

News in Brief

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News in Brief

Africa and the Africa Union

The second Belt and Road Initiative Forum (BRI) is being held this week Thursday to Saturday (April 25-27) in Beijing under the theme “Belt and Road Cooperation: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future”, with 37 heads of state and government attending and representatives from over a hundred countries. **(See article)**

An African Union consultative meeting was convened by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Chair of the African Union, in Cairo on Tuesday this week (April 24) to discuss the situation in the Republic of the Sudan. The meeting was attended by Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Presidents of Chad, Djibouti, Somalia, South Africa, Ethiopia’s Deputy Prime Minister, Demeke Mekonnen and presidential envoys from Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan and Uganda. Ethiopia participated in the meeting in its capacity as Chair of IGAD. **(See article)**

The 5th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, was held in Marrakesh, Morocco, last week (April 16-18). The theme was: "Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality". Professor Afework Kassu, State Minister of Science and Higher Education, led the Ethiopian delegation. **(See article)**

World Press Freedom Day is celebrated around the world on May 3 and this year, the main celebration is taking place in Addis Ababa, over three days, May 1-3. The theme for 2019 is “Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation”. **(See article)**

Ethiopia

President Sahle-Work Zewde, speaking at a consultative forum on gender equality organized by Civil Society Organizations on Monday (April 22), called for broad and integrated efforts to empower women. She told more than 200 CSO representatives that “we should prioritize activities that contribute for the empowerment of women.”

Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed led the Ethiopian delegation to China on Tuesday this week to attend the second Belt and Road Initiative Forum. He addressed the High-Level Meeting at the Belt and Road Forum on Friday (April 26). He also held bilateral meetings with President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Li Keqiang and oversaw the signing of a number of agreements. **(See article)**

Deputy Prime Minister, Demeke Mekonnen, led the Ethiopian delegation to the AU consultative meeting on the Sudan held in Cairo on Tuesday. **(See article)**

The Ambassador of Republic of Djibouti to Ethiopia and Dean of the East African Group of Ambassadors, H.E. Ambassador Mohammed Idriss Farah paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister H.E. Gedu Andargachew on Thursday (April 25). Foreign Minister Gedu expressed his satisfaction over the already strong relations between Ethiopia and the Republic of Djibouti. The Minister also expressed his country's continued commitment to advance the efforts of economic integration with Djibouti. The two sides reiterated their firm commitment to work more closely in the maintenance of peace and stability in the region.

The Ambassador of the State of Eritrea to Ethiopia, Ambassador Semere Russom paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister Gedu Andargachew on Thursday (April 25). On the occasion, Foreign Minister Gedu noted the historic rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which he said, opened a new chapter of relations. The Minister also underlined the need to further strengthen the bilateral relationship and enhance the people-to-people-ties between the two countries.

Foreign Minister Gedu Andargachew who officially took up his post as Foreign Minister on Monday (April 22) met and held discussions with the State Ministers, Director-generals, Ambassadors and heads of departments and directors of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He met and held discussions with all other members of the Ministry during the next few days.

A joint Ethiopia-Kenya high-level conference was held last week (April 17-18) in Addis Ababa to discuss ways to bring about peace and security among the communities living along the Ethiopia-Kenya border. **(See article)**

An Ethiopian trade and investment delegation attended the dual "China International Sesame Conference 2019 and China-Africa Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum" held in Qingdao city, on Tuesday last week (April 16). **(See article)**

Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Dr. Ergoge Tesfaye met Qatar's Minister of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs in Doha on Monday (April 22). They agreed to strengthen cooperation on labor and social affairs and noted the importance of increasing ties in business, trade and investment.

Minister of Women, Children and Youth, Ms. Yalem Tsegay met with Ms Rosemary Mbabazi, Minister of Youth of Rwanda in Kigali on Tuesday (April 23). The two ministers emphasized the need to further increase all-rounded cooperation between the two countries and agreed to work more closely on exploring ways of strengthening cooperation on youth affairs.

