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News in Brief

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Africa and the African Union

The Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat has condemned the decision of US President Donald Trump to halt its funding of the World Health Organization (WHO). Trump announced on Tuesday (April 14) that the United States will immediately halt all funding for the UN health agency. The Chairperson called the decision “deeply regrettable” and said “today more than ever, the world depends on WHO’s leadership” in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. He said the WHO often helps fill the funding gaps in Africa’s weak healthcare infrastructure, paying for much-needed essentials in the sector.

Noting the multifaceted challenges that the COVID-19 poses on the wellbeing of Africans, the African Union (AU) Labour Migration Advisory Committee (LMAC) calls upon the AUC, RECs, member states, social partners’ organizations, and the international community to strategically consider and implement measures to mitigate businesses collapse, jobs, and income losses. In a statement issued on Tuesday (April 14) the AU further called on African governments in the post-COVID-19 era to carefully look at and renegotiate the different Labour Migration Agreements that they may have signed with the view of ensuring the enjoyment by migrant workers of adequate health and safety, social protection and portability, and other human and labor rights protections.

As part of the efforts to strengthen Africa's response and preparedness in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, the African Union Commission through the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have jointly designed a program to support on-going efforts in Africa. According to a statement issued by the AU on Monday (April 13), the joint program aims to coordinate COVID-19 response to recovery efforts along with the Member States, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) to ensure coordinated cooperation and communication and to adopt a holistic approach.

A joint statement issued by the AU, WFP and WHO revealed that the first United Nations "Solidarity Flight" has left for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Tuesday (April 14). And from there, the aircraft will transport the vital medical cargo to all countries in Africa, where supplies are desperately needed to contain the spread of COVID-19, the statement added. **(See article)**

The Chairperson of the African Union, President of the Republic of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa has appointed Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Dr. Donald Kaberuka, Mr. Tidjane Thiam and Mr. Trevor Manuel as Special Envoys of the African Union to mobilize international support for Africa's efforts to address the economic challenges African countries will face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a statement issued by the presidency of the Republic of South Africa and chairperson of the African Union on Sunday (April 12), the Special Envoys will be tasked with soliciting rapid and concrete support as pledged by the G20, the European Union, and other international financial institutions.

The Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Dr Workneh Gebeyehu, on Thursday (April 09) held a video teleconference for the Finance Ministers of the Member States. According to a statement issued by the regional organization, the ministers considered the outlines of the collective IGAD Regional Response Strategy to the COVID-19 pandemic presented to them by the Secretariat and deliberated on the establishment of a Regional Ministerial Taskforce to coordinate the response. **(See article)**

Ethiopia

A Chinese emergency medical assistance team composed of 12 members arrived in Addis Ababa on Thursday (April 16). Minister of Health Dr. Lia Tadesse and State Minister Ambassador Redwan Hussien welcomed the delegation at Bole International Airport. The Chinese have carried a banner that reads, "Through solidarity, we will prevail." Together with the Chinese medical team, tons of medical supplies donated by the Chinese government also arrived with a charter plane to assist Ethiopia's efforts in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The deployment of the Chinese medical team and the donation of medical supplies is symbolic of the longstanding Ethio-China friendship and solidarity. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Ethiopian Airlines (Ethiopian) on Thursday (April 16) said it has been exerting efforts to manage the impact of Coronavirus through a fundamental shift to cargo services. The pandemic that severely affected the aviation industry has reduced Ethiopian passenger traffic by 30% incurring over \$550 million loss in revenue. Ethiopian Group CEO Tewolde Gebremariam said various airlines around the world have been receiving huge financial stimulants as COVID-19 is sweeping the globe and devastating the aviation industry.

Ethiopia on Thursday (April 16) has registered seven more Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases out of the 401 samples tested on that day. This brought the total number of confirmed cases in the country to 92. All of the seven confirmed cases are Ethiopian nationals, according to the Ministry of Health.

