

A WEEK IN THE HORN OF AFRICA
29th June 2012

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Rio+20: Pluses and Minuses

Rio+20 was not perhaps the success the organizers had hoped for and it did not produce the sort of outcome that its predecessor had done 20 years earlier. In 1992, the presidents and prime ministers signed up to a legally binding convention on biodiversity, a climate-change agreement that led to the Kyoto protocol, a 6,000-page blueprint for action and new principles to guide world development. It set the global green agenda for the next 20 years. This time, in place of any legally binding conventions, it has been a matter of merely "laying the foundations" for the next two decades. The UN wanted a "green economy roadmap" with environmental goals, targets and deadlines. Developing countries wanted "sustainable development goals" to better protect the environment, guarantee food and power to the poorest, and alleviate poverty. Neither fully got what they wanted and the developed countries had little new to offer. There was in fact no political consensus.

It was still an impressive gathering with representatives from more than 190 countries, including well over a hundred leaders, participated in the formal sessions, though there was disappointment that several major political figures including President Obama (facing an election later this year), and Chancellor Merkel (concerned by the euro zone crisis) did not attend, nor did a number of other G20 leaders. Over 50,000 participants from civil society, business groups and other organizations took part in the side events at which significant funds and a wide range of actions were pledged. UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon indeed said before the conference that he expected most concrete actions to come from NGOs, businesses and city governments. He appears to have been right.

The discussions before and during the summit revolved around two main themes: How to build a green economy that can reduce poverty without destroying the environment, and how to improve global governance. These also involved the aim to start a process to agree on a set of global sustainable development goals (SDGs), with targets for consumption and production, a mechanism for follow ups and reports, and specific actions to be taken in key areas such as water, food and energy. However, as was clear at the climate talks in Copenhagen and Durban, considerable divisions remain between developed and developing countries over burden sharing or whether environmental protection or poverty alleviation should get primary emphasis.

The final outcome document, “The Future We Want”, clearly noted the problems, underlined by the most recent UN Environment Program (UNEP) studies showing that carbon emissions have increased 40% and biodiversity loss has risen 30% in the past two decades. It calls for a wide range of possible actions. These include beginning the process to establish Sustainable Development Goals; detailing how the green economy can be used as a tool to achieve sustainable development; strengthening UNEP; promoting corporate sustainability reporting measures; taking steps to go beyond gross domestic product to assess the well-being of a country; developing a strategy for sustainable development financing; and, adopting a framework for tackling sustainable consumption and production. It also focuses on improving gender equity; recognizing the importance of voluntary commitments on sustainable development; and stressing the need to engage civil society and incorporate science into policy; among other points.

The adoption of the concept of a “green economy” was to have been the real success of Rio+20 but although it is in the final outcome document, the definition of a “green economy” has been left for each country to decide. There is, however, a vision of a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. The document states that countries must not create new trade barriers, or impose new conditionalities on aid and finance, or widen technology gaps or exacerbate the technological dependence on developed countries. By contrast there is significant support for phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, for the use of renewable energies, and the creation of “green” jobs. Developing countries managed to get in references to the transfer of technologies and for funding for this despite some strong resistance. The Commission on Sustainable Development is being elevated to a high-level body charged with monitoring and enforcing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the mandate to report to UN General Assembly. The document suggests the SDGs should complement and strengthen MDGs in the development agenda for post-2015, with a view to producing a set of goals in 2015. The aim is for this to cover sustainable consumption and production, as well as priority areas such as oceans; food security and sustainable agriculture; sustainable energy; water access and efficiency; sustainable cities; green jobs; disaster risk reduction and resilience.

Less satisfactorily, reference to reproductive rights was removed, and on the oceans all that was agreed was that countries will “initiate, as soon as possible, negotiation of an implementing agreement” to address sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction”. As the head of the World Wide Fund for Nature said: “this could well mean nothing at all”. There was no real commitment to funding despite the call by developing countries for commitments to help countries scale up sustainable development projects, or for the transfer of technology. The document does however urge developed countries to make additional concrete efforts towards the original unachieved Rio 1992 action plan to allocate 0.7 percent of their gross national product to development aid. It also calls for a 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP).

