

A Week in the Horn 10.04.2020

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**Africa and the African Union**

President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa, in his capacity as Chairperson of the African Union, convened the second teleconference of the Bureau of the African Union Heads of State and Government to track the progress of the continental COVID-19 strategy on Friday (April 03). The summit discussed the need for Africa to stand together, speak with one voice and work through African institutions to mobilize resources and harmonize the support from international partners. (**See article**)

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) member states' ministers of health convened through a virtual meeting on Wednesday (April 08) to consult ongoing efforts and progress of the region in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting endorsed a Regional Response Plan, established a regional task-force of Experts and tasked IGAD Secretariat with the operationalization of a Regional Emergency Fund. (**See article**)

Jack Ma, China's richest man on Monday (April 06) has sent the second donation to 54 countries in Africa to help them fight the spread of Coronavirus. Through

the “PM Abiy-Jack Ma (Alibaba) initiative,” Ma previously donated a total of 1.1 million Coronavirus test kits, 6 million masks and 60,000 medical protective suits and face shields to the African nations. The second donation includes 500 ventilators, 200,000 suits and face shields, 2,000 thermometers, 1 million swabs, and extraction kits and 500,000 gloves.

The African Development Bank Group on Wednesday (April 09) unveils 10 billion USD for the creation of COVID-19 Response Facility to assist regional member countries in fighting the pandemic. The Facility entails 5.5 billion USD for sovereign operations in African Development Bank countries, and 3.1 billion USD for sovereign and regional operations for countries under the African Development Fund, the Bank Group’s concessional arm that caters to fragile countries. An additional 1.35 billion USD will be devoted to private sector operations, President of the AfDB, Akinwumi Adesina said.

## **Ethiopia**

Considering the gravity of the COVID-19 health crisis with global social, political and economic impacts, the Council of Ministers of the Government of Ethiopia on Wednesday (April 8) have decreed a State of Emergency according to Article 93 of the Constitution. A video briefing released by the Prime Minister Office on Thursday (April 09) to clarify some of the issues regarding the State of Emergency said: “There are a lot of shifting variables and dynamics that the health crisis introduces which cannot be treated and addressed under a blanket state of emergency which is a uniform over time. Therefore, the announcement of a state of emergency yesterday is a decree to prepare the foundation for subsequent binding regulations that will be set by the federal government assessing these various shifting trends and dynamics that the virus will entail.”According to the statement, under the state of emergency, impositions are subject to vary and are binding on all Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians that are dwelling in the country. Depending on the threat level assessment, the scope of impositions can change over time, from geographic location to geographic location and can contract and expand within the five-month duration, the statement added.

The Press Secretariat Unit of the Prime Minister Office of Ethiopia, on Tuesday (April 07) gave a video presentation about the status of the COVID-19 pandemic

in Ethiopia including the containment and prevention activities that the Government has been undertaking so far. **(See article)**

Gedu Andargachew, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, on Tuesday (April 07) received monetary and in-kind donations on behalf of the National Resource Mobilization Committee, from various organizations to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The minister received: USD \$100,000 from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) staff members and USD \$1m from the Ethiopian Diaspora Trust Fund (EDTF). He also received a total of 4,541,805 Ethiopian Birr from HOPE Enterprises, Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA), VSO, Pathfinder International Ethiopia, “*Ahun Fiker*” Organization, “*Ras Agez*” (Women self-help group in Ethiopia) and Organization for Welfare and Development in addition to an estimated 4.5 million birr non-monetary donation from HOPE Enterprises. Gedu appreciated the decision of the organizations to partake in the joint approach of fighting the pandemic.

The Ethiopian Supreme Court has made a decision on Thursday (April 09) for federal courts to entertain charges of domestic violence as an urgent type of case. The decision was made taking into account the possibility of an increase in domestic violence during the stay at home period to curb the spread of COVID-19, according to Meaza Ashenafi, President of the Supreme Court.