The Prime Minister Office on Wednesday (April 15) presented a video briefing about the government's actions taken thus far to contain and mitigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The briefing further clarifies the State of Emergency Regulation enacted recently and some of the tasks related to the Ministerial committee and sub-committees that were set up to overseeing the implementation of the State of Emergency. (**See article**)

The Hawassa industrial park has increased its face mask production capacity to 20,000 pieces per day. Garment and textile industries have moved to produce face masks to contribute their share to the national COVID 19 containment efforts, said Fitsum Ketema, manager of Hawassa Industrial Park on Wednesday (April 15). Accordingly, the park has uplifted its face mask production capacity to 20, 000 per day from 10,000 now, he stated. Fitsum also announced plans to increase daily production to 50,000 pieces.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed on Tuesday (April 14) met with the COVID-19 Ministerial Committee to discuss development in the fight against the spread of the virus. “Updates from the COVID19 Ministerial Committee indicate good progress,” tweeted the Prime Minister. “I am pleased to hear that within Addis Ababa itself around 1,200 food banks have been set up for extreme eventualities,” he added. “Setting up multiple testing labs in regions is also on-going with the aim of increasing daily testing capacity.”

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Tuesday (April 14) has provided 15 metric tons of aid to Ethiopia to assist efforts to fight Coronavirus (COVID-19). The assistance would enable medical staff in the country to safely perform their professional duties in combating the virus’ spread. Prime Minister thanked the UAE for supporting Ethiopia’s fight against the virus, which has so far infected 74 people and killed three other people.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed co-authored an article on ‘FINANCIAL TIMES’ along with 17 African and European leaders of State and Governments calling for cooperation; emphasizing, in particular, Africa’s vulnerabilities that need to be addressed in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In related news, the Premier also wrote a piece on ‘Bloomberg’ arguing for debt relief measurements to help Africa survive the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. In line with his call for financial support for Africa from the international community, in his recently published article on ‘FINANCIAL TIMES,’ the Premier reiterated: “Africa needs an immediate emergency fiscal stimulus worth \$100 billion in addition to the International Monetary Fund’s already programmed \$50 billion of regular support to tackle the crisis.” Noting that the ongoing crisis will not be short-lived, Abiy underscored the need to have additional support to Africa over the next two to three years from the International Community. He argued that without a vast restructuring of debt, all the continent’s recent gains will be wiped out.

Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen on Monday (April 13) has met with heads of law enforcement agencies to discuss the implementation of state of emergency. In his opening remarks, the Deputy Prime Minister stressed the need to adhere to the World Health Organization’s (WHO) COVID-19 guidelines. He said law enforcement bodies have great responsibilities for the implementation of the emergency decree.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed on Monday (April 13) spoke with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo over the phone about the COVID-19 response and regional issues. “Food security will be a key challenge for sub-Saharan

Africa as the continent grapples with the economic impact of the virus,” tweeted the Premier, adding, “We discussed applying collective leadership to minimize adverse effects.” According to a statement issued by the U.S. State Department, Secretary Pompeo thanked Prime Minister Abiy and the Ethiopian Airlines for their continued support to provide flights to American citizens stranded overseas by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In related news, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed on Saturday (April 11) has held phone talks with Elon Musk, the co-founder and CEO at Tesla, on COVID19 mitigation efforts in Africa. Tesla is an American electric vehicle and clean energy company based in Palo Alto, California. The company specializes in manufacturing electric vehicles, giant batteries, solar panels, and solar roof tiles, among others. The Prime Minister tweeted that he had a good discussion with the South African born Musk.

