

## **A Week in the Horn** **3<sup>rd</sup> February 2012**

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### **The 18<sup>th</sup> session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government**

The 18<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union was held in Addis Ababa, 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> January, under the theme "Boosting Intra-African Trade". It was preceded the previous week by the 20<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the Executive Council, 26<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> January, and the 23<sup>rd</sup> ordinary session of the Permanent Representatives' Committee, 23<sup>rd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> January.

The first business of the Summit was the election of Dr Yayi Boni, President of the Republic of Benin, as Chairman of the African Union for 2012. The Assembly then moved on to exchange views on issues affecting intra-African trade. It took note of the Action Plan to fast track the establishment of a continental free-trade area. This had been proposed by the Commission and endorsed by the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of African Ministers of Trade at a meeting in Accra in November 2011. The Assembly decided to establish a Committee of seven Heads of State and Government (representing the Regional Economic Communities) to conduct a study of the challenges and achievements in relation to four priority areas: institutional framework, infrastructure, sources of finance and the concept of the market, covering free movement of people, goods and services. The outcome of the study, which the Committee will conduct in collaboration with the AU Commission, will be presented to the Heads of State and Government during the next Summit in July, in Lilongwe, Malawi.

It was noted that the promotion of peace and security continued to be the central focus of the efforts and activities of the Commission. The Assembly acknowledged that the year 2011 had been exceptionally difficult for the African Union with particular reference to the popular uprisings in North Africa. In this connection, the Assembly welcomed the initiative of the Commission to organize a consultation on the outcome of the assessment mission on

the security fallout from the crisis in Libya. It also requested that the AU Peace and Security Council convene a meeting on the situation in the Sahel. On Somalia, the Assembly expressed satisfaction over the progress made in the peace and reconciliation process, and the Heads of State welcomed the steps being taken to strengthen AMISOM and TFG forces. They called upon the TFIs to demonstrate the required unity of purpose and commitment to the achievement of lasting peace and reconciliation in Somalia.

The Assembly also held extensive discussions on the destructive role the Eritrean Government continues to play in the sub-region. The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and IGAD Member States briefed the Assembly on recent developments including the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2023 (2011) of 5<sup>th</sup> December, under which further sanctions were imposed on Eritrea to prevent it using the “Diaspora Tax” and revenue from the mining sector as financial sources to continue its destabilization of the Horn of Africa. The Assembly welcomed the adoption of Resolution 2023 by the UN Security Council. It further welcomed the Communiqué issued by the 309<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council which underscored the need to ensure the full implementation of this and other relevant resolutions and called upon member states to carry out adequate measures to fully implement the provisions of these resolutions. The Assembly urged the State of Eritrea to fully comply with these resolutions and desist from its destabilizing activities in Somalia and in the region.

The Assembly approved the election of ten new members for the Peace and Security Council. They will serve a two-year term beginning in March. Djibouti, which has been representing the Eastern Africa Region in the Council, together with Kenya and Rwanda, since 2010, was re-elected for another two-year term while Tanzania will take over from Rwanda. Kenya continues as a member of the Council until March next year when its three-year term comes to an end.

With regard to the election of the Chairperson and Members of the African Commission, the Heads of State and Government decided to postpone the election to the next ordinary session of the AU Assembly, in July 2012. Neither of the candidates for the post of Chairperson, Dr Jean Ping or Mrs. Dlamini-Zuma was able to obtain the required two-thirds majority in the voting. The present members of the Commission will now continue until July and in the meantime the Assembly decided to establish an Ad-hoc Committee of Heads of State and Government to address issues related to the next election.

At the 16<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in January last year, it was decided to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Establishment of the OAU on 25<sup>th</sup> May next year [2013] in Addis Ababa. In this connection, the Assembly declared 2013 the year of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. The Assembly therefore requested that the AU Commission coordinate activities for an inclusive and participatory process of reflection on the last 50 years of effort towards African Unity.