Ethiopia’s President Sahle-Work Zewde has joined the chorus of support for WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom. “WHO under Dr. Tedros effective leadership, are delivering on their mandate at a time we need them most. Let’s give them the space,” she tweeted. Her remarks came following the US government’s accusation of the WHO of being biased in favor of China in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Several African leaders also rejected the criticism by the US president on the UN health agency. The presidents of Rwanda, South Africa, Nigeria and Namibia, along with Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the UN Secretary-General rallied in support of the WHO. **(See article)**

Ethiopian Airlines (Ethiopia) said it has lost \$550 million in revenue following the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Ethiopian Group CEO, Tewolde Gebremariam, told journalists on Wednesday (April 8) that COVID-19 pandemic has been seriously affecting the aviation industry. Ethiopian has suspended 90%

of its international passengers' services and is now flying only to 19 destinations, down from 110.

Exports over the past eight months have generated \$1.8 billion, said the Ministry of Trade and Industry on Monday (April 06). According to the Ministry, the country achieved 79% of its target for the period, which was \$2.3 billion. The revenue earned over the past eight months surpassed by \$171 million compared to the \$1.6 billion earned in the same period last year.

Ethiopian cargo and logistics services on Wednesday (April 08) said it is adapting its operations to the evolving global demand for air cargo services following the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the current situation, Ethiopian Cargo has extended its reach to 74 destinations globally, and caters to charter flight needs anywhere in the world boundlessly, carrying much needed medical supplies in the ongoing fight against COVID-19.

In its 18th urgent session held on Wednesday (April 08), the Council of Ministers discussed a draft bill to approve three loan agreements signed with the International Development Association (IDA), a financial institution which offers concessional loans and grants to developing countries. The three agreements are \$41.3m loan for Ethiopia's COVID19 emergency response, \$54.9m for the second Africa CDC regional investment project and \$134.6m for Ethiopia's growth and competitiveness programmatic development policy project. The Council sent the draft bill to be approved by the House of People's Representatives (parliament).

The Government of Ethiopia on Wednesday (April 08) has officially launched a 20-year (2020-2039) national integrated transport master plan. Minister of Transport, Dagmawit Moges, urged all stakeholders to do their parts for the culmination of the project as per the plan and with the required quality. Ethiopia has received financing from the African Development Bank (AfDB) toward the cost of the project. The project is expected to boost the share of the transport sector to the socio-economic growth strategy of the country.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed has held on Tuesday (April 07) a phone discussion with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The two leaders discussed ways to strengthen relations between Ethiopia and Russia in addressing the COVID19 crisis. "I'm particularly pleased that President Putin champions

coordinated support from IMF, World Bank and G20 support for the African continent as we work to withstand economic shocks,” the Prime Minister Tweeted. The Prime Minister also conferred on Monday (April 06) with World Bank President, David Malpass, on debt suspension to counter the macroeconomic shock of the COVID19 crisis and additional financial support for response efforts.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed on Tuesday (April 07) expressed his solidarity with the people and President of Rwanda on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of the 1994 genocide. Rwandans started on Tuesday (April 07) their week-long commemoration of the 26 anniversary of the country’s genocide in which an estimated 800,000 ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutus were killed. In a Twitter post, the Prime Minister said “I express my solidarity with the people of Rwanda and my brother Paul Kagame as you commemorate the 26th anniversary of the Genocide.” “As a people you overcame a dark time, drawing on unity, resilience and faith. Key values for all of us to emulate in our current challenge,” he added.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed has on Monday (April 06) held a meeting with members of COVID-19 law enforcement and security sub-committee. During the discussion, they reviewed the activities of the committee, including preparations for any eventualities. The Prime Minister was pleased that the country’s National Armed Forces have made good progress in preparing for worst-case scenarios related to COVID19.

Ethiopia and the UK have signed a £24 million grant agreement on Monday (April 06). The agreement was signed by Admasu Nebebe, State Minister of Finance and Dr. Christian Rogg, Head of UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) Ethiopia. The grant will be used for a project strengthening the economies of host and refugee populations in Ethiopia’s Somali and Gambella regional states.

