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News in brief

Africa and the African Union

The 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, which comprises the Heads of State and Governments of all African countries, was held under the theme: “Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa”, on Sunday and Monday (February 10-11) in Addis Ababa. **(See articles)**

The Africa Business Health Forum was held on Tuesday this week (February 12). Organized by the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the Aliko Dangote Foundation and the Global Business Coalition on Health (GBCHealth), it launched the African Business Coalition for Health (ABCHealth) to mobilize private sector resources and expertise to strengthen health delivery systems and partnerships, and foster opportunities for the private sector to contribute in strengthening national health systems. It also launched the ECA's Healthcare and Economic Growth in Africa Report. Prime Minister Dr. Abiy, in a keynote address called for affordable and quality healthcare for all, with governments and the private sector working together.

President Kagame of Rwanda chaired the “Africa Leadership Meeting: Investing in Health,” on Saturday (February 9) to launch a new initiative to help deliver increased, sustained and more impactful financing for health across Africa, and increase commitments for health and work towards Universal Healthcare Coverage. President Kagame said African governments should increase domestic expenditure in health sector to achieve national and international health-related goals, including the AU Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

During their 22nd General Assembly at the beginning of this week, Africa's First Ladies renamed their organization the “Organization of African First Ladies for Development” (OAFLAD). The organization, established in 2002, was previously called: “The Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS”. The current president is the First Lady of Burkina Faso, Adjoavi Sika Kabore, with Kenya's First Lady, Margaret Kenyatta, as vice-president.

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed hosted a Gala Dinner Reception in honour of the Heads of State and Government at the new Skylight Hotel on Saturday (February 9). **(See article)**

The Prime Minister unveiled a commemorative statue of Emperor Haile Selassie I on Sunday (February 10) at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa. **(See article)**

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu held talks with an SPLM/IO delegation led by Ms. Angelina Teny on issues of implementation of South Sudan's Revitalized Agreement on Wednesday (February 13), Dr. Workneh underlined Ethiopia's commitment, both as a neighbor and as IGAD Chair, to the full realization and implementation of the Revitalized Agreement.

Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh met the Senior Director for Africa at the US National Security Council, Mr. Cyril Sartor, on Tuesday (February 12) to discuss bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual concern. Dr. Workneh thanked the US government for its continued support to Ethiopia; Mr. Sartor appreciated the positive developments taking place in Ethiopia and reiterated US government's continued commitment for all-round cooperation.

Luxembourg Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn, made a working visit to Ethiopia and the AU this week. He held talks with President Sahle-Work Zewde and met with Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu on Wednesday (February 13). The two sides agreed to further strengthen cooperation in both bilateral and multilateral venues and underlined the importance of enhancing bilateral relations and other multilateral issues including migration and refugee management. Mr. Asselborn also met the Chair of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi ending a four-day visit to Ethiopia on Wednesday (January 13) commended Ethiopia for its open-door policy towards refugees. He praised the government's openness to new and innovative approaches to improve the lives of refugees and host communities. The UN High Commissioner earlier attended the AU summit.

French Secretary of State to the Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, M. Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, visited Ethiopia at the weekend to prepare for visit of the French President Macron, to Ethiopia next month. President Macron will also be visiting Kenya and Djibouti.

An Eritrean Public and Cultural Diplomacy Delegation has arrived in Addis Ababa on Thursday (February 14). Upon arrival at Bole International Airport, the Eritrean Public and Cultural Delegation was warmly welcomed by Ethiopian Ambassador to Eritrea, Ambassador Redwan Hussien, Eritrea's Ambassador to the African Union, Ambassador Araya Desta, Head of the Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Bureau, Nebiyu Bayu, Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nebiat Getachew as well as dozens of the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy team. The visit of the Eritrean Public and Cultural Diplomacy team, which comprises over 55 Eritreans drawn from all walks of life, is expected to further strengthen the historical relations and people-to-people ties between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The 32nd Ethio-Kenya Joint Border Commission meeting was held in Adama, Ethiopia, this week, focusing on border security, illegal weapons and human trafficking, enhancing trade and cooperation and strengthening people-to-people ties. **(See article)**

The recent Djibouti-Ethiopian Joint Ministerial Commission meeting held at the end of last month reflected the excellent relations of the two countries and their reform agendas as well as providing a

unique platform to demonstrate their renewed resolution to play a pivotal role in development in the region and in Africa. **(See article)**

Tourism Ethiopia and Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) last week launched the brand: “Ethiopia: Taste of Origins”. Derived from the national brand “Ethiopia: Land of Origins”, Ethiopia: Taste of origins” will serve as the branding element for all agricultural commodities and food related trade shows. It will ensure Ethiopia is promoted consistently across different sectors in trade fairs, sending a unified message that Ethiopia offers a colourful and eclectic menu of things to see and do.