At a weekly press briefing held on Thursday (April 25), Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Mr. Nebiat Getachew addressed the media regarding the 2nd Belt and Road Forum (BRF) being held in #Beijing #China: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future; the 26th edition of World Press Freedom Day to be celebrated in Addis Ababa on 2-3 May 2019, Citizen-Centered Diplomacy, and upcoming business forums as well as on the reform of the country's Foreign Affairs and National Security Policy and Strategy.

Ethiopia and the Korea EximBank have signed two concessional loan agreements. One for US\$170 million is for the southern extension of the national electricity grid power transmission project; the second for US\$ 94 million will be used to fund ground water irrigation and rural development projects.

The World Travel and Tourism Council's annual review of the economic impact and social importance of the sector released this month says Ethiopia experienced the highest tourism growth in the world in 2018, surpassing the global average growth rate of 3.9% and the African average of 5.6%. It grew by 48.6% in 2018 and supported 2.2 million jobs, contributing \$7.4 billion to Ethiopia's economy, an increase of \$2.2 billion over the previous year.

Last weekend another 850 Ethiopians residing in Saudi Arabia without permits were repatriated to Ethiopia. Their orderly and safe return was facilitated by the Ethiopian consulate in Jeddah together with the government in Riyadh and the International Organization for Migration.

May we wish a Happy Easter on Sunday (April 28) to Christians throughout the world who observe this day. May it be a peaceful day for all and allow time to reflect on unity, compassion and love for humanity.

Djibouti

The Chairman of the Djibouti Ports and Free Zones Authority, Aboubaker Omar Hadi, said on Monday (April 22) that Djibouti was in discussion with a syndicate of European banks led by German Development Bank, KfW, to finance a new airport. The Hassan Gouled Aptidon International Airport will be built 25 kilometers south of Djibouti City and will also serve Ali Sabieh near the border with Ethiopia. The government is also planning to build Ahmed Dini Ahmed International Airport on the Seven Brothers Islands archipelago off the coast.

Eritrea

Presidential Advisor, Yemane Gebreab, led the Eritrean delegation to a meeting of Arab and African Coastal States of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, held in Riyadh at the weekend (April 21-22). Officials from Egypt, Eritrea, Djibouti, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen participated in the conference. Mr. Gebreab told the meeting that creating a viable framework of cooperation required continuous and serious consultations. It should involve realistic assessment of realities in the Red Sea, clarity of objectives, strategies to eliminate threats and create policies of cooperation; respect for sovereignty and international law; ensuring all littoral states build and possess defense capabilities and naval forces, without delegation to others; collective support for tasks that couldn't be met by individual resources; consensual agreement on cooperation with external forces; and committees to address these issues.

Somalia

President Mohamed Abdullahi held talks with Egyptian President el-Sisi on Tuesday (April 23). President el-Sisi expressed Egypt's desire to continue to enhance bilateral cooperation and offer all support to the people of Somalia to establish security and stability. President Abdullahi praised Egypt's role in supporting Somalia and its efforts to achieve security and

stability and said Somalia would continue coordinating and consulting with Egypt on various issues.

President Mohamed Abdullahi arrived in Asmara on Wednesday (April 24) for an official visit to Eritrea. He and his delegation, which included the Minister of Education and other senior officials, were welcomed at Asmara International Airport by President Isaias.

President Mohammed Abdullahi opened a three-day conference of Islamic scholars to discuss insecurity, reconciliation and terrorism in Mogadishu on Monday (April 22). In a communiqué on Wednesday, the conference rejected all forms of violence and vowed to unite and promote religious harmony. It called on all Muslims to fight against terrorism and declared financing of extremist groups to be illegal. It said that groups which had decided to kill citizens of Somalia had erred in the teachings of Islam and people must unite against them.

Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre attended the passing out parade of the 1st infantry battalion, a 330-strong unit of the special Danab force, which completed its training at the Turkish Commando School and Training Center in Mogadishu at the end of last week. A second battalion has already started its training. The center is among the largest Turkish overseas military facilities and has the capacity to train more than 1,500 troops at a time.