In its 81st regular meeting held on Saturday (April 04) via teleconferencing, the Council of Ministers passed decisions on two issues. The Council first discussed the draft bill implementing electronic transaction and referred it to the parliament for endorsement. It also unanimously decided the draft law establishing Eka Kotebe mental and physical healthcare hospital to enter into force.

## **Eritrea**

Eritrean Ministry of Information on Wednesday (April 08) announced the postponement of all passenger flights to and from the country that were already banned for two weeks. This is extended now in accordance with Article 11 of the guidelines of the High-Level Task Force on COVID-19 Article 1, which ‘supplements’ and ‘supersedes’ all previous measures and is effective for 21 days, the announcement reads.

Among 14 people tested on Monday (April 06), two patients were diagnosed positive for COVID-19. The total number of confirmed cases in the country to-date has now risen to 31. All the patients are receiving the necessary medical treatment.

## **Djibouti**

According to John Hopkins University COVID-19 Resource center, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Horn of Africa nation today has reached 140. Among these, 28 have fully recovered while one death has been registered making the total active cases 111.

## **Kenya**

A special sitting to discuss the banning of miraa (Khad/Chat), a mind-stimulating leaf, by a number of counties is being planned by the county assembly. Speaker Joseph Kaberia said on Tuesday (April 07) the assembly has been alarmed by the confiscation and burning of miraa by some counties under the guise of preventing the spread of Coronavirus. “I have talked to assembly majority leader Victor Kariithi and minority leader AyubBundi as well as MCAs from miraa growing regions who are concerned with the disruption in miraa trade,” said MrKaberia in an interview. “We have heard many counties are demolishing miraa kiosks and banning the trade. Others have raised taxes. This is unacceptable and we will discuss it in the assembly.”

Kenya on Thursday (April 09) recorded five more cases of the COVID-19 disease, raising its total number to 184. In the daily update by Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe, the government said three of the new patients are Kenyans and the other foreign nationals. Mr. Kagwe said three had traveled from Tanzania, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates. Three of the five cases were recorded in Nairobi and the others in Mombasa, he said, adding only one of the patients had been in quarantine.

## **Somalia**

Ahmed Ismail Hussein, whose sweet-stringed and melancholic melodies captivated generations of Somalis and made him one of Somalia's most important musicians, died on Tuesday (April 7) in London. He was 91. He had been infected by the novel Coronavirus, according to Hanna Ali, the artistic director of Kayd Somali Arts and Culture, based in London, with which Mr. Hussein had been affiliated in recent years.

Somalia has registered its first death from Coronavirus, the Horn of Africa country said on Wednesday (April 08). "We have confirmed one person who died of Corona (virus). May Allah show him mercy," Health Minister Fawziya AbikarNur said in a Tweet. He added that four new cases of the virus had been detected, bringing the number of people infected in Somalia to 12.

US Africa Command (AFRICOM) has issued a release confirming the elimination of a "long-standing, high-ranking leader" during a precision airstrike earlier this month in Somalia. The US military command announced in its Tuesday (April 07) news release that one of the three terrorists killed during its April 2 airstrike around Bush Madina, Somalia, was none other than Yusuf Jiis, who AFRICOM stated "held many significant positions that facilitated Al-Shabaab's violent and harmful activities throughout East Africa."

All court proceeding will now be conducted through a video link in a bid to curb the spread of COVID19. This follows a directive announced on Monday (April 6) by Somalia's Chief Justice, Bashe Yussuf Ahmed, who directed that criminal proceedings should be conducted via video conference instead of the courtrooms. He also extended the period for the suspension of hearing civilian cases, noting that simpler cases be handled and resolved within police stations.