Of course, there is more to Rio+20 than just a document. The Summit has certainly helped focus the eyes of the world and its leaders on the planet’s most pressing problems. It may not have produced any binding agreements but there were a lot of individual commitments made. If implemented, these could result in billions of dollars of new clean energy and sustainability investment, and could improve air and water conditions, slow down global warming and improve the levels of food and water in developing countries. They included Australia’s commitment to place more than a million square miles of its ocean waters under conservation management as well as invest US\$33 million to fund fisheries and climate change adaptation in the Pacific. Norway is going to invest some US \$140 million over five years to improve access to sustainable energy in rural Ethiopia, replace kerosene lamps with solar alternatives in Kenya, and support Liberia’s development of a strategic energy and climate plan. Microsoft has

committed itself to carbon neutrality by the end of 2013. The United Kingdom government is going to demand more than a 1,000 UK companies must measure greenhouse gas emissions. At the end of the day governments, the private sector, civil society and other groups committed some US\$513 billion in funding for various projects. A website, (www.onearth.org or www.cloudofcommitments.com) has been created to track implementation. The UN Secretary-General summed it up: "The speeches are over. Now the work begins."

In fact, many countries have already begun to adopt "green growth" strategies that use limited natural resources more efficiently, create jobs and promote low-carbon development. Others are applying new green-growth technologies. China has committed itself to get 16% of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2020, and plans to invest more than US \$450bn in waste recycling and clean technologies. Brazil employs more than 500,000 people in waste management and recycling. Under a new National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, India has begun paying people to better manage natural resources, such as forests and fresh water.

Ethiopia made it clear well before the Summit that it was looking for commitments to a Climate-Resilient Green Economy Strategy. This was reiterated by Alemayehu Tegen, Ethiopia's Minister of Water and Energy in his statement to the Summit. He said that Ethiopia viewed a green economy as a necessity and as the only realistic and effective tool for ensuring sustainable development, for overcoming poverty, improving the carrying capacity of the land and protecting and improving the environment. "It is in line with this conviction that we have launched our Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy", a strategy which addresses both climate change adaptation and mitigation objectives. This is being fully integrated into the five-year Growth and Transformation Plan with the goal of reaching a middle-income status by 2025 based on carbon-neutral growth. An important resource for this is hydroelectric power and the country will increase generation capacity fivefold over the next five years to support green growth at home and export to neighbouring countries as a concrete contribution to development and sustainability in Eastern Africa. There will also be a positive and significant impact on sustainable development in health, social justice, economic growth, and natural resource conservation. The policy commits the country into effectively transforming itself into a low-carbon growth path by 2013. The Minister said it was very satisfying that "this commitment to a green economy is widely shared in Africa and has in fact become a Common African position, the AU having decided to embrace the strategy."

The Minister also pointed out that commitment to a green economy was not sufficient by itself. In 1992 it was agreed that "the developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and the financial resources they command." This is particularly pertinent to the situation in Africa where "eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today." Ethiopia, he said, requires a great deal of support and cooperation to ensure its strategy succeeds. There is a great need for more investment, greater business opportunities, and for financial support as well as support in technology transfer and capacity building.

It was also very apparent, he said, that the creation of an effective Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development is vital. International environmental governance architecture should be provided to support the most vulnerable. African states, therefore, were convinced that it was most appropriate for UNEP to be strengthened and upgraded. Equally, an inter-governmental, open, transparent and inclusive negotiation should be launched in the General Assembly to address the challenges of organizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

AMISOM and the SNA continue their advances out of Mogadishu....

AMISOM and Somali National Army forces have continued their advances out of Mogadishu this week, taking over the strategic coastal town of El Ma'an as well as neighbouring Esaley Airstrip, and the town of Balad. All three places are in Middle Shebelle region to the north east of the capital. Esaley Airstrip and El Ma'an Port are located 37kms outside of Mogadishu and they have been used extensively by Al-Shabaab to import arms and other equipment for the last three years. They were also one of the main entry points for foreign fighters coming from the Gulf of Aden or further afield. Esaley Airstrip was also an important entry point for humanitarian aid prior to 2006 but Al-Shabaab subsequently international humanitarian groups from using it, severely limiting their access to populations in Middle Shebelle and other central regions. The take-over of these two facilities will seriously affect Al-Shabaab's ability to re-equip its forces which have been driven out of Mogadishu. AMISOM's Force Commander Lieutenant-General Andrew Gutt said that the "successful offensive, launched by our forces, has enabled us to secure an extremely strategic entrance to Mogadishu", and during the operation a number of weapons were seized. The General said that the increase in AMISOM's authorized troop strength to 17,731 had re-energized it for the greater task ahead, "to bring peace and stability to the rest of Somalia."