Foreign Minister Ahmed Isse Awad met with Egypt's Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli on Sunday (April 21). Mr. Madbouli, who urged the opening of a branch of the Egyptian Banque Misr in Somalia saying it would have positive repercussions on trade and financial transactions, expressed readiness to meet the needs of the Somali government on technical support, training and scholarships. He also spoke of the need to increase trade between the two countries. Mr. Awad said Somalia prioritized cooperation with Egypt, and was working to strengthen cooperation between their business sectors.

Ambassador Gamal Mohamed Hassan, Minister of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, is attending the Belt and Road Forum this week. Somalia officially joined the BRI in August last year.

Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi officially assumed office as the new Governor of the Central Bank of Somalia on Sunday (April 21) in a ceremony attended by Minister of Finance Abdirahman Duale Beyle, Auditor General Mohamed Ali and outgoing governor Bashir Isse Ali.

Pirates attacked two fishing boats off the Somali coast on Sunday (April 21), but were driven off by maritime security teams on board. The EU Naval Force for Somalia, EUNAVFOR, Operation Atalanta confirmed the attacks. A warship from EUNAVFOR on Tuesday (April 23) successfully intercepted and boarded the pirate 'mothership' which had been seized two days earlier.

Sudan

The Transitional Military Council leader, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, said at the weekend that the TMC was committed to handing power over to the people. He confirmed that former president Al-Bashir and a number of former officials, were being held at Kobar prison,

adding that “a large number of symbols of the former regime suspected of corruption will stand trial”.

Ethiopia's Ambassador to Sudan, Ambassador Shiferaw Jarso, met and held discussions with Lt. General Abdul Fattah Al-Burhan, Chairman of the Transitional Military Council on Wednesday (April 24). Ambassador Shiferaw reaffirmed the position that the Government of Ethiopia supported the people of Sudan based on the principle of non-intervention and respect for Sudan’s sovereignty. He said Ethiopia as chair of IGAD was working closely with the AU and the international community to support a peaceful and inclusive transition process and provision of additional time as recommended by the AU consultative meeting. Lt. General Al-Burhan stressed the TMC was working towards a quick transition to a civilian rule. He noted the strong relations between the two countries would continue regardless of regime change.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates announced on Sunday (April 21) that they had agreed to provide Sudan with \$3 billion worth of assistance. \$500 million would be deposited with Sudan’s Central Bank and the rest would be provided in the form of food, medicine and petroleum products. The Saudi Press Agency said this was to strengthen the country’s financial position, ease the pressure on the Sudanese pound and increase stability in the exchange rate.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy visits China for the Belt and Road Forum...

Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed arrived in China on Tuesday this week to attend the second Belt and Road Initiative Forum being held Thursday to Saturday (April 25-27) in Beijing. Launched six years, the Belt and Road Initiative aims to strengthen infrastructure, trade, and investment links between China and some 65 other countries. Ethiopia was among the first group of African countries to sign cooperation agreements concerning building Belt and Road projects and it also plays a role as a bridge and a link for jointly advancing the initiative in Africa.

This year’s Forum is being held under the theme “Belt and Road Cooperation: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future,” and representatives from over 100 countries, including 37 heads of state and leaders of government are attending, including the presidents of Chile, Mongolia, Nepal, Portugal, the Swiss Confederation, Austria, Egypt, Italy and Laos. Other countries, including France, Germany, the UK, Spain, Japan, South Korea and the EU are sending high-level representatives. The Forum includes plenary sessions as well as a leaders’ round-table, high-level meetings, thematic forums, CEO conference and other side events. Among the side-events are 12 sub-forums focusing on practical cooperation as well as a specific business community conference. Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the opening ceremony and delivered a keynote speech.

In his remarks during the High-Level Meeting at the Belt and Road Forum on Friday (April 26), Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed highlighted the role the Addis Ababa - Djibouti railway is playing in facilitating trade between the two countries; testament to the connectivity principle of the Belt and Road Initiative. Sharing the investment-led economic policy and reforms being undertaken, he encouraged more investors to participate in the newly opened up

sectors.