Minister of the Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Gedu Andargachew on Saturday (April 11) held a video teleconference with Ethiopian heads of missions in Europe. The virtual meeting deliberated upon ways to coordinate the missions’ efforts in gathering support from governments, non-governmental organizations and members of the Ethiopian Diaspora to the fight of the COVID-19 pandemic at home. Gedu briefed the Ambassadors and Heads of missions about some of the key measures the Government is undertaking to curb the spread and minimize the effects of the scourge. The minister also highly appreciated the Embassies and Ethiopians in the Diaspora for their commendable success registered so far in mobilizing resources to fight the pandemic in Ethiopia. Gedu had similar discussions with Ethiopian Heads of Missions in the Middle East and the Americas in the last couple of days.

Eritrea

Eritrean Ministry of Information on Tuesday (April 14) announced that one patient was diagnosed positive for COVID-19 in tests carried out for quarantined individuals on the same day. The patient is a 25-years old male national who returned home prior to the ban on Flights. This brings the total number of confirmed cases in the country to-date to 35. All the patients are receiving the necessary medical treatment.

The desert locust invasion that appeared in Adi-keih sub-zone in the past three days was put under control through a coordinated effort by the Ministry of Agriculture, sub-zonal administration, the public, and other partners without

inflicting any damage, the Eritrean Ministry of Information announced on Wednesday (April 15).

Djibouti

Djibouti has announced 82.5% reductions in port tariffs for Ethiopia's exports due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Port Djibouti currently accounts for more than 95% of Ethiopia's imports and exports. Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed appreciated the decision and extended gratitude to the President. "Profound gratitude to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti for recognizing a neighbor in need," he said on Twitter. "With 82.5% reductions in port tariffs for exports at this critical time, the support is testimony to countering the effects of COVID19 through collective leadership," he added.

Kenya

To aid in the government's aggressive track-test-and-isolate policy, Kenya has received nearly 40,000 testing kits as the country's confirmed cases hit 225 after nine more people tested positive Wednesday. One more person also died, bringing to 10 the total number of fatalities, a 4.6 percent fatality rate. Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe said the ministry had received a consignment from Chinese billionaire Jack Ma. Kenyan authorities on Thursday (April 16) said Kenya has received "18,900 swabs and viral transport medium, 18,912 extraction kits, 3,790 medical disposable protective clothing, ventilation machines, and thermometer guns.

Somalia

Somalia has registered a spike in confirmed COVID-19 cases after 35 People tested positive for the virus on Tuesday (April 14). "We hereby confirm 35 new cases of the novel Coronavirus, bringing the total number of COVID-19 cases in the country to 60," the Federal Minister for Health, Dr. Fawzia Abikar Nur, told the media in the capital Mogadishu.

Somalia's Ministry of Finance has announced tax exemptions on basic commodities in order to ease the cost of living for the vulnerable sectors of the society amid increasing economic hardships exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ministry announced 100 percent tax exemptions for rice and dates and 50 percent tax exemptions for wheat flour and cooking oil. The tax exemptions took place as of Wednesday (April 15) and are meant to cushion citizens against an increase in prices of consumer goods ahead of the holy month of Ramadan.

The Somalia Prime Minister Hassan Khaire on Wednesday (April 15) ordered Treasury to release \$1 million to all the regional states to help them fight the spread of Covid19. He said the move was part of a multi-pronged approach that the Federal Government of Somali had adopted to help fight the menace that has so far claimed two lives and infected 60 others. Mr. Khaire at the same time ordered the regional state governments and the state administration of Benadir to quickly set funds to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Khalif MuminTohow, the State Minister for Justice of Hirshabelle, has died in Mogadishu on Sunday (April 12). Officials from the Hirshabelle State, including its security minister, have confirmed the cause of Tohow's death as Coronavirus. Tohow was transported to Mogadishu last week from his duty station in Jowhar town, the capital of Hirshabelle State, 90 km north of the Somali capital, following his illness.

The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Ambassador Francisco Caetano Madeira congratulated the Somali National Armed Forces (SNAF) as they mark 60 years since their establishment, a statement issued by AMISOM on Sunday (April 12) indicated. The SNAF was founded in 1960 under the command of the late General Daud Abdulle Hirsi. They were once among the largest and well-trained forces in Sub-Saharan Africa.