Eritrea

President Alpha Conde of Guinea, accompanied by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, made a one-day visit to Eritrea, arriving on Saturday (February 9) in Massawa. He held talks with President Isaias on developing Guinea/Eritrea bilateral relations, and strengthening the African Union as well as the place of Africa in international fora.

EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica visited Eritrea at the end of last week, where he launched a project to support road connections between the Ethiopian border and Eritrean ports. **(See article)**

Luxembourg Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn, made a working visit to Eritrea this week where he held talks with Foreign Minister Osman Saleh.

Somalia

President Mohamed Abdullahi called upon African leaders to adopt progressive policies towards refugees in the continent. Appreciating states that host Somali refugees, he underlined need for progressive refugee laws and policies across the continent, urging leaders to take initiatives to accommodate vulnerable refugees, wherever they are and commit to remedy the causes of displacement. He called for reforms to allow freedom of movement, the right to own land, seek employment, get access to education and health services and all the necessary documents and permits to allow refugees to develop themselves.

President Abdullahi held talks with UN Secretary-General Gueterres in Addis Ababa on Saturday (February 9). The Secretary-General stressed the need for continued strong coordination between the Somali federal forces and their international partners, particularly AMISOM.

Prime Minister, Hassan Ali Khayre, accompanied by Security Minister, Mohamed Abukar Islow, presided over the inauguration ceremony of more than 1400 police officers in Mogadishu on Wednesday (February 13). The officers are part of a total of 3,000 police officers expected to boost security in Mogadishu in a new security re-organization. The Prime Minister urged the new recruits to respect the rule of the law while performing their duties.

Senior military commanders of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), started a four-day meeting in Mogadishu on Monday (February 11) to develop a comprehensive plan for implementation of the new Concept of Operations (CONOPS). **(See article)**

The 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union...

The 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, which comprises the Heads of State and Governments of all African countries, was held under the theme: “Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa”, on Sunday and Monday (February 10-11) in Addis Ababa. The Assembly is the culmination of the Union’s statutory meetings and it was preceded by the meetings of the Executive Council of Foreign Ministers and of the Permanent Representatives Committee. The Assembly heard the reports of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat on the Implementation of the Institutional Reform of the AU and the Annual Report on the activities of the Union and its organs. The Heads of State and Government was briefed on the Outcome of the Leadership in Health Financing High Level Meeting by President Kagame of Rwanda; and heard reports on the Status of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) from President Mamadou Issoufou of Niger; and on progress achieved with regard to Agenda 2063 from President Alassane Dramane Ouattara of Cote d’Ivoire.

The outgoing chairperson of the Assembly, President Kagame of Rwanda, welcomed the new leaders of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, and of Madagascar, Andry Rajoelina, as well as commending Guinea-Bissau, Botswana, and Zambia for signing the instrument for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) during the Summit. He encouraged those signatories who have not yet ratified to do so, at the earliest opportunity. President Kagame said the re-launched Peace Fund stood at \$89 million dollars, with 50 Member States contributing, adding: “This demonstrates the force of our collective resolve and ability”.

During his year as chairperson of the Union, President Kagame initiated various reforms for the AU, providing for performance enhancement mechanisms including sanctions for the non-payment of contributions by member states, provisions for the termination of appointment for the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission and performance evaluation of its senior leadership. The reforms being carried out also include the transformation of NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency into the African Union Development Agency (AUDA). This is tasked to coordinate and execute priority regional and continental projects to promote regional integration, to strengthen the capacity of African Union Member States and regional bodies as well as advance knowledge-based advisory support. Its mandate also includes a full range of resource mobilization. It will serve as the continent’s technical interface with all of Africa’s development stakeholders and development partners. Another aspect of the reform is the strengthening of the African Peer Review Mechanism to track implementation and oversee monitoring and evaluation in key governance areas.