Subsequently, AMISOM and Somali National Army troops moved to take over Balad, a town 36 kilometers from Mogadishu and 10 kilometers from Jowhar, the capital of Middle Shebelle region. Balad is an important strategic point as it controls a major bridge over the Shebelle river. Somali forces, supported by AMISOM troops took control of Balad on Tuesday. It had been held by Al-Shabaab for the last three years and according to a Somali military spokesman, General Ali Araye Osoble, allied forces liberated the town and the surrounding villages with little or no resistance from Al-Shabaab and without causing any civilian casualties. The allied forces in Balad have now set up bases in the town at the police station and in the central district offices.

The advance to Balad was part of more extensive military operations, carried out jointly by the Somali National Army and AMISOM, to expand government control by liberating areas outside Mogadishu in a widening arc. The forces in Balad can be expected to advance shortly to take over Jowhar and the advance up the Shebelle Valley towards Belet Weyne, the capital of Hiiraan. Belet Weyne was liberated by Ethiopian troops late last year and it is now being garrisoned by the battalion of Djibouti troops which is in the process of deployment in AMISOM. Since last August, Al-Shabaab have been forced out of a string of major towns and bases including Belet Weyne, Baidoa and Afmadow, and the Kenyan forces operating under AMISOM have now announced that they plan to liberate the port of Kismayo, the last major stronghold and source of revenue for Al-Shabaab, before August 20th and the appointment of the new government.

Meanwhile, The UNHCR warned on Tuesday that the humanitarian situation in Somalia remained critical with some 2.5 million people still in need of support, despite the more effective delivery of international aid and a good harvest in some areas rolling back last year's famine. There were now more than 157,000 Somali refugees in the five camps in southern Ethiopia and at the Dollo Ado transit centre, and refugees have been arriving in increasing numbers since the beginning of June, with an average of almost 1,200 new arrivals every week. The majority are from the Bay, Bakool and Lower Juba regions, and are talking of growing physical and food insecurity as the reason for their flight. They are also fearful of forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab which has been trying to build up its forces in face of AMISOM and TFG advances. UNHCR and the Ethiopian authorities have now agreed to extend the capacity of the Buramino camp while finalizing the selection of a site for a sixth camp. The UNHCR also noted that regular commercial traffic bringing food and other commodities from Kismayo to the towns of Afmadow and Dhobley on the border with Kenya, and further north towards Gedo region, had been hampered

by roadblocks over the last week or so. It expressed concern that these actions would have serious negative consequences for already vulnerable displaced people and others in the region.

This week, TFG's President Sheikh Sheriff, after visiting Addis Ababa for talks with Prime Minister Meles, attended a two-day global anti piracy conference in UAE, telling the conference that Somalia could eliminate piracy within a year if given the necessary funds. He said that training and funding Somali Navy forces could stop piracy along Somalia's extensive coastline. There were between 5,000 and 6,000 ready to be trained and deployed and this, he added, would cost less than a third of the amount paid out in ransoms over the last three or four years. The President also called on the international community to respect Somalia's maritime rights properly. The failure to do this is often cited as a factor pushing many Somalis into piracy. The President said that ships fishing in Somali waters and companies dumping chemical waste on Somali shores had to be stopped: "They have been taking advantage of our situation and the international community should help us stop them." According to the European Union Naval Force, Operation Atalanta, operating in Somali waters, more than 200 sailors are currently held hostage by Somali pirates. This year there have been some 30 incidents involving pirates. Although the pirate success rate has fallen from 28 per cent in 2009 to 14 per cent last year, the level of violence used against ships has been escalating.

...Roadmap Signatories reject criticisms of the draft constitution...