U.S Africa Command on Wednesday (April 15) issued a statement denying accusations that it has killed an innocent civilian during its precision airstrike in the vicinity of Jamaame, Somalia, on April 10,2020. The mission said it is aware of two news affiliates alleging an innocent civilian was killed as a result of the command's precision airstrike and these allegations are based on al-Shabaab propaganda and are false. The terrorist that was killed in the April 10 airstrike was an al-Shabaab member complicit in the murder of at least six innocent Somalis, the statement added.

South Sudan

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) announced on Tuesday (April 14) that as of 9 April 2020, the total number of civilians seeking safety in six Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites located on UNMISS bases is 190,376. This includes 118,385 in Bentiu, 27,928 in Malakal, 29,659 in Juba UN House, 1,921 in Bor, and 12,483 in the area adjacent to UNMISS in Wau.

Four people were killed by Misseriya gunmen on Monday (April 13) in the village of Mabok, located 17 miles south-east of Abyei town, according to a statement released by Kuol Alor Jok, the head of South Sudan's Abyei Special Administrative Area. The "attack claimed the lives of four innocent citizens; two children are abducted; many houses were burned, and more than one hundred (100) Goats and citizens' properties were also looted by the Misseriya."

Traditional leadership of the NgokDinka and Misseriya failed to strike a deal on peaceful coexistence but reiterated their commitment to peace and security in Abyei. The United Nations' Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) facilitated two meetings between the NgokDinka and Misseriya traditional leaders at Diffra on 16 March and 9 April to discuss ways to end intercommunal tensions and enable save corridors for their cattle to graze south to Bahr al-Arab or Kiir River basin. "While no written agreement was reached during the 9 April meeting, both sides reiterated their commitment to peace and agreed to meet again, in a wider format, once COVID-19 restrictions were lifted," said UNISFA in a statement extended to media outlets on Sunday (April 12).

Sudan

A U.S. judge closed the case of the victims of USS Cole bombing against the Government of Sudan on Monday, nearly 20 years after the attack which killed 17 U.S. Navy sailors. On 3 April, the families of the victims and the Sudanese government filed a joint stipulation demanding to close the case as Khartoum paid them a \$30 million compensation agreed in February 2020. Robert

Doumar Senior US District Judge in Eastern Virginia signed an order close the case on Monday 13 April.

South Sudan's mediation for peace in Sudan announced Tuesday that the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) resumed its participation in the peace talks and signed the one-month extension agreement. SLM-MM last Friday suspended its participation in the Juba process blaming the mediation for not consulting them and also criticized its allied groups for signing an agreement providing to extend the negotiations for one month until 9 May.

Khartoum, the most populated state in Sudan, will go into full lockdown on next Saturday after the registration of 10 confirmed cases of Coronavirus on Monday. The federal health ministry proposed the measure two weeks ago, fearing the spread of respiratory disease but the prime minister preferred at the time delaying the radical measure. However, the ten new cases announced on Monday (April 13) forced the government to review its position. One of the ten patients came from abroad while the remaining cases are infected by local transmission.

The World Food Programme will provide Sudan with 200,000 imported tones of wheat; the latter will pay in local currency. The deal was signed by Ibrahim al-Badawi Finance Minister and Hameed Nuru WFP Country Director in Sudan on Monday (April 13). According to the finance ministry with this deal, Sudan will save more than \$50 million, an important amount of money for the impoverished country which faces an acute shortage of hard currency.

Sudan's ruling partners agreed on Saturday (April 11) to appoint civilian governors and the legislative parliament before mid-May. The agreement was announced in a short statement read on the first anniversary of the ouster of the former president Omer al-Bashir and his Islamist regime. Also, the statement was read by the cabinet affairs minister Omer Monis in the presence of Siddiq Youssef as representative of the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) and Yasir al-Atta representing the military component.