The Chinese Ambassador to Ethiopia said in advance of the Forum that cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative was the new driving force in Ethiopia-China relations. He said the two countries had comprehensive strategic partnership and cooperation on the BRI would further elevate this partnership and help broaden their cooperation in trade, investment, tourism and other areas. The Ambassador said China was fully convinced that under the leadership of Dr. Abiy and against the backdrop of the profound reform efforts in Ethiopia, the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Ethiopia would continue to be at the forefront of China-Africa relations and play a model role in the framework of the Belt and Road cooperation.

In a press conference last week, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said 126 countries and 29 international organizations had signed cooperation agreements with China to jointly build the Belt and Road. He stressed that over the past two years with concerted efforts, the Belt and Road had become “a clean road for cooperation, prosperity, openness, green development and win-win outcome” and it would, he said benefit people of all countries. He noted that the total trade volume between China and participating countries now surpassed six trillion U.S. dollars, investment had exceeded 80 billion U.S. dollars and the 82 cooperation parks built by China and relevant countries had created nearly 300,000 jobs. This had provided enormous development opportunities for the countries involved and laid a solid foundation for China to host this Second Belt and Road Initiative Forum.

The Forum is expected to produce a full range of deliverables, including governmental cooperation agreements and initiatives as well as concrete cooperation projects involving participation of relevant business sectors. It is also expected that participants will build on successful practices and develop a multi-tiered cooperation framework with increased higher quality results. Expectations include improved bilateral cooperation mechanisms to strengthen links between the BRI and development policies, plans and initiatives of participating parties; enhancing trilateral cooperation and cooperation among participating countries in third markets; and expanded multilateral cooperation, and enhanced cooperation with multilateral economic and financial institution to explore multi-party cooperation.

Since inception, the BRI has opened a new area for international cooperation and boosted confidence in it. As President Xi has stressed, the BRI is a significant move China has taken to fully open itself under the new conditions. It represents an approach to international cooperation featuring mutual respect, justice, equity and cooperation for win-win outcomes. It also demonstrates a commitment to multilateralism and an open global economy. It aims to promote development by enhancing all-round connectivity, removing bottlenecks to implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It provides for new opportunities for fostering closer ties between countries and by improving connectivity between countries it has strengthened economic ties and people-to-people exchanges. This will naturally build consensus, enhance cooperation, and ultimately promote development for all.

The BRI is well aligned to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and at the regional level connects with regional development plans and cooperation initiatives such as the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. For Ethiopia, it links to the Growth and Transformation Plan II which aims to spur economic structural transformation and sustain accelerated growth towards the realization of the vision of becoming a middle-income

country by 2025. It has strengthened cooperation through development of major transport links such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway. Cooperation on transnational economic corridors is being intensified; construction of infrastructure projects on railway, port, motorway and pipeline construction as well as economic and trade cooperation parks is proceeding smoothly. In addition, China and other participating countries have set up platforms for multilateral cooperation on port, shipping, finance, taxation, energy, culture, think tank, the media and other areas and launched initiatives on a green Silk Road and a clean Silk Road.

...and had bilateral meetings with President Jinping and Premier Keqiang

In advance of the Belt and Road Initiative Forum, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy met China's President Xi Jinping for bilateral talks on Wednesday (April 24). President Jinping praised the Prime Minister's leadership and the reforms he has been carrying out over the past year. He said China held Ethiopia's development in high regard. President Jinping said both countries should continue to promote mutual understanding and trust as well as mutually-beneficial cooperation. They should strengthen cooperation in industry and trade, climate change and other regional affairs under the Belt and Road Initiative. President Jinping also emphasized the Chinese government attached high importance to the beautifying Sheger river project in Addis Ababa and was considering assistance for its support.

The Prime Minister emphasized Ethiopia's commitment to deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with China. This had enabled important moves like restructuring the debt of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway, an early development of the Belt and Road Initiative. He said Ethiopia wanted to promote the BRI on the basis of the principle of shared growth, and firmly supported the building of a community with shared future between China and Africa. He said China always respected African countries and did not try to impose its own will on them. Dr. Abiy noted that 2020 marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Ethiopia and Ethiopia hoped this would provide an opportunity to extend and expand ties. During their discussion, the Prime Minister also expressed his concern over the arrest of the young female engineer Nazrawit Abera, facing drug trafficking charges and a death sentence if found guilty.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy and his delegation also met with Prime Minister Li Keqiang to discuss further strengthening of Ethio-China relations. Prime Minister Keqiang confirmed that China would continue to support Ethiopia's efforts in promoting the wellbeing of its citizens and its economy. The two Prime Ministers presided over the signing of five agreements that underlined the deepening of relations. The agreements included an agreement to finance the development of a plaza and 12km of the 'Beautifying Sheger' river bank project in Addis Ababa; the provision of grants for technical cooperation and of grants for food aid; the five-year Belt and Road Initiative cooperation plan; and a Memorandum of Understanding to operationalize cooperation under Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