Prime Minister Meles, as the current Chairperson of NEPAD Heads of State and Government Orientation Committee (HSGOC), presented a report on the 26<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee, held on 28<sup>th</sup> January in advance of the Summit. Following the recommendations of the HSGOC, the Assembly approved the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa

(PIDA) and the Institutional Architecture for its implementation (IAIDA). In addition, as Coordinator of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC), Prime Minister Meles also briefed the Assembly on the outcome of the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Conference on Climate Change (COP 17), held in Durban, South Africa, last December. The Assembly commended the members of CAHOSCC and Prime Minister Meles for their successful efforts to preserve the Kyoto Protocol and for operationalization of the Green Climate Fund. The Assembly reiterated the importance for Africa to speak with one voice as the key to success. It called upon member states to continue to do so not only at the next climate negotiations, scheduled to be held in Qatar later this year, but also in other international fora including the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), scheduled to be held in June in Brazil.

The Summit itself was preceded by the inauguration of the new AU Conference Centre and Office Complex, built with the assistance of China. The ceremony took place in the presence of Mr Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and several Heads of State and Government. Prime Minister Meles, in a statement he delivered on the occasion, indicated that “the new headquarters of the continental organization, which has been the centre of the struggle for the African renaissance, is a symbol of the rise of Africa”. In his speech to the AU Assembly, Mr Jia Qinglin gave a message of congratulations from the President of the Peoples Republic of China, Mr Hu Jintao. He also noted the importance of upholding peace, stability and development, and the need to fully respect the efforts of African countries to resolve African issues themselves. He spoke of the importance of promoting China Africa friendship, increasing coordination on regional and international issues, raising the level of economic cooperation, expanding people-to-people relations and enhancing the building up of the China African Forum. In conclusion he noted the friendship of China and Africa was “as solid as the towering Mount Kilimanjaro and as vibrant as the Yangtse River and the Yellow River.” There were, of course, numerous bilateral meetings on the margins of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government both between member states and with other delegations observing the Summit.

#### **The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister meets a US delegation.....**

A US government delegation was led by the Deputy Secretary of State, William J. Burns, accompanied by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, the Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for African Affairs at the White House, Grant Harris, the US Special Envoy to Sudan, Ambassador Princeton Lyman, the U.S Special Representative to Somalia, Ambassador James Swan and U.S Agency for International Development’s Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa, Raja Jandhyala. The delegation held discussions on bilateral and regional issues of mutual interest with Prime Minister Meles and with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hailemariam. The talks with Ato Hailemariam focused particularly on recent developments in North and South Sudan and issues of security and political development in Somalia. The Deputy Prime Minister underscored the importance of solving the difference between Sudan and South Sudan with the issue of the oil pipeline as a key to maintaining peace and security in the region. Mr Carson and Ambassador Lyman applauded Ethiopia's efforts to mediate and congratulated Ethiopia on the professional job being done by the Ethiopian peacekeeping force in Abyei.

On Somalia, both sides agreed on the importance of keeping developments in the security track linked with the political track. It was noted that civilian administrations operating in liberated areas should be able to provide basic services to the population. Both parties also agreed on the importance of identifying spoilers of the Somali peace process for possible individually targeted sanctions. They agreed to continue to work together to support the TFG to bring a lasting peace to the Somali people.

#### **....And Iran's Foreign Minister**

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hailemariam met Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Salehi on Sunday [29<sup>th</sup>]. Discussions centred on strengthening bilateral relations, on consolidating people-to-people relations and economic cooperation. Mr Ali noted that Iran had recently donated ten 45-seat tourist buses and expressed Iran's interest in participating in the insurance and banking sectors in Ethiopia. The 5<sup>th</sup> Ethio-Iran joint commission meeting had been held in Addis Ababa and he invited the Deputy Prime Minister to attend the next meeting in Teheran. On multilateral relations, the Iranian Foreign Minister regretted that Iran-Africa relations had not reached the desired level despite the establishment of the Iran-Africa Forum two years ago. He emphasized Iran's commitment to revitalize the Forum and to work in such strategic areas as mining, health, pharmaceutical, agriculture, politics and culture. Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam took the opportunity to thank Iran for the donation of the buses. He said that Iran has a lot of expertise in infrastructure, railway, energy and geothermal production which could contribute significantly to Ethiopia's on-going development efforts through loans, grants, and technology transfers. He said that investment in the financial sector could be considered in the future and in the meantime invited Iranian investment in agriculture where there was huge unused potential in Ethiopia. The two ministers also discussed the regional problems and in particular the situation in Sudan and Somalia. Ato Hailemariam encouraged the Iranian Foreign Minister to provide support for capacity building in Somalia to complement recent political gains with economic assistance. Iran has already allocated 25 million dollars for water projects in Somalia.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Ato Hailemariam also attended a number of other meetings to discuss issues of bilateral and regional concern. These included the Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, the Foreign Minister of Luxemburg, and the Vice-Foreign Ministers of Russia and Italy. The State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Berhane also met with the Vice-Foreign Ministers of Norway and Finland and the Head of the European Union Delegation.