At the end of last week, the Somali Signatories meeting in Nairobi approved the draft constitution, but the Independent Federal Constitution Commission's (IFCC) which had been largely responsible for the original draft of the constitution, immediately rejected it. The head of the IFCC, Abdullahi Hassan Jama, said that the IFCC could not present the constitution, as ratified by the Roadmap Signatories, to the public as it was not a document for which the IFCC was prepared to be responsible. The IFCC and the Council of Experts had submitted the first draft of the constitution in April. In May, the Roadmap Signatories meeting in Addis Ababa agreed to create a technical committee to revise the document and amend "unclear" and "contradictory" articles, which it did. Earlier this week, the TFG's Minister for the Constitution, Abdirahman Hoosh Jibril, told a press conference firmly that any rejection of the newly approved draft Constitution document was 'unacceptable'. In any case, the Minister said, the IFCC's services were no longer needed as its mandate had ended. The Minister said the IFCC had "7 years to produce a constitution for which they were given millions of dollars", adding that, "they squandered the money in Nairobi and Kampala". The Minister said TFG leaders would now be pressing ahead with the process of ending the transition; and the constitution would be presented to the Somali public "so we can hear if there needs to be corrections, what needs to be changed and what they support, and we are waiting for their inputs".

The UN Special Representative to Somalia, Ambassador Mahiga, has described the approval of the draft constitution as a key achievement. Roadmap Signatories and the international community have emphasized that any further disagreements could have a serious impact on the end of the transition in August. The Speaker of the Somali Parliament, Sharif Hassan, this week called on the people of Somalia to refuse any unconstructive views and support the new draft constitution.

....And Somalia and Somaliland presidents meet in Dubai

The presidents of Somalia and of Somaliland met in Dubai yesterday for the second stage of Somaliland-Somalia talks. After their meeting, Somali President Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed and Somaliland President Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo issued a statement which noted that the meeting had been hosted by the Government of the United Arab Emirates at the request of the two sides. The purpose was for the two presidents to formally endorse the process of talks between the

two sides which had been started at Chevening House outside London June 20th-21st. The fourth point of the Dubai Statement added that “Both parties agreed to the continuation of this dialogue, and agreed to allow the two committees, formed by the presidents, to continue the talks in order to clarify the relationship between the two sides.”

Their meeting followed the two-day meeting between delegations from Somalia and Somaliland held at Chevening House outside London and hosted by Britain, Norway and the European Union. After the discussions, a Chevening Declaration was issued on June 21st. This agreed that talks would take place between the TFG (or its replacement after August 20th) and Somaliland, in accordance with paragraph 6 of the London Conference Communiqué and paragraph 10 of the Istanbul II Conference Communiqué. It noted the need to adopt a common approach to avoid anything that would undermine the continuation of the talks and called on the two presidents to meet to review progress as soon as possible. The declaration also called on the international community to continue to facilitate discussions, and provide the two sides with external experts on legal, economic and security matters as required. The two sides agreed to share experiences on working more effectively with the international community on the use of development and humanitarian assistance for the people of both sides and called for the international community to increase that assistance. They agreed to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, extremism and serious crimes and in the fight against piracy at sea and on land, maritime crime, illegal fishing and toxic dumping. They reiterated their support for the ending the Transition in Somalia.

The talks at Chevening were the first time the two parties had talked to each other since Somaliland declared its independence in 1991. They were nearly cancelled before they started when Somalia added two individuals from Puntland’s government to its delegation. The talks were only able to proceed after the two individuals had been dropped from the delegation. The issue has been controversial in Somaliland with many, particularly in opposition parties, arguing against any contacts with the Government of Somalia unless it first recognized Somaliland’s independence. Despite the wide gap that still separates the basic position of the two sides the discussions at Chevening did find a number of points on which most people on both sides could agree.

The Deputy Prime Minister meets UN Department of Field Support official

On Tuesday this week, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hailemariam Desalegn met with Anthony Banbury, Assistant Secretary-General for Field Support of the United Nations. Discussions covered Ethiopia’s peacekeeping role in the Sudan, both in Darfur, and in Abyei where Ethiopia is supplying all the troops for the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and the situation along the border between Sudan and South Sudan. The Deputy Prime Minister noted that Ethiopia had demonstrated its strong commitment to the maintenance of peace and security along the Sudan/South Sudan border areas through the deployment of troops, military observers and civilian officials under extremely tense and sometimes hostile conditions. Mr. Banbury agreed that Ethiopian peacekeeping forces had demonstrated their high-quality as professional and disciplined troops. Peace-keeping, he added, was not just a matter of quantity but of quality as well and this was something on which the UN focuses. In both the UNISFA area in Abyei and in Darfur, he said the Ethiopian troops fulfilled their obligations and showed understanding of the political, economic and social dynamics of the areas in which they were operating.