Somali and U.S. security forces have killed five Al-Shabaab terrorists following an airstrike which was conducted in the southwest region of Somalia last week on Friday (April 03). The U.S. Africa Command (Africom) said on Saturday the latest drone strike which targeted the fighters of the extremist group in the vicinity of Bush Madina in Bay region did not injure or kill any civilians.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Saturday (April 04) said it is deeply concerned about the impact that COVID-19 could have on Somali communities weakened by violence and conflict. Somalia is at a critical juncture where immediate action can still curb the spread of COVID-19 and save lives, ICRC said in a statement. “Somalia is at a crossroads, where we can rapidly scale up to get information and resources out to communities and health care facilities against COVID-19, or move too slowly and never catch up,” said Juerg Eglin, ICRC’s head of delegation for Somalia.

Testing for COVID-19 in Somalia will now be conducted within the country thanks to the acquisition machines by the Ministry of Health. Health Minister Fawziya Abikar announced on Thursday (April 09) the acquisition of two COVID-19 testing machines saving the Horn of Africa nation the agony of transporting samples for testing in neighboring Kenya. “I happy to announce that from today henceforth we can conduct tests in our national laboratory,” Dr. Fawzia said adding three other machines will soon arrive in the country to bolster testing.

First Instance military court judge Col. Hassan Nur Shuute has pledged all those behind the bloodshed in Wanlaweyn which has since claimed at least 20 lives will face the full arm of the law. Col. Shuute said on Thursday (April 09) as the military court moved sittings to the clashes affected district the courts and security forces will ensure the offenders in the clashes are prosecuted to ensure justice for victims of the fighting. “We have come here to prosecute those who have tarnished our image, burned and slaughtered innocent civilians,” Col. Shuute said. “We promise to fulfill our mission.”

Somalia has halted the issuance of passports in its latest measures to curb the spread of the deadly COVID-19 cases. Immigration Department said in a statement on Tuesday (April 07) the suspension which takes effect on the same day will be in force ‘until further notice.’ “The passport application process has been suspended until further notice,” the Department said. “The department will

announce when normal services will resume.” The latest move adds to the increasing number of measures taken by the government in the fight against the spread of Coronavirus which causes the deadly COVID-19 disease.

Somali and U.S. security forces on Sunday evening killed eight al-Shabab militants in the latest onslaught on the extremist group in the southern region, officials confirmed on Monday (April 06). The Somali Ministry of Information said no civilians were killed or injured in the attack conducted by the Somali National Army (SNA) and U.S. Africa Command (Africom) in the vicinity of Mubarak.

President Mohamed Farmaajo has called for an immediate end to the fighting in Kismayo which has since led to the death of at least 20 people. The President said the killings were unacceptable and must end unconditionally. “It is unacceptable that we see violence between citizens who should be uniting against the common enemy Al-Shabaab,” the head of state said. The president’s remarks come on (April 04) amid heavy fighting in Koyame, Fuma, Suggani and Jirole villages in the outskirts of Kismayo town this past week.

## **South Sudan**

South Sudanese authorities on Thursday (April 09) confirmed the third case of Coronavirus involving a 28-year-old woman. Dr. Makur Koryom, the Undersecretary of the National Ministry of Health, told Radio Tamazuj that the patient had been in close contact with the first victim. Koryom pointed out that the woman works for the United Nations in the country. “She is not a South Sudanese national. The patient had returned to her place of work in Torit on March 16,” he said.

## **Sudan**

Sudan’s Health Ministry on Thursday (April 09) announced a new COVID-19 infection, bringing the total number of confirmed cases in the country to 15. “Epidemiological reports of the Federal Ministry of Health have confirmed a new

case of infection with the Coronavirus, bringing the total to 15,” said the ministry in a statement. The newly identified patient is a Sudanese man in his 40s, who returned from the United Arab Emirates, the ministry noted; pointing out that the patient is now receiving the necessary medical care at an isolation center.

Families of the victims of the USS Cole bombing and the Government of Sudan filed last week on Friday (April 03) a joint stipulation with the U.S. District Court in Virginia to close the case on financial compensation. The two parties reached a settlement agreement on 7 February providing that the case would be definitively closed and prevent future cases before the U.S. courts. Last February, the government in Khartoum said the agreement intends to settle “the historical allegations of terrorism created by the former regime and only for the purpose of fulfilling the conditions set by the U.S. administration to remove Sudan from the list of state sponsors of terrorism”. Meanwhile, Lina Al-Sheikh, Minister of Social Development and Labor dismissed the accuracy of reports that the compensations for the victims of the USS Cole bombing will be paid by the social security and pensions funds.