#### **Strengthened relations between Ethiopia and China**

The Chairperson of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Mr Jia Qinglin, visited Ethiopia from 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> January. He came at the invitation of the Ethiopian government and to attend the opening of African Union's 18<sup>th</sup> ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government and the inaugural ceremony of the new African Union Commission Conference Centre and Office Complex, the gift of the Chinese peoples to Africa.

The Conference Centre was inaugurated on Saturday and Mr Qinglin acknowledged it as the “latest symbol of China-African friendship”, a theme which he elaborated on in his speech to the African Union Summit. At the inauguration of the building “this magnificent new headquarters of our continental organization”, Prime Minister Meles spoke of China with “its amazing re-emergence and its commitments for a win-win partnership with Africa [as] one of the reasons for the beginning of the African renaissance.” Over the past decades, he said, China Africa cooperation has gone from strength to strength. “The future prospects of our partnership are even brighter. It is, therefore, very appropriate for China to decide to build this hall – the hall of the rise of Africa, this hall of African renaissance and the adjoining office building for us. I am sure I speak for all of you when I say to the people and government of China, thank you so very much. May our partnership continue to prosper.”

During his visit, Mr Qinglin and his delegation held talks with senior Ethiopian government officials led by Prime Minister Meles to discuss bilateral issues. The two sides exchanged views on future high-level visits between the two sides and deepening economic cooperation, The Chinese side announced further assistance to Ethiopia with a 100 million Yuan grant and another 100 million Yuan interest free loan. The two also discussed strengthening people-to-people cultural exchanges and agreed to reinforce their multilateral cooperation in areas such as the solidarity and stability of the East Africa region and of Africa in general. On the wider economic front, the talks covered the defining moments of the current global economic downturn and the role that China can play in lifting Africa away from the effects of this development.

On Saturday [28<sup>th</sup>], Ethiopia and China signed five economic and technical cooperation agreements and two memoranda of understandings. The agreements covered further strengthening of the existing bilateral cooperation between the two countries in a number of areas: Providing Grant and Interest Free Loans; Cooperation in Railway, Sugar Production and Telecommunication Development; Currency Swaps and Payment Mechanisms between the Export-Import Bank of China, the National Bank of Ethiopia and the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia; and promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises. The Memoranda of Understanding covered Cooperation in Financial Services in RMB between the Ministry of FED and the Export-Import Bank of China.

During their visit the Chinese delegation also visited Chinese investments in the Eastern Industrial Zone which is being built near Dukem to the south of Addis Ababa. One of the companies installed there is the Huajian Shoe Factory. It set up its factory within three months, and it now produces 3,000 pairs of shoes daily for the US and European markets. Factory officials said they now use leather that has been produced locally, and the factory now employs 260 Ethiopians.

### **Ethiopia-Norway agreement on voluntary return of asylum seekers**

Ethiopia and Norway signed an agreement in Addis Ababa concerning the voluntary return of rejected asylum seekers in Norway on 26<sup>th</sup> January. The agreement was the result of a long process of negotiations that has been going on for nearly a decade. Since the agreement was signed, there have been a number of rumours about the agreement and misinformation disseminated particularly in the Diaspora and among those in Norway in

regard to what was agreed between the two parties. Certain pronouncements and press statements given to the Norwegian media by various agencies, including those who derive their livelihood from “defending the rights of asylum seekers” have contributed to the confusion. It has become necessary to provide the accurate facts for those concerned about the agreement and others who profess to be doubtful about the principles and intentions of the Ethiopian government in entering into this agreement.

