakeholders were demanding for his release from confinement, further noting that it was proper to give a clear answer on this particular issue.

The council also decided that the Chairperson of the council and his colleagues as well as the IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan would undertake shuttle diplomacy with the parties to reconcile the position of the parties on responsibility sharing and security arrangements before the next peace forum. It also decided to take targeted sanctions against peace spoilers and refer to the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) for appropriate measures.

In this regard, the Council requested the Chairperson to "transmit CTSAMM's report to the Chairperson of the AU Peace and Security Council." The mandate of the CTSAMM is to monitor and verify the implementation of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities (ACoH) as agreed by the Parties and thus help bring an end to the conflict and its devastating consequences: great loss of life, the displacement of millions of people and destruction of property and livelihoods.

CTSAMM Monitoring and Verification Teams (MVTs) remain in 12 of the most conflict affected areas of the country; and are continuing to monitor the security situation pursuant to the Cessation of Hostilities.

IGAD issues Statement on the ongoing political tension in Somalia

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) issued a statement on the ongoing political tension in Somalia this week on Monday (March 26). While reaffirming its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia, IGAD noted that it was closely following the evolving new political tension in the country, which it said,

threatened to derail the significant progress registered in the past year. More specifically, the statement said the standoff within the country's legislature that threatens to impede efforts by the current Government towards reforming security and justice institutions, increasing opportunities for economic growth as well as providing basic services to its citizenry.

Equally, IGAD had demonstrated that over the past year Somalia had made steadfast progress towards a robust reform agenda, further acknowledging the commitment shown by Somalia's current leadership, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in close collaboration with its Federal Member States (FMS) for the progress registered in the course.

IGAD welcomed the progress made towards operationalization of the National Security Council and the implementation of the National Security Architecture, in particular the political agreement reached at the recent National Security Council of 6-10 February 2018, in a bid to recognize the regional forces and proceed with their integration within the National Security Architecture. It acknowledged the development of a condition based Transition Plan with a view to conduct a condition based, gradual handover of security from AMISOM to the Somali Security Forces, and looks forward to its swift finalization and implementation.

It also commended the great progress made by the Federal Government of Somalia in meeting the requirements of the ongoing IMF Staff Monitored Programme (SMP) as part of its broader reform agenda in reengaging with the International Financial Institutions.

IGAD however cautioned that the recurring political instability threatened the fragile gains made by the Federal Government of Somalia over the last 12 months, which it said, portended serious risks to stabilization process. Accordingly, IGAD called upon the Executive and Federal Parliament to join hands to facilitate the delivery of the critical milestones under the 2020 Road map, aid the implementation of the national security architecture, and further develop the Roadmap to the debt relief. It also urged all Somali Federal institutions to maintain their unity and cohesion, in the spirit of separation of power and also use constitutional and peaceful means to resolve political disputes.

The AfCFTA offers significant opportunities to Ethiopia

The Rwandan capital, Kigali, hosted the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) summit last week, which led to the signing of and the launching the AfCFTA by the vast majority of the member states of the African Union. With its unprecedentedly appealing theme, "Creating One African Market", the summit garnered not just the attention of member countries but also their proactive support and recognition. The AfCFTA, most importantly, a flagship project of Agenda 2063 of the African Union ushered in what could be considered a new dawn for Africa. Among other things, the AfCFTA, which was signed by 44 of the 55 member states of the AU, with its grand aim of forging a unified and free continental market, brought a far ambitious vision of granting the free movement of people and goods with an added value of boosting the negotiating

capacity of the continent to the table. The other most important document was the signing by 47 of the member states is the Kigali Accord or Declaration, which affirmed their commitment to implement an AfCFTA- geared towards doubling intra-African trade by removing non-tariff and tariff barriers on goods and services.

Certainly, the AfCFTA aims to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and pave the way for accelerating the establishment of the Continental Customs Union and the African customs union; expand intra African trade through better harmonization and coordination of trade liberalization and facilitation regimes and instruments across RECs and across Africa in general; resolve the challenges of multiple and overlapping memberships and expedite the regional and continental integration processes, as well as enhance competitiveness at the industry and enterprise level through exploiting opportunities for scale production, continental market access and better reallocation of resources.

It is to be recalled that Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu led a high-level Ethiopian delegation to the 10th Extraordinary Session of the African Union Assembly on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). In addition, Minister of Trade, Dr Bekele Bulado signed the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement on behalf of the FDRE.