The Troika countries have called on the armed groups refusing to negotiate peace in Sudan to reach an agreement with the transitional government paving the way for political stability in the country. Still, there are two groups in Sudan that refuse to hold talks with the government in Khartoum the first is the Sudan Liberation Movement of Abdel Wahid al-Nur. The second is the SPLM-North of Abdel Aziz al-Hilu which accepted to join the Juba process but refuses to

engage in direct talks before to include secularism and self-determination in the agenda of the talks. The United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the Kingdom of Norway issued a joint statement on the occasion of on the one-year anniversary of the ouster of Omer al-Bashir and his regime on 11 April 2019. The Troika countries welcomed the progress of the peace negotiations in Juba and urged all the parties to agree on a comprehensive peace agreement.

UN Chooses Addis Ababa as one of the Departure Points for “Solidarity Flights” against COVID-19

A joint statement issued by the AU, WFP and WHO revealed that the first United Nations “Solidarity Flight” has left for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Tuesday (April 14). And from there, the aircraft will transport the vital medical cargo to all countries in Africa, where supplies are desperately needed to contain the spread of COVID-19, the statement added.

According to the statement WHO cargo is being transported by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), and includes face shields, gloves, goggles, gowns, masks, medical aprons, and thermometers, as well as ventilators. The cargo also includes a large number of medical supplies donated by the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Jack Ma Foundation Initiative to reverse COVID-19 in Africa. The African Union, through the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), is providing technical support and coordination for the distribution of the supplies, the statement added.

“Commercial flights are grounded and medical cargo is stuck. We can stop this virus in its tracks, but we’ve got to work together,” said David Beasley, WFP’s Executive Director. “Our air bridges need to be fully funded to do this, and we stand ready to transport frontline health and humanitarian workers as well as medical cargo,” he added.

“The Solidarity Flight is part of a larger effort to ship lifesaving medical supplies to 95 countries,” said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO. “I would like to thank the African Union, the governments of UAE and Ethiopia, the Jack Ma Foundation and all our partners for their solidarity with African countries at this critical moment in history.”

The crucial WHO cargo includes one million face masks, as well as personal protective equipment, which will be enough to protect health workers while treating more than 30 000 patients across the continent and laboratory supplies to support surveillance and detection.

“The African Union values the efforts of our partners – the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme, the Jack Ma Foundation/Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed – in supporting the African continental strategy for COVID-19 response. The medical supplies are much needed at this critical time that medical commodities are in short supply worldwide,” said Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. “The African Union will continue to provide the coordination needed as well as resources to ensure that our Member States are able to meet the need for healthcare services during this pandemic,” he added.

“We have seen time and again our health workers fall victim to infectious diseases as they work in hospitals and sometimes pass away,” said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa. “This is unacceptable. This personal protective equipment will help keep them safe. WHO is committed to protecting those on the front-lines of health care.”

According to the statement, WHO’s logistics hub in Dubai, staffed by a team of seven, has been working around the clock to dispatch over 130 shipments of PPE and laboratory supplies to 95 countries across all six WHO regions.

“Thanks to the Government of the United Arab Emirates for its generous support of this operation, WHO’s regional logistics hub in Dubai has played a key role in making sure these supplies are prepared and shipped to where they are most needed. This is by far the largest single shipment of supplies since the start of the pandemic, and will ensure that people living in countries with some of the weakest health systems are able to get the test and treated while ensuring that health workers on the frontlines are properly protected,” said Dr. Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The statement further stated that the WFP and WHO extended thanks to the Government of Ethiopia, which helped WFP set up the Addis Ababa Humanitarian Air Hub this week, to help transport protective equipment, medical supplies, and humanitarian workers across Africa for the COVID-19 response, as well as ensuring medical evacuations for humanitarian responders.