Following a meeting with the State Grid Corporation of China, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy also oversaw the signing of a USD 1.8 billion investment agreement to cover provision of energy transmission and distribution lines. This project will supply power for up to 16 industrial parks; the Addis Ababa to Djibouti 2nd railway line, and for different cities in the country. It will facilitate uninterrupted power supplies and also provide for the creation of jobs. Dr. Abiy later met with the China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation (Sinosure). They

guaranteed their full cooperation to enable materialization of the investment in energy by the State Grid Corporation. The Prime Minister also met with the leadership of the China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC). The Corporation, which is involved in the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway, has expressed interest in investing in agro-industry parks development, oil and gas development and the Beautifying Sheger river project.

AU consultative meeting in Cairo on the situation in the Sudan

A consultative meeting, convened by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Chair of the African Union, was held in Cairo on Tuesday this week (April 24) to discuss the situation in the Republic of the Sudan. The meeting was attended by Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Presidents of Chad, Djibouti, Somalia, South Africa, Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister, Demeke Mekonnen and presidential envoys from Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan and Uganda. Ethiopia participated in the meeting in its capacity as Chair of IGAD, and IGAD member states also held their own deliberations on the situation in the Sudan ahead of the consultative meeting of the African Union.

AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Fai Mahamat briefed the meeting on the report of his visit to Sudan at the beginning of the week. He said he held consultations with the Transitional Military Council, political parties and personalities, and civil society organizations, as well with members of the international community, including the African diplomatic corps, the United Nations, the European Union and bilateral partners. The Chairperson reiterated the African Union's "solidarity with the people of Sudan and support to their yearning for democracy, good governance and well-being." He stressed the need for all Sudanese stakeholders to continue to show a high sense of responsibility and to place the interests of Sudan above any other consideration.

The Chairperson urged all stakeholders to agree in earnest "on a civilian-led and consensual transition that would pave the way for the holding of free, fair and transparent elections and mark a turning point in the democratic transformation of their country." He underlined the need for sustained efforts to advance peace in Sudan, promote reconciliation among all political components, and ensure stability. This was key to creating conditions conducive to the fulfilment of the aspirations of all Sudanese people.

President el-Sisi affirmed Egypt's "full support for the choices of the Sudanese people, their free will in shaping their country's future, and what they will agree upon in such crucial and determining phase of their history." He told the meeting: "Establishing the concept of 'African solutions for African problems' is the only way to deal with joint challenges. The African states are most capable of understanding the complications of their issues, and the uniqueness of their affairs."

Ethiopia's Deputy Prime Minister, Demeke Mekonnen, called for all Sudanese political stakeholders to find a peaceful solution to the current situation through sober and rational dialogue. He stressed: "Ethiopia has full confidence in the wisdom of our Sudanese brothers and sisters to overcome this difficult moment, and secure the sovereignty and political independence of the Sudanese nation". Ethiopia, he said, was always ready to support the Sudanese people, while fully adhering to the principle of non-interference in the internal

affairs of the Sudan. The Deputy Prime Minister added that Ethiopia welcomed the ongoing efforts being made by the African Union. He said: “Ethiopia as the chair of IGAD, and together with its entire membership is fully committed to work closely with the African Union to help find an African solution to the current situation in the Sudan.”