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### ***African Union Bureau of Heads of State and Government Hold Second Virtual Summit to Tackle COVID-19***

President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa, and Chairperson of the African Union (AU) convened a second and follow-up teleconference meeting of the AU Bureau of Heads of State and Government, on 3 April 2020, to discuss the African response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a communique issued by the African Union revealed.

Chairperson Faki briefed the Bureau on actions undertaken by the Commission on recommendations from the Bureau meeting on Covid19 held on 26 March 2020. The Bureau received presentations from Dr. Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr. John Nkengasong, Director of Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and President Emmanuel Macron of France.

Dr. John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC gave a continental update which highlighted rapidly increasing COVID-19 infection rates across the continent;

while Dr. Tedros Adhanom emphasized the importance of acting now to test and to guarantee equitable access to test kits, masks and personal protective equipment (PPEs), vaccines and therapeutics as soon as they become available.

The Bureau of Heads of State and Government commended the able stewardship of exemplary leadership of Dr. Tedros in leading the global response to the pandemic.

The Heads of States highlighted the unprecedented threat that COVID-19 presents to the health of African citizens and to the continent's hard-won developmental and economic gains. They also recognized the imperative to establish humanitarian and trade corridors in a spirit of African solidarity and integration.

Given the urgent need for medical supplies and equipment, the Heads of states called for international cooperation and support while up-scaling local production on the continent.

The Heads of States noted with satisfaction progress made in operationalizing the African Union COVID-19 Response Fund established on 26 March 2020 to which members pledged the sum of US\$12.5 million and an additional US\$4.5million to the Africa CDC.

It was agreed to establish continental ministerial coordination committees on Health, Finance, and Transport to coordinate in order to support the comprehensive continental strategy.

The Heads of States underscored the need for a comprehensive and coordinated continental approach, and to speak with one voice on Africa's priorities.

Cognizant of the devastating socioeconomic and political impact of the pandemic on African countries, the Bureau reiterated the need for rapid and concrete support as pledged by the G20 and other international partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is critical that these institutions review their current disbursement policies to display flexibility and speed, including raising the availability of IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). The Bureau also echoed the call for a comprehensive stimulus package for Africa, including, deferred payments, the immediate suspension of interest payments on Africa's

external public and private debt in order to create fiscal space for COVID-19 response measures.

Lifesaving supplies including PPEs, masks, gowns, and ventilators and other support devices are urgently needed. The Bureau commended the rapid action coordinated by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Jack Ma Foundation in mobilizing and distributing, with the support of the World Food Programme (WFP) and Africa CDC, over one million diagnostic tests, six million masks, and 600,000 PPE items to all African Union member states in less than a week.

The Heads of States and Government strongly urged for the immediate lifting of all economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe and Sudan to allow them to adequately respond to the pandemic and save lives. The African Union has repeatedly called for the lifting of these punitive sanctions, which the Bureau considers intolerable and inhumane in the present context.

It was noted that the Sahel region needs special attention in the light of the terrorist activity, and pledge solidarity with the countries in this region who have to fight the twin scourge of terrorism and COVID-19.

The Heads of States and Government thanked President Emmanuel Macron for his strong support for Africa during the Extraordinary G20 Summit. The Bureau expressed its support for the proposals he raised regarding a comprehensive approach to mobilizing international support for Africa's health, economic, humanitarian, and medical research priorities, which are aligned with the African position. The Bureau also acknowledged the commitment of the People's Republic of China for its support and solidarity with Africa.

The following members of the Bureau participated in the teleconference meeting: President Abdel Fattah al Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of the Republic of Mali, President Uhuru Kenyatta of the Republic of Kenya, and President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat.