The main elements or principles of the agreement are that:

1. The signed Memorandum of Understanding lays down the basis for a closely coordinated, phased, dignified and humane process of assisted return for Ethiopian nationals residing in Norway. This is primarily in respect to voluntary return and to the importance of a safe and dignified return and sustainable re-integration into their communities in Ethiopia.
2. The agreement is to be applied only in respect to Ethiopian nationals whose nationality is ascertained by the competent Ethiopian authorities, who have been staying temporarily in Norway and whose request for refugee status or a residence permit has been properly considered, but rejected through due process of law in Norway, and those who may opt for voluntary return to Ethiopia after a final negative decision by the competent Norwegian authorities on their asylum claims.
3. The agreement can also be applied to those rejected asylum seekers who have no protection or compelling humanitarian needs to justify prolongation of their stay in Norway, but who nevertheless continue to refuse to avail themselves of the option of voluntary return and who may be ordered to leave Norway as an option of last resort.

In other words, this agreement bears no relationship to the way rumour and misinformation has construed it. This is an agreement entered into by the Ethiopian government and Norway to allow for the return of rejected asylum seekers from Norway, primarily on the basis of voluntary decisions by returnees and not by forced departure. In fact, it paves the way for a safe, dignified, phased and humane assisted return process, operating essentially on a voluntary basis.

### **The first political consultation meeting between Ethiopia and Egypt**

On Monday [30<sup>th</sup> Feb], Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hailemariam Desalegn met with Egypt’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Mohamed Kamel Amr for their first political consultation meeting. Prior to this, senior officials of both countries met on 27<sup>th</sup> January to review and evaluate implementation of the agreements signed between the two countries during the fourth round of the Joint Commission held in Cairo from 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> September last year. The Ministers discussed the status of the implementation of the action plan aiming to endorse bilateral relations in all areas. They exchanged views on the development of bilateral relations and expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of the

implementation agreements signed between them over the past few months. They also noted with appreciation the positive development in relations, and the progress made in joint projects and developmental programmes, particularly in the fields of health, capacity-building, water resources and irrigation, tourism and agriculture as well as diplomatic training and investment. The two parties emphasized their willingness to sign additional agreements in mining and for a national research institute of astronomy and geophysics. They agreed to activate the Cooperation Protocols signed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> joint Ministerial Meeting, and reaffirmed their commitment to sustain the pace of development and cooperation in all fields.

The ministers welcomed the establishment of the Egyptian Ethiopian Technical Advisory Committee on water resources and irrigation and the convening of the Panel of Experts from Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Grand Renaissance Dam as positive steps towards achieving the overall objective of building confidence among the three countries. They also exchanged views on regional political and security issues in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, reaffirming the Kampala Agreement as a viable option to bring lasting peace, security and stability in Somalia.

Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam said that bilateral relations were on the right track and stressed the need to continue their joint political discussions. It was agreed that the next joint political consultation should take place in July. Minister Mohamed Kamel Amr said that Egypt wanted to consolidate further its relations and cooperation with Ethiopia. It was, he added, keen to establish wider investment and trade ties and was planning to set up an Egyptian industrial zone in Ethiopia in the near future. He also underlined that any government in Egypt would respect the agreements that had been signed between Egypt and Ethiopia.

Meanwhile, Egypt's Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation said that the Panel to study the impact of the Grand Renaissance Dam should be convening in Addis Ababa by the end of the week for a two-day meeting, when it will be choosing two international water and social science experts as members of the Panel. At an earlier meeting in Khartoum, it chose two experts in the fields of dam construction, mega reservoirs and the environment. The full Panel is due meet later this month in Cairo to start its assessment. It is expected to work for six to nine months before presenting its recommendations to the three governments on any positive or negative factors and on means to handle their impact.