Discussions also covered the conditions for the missions, the problems of food supply and a shortage of rations as well as difficulties arising from the climate. Part of the problem arose from

the damage to infrastructure arising from conflict, and the difficulties of transporting material into Abyei from Sudan itself. However, the Ethiopian forces had brought in their own equipment and Banbury said that the problems of supply were now being addressed. Ato Hailemariam agreed the logistics for UNISFA were not easy but he pointed out that the troops understood the situation of the two Sudans, and was aware that peacekeepers could not function in the absence of acceptable community relations. The concern was much wider than just logistics, he said. In this respect, the Deputy Prime Minister welcomed the agreement between the Government of Ethiopia and UNISFA to use Assosa as a temporary headquarters for the operationalization of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. This would provide technical support for UNISFA as well as for border demarcation and verification. He pointed out that Ethiopia was cooperating with UNISFA requests in expediting the visas for its staff and in granting flight permission whenever requested.

The Deputy Prime Minister underlined Ethiopia's commitment and readiness to provide all necessary support to the efforts to build peace between South Sudan and Sudan. He said he was encouraged by the support and cooperation of the Inter Governmental Authority on Development in this regard. Close monitoring for the 2000km border verification and demarcation was important. He said that Ethiopia was ready to work with the UN and with the joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism Unit. In Abyei he noted that a lot of work had been done with the Misseriya community but there was still much to be done with the other main group in the region, the Dinka, and resettlement had yet to start. He suggested that the United Nations should work with international humanitarian agencies to alleviate some of these community problems. Mr. Banbury said his office shared this view and he would pass the message on to the Department of Political Affairs and the UN Humanitarian Office in New York. He also noted the need for border demarcation and verification between the two Sudan, which required qualified civilian personnel from local communities.

An official visit by Italy's Development Cooperation Minister to Ethiopia

The Development Cooperation Minister of Italy, Professor Andrea Riccardi, paid an official visit to Ethiopia this week, June 27th-28th, meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hailemariam Desalegn, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Sufian Ahmed and other officials.

In their discussions Professor Riccardi and the Deputy Prime Minister shared views on a wide range of bilateral, regional and multilateral issues. The Deputy Prime Minister emphasized the long-lasting friendly relations between the two countries and welcomed the visits of high Italian officials to Ethiopia, including the Foreign Minister and now of Professor Riccardi which were a witness of the strength of the relationship. They noted the many examples of cultural cooperation and agreed on the need to continue and strengthen this. Ato Hailemariam said the Ethio-Italian Second Executive Program on Cultural Cooperation had now been finalized for signing. They also shared their ideas for a continued exchange of views and political consultations between Ethiopia and Italy on matters of common interest. On regional issues, both sides agreed to hold regular consultation and to coordinate efforts towards ensuring peace and stability in the region

The Deputy Prime Minister briefed Professor Riccardi on the situation in Somalia where, he said, that on the whole things were moving forward. Somalis had agreed on a constitution in Nairobi, the traditional elders were choosing the members of the Constituent Assembly, and officials were now involved in election campaigning. He said there were some legitimate concerns that TFG officials were more focused on the election than on facilitating the processes of ending the transition. The international community had to encourage the TFG leadership rather to dedicate all its efforts towards ending the transition and establishing strong and all-inclusive local

administrations in liberated areas in the remaining time. The Deputy Prime Minister said Al-Shabaab was fragmenting even within itself, many of its members were defecting and it was declining. It no longer had the moral capacity to defend itself. Indeed, it was now isolated from the community and in disarray.

Professor Riccardi emphasized that relations between Italy and Ethiopia were very important. He described Ethiopia as a strategic country in the region with which Italy wanted to work and praised its role in bringing peace and stability in the region. He expressed his concern about Eritrea, describing its strategy of isolation and its failure to respect international law as not useful. He stressed that Eritrea had to change its policy. Eritrea was not just a problem for Ethiopia but also for Africa. "We want the region to be peaceful based on the rule of law", he said. He also deplored the way Eritrean youth were fleeing their country and described it as a dramatic humanitarian situation. In turn, the Deputy Prime Minister briefed Professor Riccardi on Eritrea's destabilizing activities and its continuous attempts to cause problems to both Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. He mentioned the findings of the UN Monitoring Group about the effort to disrupt last year's AU Heads of State summit, and Eritrea's training and support for terrorist groups which had attacked and kidnapped tourists. The Deputy Prime Minister detailed the recent carefully proportional response by Ethiopia against selected terrorist training camps in Eritrea. He also noted that Ethiopia had become a destination for thousands of Eritrean immigrants, pointing out that it now providing university education to around 1,800 Eritrean students in different universities.