The meeting stressed that the Sudanese authorities and the political parties should work together in good faith to address the current situation in Sudan and to speed up the reestablishment of a constitutional regime. It firmly re-emphasized that Sudan’s Transitional Military Council should transfer power to a civilian government, but as the ultimatum previously set by the AU’s Peace and Security Council was only seven days away, the meeting also recommended the Transitional Military Council should be given additional time to finalize the transfer of power to a civilian government. It suggested three months. The statement issued after the meeting said, "The participating countries recognized the need to give more time to the Sudanese authorities and the Sudanese parties to implement these measures, taking into consideration that they will not be lengthy, and recommended that the African Peace and Security Council extend the schedule given to the Sudanese authority for three months."

The head of Sudan’s Transitional Military Council, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan said earlier, on Sunday, there was no obstacle in passing power to a civilian government, but political forces need to agree on a unified concept of transmission, and proposals must involve the interests and expectations of the whole country to ensure good democratic development. He also emphasized that the opposition must present a vision that guarantees Sudan’s sustainable development..

A regional peace conference on the Ethiopia-Kenya border

The Ethiopia-Kenya Cross-border Peace and Development Initiative organized a high-level conference last week (April 17-18) in Addis Ababa to explore ways to enhance peace and security among the communities living along the Ethiopia-Kenya border in the areas of Moyale-Marsabit, Omo-Turkana and Mandera. The meeting included senior officials from both Ethiopia and Kenya, representatives from the UN and the EU as well as from IGAD, and parliamentarians, local authorities, and community elders.

The meeting emphasized the need to make concerted efforts to ensure sustainable peace to allow both sides to address poverty and the development challenges facing the cross-border communities of both countries. The two-day conference deliberated on ways to ensure sustainable peace by uncovering the causes of the violent and complex conflicts along the border areas. It discussed ways to encourage dialogue between the communities to achieve a sustainable peace, and considered other measures including long-term investments in agriculture, irrigation and infrastructure projects.

In a key note address, Ethiopia's State Minister of Peace, Zeinu Jamal, said the conference would facilitate open discourse among the stakeholders. It would uncover underlying causes of conflict and discuss structural bottlenecks causing instability in the area. He recalled last year’s violence in Moyale which had devastating impact on the lives of community members. “Regrettably,” he said, several people died and thousands of people were displaced. ” He said the region had, in fact, been an “epicenter of violence” for several years and the communities had not found the peace and order they wanted.

Josephat Nanok, Governor of Turkana County, Kenya, said the communities along the borders of Ethiopia shared similarities in many aspects, despite the deadly conflicts occurring in those areas. He said there had been chronic conflict among communities across these regions, but most occurred around competition for natural resources, in Lake Turkana - Omo River Delta involving pastures and livestock.

Mohamud Mohamed Ali, Governor of Marsabit, Kenya, underlined the need to employ joint efforts to address the conflicts that might arise among the communities in the cross-border areas, and to realize common goals of development and prosperity. He said the destiny of Ethiopia and Kenya was interconnected and their identities intertwined. He emphasized that Kenya's leadership, nationally and locally, believed "in the shared identity of our peoples and the common destiny of our countries." He said: "We are willing to stand up to all challenges to craft common promises of all socio-economic integration. I have no doubt our counterpart in Ethiopia shares this commitment. Because it is only by working together that we have a chance of creating the bright future for our communities. Together we must work for peace and fight the battle against common challenges, poverty, ecological fragility and underdevelopment faced by cross border communities."

The Deputy Chief Administrator of Oromia Regional State, Girma Amente, said Ethiopia and Kenya should implement joint projects to address root causes of conflicts and achieve sustainable peace and security in the region.

In a statement to the conference, Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie, the UN Development Program (UNDP) Africa Regional Director, praised the role the conference was playing in creating a platform to discuss and exchange ideas on the causes and drivers of the recent surge of violent conflict in the cross-border areas of Moyale, and its efforts to come up with viable solutions.

The 5th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

The 5th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, was held in Marrakesh, Morocco, last week (April 16-18). The theme was: "Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality". Ministers from 20 countries attended with delegates from another 29 and a total of 600 participants. Professor Afework Kassu, State Minister of Science and Higher Education, participated in the Forum leading Ethiopia's delegation.