### **The British Foreign Secretary visits Mogadishu**

Britain's Foreign Secretary, William Hague, paid an unexpected visit to Mogadishu on Thursday [2<sup>nd</sup> Feb], and he took the opportunity to appoint a new British Ambassador to Somalia, the first since 1991, though the envoy will be based in Nairobi until the embassy can be established. Speaking of his visit to Mogadishu and the forthcoming London conference (23<sup>rd</sup> February), Mr Hague noted that one of the key objectives of the conference was to strengthen co-operation in counter-terrorism and to disrupt terrorist networks and financing. "We need to step this up. We are not complacent about it," Mr Hague said. Mr Hague met with President Sheikh Sharif at the presidential palace in Mogadishu. He praised AMISOM troops for forcing al-Shabaab militants out of the city but



warned that much of the south remained in the hands of the militants. Mr Hague's visit is another sign of growing international confidence in the improving security situation, at least in Mogadishu. The UN special envoy to Somalia has moved the UN Political Office for Somalia back to Mogadishu after an absence of 17 years. Representatives from more than 40 nations have been invited to the London conference, and Mr Hague said in a statement: "The conference will seek to generate a more effective and concerted international approach outside Somalia that addresses the root causes of the conflict; and a new political process inside Somalia that meets the needs of all Somalis." The international community at last appears to have understood that the chaos of Somalia is not just a regional problem but has morphed into piracy that threatens global trade, terrorism that threatens regional even global security and a famine that threatens the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. It has finally realized that containment of Somalia is no longer an option, that a solution must be found.

Meanwhile Prime Minister Meles has said that Ethiopian troops will stay in Somalia until AMISOM forces replace them to avoid creating a power vacuum that might allow a resurgence of Al-Shabaab. Ethiopian forces aided TFG allied forces in capturing the town of Belet Weyne, 30 kilometres from the border on 31<sup>st</sup> December driving out Al-Shabaab. The Prime Minister said that Ethiopia expected AMISOM troops to fill in the gaps before Ethiopian troops withdrew and "so at this stage there is no rush for us to withdraw before AMISOM troops have come in." The Prime Minister added that Ethiopia was willing to expand its operations, in conjunction with TFG forces, beyond Belet Weyne, but only if the Somali government asked for backing. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hailemariam has indicated that Ethiopia might consider advancing to Baidoa if circumstances necessitated it.

Kenya's Minister of State for Defence, Yusuf Haji, in Addis Ababa for the AU Summit, said that Kenyan military operations were proceeding smoothly. He claimed Kenyan and TFG forces and allies were capturing additional territory almost every day. "Al-Shabaab right now are on the run, they are in disarray." Mr Haji said they were no longer a challenge "because they are no longer a formation of troops, they are fighting guerrilla war." Nevertheless, he emphasized, while the Kenyan troops have air power and the necessary equipment, the AMISOM forces in Mogadishu needed helicopters, body armour and additional ammunition to enable them to hunt down Al-Shabaab groups. It was necessary to keep up the momentum to deal a decisive blow to Al-Shabaab to put it out of the way. "We need more troops because we have to go outside the areas that we know" and follow Al-Shabaab fighters wherever they go. Increasing the size and support for AMISOM will depend on the UN Security Council which is expected to consider a resolution in advance of the UK's London Conference on Somalia on 23<sup>rd</sup> February. The Secretary-General is due to report shortly to the Council on the new strategic concept recently endorsed by the AU Peace and Security Council for the next phase of AMISOM.



## Time for some fact-checking at the New York Times?

In the New York Times (28<sup>th</sup> January) Nicholas Kristoff, in a column entitled “What’s he got to hide?”, claims he had been pursuing Ethiopia’s Prime Minister for several days at the World Economic Forum at Davos to try and ask him about “a worsening pattern of brutality in Ethiopia.” He said that Meles refused to see him. I doubt if Prime Minister Meles (who was only in Davos for a day in any case) was bothered either way by a columnist of the NYT, but he surely wouldn’t want to see a journalist who made no effort to get his facts right, didn’t do any research on the subject, and was content to merely repeat allegations from Human Rights Watch which have been comprehensively rubbished by NGOs, international agencies, donors and others.