Ato Hailemariam said the number of Italian investors in Ethiopia was disappointing when compared to the number of people from Asia, the Middle East and other European countries. He called on Italian investors to engage in the areas that are given particular attention in the Growth and Transformation Plan, including mining, horticulture and floriculture development, railways and sugar production. Professor Riccardi said Italy's investors who are involved in Ethiopia have a very positive attitude towards the country and he hoped more would soon appear in Ethiopia. He noted that the euro zone crisis had affected Italy but at the same time Italy was determined to continue its cooperation with Ethiopia.

The meeting was attended by Italy's ambassador to Ethiopia, Renzo Mario Rosso, and Ambassador Grum Abay, Director-General of the European Directorate-General of the Ministry and other officials. Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam, of course, made an official visit to Rome in March himself when he held useful discussions with Foreign Minister Terzi during the Ethio-Italian Business Forum, at which time an understanding to work together in trade and investment had been signed. Minister Terzi had also made an official visit to Addis Ababa last month.

Railway deals to boost infrastructural development

Under the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) Ethiopia is planning to build some 2,359 kms of railway line by 2015. Feasibility studies are being carried out to provide access to the new port being built at Tadjourah in Djibouti and contribute to the economic development of the country's hinterland. Construction of a light railway for Addis Ababa has already commenced, and other construction agreements are now being worked out. In the last two weeks, agreements have been signed with Chinese and Turkish construction companies for significant portions of the Makelle to Tadjourah rail project. The time scale for both is three and a half years.

The first agreement is with the China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) and is for the building of 268.2 kms of railway from Mekelle to Woldiya/Hara Gebeya at an expected cost of \$1.6 billion USD. This is the northern section of the railway which is to link Mekelle, Woldiya, Hara Gebeya, Semera, Dicheto and Elidar, so connecting northern Ethiopia with Tadjourah,

Djibouti. This is the first of three phases of links between Mekelle and Djibouti. This part of the project will include 29 large bridges and 19 kilometers of tunnelling work and is expected to be the toughest element. The CCCC is now beginning to mobilize resources and is expected to start construction soon.

Dr. Engineer Getachew Betru, the General Manager of the Ethiopian Railways Corporation (ERC), said civil works on the railway will be subcontracted to local contractors in an effort to build up the capacity of domestic companies. The planned network will allow access to another port and contribute to the development of the northern areas of the country. It will also open up a means of transporting potash and metals from mineral developments in Afar Regional State and Tigray Regional State to a port. The railway corporation also expects to carry freight and passengers to and from all points along the network.

Another agreement was signed this week with the Turkish company, Yapi Merkezi. Signed by ERC's General Manager, Dr. Engineer Getachew Betru and officials of Yapi Merkezi, it was also witnessed by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hailemariam, the Chairman of the ERC Board, Ambassadors of both countries and senior government officials. This is for the construction of another 447kms of railway line to cover the stretch from Awash to Woldiya, Hara Gebeya. The expected cost will be \$1.7 billion. This agreement covers the engineering, procurement and construction works, and includes the length of the main line, of approximately 389 kms, as well as station and maintenance tracks. The agreement details the signalling and telecommunication works for the line and for the stations as well as the construction of an Operation Control Centre. There is also going to be an extension from the Woldiya to Awash section of the line, to link up with the Addis Ababa to Djibouti railway around Dire Dawa.

In addition to these railway projects, the government is planning significant road construction to boost infrastructure. The road sector program includes the rehabilitation of 728 kms of trunk road, the upgrading of 5023 kms of trunk and link roads, the construction of 4331 kms of new link roads, and the maintenance of 4700 kms of asphalt and gravel roads as well as routine maintenance of 84,649 kms of the road network. In addition to this federal government program, there are another 82,735 kms of roads linking rural areas and woredas (districts) which are the responsibility of the local government administrations.