As the 32nd Ordinary Session marked the end of Rwanda’s chairpersonship of the Union, President Kagame handed over the chair to President Abdul Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt. President el-Sisi urged Africa’s leaders to encourage trade and investment between African countries as well as expand job opportunities for youth. This, he said, was one way to create economically integrated Africa. He said he would work to promote the unity of African states in the fight against terrorism and extremism which he identified as one of the biggest threats in the continent,

and underlined his determination to focus on the fight against armed groups on the continent and the rebuilding efforts of countries recovering from conflict. He said: "Terrorism remains a cancer that affects African nations and steals the dreams of our people and we must identify and combat those who fund terrorism activities on the continent," He said that he would prioritize mediation and "preventive diplomacy" as one of the key mechanisms for promoting peace and security.

...the major decisions of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government...

The 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly concluded on Monday this week (February 11) adopting a series of major decisions and declarations. The theme of the Summit, the Year of Refugees, fitted closely with Ethiopia's new refugee law, and the Summit took note of the fact that Ethiopia's new refugee law provides for one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa and more beyond. It allows refugees to obtain work permits, access education and health services, obtain drivers' licenses, legally register life events such as births and marriages and opens up access to national financial services, such as banking, and will certainly enhance the lives of refugees and host communities alike. Ethiopia currently hosts close to a million refugees.

On aspects of peace and security in the Horn of Africa region, the AU Assembly commended the Federal Government of Somalia for the continued progress made in implementing the Somali Transition Plan, while also welcoming AMISOM's critical role in degrading the capacities of Al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups. The Assembly paid tribute to the AMISOM Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries for their immense sacrifices in Somalia. On South Sudan, the Assembly commended the South Sudanese stakeholders for the leadership demonstrated since the signing of the revitalized agreement and called on opposition groups that have not yet signed the agreement to do so and without any preconditions. The Assembly also welcomed the commitments of President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti and President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea to normalize their relations within framework of the relevant Peace and Security Council Communiqués and UN Resolution 2446 (2018).

African leaders as well as UN Secretary-General Guterres praised Prime Minister Dr. Abiy's bold initiatives for regional peace and security. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki, noting the progress made across Africa on aspects of peace, security and democracy, also acknowledged the "Wind of Hope" as evidenced in practice by the rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and its dividend for regional peace and security. UN Secretary-General Guterres, citing Ethio-Eritrean reconciliation, said firmly that there was a "Wind of Hope" blowing in various parts of Africa and the rapprochement between Ethiopia-Eritrea was a bright example on the African Horizon. He said, "The reconciliation is having a positive effect throughout the Horn of Africa," adding: "We see negotiations between Djibouti and Eritrea, and we see a reconciliation between Eritrea and Somalia that has already taken place." African leaders described Dr. Abiy Ahmed's bold initiatives for regional peace and security as exemplary.

On the reform of the United Nations Security Council, the Assembly welcomed the growing acceptance of the legitimacy of the Common African Position. It also welcomed the full endorsement for the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration shown by a number of Interest Groups and Member States from elsewhere during the Intergovernmental Negotiations at

the United Nations in 2018. It reiterated the critical need for full representation of Africa in the United Nations Security Council.

In terms of AU finance, the Assembly mandated the Commission to provide technical support to Member States to accelerate implementation of the 0.2% levy on imports; to facilitate the involvement of the Committee of Fifteen Finance Ministers (F15) in the annual audit report; to organize a retreat for the F15 to assess mechanisms for its working methods and to consider modalities on how to accelerate implementation of decisions on the 'Financing of the Union'; as well as strengthen the Secretariat of the 'Financing of the Union' 'to provide adequate support for both the F15 and Member States.

On the Post-2020 Partnership with the European Union, the Assembly stressed the need to ensure that Africa speaks with one voice in the various platforms of partnership with the EU. It requested the Commission to ensure consistency between the Post-Cotonou Agreement and the Post-2020 Continent-to-Continent Partnership, so that continental priorities, as articulated in Agenda 2063 and other related instruments, were achieved.