HRW’s last report on Gambella was based on a handful of interviews, most done outside the region as the footnotes admit, and got both facts and figures wrong. With its usual flawed methodology, it also refused to question the credentials of its interviewees and other sources or query their political affiliation. Kristoff also quotes from an earlier HRW report to claim that the government “uses foreign food to punish critics”. Well, actually it doesn’t, as other reports investigating this allegation conclusively demonstrated. None of the NGOs and international agencies, nor the donor’s Development Assistance Group (DAG), nor any of the embassy personnel from a dozen or more countries who have travelled in these areas and investigated these claims, have managed to come up with anything to support them. On investigation, HRW’s allegations simply don’t hold water, nor does its defence of criticisms which has been limited to the rather feeble and simplistic - “This finding is inconsistent with Human Rights Watch’s field research.”

Yes, certainly, it is possible to find some individuals who feel hard done by in the massive Productive Safety Net Programme, which provided aid for 6.3 million people last year, or the Protection of Basic Services programmes. Equally, in a programme organizing the voluntary movement of 20,000 households in the last few months, one or two were, not surprisingly, dissatisfied with what they found on arrival in their new homes. In one or two cases there were also problems with water supplies and delays in the provision of facilities. No one denies it, but to jump from this to sweeping allegations about large-scale denial of food aid to people who may have voted for the opposition, the deliberate use of food aid for political purposes or massive forced resettlement, for none of which anyone can provide evidence, is lazy and poor journalism.

Kristoff’s failure to check his facts is not confined to HRW’s allegations. He quotes the editor of a paper who left (not fled) Ethiopia for the US in 2009. The paper wasn’t closed down by the government. It was shut down by its three editors after they had all left the country, and it was only once outside that they alleged they had been forced to flee the country. All have now been granted asylum in the US or the UK. Kristoff refers to another journalist facing charges, claiming his true crime was to call on the government to allow free speech and end torture. No it wasn’t. Eskinder’s ‘crime’ was to call for the overthrow of the government and for support to opposition organizations involved in terrorist activities in Ethiopia. And Ethiopia has been an-all-too-often target for terrorist activity. It was only last month that five tourists were deliberately murdered by an Eritrean-backed organization from across the border in Eritrea, and others kidnapped.

Kristoff starts off his piece with typical journalistic exaggeration about the apparent sufferings of the two Swedish journalists in prison in Ethiopia and now serving what are certainly very tough sentences after admitting illegally crossing into the Ogaden area of the Somali Regional State. Not surprisingly, Kristoff harks back to the case of his colleague, Jeffery Gettleman, who went into the same area in 2007 and claimed to have found a pattern of torture and rape by Ethiopian security forces before being expelled after a few days. Gettleman's "evidence" for his claims was exclusively provided by the Eritrean-backed opposition group he was travelling with. It was a group which, *inter alia*, slaughtered 74 men, women and children working at an oil exploration camp, together with 9 Chinese workers, many died in their beds, indiscriminately killed in the attack in April 2007. Over the years, this group has been responsible for the murder of thousands of civilians who opposed them, as well as government officials and police; they have blown up civilian buses and other vehicles, planted land mines on pastoralist routes and burnt villages. These are the people Martin Schibbye and John Persson went into the region with, and despite Kristoff's claims, they weren't 'bravely' trying to investigate human rights abuses, they were sneaking in illegally (as they admitted) to try and dig up some dirt on a Swedish oil company. This wasn't a display of courage; it was, at the very least, quite frankly stupid. Defending them certainly suggests double standards are at work.

The sentences might seem harsh, but Kristoff might have considered the whole issue of terrorism, and the response to it, in states which have suffered extensively from terrorism over a number of years as Ethiopia has, facing several terrorist groups armed and funded by a neighbouring state. The atrocities seldom reach the international press, possibly because foreigners are seldom involved. No one reports on the dozens regularly killed or kidnapped along the Ethiopian Eritrean border by Eritrean-backed and organized opposition movements or the many hundreds killed and maimed by the ONLF in the Ogaden.