President Paul Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, President MackySall of the Republic of

Senegal, and President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the Republic of Zimbabwe also participated in the teleconference.

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### ***IGAD Ministers of Health Call for Action to Combating COVID-19***

The Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Dr. WorknehGebeyehu, on Wednesday (April 08) organized a video teleconference for the Ministers of Health of the Member States meant to follow up on the recommendations by the IGAD Heads of State and Government Summit on COVID-19 held on March 30, and decide on actions to be taken in a collective and collaborative manner so as to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate the impact of the outbreak in the region, a statement released by IGAD Secretariat bureau indicated.

The Deputy Minister of Health of Sudan, Sarah AbdelazemHassana, chaired the video teleconference meeting which brought together Mohamed WarsamaDirieh-Minister of Health of Djibouti, the Minister of Health of Kenya, MutahiKagwe, the Minister of Health of Somalia, FowsiyaNur, the Minister of Health of South Sudan, Elizabeth AcueiYor, and the State Minister of Health for Primary Care of Uganda, Dr. Joyce Moriku.

On the basis of the guiding principle that ‘no country is safe until every country is safe’, the Ministers discussed ways and means to operationalize the outcomes of the IGAD Summit of March 30, including the development of an IGAD Regional Response Strategy for COVID-19, the establishment of an Emergency Fund for COVID-19 and other disease outbreaks; and the strengthening the national response systems.

The Deputy Minister of Health of Sudan appreciated ‘the swift action taken by all the IGAD Heads of State and Government to contain and combat the spread of the Corona Virus’. On behalf of the Minister of Health of Sudan and Chair of the IGAD Health Ministerial Committee, Dr. Akram Ali Eltom, she communicated Sudan’s commitment to mobilize domestic resources in the struggle against the Corona Virus. She urged the IGAD Secretariat to expedite the process of dispatching response teams across member states and to facilitate the coordinated partnership.

The Executive Secretary recalled the focus of the meeting which was to discuss the current needs of Member States and to collaboratively ‘combat the Coronavirus and provide projections of the urgently needed infrastructural, technical and material capacity for the duration of the outbreak’ via a comprehensive regional response strategy to address the COVID-19.

He also reiterated his call for protection against the pandemic for vulnerable populations such the Internally Displaced Persons, the refugees and the migrants in the region.

Following their deliberations, a Call for Action document was released at the closure of the meeting. Among other major items on the program, the Ministers endorsed the outlines of a Regional Response Plan (RRP) to combat COVID-19 pandemic presented by the IGAD Secretariat; established a regional task force of experts to coordinate and monitor the regional response to COVID-19 and other similar outbreaks, and tasked the IGAD Secretariat with the operationalization of a regional Emergency Fund for COVID-19 and other disease outbreaks.

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### ***Highlights of Government’s Video briefing about the Status of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Ethiopia***

The Press Secretariat Unit of the Prime Minister Office of Ethiopia, on Tuesday (April 07) gave a video presentation about the status of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia including the containment and prevention activities that the Government has been undertaking so far.

In terms of the activities that have been undertaken by the federal government since the end of January 2020, the statement said that Ethiopia has been taking measured approaches in monitoring the spread of COVID-19 globally and preparing nationally before it was officially announced with the positive case in Ethiopia. This began with the formation of a ministerial committee chaired by the Prime Minister which has been issuing multiple measures and progressive measures as issues as the number of cases were increasing and as was required based on assessments that were being made nationally, the statement added.

According to the statement, so far the measures that have been taken include stopping large gatherings and sporting events, closure of schools, 14-day quarantine for all travelers arriving in Ethiopia, cessation of over 80 Ethiopian Airlines flight destinations, temporary closures of bars and nightclubs as well work from home measures have been put into place for government employees aimed at decreasing public transport crowding. Additionally, closure of land borders with the exception of entry and exit of goods has also been one of the key measures that have been put in place and this has been gradually monitored with the law and enforcement bodies to curtail movement within borders as well.