As regards to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the Assembly requested the African Union Ministers responsible for trade to: submit Schedules of Tariff Concessions and Schedules of Specific Commitments on Trade in Services, in line with agreed modalities, to the July 2019 and January 2020 Sessions of the Assembly, respectively, for adoption. It also called for conclusion to the negotiations on Investment, Competition Policy and Intellectual Property Rights, and for draft legal texts to be submitted to the January 2021 Session of the Assembly.

The Assembly also heard the report of the 28th Summit of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and decided that it should be an Organ of the Africa Union in line with Article 5 (2) of the Constitutive Act. It welcomed the peer review Reports of Cote d'Ivoire and Mozambique and encouraged both countries to take into account the observations of Member States as well as the recommendations in reports on development and implementation of National Action Programs.

With regard to climate change, the Assembly urged parties to the Paris Agreement to recognize the special circumstances and needs of African countries, in line with the relevant and previous decisions adopted by the Conference of the Parties. It called upon the incoming presidency of the Conference of the Parties to continue with these consultations. It also urged developed countries to continue to scale up mobilized climate finance towards achieving the 2020 finance goal through private and public funds, and building on the needs of developing countries and enhance the provisions of predictable and sustainable finance to deliver on the US\$100 billion required annually. The Assembly also encouraged African countries to ratify the Kigali Amendment of the Montreal protocol as a vehicle to strengthen efforts to tackle climate change.

...Prime Minister Dr. Abiy's reception...

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed hosted a Gala Dinner Reception in honour of the Heads of State and Government at the newly inaugurated Skylight Hotel on Saturday (February 9). He said Ethiopia's reforms were deeply rooted in the philosophy of Medemer, which, he said, offered a synergy at the continental level. Medemer had three interlinked pillars: a vibrant democracy, economic vitality, regional

integration and openness to the world.”, and it offered a key for service to others and a means to ensure peace, development, and prosperity for the continent.

Dr. Abiy said Ethiopia had embraced a great vision and embarked on bold reforms, improving the political environment, opening up its political space, releasing all political prisoners, inviting exiled armed opposition groups to be part of the political process and ushering in a Wind of Hope, harmony in the Horn region, as a continental model for peace, normalcy, and stability. The country was undergoing multifaceted, multidimensional institutional reforms to enhance and refurbish ease of doing business in the areas of Telecommunications, logistics, energy, aviation, railways, and industrial parks.

The Prime Minister told the Heads of State and Government, other dignitaries and invited guests that Ethiopia was embracing change, and this transformation was giving hope to millions of a more harmonious and prosperous future for the country and the region.

Dr. Abiy thanked the AU staff for their commendable work and unwavering commitment to a prosperous Africa. AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki said Dr. Abiy had demonstrated his full support for the AU's mission, for a prosperous Africa, a dynamic force in global arena.

...a commemorative statue of Emperor Haile Selassie I is unveiled...

A commemorative statue of Emperor Haile Selassie I was unveiled on Sunday (February 10) at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa. The unveiling took place in the presence of the African Union Chairperson, Moussa Faki; the President of Ghana, Nana Addo Akofo, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed; the outgoing Chairman of the African Union President Kagame of Rwanda; Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, representatives from the former Imperial family and the Rastafarian community, AU officials and members of the diplomatic corps and other invited guests.

AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki, said the statue recognized the Emperor's contribution to Africa's liberation and unity leading up to the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963. Earlier, Deputy Chairperson, Ambassador. Kwesi Quartey, noted Addis Ababa was Africa's diplomatic capital and symbol of Pan-Africanism, and extended the AU Commission's appreciation to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the people of Ethiopia, for their commitment to the AU.

The 3-meter high statue, cast in bronze, shows the Emperor making his signature hand sign with the thumb and index finger in a triangular shape. The statue reflects the history of African liberation, integration, and his part in the evolution of Africa's development. Emperor Haile Selassie played a major leadership role in the establishment of what was then the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Together with Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, Emperor Haile Selassie promoted Pan-Africanism and African Unity and spearheaded the creation of the Organization of African Unity on 25 May 1963.

The statue is the second to be erected inside the AU Headquarters along with one commemorating Ghana's first leader, Kwame Nkrumah, another champion of pan-Africanism, which was erected in 2012. Haile Selassie's statue was designed by Bekele Mekonnen, an Ethiopian sculptor.