Professor Afework delivered key messages at the "High-level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation and the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Implementation of the Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want", and at the "High-level Panel on Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality: Stepping up Actions to Deliver the Commitments Contained in the 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Africa."

He stressed the need to promote and strengthen science as a culture of society, to strengthen the basis of science from pre-primary education right through tertiary education in Africa. He emphasized the need to work with academies such as African Academy of Sciences, or the International Council of Science, and with the Academies of Sciences of each African

Country, so scientists in academic and research institutions could work closely with the relevant sector ministries in addressing issues that needed scientific developments or intervention. He touched upon the need for countries to map appropriate technologies in their own specific context and priority. This would help them address issues of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. He also emphasized the importance of appropriate technologies for value addition to help African countries improve products and services. Helping them shift, for example, from export of primary products to value added products would substantially increase the return.

On innovations, Professor Afework addressed the need for African countries to have in place policies and legal frameworks that would help innovators translated ideas and suggestions into products and services. He mentioned the exemplary initiatives of South Africa’s Innovation Hubs and the Kigali Innovation City in Rwanda, as the possible future Silicon Valley or Innopolis of Africa, centers from which other AU member states could learn. These centers are incubating African youth who are trying to bring home-grown solutions to solve Africa's problems, problems which do not necessarily relate to other parts of the world.

On Education and Scientific Research, Professor Afework emphasized that inclusive and relevant quality education and problem-solving research must provide the foundations to harness Science and Technology Integration to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. Citing examples from Ethiopia, he explained the alignment of Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) priority areas with the 17 Goals of the SDGs and the targets in Agenda 2063. He also briefed the Forum on Ethiopia’s STI policy which has 11 critical policy issues that are directly related and relevant to GTP priorities. In conclusion, Professor Afework stressed that Africa’s development challenges should be the trigger to harness STI and this would provide an enormous resource for the continent’s development.

Ethiopia and World Press Freedom Day

World Press Freedom Day is celebrated around the world on May 3 and this year the main celebration is taking place in Addis Ababa, over three days, May 1-3. The theme for 2019 is “Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation” and the event will provide a platform for officials, representatives of civil society, media organizations, professional associations, academia and the judiciary to exchange thoughts on current issues, threats and achievements concerning the freedom of the press. There will be a wide range of plenary sessions, debates, talks and other opportunities to address different aspects of the theme. On May 2, UNESCO Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, will award the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize to an individual or organization that has made an outstanding contribution to the defense of press freedom. There will be an academic conference on the safety of journalists and a Youth Newsroom for young journalists and journalism students to cover the event and extend their reporting skills.

It is entirely appropriate for Ethiopia to be hosting the main celebration for World Press Freedom Day this year in Addis Ababa. It demonstrated the biggest improvement in the treatment of journalists. Ethiopia's past record on press freedom was certainly poor, with numerous media outlets closed and many journalists jailed. All this changed a year ago, however, following the election of Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed. A new approach to the media was laid out in his acceptance speech: "we need to respect all human and democratic rights, especially of those of freedom of expression, assembly and organization, by upholding the constitution that emerged from this understanding of freedom." Following his appointment in April 2018, the Prime Minister moved quickly and in a spectacular manner to provide for freedom of the press, not least in releasing a wide range of political prisoners, including both journalists and social media activists and bloggers. The Committee to Protect Journalists in a Special Report in December 2018 could write that it had found that there were "no journalists jailed in relation to their work in Ethiopia for the first time since 2004". Within a couple of months, 264 websites had been unblocked and two externally based opposition TV stations allowed to set up inside Ethiopia. A month later an Advisory Council to Reform Legal and Justice System had set up working groups to revise the main laws that impacted media activity: the law on mass media and access to information, the Civil Society and Charities and anti-terrorism proclamations and the 2016 cyber-crime law. For instance, the Civil and Society law was amended and approved by the parliament. Similarly, the National Electoral law and anti- terrorism law is under review.

In the meantime, the changes have already allowed a free press to flourish again in Ethiopia. Twenty-three new media organizations have been licensed over the last year with several new newspapers appearing and nearly a dozen weekly magazine as well as TV channels. In fact, during the past year Ethiopia has moved from being one of the worst jailers and controllers of journalists and journalism in Africa to a country in which journalists can now operate as they should; in which they can provide criticism and comment without fear or restraint; a country in which there is a genuine free press.