According to the statement, a team of 25 WFP aviation and logistics staff is based at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, managing the 24-hour operation. They manage warehouse space for dry bulk, temperature-controlled and cold storage cargo and its onward transport by air. WFP also provides dedicated cargo tracking, warehouse management and customer service to countries across Africa in collaboration with the Africa CDC.

“The medical supplies are timely as the continent still has a window of opportunity to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Collective and fast actions as exemplified by the Solidarity Flight are therefore critical,” said John Nkengasong, Director of the Africa CDC.

As part of a global appeal to raise a US\$2 billion for the COVID-19 response, launched by the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on 25 March, WFP is calling for US\$350 million to establish vital humanitarian hubs around the world to facilitate the storage and dispatch of essential medical cargo, set up air transport links for cargo and personnel, contract charter vessels for shipping services, and provide passenger air and Medevac services for humanitarian and health workers. This includes such Solidarity Flights through Addis Ababa. Currently, WFP has received only 24% (US\$84 million) of the US\$350 million it requires to provide these vital common services to the global humanitarian community.

IGAD to establish Regional Ministerial Taskforce in fighting COVID-19

The Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Dr Workneh Gebeyehu, on Thursday (April 09) held a video teleconference for the Finance Ministers of the Member States.

According to a statement issued by the regional organization, the ministers considered the outlines of the collective IGAD Regional Response Strategy to the COVID-19 pandemic presented to them by the Secretariat and deliberated on the establishment of a Regional Ministerial Taskforce to coordinate the response.

They also exchanged on mobilizing support domestically and from the International Community to respond to COVID-19 and minimize impacts on

the economies. They looked into costing, budgeting and mobilizing the monetary resources required to underwrite the current needs of the region including debt relief and cancellation as well requesting access to financial assistance for all IGAD member states.

The Minister of Finance of Sudan and chair of the meeting, Dr. Ibrahim Elbadawi, expressed his will and that of his country to ensure that ‘the COVID-19 will not translate into a recession curve’ for the region and its people. He highlighted that the IGAD region ‘cannot afford to be complacent’ in the face of the current threat. He welcomed the initiative for a regional response in the context of promoting cooperation and ensuring that not only work is done at the country level but also on a regional basis to mitigate the potential fall-out and impact of the COVID-19 on the economies of the region.

‘If we do not act fast to arrest it and minimize its impact, the virus has the potential to mutate into a social and economic catastrophe’, Dr. Workneh said before putting forward a Draft Call for Action for deliberation and adoption.

The European Union Commissioner for International Partnerships, Ms. Jutta Urpilainen, commended IGAD for holding meetings with Health and Finance Ministers of the member states. Urpilainen announced the setting-up of an EU financial package to include ‘immediate humanitarian assistance’ and ‘support for the strengthening of health systems and support the mitigation of the economic crises.

The meeting was chaired by the Minister of Finance of Sudan, Dr. Ibrahim Elbadawi, with in attendance the Ministers of Finance of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and the Minister of Finance of Uganda.

After discussions and deliberations, the Ministers agreed to the attached Call for Action.

Highlights of the 3rd Video Briefing about Measures taken by Government against COVID-19

The Prime Minister Office on Wednesday (April 15) presented a video briefing about the government’s actions taken thus far to contain and mitigate the

challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The briefing further clarifies the State of Emergency Regulation enacted recently and some of the tasks related to the Ministerial committee and sub-committees that were set up to overseeing the implementation of the State of Emergency.

Since the April 8th enactment of the state of emergency Proclamation by the Council of Ministers and the subsequent endorsement of the proclamation by the House of people's representatives, the detailed regulations have also been issued on April 11th. In delivering the video message, Billene Seyoum said: "The State of Emergency Proclamation enacted is to counter and control the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its impact and through the adoption of the regulation, it stipulates the specific details of which are the suspended rights and which are the measures to be taken. As a result, it prohibits up to 27 activities; it imposes up to 18 duties and it defines the establishment of a ministerial committee and their related powers and responsibilities in overseeing the State of Emergency. These prohibitions and impositions of duties are binding upon all Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians that are residing within the country and this also refers to diplomats." The Deputy Prime Minister is the one who has been tasked with chairing the Ministerial Committee which, according to the briefing "is mandated to oversee the implementation of the State of Emergency Proclamation as well as the enforcement of the related regulations."