Ethio-Kenya Joint Border Commission meeting in Adama City, Ethiopia

Ethio-Kenya Joint Border Commission meeting opened in Adama City, Ethiopia, on Tuesday (February 12). The meeting focused on intra-border security, stemming illegal weapons flow and human trafficking, enhancing border trade for the benefit of the border communities, and cooperation on health and education as well as strengthening people-to-people ties between the communities on both sides of the border.

Mrs. Teyiba Hassen, the Deputy Chief Administrator of Ethiopia's Oromia Regional State noted that the relationship between Ethiopia and Kenya was longstanding and one based on solid foundations. The peoples of the two countries, she emphasized, were tied together by blood, culture and tradition. She also underlined the importance of their joint efforts to ensure security along the border as well as improve the socio-economic wellbeing of border communities. Moffat Kangi, leading the Kenyan delegation, said the bilateral ties and longstanding cooperation between Ethiopia and Kenya was exemplary for the countries in the region. The two countries, he said, were working together to ensure that their common borders were corridors of peace and prosperity.

The meeting also assessed implementation of the various agreements reached at the previous (31st) session of the Joint Border Commission meeting, held in Mombasa, Kenya, in 2016. The 32nd Ethio-kenya Joint Border Commission meeting was concluded with upholding common understandings to further strengthen their all-rounded cooperation along their common borders. With the view to dealing with peace and security concerns along their common borders, the two sides have agreed to establish a "Peace Committee", which comprises respective institutions of the two countries, administration units of border communities as well as community elders from both sides.

An EU road project in Eritrea

EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica visited Eritrea at the end of last week, launching an initial €20 million project for road connections between the Ethiopian border and Eritrean ports.

During his visit, Commissioner Mimica met President Isaias to explore ways for the EU and Eritrea to step up political relations and dialogue on matters of concern to both sides. He noted: "The European Union is committed to support Eritrea and Ethiopia in delivering their historic peace agreement, which ended twenty years of conflict. To back this, we are launching a €20 million program to rebuild the roads connecting both countries. This will boost trade, consolidate stability, and have clear benefits for the citizens of both countries through the creation of sustainable growth and jobs."

The new project will be financed through the EU Trust Fund for Africa and through the United Nation's Office for Project Services. It will rehabilitate road connections between the Ethiopian border and Eritrean ports to boost trade and create jobs. This is the first phase of a broader support to Eritrea, which is planned to scale up later this year. It is part of the EU's new dual track approach of strengthening political dialogue with Eritrea, notably encouraging political and economic reforms and improvement of human rights, as well as pursuing development cooperation to tackle root causes of poverty, and to reinforce the peace agreement and economic integration.

One of the commitments in last year's Eritrea/Ethiopia peace agreement is that transport, trade and communications links between the two countries would resume. To achieve this, it requires rehabilitating the main arterial roads between the Ethiopian border and the Eritrean port of Massawa. This is the focus of this road project.

AMISOM commanders meet to plan military operations

Senior military commanders of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), started a four-day meeting in Mogadishu on Monday (February 11) to develop a comprehensive plan for implementation of the new Concept of Operations (CONOPS). Those taking part are AMISOM sector commanders, representatives from the Somali National Army (SNA), the UN and development partners. The new CONOPS was approved by the Military Operations Coordination Committee, a forum of Chiefs of Defense Staff and representatives of the AMISOM Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries, the Federal Government of Somalia, UN, development partners, and the AU Peace and Security Council, in November last year. It will guide AMISOM military activities and operations for the next three years, and is taking place as AMISOM is drawing down one-thousand more troops by the end of this month, in line with the UN Security Council Resolution 2431 (2018), following the first reduction undertaken in December 2017.

The plan will identify activities and operations to be implemented and lay out the necessary timeframe and logistical support needed to implement these. Simon Mulongo, the Deputy Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (DSRCC) for Somalia, urged the commanders to come up with realistic operational plans that will ensure the key CONOPS requirements are successfully implemented. "We need to do with the little resources we have and implement the new CONOPS to help AMISOM fulfill its mandate of securing Somalia," said Mr. Mulongo.