Attesting to the fact that Ethiopia is a signatory to both the AfCFTA and the Kigali Accord, Dr. Bekele, accentuated one of the takeaways of significant importance to Ethiopia, that the agreement helps Ethiopia gain more recognition across the Continent. Stressing the historical role Ethiopia played in the critical moments of the Continent as well as in the overall efforts vested in the AU and the rationale behind Ethiopia's signing, Dr. Bekele, said, "Given Ethiopia's historical attachment to the Continent and the AU there should be no reason not to sign the agreement."

Pointing to a future filled with so many socio-economic possibilities, Dr. Bekele further stated that "the free trade deal will help Ethiopia to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI), once it goes fully operational." As a nation that strives to attract more FDI, through its unrelenting endeavors in the facilitation of foreign investment as well as in the enhancement of its foreign trade, the AfCFTA could help Ethiopia draw a significant sum of ForEx that could, in turn, help develop its infrastructural facilities.

He underscored the burgeoning of intra-Africa trade could help much in the alleviation of conflicts in different parts of the Continent by the creation of a massive employment opportunity for the youth, as the youth are the principal fodder of so many sporadic and at times, seemingly never-ending conflicts in Africa.

The other most important aspect of the AfCFTA summit was its much needed call to the African business corps that included entrepreneurs, marketers and innovators, to holistically prepare themselves ahead of time to accelerate its effective implementation in line with the perennial business dictum, quid pro quo.

The gradual creation and adoption of a single continental currency both in the fiat and digital variants was also considered by the member states as well as the major stakeholders from the business community in a plethora of panel discussions. During the plenaries, the participants stressed the fact that the adoption of a common, Pan-African currency could help Africa boost its negotiating capacity. The AfCFTA Business Forum under the theme "Leveraging the Power of Business to Drive Africa's Integration" hosted four pivotal panel discussions that focused on the most pressing challenges and most promising opportunities of the Continent, including, youth unemployment; the role women play in the value chain; the proper utilization of technological innovations in the finance sector, and on ways of financing the Intra-Africa Trade project.

The plenary session on "Technology, Innovation and Intra-Africa Trade", reiterated the need for traversing the contours of the brave new world of Digital Innovation in the fields of finance, education, media, trade, social interconnectedness, the cross-border flow of data and leveraging the advantages as a robust and faster way of realizing, not only the oft talked about agenda of regional integration but also the improvement of African lives and the better propagation of African narratives and the preservation of the African identity on the world stage. Paying due attention to the fact that, these days the cross-border flow of data by far exceeds the flow of goods or people in different regions of Africa as well as the youth dividend that is both a resource and if not well taken care of, a burden, several keynote speakers from the innovative business solutions corps urged governments and entrepreneurial cliques across the continent ICT infrastructure, content platforms for African narratives, financial platforms in the form of a Pan-African Digital Currency for an integrated Pan-African Market, secure Identity Platforms to imprint the African identity on the global iconography and trade and trading facilitation platforms are key to a highly promising and innovative CFTA - Smart CFTA - with an immense potential to ensure the job security of the youth and the combined trade competitiveness of the continent.

Ethiopia-Djibouti railway winning hearts of passengers

Over two months into its commercial operation, the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway has become the pride and joy of Ethiopian passengers (March 28). This railway line is a milestone that would pave the way for the historical, ethnical, geographical and economic ties that have been going on between the two countries for many years. This economical and infrastructural interdependence between the two countries is by far significant, not only in terms of strengthening the bilateral relations but also in bringing about regional integration that the region needs desperately.

The railway line, which was launched in October 2016 as part of efforts to open up landlocked Ethiopia to business, stretches from the capital Addis Ababa to the port of *Djibouti*. This Africa's first 752 kilometers standard-gauge electric *railway* which is built by the Chinese commenced its commercial operations for both passenger and freight services between the two countries in January. The railway contracted by two Chinese companies China Railway Group (CREC) and China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), is currently managed by a consortium of Chinese companies for a period of six years. During the six years period of time,

local professionals will be enabled to take over and have total control of the railway transportation system which begs the need for the transfer of knowledge.

The project, when it was commenced, intended to handles the lion's share of Ethiopia's trade and is the country's main window to the sea by at creating new manufacturing industries, improving transport and further opening up landlocked Ethiopia. According to the share-company, this railway system has the capacity of transporting 106 containers in a single route and has transported over 2,000 containers of commodities from the port to central Ethiopia during its first two months of operations. The linkage between the Djibouti port and Ethiopia's Modjo dry port has also shown encouraging signs in a manner that would help in expanding Ethiopia's export and international trading.

While noting the commercial use of the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway, it should not be passed without acknowledging the very fact that Ethiopians passengers are using it for recreation purpose as well by taking into account the effectiveness of the railway line in terms of affordability and time efficiency.