Equally, issues remain. As media outlets acknowledge there is a real need for increased professionalism and competence to staff the enlarged media, and for the media to provide acceptable code of conduct for itself. It still needs to work to keep up standards and journalistic principles. The media can and should be a force for verification of facts, a platform for discourse, for rational discourse. In part, this requires increased access to information, for government and other officials to understand the importance of adequately implementing access to information. Regular press conferences are vital for an effective media and an effective flow of information. The government has made it clear it is committed to opening up of the media space as part of its democratization process and has also announced plans to professionalize the state media. Laws are being drafted to regulate media and combat fake news and hate speech. A government spokesperson emphasized: "In defining what constitutes hateful speech, the law would ensure that the definition is precise, clear and narrow to ensure that it does not burden freedoms of speech." The government also wants people to become more discerning and hold the media "accountable to higher standards of reporting."

As noted, the theme of this year's World Press Freedom is: "Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation". On May 3, this will be accompanied by discussions of the media's potential in supporting peace and reconciliation processes – a subject of particular relevance to Ethiopia today, and for the elections due next year.

A Sesame Conference and Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum in China

An Ethiopian trade and investment delegation attended the dual “China International Sesame Conference 2019 and China-Africa Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum” held in Qingdao city, on Tuesday last week (April 16). The delegation included representatives of the Ethiopian Embassy in Beijing, of the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) and the Ethiopian Pulses, Oilseeds and Spices Processors and Exporters Association (EPOSPEA). The event was co-organized by the China Chamber of Commerce for Import/Export of Foodstuff, Native Produce and Animal By-Product (CFNA) in collaboration with the Qingdao Bureau of Commerce and International Trade Center (ITC) to provide a platform for representatives of the global oilseeds and pulses industry to create trading and investment partnerships while obtaining a better view of changes and development trends in the oilseeds market.

Opening the event, Mr. Cao Derong, President of CFNA, noted that China was not only a sesame producing country but also a major annual importer of close to 1.2 million tons of sesame. And, he noted 97.5% of those imports were from Africa. Ato Negus Kebede, Minister-Counsellor at the Ethiopian Embassy in Beijing, emphasized that African and Chinese governments were becoming steadily more committed to enhance their trade and investment relations under the framework of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). There had been declarations and implementation of major initiatives of industrial promotion and trade facilitation. He stressed that this pragmatic approach meant greater chances for exporters from countries like Ethiopia to access wider markets in China, and for companies from China to participate in value-adding agro-processing investment in Ethiopia.

Mr. Haile Berhe, President of EPOSPEA, presenting details of Ethiopian sesame production and market outlook to around 300 participants, emphasized that Ethiopia was the fourth largest sesame seed producing country in the world. It had 3 million small, medium and large-scale farmers. Production this year, he said, was forecast to cover more than 500,000 hectares of land with an estimated yield of more than 300,000 metric tons of sesame seed. China, he added, remained top importer of sesame products from Ethiopia, taking around 50% of output.

On the side-lines of the conference, CFNA and ITC organized an investment road show for the agencies of four pilot countries selected under the China-UK-ITC tripartite Partnership for Investment and Growth in Africa (PIGA). These were linked with Chinese companies with interests in investing in agri-business in African countries. Ethiopia was represented by Ato Mirafe Gabriel, Senior Director of Agribusiness at the Agricultural Transformation Agency. He presented the investment case for sesame processing in Ethiopia to Chinese enterprises, underlining Ethiopia’s key competitive advantages for production and processing of sesame. These included suitable agro-ecology, strong sesame supply, available resources, fertile land and access to quota-and duty-free markets.

Ethiopian exporters displayed a full range of oilseeds, and both actual and potential buyers and sellers made fruitful and networking contacts. The representatives of Chinese enterprises at the conference showed significant interest to import sesame and pulses from Africa, and to invest in commercial agriculture and food-processing industries. Sudan and Ethiopia continue

to provide major sesame exports to China despite world price fluctuations and financial turbulence.