Under the new CONOPS, a number of Forward Operating Bases are being reconfigured and others closed as troop numbers reduce. AMISOM has assured local populations that changes will be undertaken with utmost consideration of the safety and security of populations living in these areas. AMISOM Force Commander, Lt. General Tigabu Yilma said: "In order to implement the Concept of Operations effectively, we will focus on conducting targeted offensive operations against Al-Shabaab to degrade its capability, deny them freedom of action and movement and secure our friendly forces in fulfillment of our mandate." General Tigabu, who took over from

Uganda's Lt General Jim Owesigyire two weeks ago, described the meeting as crucial in aiding the planning of military activities and operations in all AMISOM sectors.

Ethiopia and Djibouti's renewed resolve for cooperation and economic integration

The 15th Djibouti-Ethiopian Joint Ministerial Commission meeting was held at the end of last month (January 30-31) in Djibouti. The meeting was held in a spirit of brotherhood that reflected the excellent relations between the two countries. At the same time, it also provided a unique platform for both countries, to serve as a venue for the determination of both governments to demonstrate a renewed resolution to continue to play a pivotal role in the progress of the Horn of Africa and of Africa. Both governments are, after all, engaged in a process of reform aimed, *inter alia*, to encourage their nationals to engage fully and practically in the creation of employment opportunity for youth, expand the structures of democracy, buttress ongoing economic progress, and respect the rights of the people.

This Joint Ministerial Commission meeting was an opportune occasion to showcase the renewed commitment of both countries to resolve all pressing issues, and underline their determination to work closely together on the peace and stability in the region and to support economic development and regional integration.

The Ethiopian side commended the Government of Djibouti for taking steps to improve relations with Eritrea. Djibouti appreciated Prime Minister Dr. Abiy's bold moves to encourage tranquility in the region. The initiatives for peace provided a firm jumping off point to encourage youth to participate in the current wind of hope, change and confidence. The agreements reached clearly demonstrated the deep-seated commitment of both governments to encourage prosperity of their peoples. They included bolstering cooperation on criminal matters, formulating plans for ensuring regular, safe and orderly migration on the basis of the spirit of the Marrakech Agreement, and producing a new comprehensive agreement on labor issues, as well as enhancing existing cooperation on peace and security issues bilaterally as well as within the frame work of IGAD, the African Union and the United Nations.

The Joint Ministerial Commission in fact provided an important venue to underline the need to work closely together to revive the economy of areas that shared a common border and improve the conditions and ways of life of the populations on both sides of the border. There was strong awareness that this would give further impetus towards reinforcing already deep-rooted people-to-people ties. Similarly, aiming to further concretize the ties, a new level of cooperation was reached to exchange instructors and youth experts in such areas of logistics and transport, forestry, engineering, and language teaching.

The second distinctive feature of the Joint Ministerial Commission meeting was that it served as a venue to navigate the future of this symbolic cooperation and make clear the way forward for moving towards the dream of the "Africa we want in 2063." Important milestones like the Continental Free Trade Area brokered by the African Union and signed on to by 44 of its 55 member states in Kigali last year, can best be materialized if meaningful efforts are undertaken at

regional level. Allowing free access to commodities, goods, and services across the continent are prerequisites to African unity. This was clearly shown by Ethiopia and Djibouti, both signatories to the CFTA, to expedite implementation of their bilateral Border Trade Protocol and General Trade Agreement at the JMC meeting.

Both sides have scaled up the gains achieved in port operation and transportation. They have made great efforts to remove impediments to enhance the efficiency of the port and ensure effective utilization of transport links. Enhancement of the quality of operations as well as completing interconnection projects, and initiating new phases of railway projects to augment integration, were discussed in detail. Joint mechanisms have been put in place. Both sides agreed that completion of infrastructure projects was essential to fast-track economic integration. They agreed to work to launch the natural gas pipeline project by fast-tracking technical issues.

Overall, the 15th Djibouti-Ethiopia Joint Ministerial Commission meeting clearly provided the opportunity for an important dialogue and a realistic working platform to further speed up the pace of cooperation and economic integration. It called for credible steps to resolve any outstanding issues, agreeing to implement solutions to encourage the continued upward spiral of economic links and joint peace and stability. It emphasized the need to forge closer follow-up of agreements, and to hone capacity to manage the systems underpinning prosperity and security. The meeting strongly underlined the value of holding bilateral dialogues regularly to encourage the advancement of the joint common agenda for the greater common good.