Cognizant of the global financial difficulties that COVID-19 has created, a number of key financial measures have also been undertaken. Some of these, according to the statement, “include tax exemption for the import of materials and equipment related to COVID-19 containment. Secondly, the National Bank of Ethiopia also availed 50 billion birr liquidity for private banks to enable them to provide debt relief and additional loans to their customers in need; banks to also avail of foreign currency for imports primarily for the import of goods and input materials for the production of goods or preventive materials that are going to be used in COVID-19 prevention tasks. Fourthly, the National Bank of Ethiopia has also increased the amount of money individuals can transfer through mobile banking to limit in-person cash handling. Removal of the minimum price set by the National Bank of Ethiopia on the horticultural sector for flower exports has also been a measure that has been put in place as part of macroeconomic balancing measures. The Ministry of Revenue has also been tasked to expedite the return of value-added tax returns to support companies with cash flows in these times. And lastly, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has also been mandated to continue strengthening the measures that it had begun taking to control price increments and supply shortages of consumer goods.”

It is clear that the global COVID-19 crisis will have a direct and indirect impact on our economy due to the global macroeconomic challenges that are ensuing; nevertheless, we don't expect any disruption with regards to the homegrown economic reform agenda that Ethiopia has adopted some months back and in fact, we do believe that the commitment from our partners in this regard will also continue, the statement added. The briefing also highlighted Ethiopia's leadership role within the past few weeks particularly in putting forth the three-point proposal to the G-20 countries which includes a continent-wide support of 150 billion US dollars to withstand the financial damages that COVID-19 is going to

pose. According to the briefing, “part of the proceeds of this that would come to Ethiopia is also expected to level the economic playing field and absorb some of the key shocks that may come as a result.”

In terms of other tasks that have been undertaken, the statement highlighted that seven high-level subcommittees have been created by the prime minister overlooking various activities related to COVID-19 containment and prevention work. These committees or these subcommittees are the law enforcement and security subcommittee, which is led by the Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen; a medical equipment and supplies subcommittee; the macroeconomic subcommittee that is created to continuously assess the economic impact of this crisis and come up with requisite measures; ICT Subcommittee, quarantine, isolation and treatment facilities subcommittee, a resource mobilization subcommittee and then finally a communications committee that has been formed to streamline awareness-raising as well as key pertinent information related to COVID-19 updates.

The statement also responded to some of the questions raised by the public. One of them is on the announcement of a COVID-19 treatment medicine in Ethiopia. In that regard, the statement said: “This announcement was not on finding a treatment per se, rather it was about a potential treatment that has passed one stage of research and passed on to the next stage of animal study and is going to be supported by the government of Ethiopia. The way that this was initially communicated may have created confusion but there have been corrective measures taken with regards to rectifying the confusion around the announcement.”

With regards to testing suspected cases for COVID-19, the briefing revealed that the previous protocol followed focused only on travelers who have developed symptoms of COVID-19 and contacts of people around them. This has usually been a small number and this is also attributable to the small number of testing kits that were available at that point in time. Therefore, there was a push to only limit testing and prioritized testing to that small subset. However, as the situation has been changing the Ministry of Health has also revised the case definition and began including testing from a larger community with identification of cases without travel history and known contacts, and more suspected cases have also begun being tested. According to the statement, the Ministry of Health and the Ethiopian Public Health Institute are working to expand their testing capacities at

the federal and regional levels. And in this regard, in Addis Ababa, there are already three labs that have been set up to expand testing and they have already begun their work in this regard. At the regional level, there are four testing sites that have completed full preparedness and will start testing within the next coming days. The other seven sites within the regions have also finalized the requisite training and will start proceeding towards the preparation stage making sure that their facilities are adequately fulfilled with the necessary supplies in order to begin testing within the next weeks as well.

With regards to the option of utilizing rapid test kits, the statement said, “the Ministry of Health is waiting for the quality check by the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority to proceed to rapid testing capacities.”