As the briefing stated, the Ministerial Committee met with members of the federal law enforcement and security apparatus on Monday, April 13th to discuss the details of prohibitions and duties which they are mandated to enforce. A similar discussion was also held on April 14th virtually with regional law enforcement and security apparatus as well. And as a result, the Ministerial Committee has enforced all regional and federal law enforcement agents to observe and enforce all regulations nation-wide, including through the commensurate use of force.

"It is to be noted that the regulation also indicates miscellaneous provisions which comprise the suspension of the Criminal Procedure Code and the criminal procedural provisions as well for the duration of the State of Emergency period," the Billene said. "However," she added, "federal and regional courts are obligated to set up dedicated benches in the interim to handle these cases of State of Emergency violations as they arise." It is also important to emphasize once again that the State of Emergency regulation is drawn with the purpose of countering and controlling the spread of COVID-19 and mitigating the humanitarian social economic and political damages that

could be caused as a result of the spread of COVID-19 within Ethiopia, she added.

The briefing further stated that based on continuous assessments that would be undertaken on the severity of COVID-19 threats, the Ministerial Committee overseeing the State of Emergency will evaluate whether to further strengthen prohibitions and duties or to lift the duties and prohibitions that have been set already.

According to the briefing, the other COVID-19 prevention ministerial subcommittees have also continued undertaking various prevention and mitigation tasks that they have planned over the past few weeks. “Part of this includes the identification of the symptomatic through house-to-house visits and also information sharing which has been started in various cities and this is also going to be expanded throughout the country. However, we need to note here that the identification task of the symptomatic is not to be confused with testing,” the statement added.

The statement also reiterated that the number of laboratories performing testing has increased to a total of 8 nationally and additional sites with fulfilled equipment will be initiated in the coming 1 to 2 weeks. The Ministry of Health is also in its final preparations to increase the daily testing capacity of these sites which is also a critical component of the mitigation strategy that has been put in place. Similarly, contact tracing has also been expanded with more than 800 contacts of current COVID-19 positive patients that have been traced and isolated or quarantined, the statement added.

In describing the other tasks related to the subcommittees that have been set up as part of the ministerial taskforce, Billene said: “The ICT subcommittee has also been addressing disruption in learning communication and service provision that COVID-19 prevention measures have introduced.” She said: “The subcommittee has developed is in the process of developing four particular solutions: Firstly, national call centers have been set up to report or to enable the reporting of COVID-19 suspected cases. With regard to information sharing, a virtual information exchange and meetings platform has also been set up for federal entities to be able to convene online meetings as well as for federal and regional counterparts also to convene online, discuss and plan accordingly. Secondly, a national digital payments platform is also one of the tasks that the ICT subcommittee has undertaken. Thirdly, a government services platform at <http://www.eservices.gov.et> through which 176 types of services have been identified to be delivered from 34 government

institutions has been set up. So far, six institutions are already providing the services online with the remaining to come on board. And lastly, an education platform for higher education has also been set up while the primary education curriculum is being delivered via radio throughout the country and secondary education curriculum is also being delivered via Television.”

According to the statement, In preparation for extreme eventualities that may arise as a cause of COVID 19 the national resource mobilization subcommittee has also continued its work to set up food banks and is accumulating the required resources. In Addis Ababa alone around 1,200 food banks have been set up to stockpile the needed food supplies for vulnerable sections of the society, the statement added.

In concluding the briefing, Billene said: “I call upon all, including members of the international community, to strictly adhere to the measures that have been stipulated in the regulations as part of the State of Emergency.