Organizing against illicit human trafficking

Illegal human trafficking has been much in the headlines recently with a number of fatal disasters in Malawi, Tanzania and Djibouti, affecting migrants from Somalia, Ethiopia and elsewhere in the IGAD region. And it appears to be a spreading problem, for the deaths are no more than the tip of the iceberg of the effects of human trafficking.

In fact, illegal human trafficking has become a major social ill that is posing serious challenges to development efforts. In spite of legal and administrative structures to try and bring illegal activities to an end, it has continued and indeed those responsible have shown an unexpected ability to continue their operations, increasing the number of destinations, changing their routes of trafficking, establishing strong underground recruiting networks and exploiting national and international legal loopholes and incongruities. One result of this is that thousands of Ethiopians, in particular women, have been lured away to the Middle East or neighboring countries over recent years. The fate of these youngsters, for most of them are young, often using fake travel documents, has nearly always been miserable. Thousands who those who have left their country seeking a better life have instead faced tragic and at times sub-human living conditions. Over the years, countless numbers of heart rending stories of illegal detention, physical abuse, sexual assault, and at times even the death of Ethiopians in Middle East and elsewhere, have filled the headlines and columns of newspapers.

Faced with this increasing problem, despite the tougher measures ranging from criminalizing illegal trafficking to an outright ban of travel to some destinations, a consultative meeting was held at the prime minister's office last weekend. The aim was to form a national council to provide the impetus to create a popular tide against this growing menace as well as plan for ways to prevent it. The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hailemariam Desalegn, Redwan Hussein, Public Mobilization Advisor to the Prime Minister with the rank of Minister, Abadula Gemedo, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and representatives drawn from various stakeholder institutions. The day-long meeting, opened with a speech from the Deputy Prime Minister, deliberated on a paper presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and discussed strategic points of intervention to curb the problem and on ways to lead to the formation of the national council.

The Deputy Prime Minister's speech covered the root causes that have given rise to the current predicament, and the ways to combat the problem. On current conditions, he noted that youngsters, thousands of whom were hardly of age, who trusted in the fictions of traffickers about better life in the Middle East, were now languishing in foreign lands. He said that for a nation that prides itself on its long history, the horrifying stories about Ethiopian immigrants must remain a very sore point. For a country that is fighting poverty tooth and nail and with some success, "the reality is even more disenchanting". This, he said, was a national shame and "an affront to our national pride". The Deputy Prime Minister also reflected on the factors that had allowed the crime of illicit trafficking to reach such a level. He said that despite the double digit pro-poor growth over the past nine years, and which had created tens of thousands of jobs, the fact was that Ethiopia's poverty reduction policies still did not have the ability to provide sufficient jobs. Many job-seeking youngsters fall easy prey to traffickers. The lure of life elsewhere, even when the details of expectations simply don't add up, reluctance to exhaust job opportunities at home and disdain for low level jobs as well as failure by government agencies to expand poverty reduction packages to create jobs and the lack of coordination among government offices to control or bring to justice illegal traffickers has helped to make young women easy targets for the traffickers. What has also added fuel to fire, said the Deputy Prime Minister, was a flourishing well-entrenched network of traffickers who for years have been active in spreading exaggerated stories about life in exile, concealing the reality from largely naïve, uninformed and unquestioning youth.

The Deputy Prime Minister called for a more united action to provide a strategic point of intervention to bring an end to a problem that has been tarnishing the nation's image and causing immeasurable damage to many youngsters. As poverty has been one major source of this national shame, he reiterated the importance of intensifying the battle against it as one way forward. He called on federal agencies to work more effectively on technical and vocational programs and poverty reduction packages to create more jobs. Secondly, he emphasized that while the legal export of manpower, as opposed to illicit trafficking, could contribute to the fight against poverty, it was critical to strengthen legal frameworks through bilateral agreements to provide the necessary rights for expatriate Ethiopian workers. The government should work on establishing such relations and follow-up on all scenarios of exploitation, mal-treatment and infringement. He emphasized that changing people's ideas could also make an important point of intervention. It was of the utmost importance to create a popular tide of awareness and do away with the problem altogether. He urged all stakeholders to work firmly within the auspices of the national council to bring this about at the grassroots level.

Following a further presentation from an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the meeting discussed strategic intervention points and the way forward for the activities of a national council. The discussants concluded that a lack of coordination among stakeholders, inadequate legal instruments and administrative malfeasance were major elements in the current situation.