In responding to another question that had been raised by the public regarding measures of the government on contact tracing, the statement said: “As contacts could sometimes be located in different regions and localities, it requires a lot of alignment and integration work with respective regions so there might be a little bit of a delay in that but all of the needful is being done in ensuring that contact tracing is also something that is being strengthened.”

The statement also reaffirmed that the Ministry of Health has been working with the private health system in various ways and some private facilities are already providing services at various levels as well. Finally, with regards to the role of different sections of society within Ethiopia to mobilize and to put all their efforts in the containment and mitigation of COVID-19, the statement said: “The prime minister has been holding discussions with leaders of various political parties and this is part of efforts to also bring everybody on board because this is a national emergency and we want to make sure that the impact of COVID-19 does not really affect our current setup so the political parties have also sanctioned the measures that have been taken by the Federal government and have given their full support for any further measures that are going to be undertaken to ensure that COVID-19 does not wreak havoc within the country.”

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*Leaders Reaffirm Support to the WHO and its Leader*

Following the recent criticism labeled against the WHO and its leadership, several leaders and institutions rallied in support of the UN organization and its Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom. In addition to Ethiopia's President, Sahle-work Zewde and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gedu Andargachew, several African leaders such as the presidents of Rwanda, South Africa, Nigeria, and Namibia, along with Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the UN Secretary-General rallied in support of WHO.

“WHO under Dr. Tedros effective leadership, are delivering on their mandate at a time we need them most. Let's give them space,” President Sahle-Work Zewde tweeted. “Our global priority is to save lives. COVID-19 is killing many. We must support and protect the most vulnerable. Now is not the time for the blame game,” she added. The Minister of the Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Gedu Andargachew, said: “This is the time to rally behind the WHO under the leadership of Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus as millions of lives are affected in many ways due to COVID19 pandemic. “ “Cooperation and solidarity are what we need to win this fight,” he added in his tweet.

“Surprised to learn of a campaign by the U.S. government against WHO's global leadership,” said a tweet by Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. He said the African Union fully supports the WHO and its Director-General. “The focus should remain on collectively fighting COVID-19 as a united global community. The time for accountability will come.” South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said in a tweet that the WHO is providing “exceptional” and “incalculable” leadership, adding that international solidarity is “the most potent weapon” against the pandemic.

A statement issued by the African Union said: “the AU recognizes and appreciates the good work that has been undertaken by the WHO and notes with a sense of satisfaction the various initiatives and measures that are continuously undertaken by the organization to mitigate the spread of the pandemic such as mobilizing resources, sharing the real-time information and providing the technical and material support.” The statement, noting that the time calls for unity rather than playing the blame game, said: “The AU calls upon the international community to join hands to support the efforts of the DG and the entire WHO family as they lead global efforts to fight this pandemic. If there was a time for global unity, solidarity, and cooperation, this is that time. Working together, we will be able to overcome this challenge.”

Supporting Moussa Faki Mahamat's stand on the matter, Rwandan President Paul Kagame tweeted that Dr. Tedros has the "full confidence and support of Africa." He added: "Save us [from] too much politics, Africa does not need it." Namibian President Hage Geingob added his support for the WHO and Dr. Tedros. "Global solidarity has become critical," he said on Twitter. "Let's hold hands in this crucial moment and focus on what matters, saving lives."

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is also among the leaders who defended Dr. Tedros. He said: "'Once we have finally turned the page on this epidemic, there must be a time to look back fully to understand how such a disease emerged and spread its devastation so quickly across the globe, and how all those involved reacted to the crisis". "But now is not that time," Guterres said, "Now is the time for unity, for the international community to work together in solidarity to stop this virus and its shattering consequences."

The Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement has also issued a statement today (April 09) in support of the WHO and its director General. The statement stated its confidence in Dr. Tedros in discharging his responsibilities and underscored: "It is time to avoid the politicization of the virus and to set aside all political ideologies and discrimination for the sake of all humankind; it is time for global unity and for redoubling international solidarity and multilateral cooperation in order to, together, ensure that our common enemy, COVID-19, is defeated sooner rather than later, along with its severe health and socioeconomic consequences."