After deliberations, therefore, they agreed on the establishment of a national council in which 14 federal ministries, various associations, religious institutions and civic organizations would be members. They also agreed to establish local bodies at regional level and down through all elements of the administrative hierarchy. The meeting agreed to reconvene on September 15th to review progress and activate the formation of the council.

News and Views

Sudan and South Sudan's Joint Political and Security Talks

The second round Sudan and South Sudan negotiations on post-secession issues under the mediation of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) has been taking place this week in Addis Ababa. The defense ministers of the two countries arrived last week to discuss specific issues on border security and over the weekend reached an agreement on the activation of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM). At mid-week, the two sides both decided to return to their respective capitals for further consultations. The talks are now scheduled to reconvene on July 5th after a week's adjournment. Sudan and South Sudan have been given a three-month deadline by the United Nations Security Council and the African Union to conclude negotiations over the outstanding issues between them. These include citizenship, oil exports, demarcation of borders and the status of the Abyei region as well as defence and security. Both sides have agreed to implement the AU and UN-promoted peace plan and both sides have withdrawn their forces from Abyei as demanded by the UN Security Council.

Somaliland's President appeals for drought assistance and relief aid

Somaliland's President Ahmed Mahmoud Silanyo has issued an appeal for drought relief aid. In a statement released from Hargeisa he asked the international community, UN agencies, international and local NGOs and the public at large to take action to save lives from the drought currently affecting large areas of Somaliland. It was, he said, harmful to lives and community development. He said the rains this year had been below normal and uneven and indeed in some areas including Awdal, Salal, Saahil and Sanaag rainfall had been inadequate for three years. A fact-finding team from the Amoud Foundation for Horn of Africa that visited Awdal, Salal and Gabiley has estimated that 150,000 pastoralists in the coastal areas of the country have been affected by drought and need immediate humanitarian assistance. According to the team, the drought has already caused dozens of deaths and displaced over 90% of the population from villages in the affected areas.

Outstanding innovators and researchers to be honoured

The Ministry of Science and Technology has announced that outstanding innovators and researchers will be honoured on July 7th at a ceremony expected to be attended by the Prime Minister. The research involved covers the release of three improved *Teff* varieties, disease-resistant wheat varieties and coffee seedlings with special taste and aroma. According to the Ministry's Capacity Building Director, Girma Yosef, the new *teff* varieties provide more than 35 quintals of yield per hectare while traditional seeds can produce no more than nine quintals. The new wheat varieties also produce a ten percent increase in yield as well as being resistant to "wag", a disease that affects wheat as well as other grains. The team that worked on coffee has produced eleven varieties of coffee with different flavours and aromas by breeding from local forest coffee strains. Seven of these new varieties have been distributed to model farmers, to investors and to state coffee farms and have been instrumental in boosting national production from 350,000 tonnes to 830,000 tonnes per annum. The new varieties are also drought and disease resistant. Other innovations include a green coffee washing machine that can enhance the quality and speed of washing coffee beans; the design and production of machines to

produce fuel from Jatropha plants, and a thread spinning machine that can increase the productivity of indigenous weaving.

Agricultural Cooperatives Sector Development Strategy launched

A five-year, 2012-2016, Agricultural Cooperatives Sector Development Strategy was launched this week by the Agricultural Transformation Agency, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Federal Cooperatives Agency. The first of its kind in Africa, it is aimed at developing an integrated scheme to enhance support for agricultural cooperatives to increase their yields and income. The strategy is to be implemented in four Regional States, Amhara, Tigray, Oromia and SNNP, in the first instance and then will be extended to other states. At the launching ceremony, Ato Wondirad Mandefro, State Minister of Agriculture said the government had identified cooperatives as a key instrument in improving livelihoods and in mobilizing small and fragmented resources to address basic societal needs. The five-year Growth and Transformation Plan, he said, sees agricultural cooperatives as a means to increase productivity and the household income of smallholder farmers: "In line with this, the newly designed Cooperative Strategy will be expected to take the Ethiopian Cooperative Movement to the next level and contribute greatly to transforming the agriculture sector." The head of the Agricultural Transformation Agency, Khalid Bomba, noted that Ethiopia has been recording impressive and successive economic growth in general and in the agricultural sector in particular over the past few years. Representatives from all State Agricultural Cooperatives, Federal Cooperative Agencies, stakeholders, and development partners attended the launching ceremony.