In his blog, Kristoff does wonder whether it is "parochial when we journalists focus on other journalists in trouble". His answer is to claim that journalists are essentially the only way to provide accountability in a country like Ethiopia which he claims has no reliable institutions to look after human rights and create checks and balances, hasn't a free election system, independent courts and so on. Actually it does have an Office of the Ombudsman and a Human Rights Commission, it does have an independent judiciary and it has held successful multi-party elections in 2005, 2008, and 2010. The failure to note any of this certainly begs a few questions about the behaviour of journalists even those writing for the New York Times (though its record of accuracy has been called into question in the past occasionally, hasn't it?). It also and most importantly reinforces the necessity for getting the facts right and checking the allegations, claims and the political affiliations of one's sources.

Kristoff claims he doesn't want to see foreign aid cut off, because it is saving lives. Well and good, but in that case he shouldn't be producing ill-informed, inaccurate articles which will be used by the people who supplied the information to try and induce exactly that aim. Almost all the comments on Kristoff's blog were opposition supporters disinterested in the accuracy of his reporting and only interested in mindlessly insulting his targets. To allow oneself to be used in this way is lazy and incompetent: it certainly doesn't inspire confidence in these incoherent and fallacious musings.

## No sign of any policy changes by Eritrea's "Big Brother"

In the late nineteenth century, when the once mighty Ottoman Empire was in a state of collapse, its rapidly failing health gave rise to the phrase "The Sick Man of Europe". Its bleak situation was in sharp contrast to the economic prosperity and political strength that prevailed in the rest of Europe. Today, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa, many countries are moving forward on the path of economic growth and political stability, while there is one notable exception moving in the opposite direction. That country is Eritrea. No other country in our continent today is more eligible for the unflattering designation of the "Sick Man of Africa" than Eritrea.

The country's record of the past 20 years speaks for itself. Economically speaking, under normal conditions of governance, Eritrea could do much better. It certainly has the potential to become a far better place in which to live. However, governance in Eritrea today is far from being normal. The country is run by one of the most repressive regimes in the world, a regime that controls everything. The result is that it is a country that is going nowhere politically or economically.

Nothing much is happening in Eritrea by way of economic activity. Whatever small-scale industry existed in the past has deteriorated to a point of virtual disappearance, partly due to lack of any market. The reality of the agricultural sector is that it is incapable of matching the government's exaggerated propaganda about food self-sufficiency. Tourists are not stampeding to visit what is widely seen as a pariah state. Local levels of saving are insufficient to provide the capital accumulation required for investment. This might suggest the need for an aggressive investment promotion policy, but taking such action to launch any proactive measure to attract foreign direct investment is in itself a concept that is totally alien to the Eritrean government. The problem is compounded by the dwindling levels of remittances provided by expatriate Eritreans. Nevertheless, their support to a significant section of the Eritrean population remains critical to the economy as a whole.

There is one partial exception to the economic gloom - the mining sector. There have been some promising mineral discoveries and last year the Canadian company Nevsum brought the Bisha gold project into production. However, it remains far from clear how much this will be allowed to impact on the economy as a whole. President Isaias has already warned the population at large not to expect too much from mineral development. At the same time, and of much greater concern, perhaps, are the stories of virtual slave labour that are coming out of the mining areas, with the use of national service conscripts forced to work in the mining industry for virtually no wages. Many of the thousands of refugees who cross the border every year into Sudan or Ethiopia have horrific stories to tell about their treatment in the mines, and elsewhere.

The political situation could hardly be worse. Eritrea is a one-party state. The name of the party, PFDJ (Popular Front for Democracy and Justice), is, in fact, a complete misnomer. There is neither democracy nor justice in Eritrea, nor, it might be added, is the Front popular. Indeed, the party has lost whatever popular appeal it once had and in strict political parlance it cannot even be called a "front". The country has no constitution, no elective parliament, and the National Assembly carries out no real activity. No elections are

carried out, there is no genuine system of justice, and there are no private newspapers of any kind. In Eritrea, listening to gospel songs is a serious offence and playing Ethiopian music is a punishable crime. It is one of the few countries in the world today where prominent citizens including ministers can be detained in secret locations for more than ten years without ever appearing in court, let alone facing a judge and with their whereabouts unknown to relatives, Red Cross officials or anybody else.

Eritrea's current international standing has hit an all-time low. Its relations with most of its neighbours and its regional organization are exceptionally poor. Its interaction with aid organizations has always been acrimonious and is now virtually non-existent. On its own evaluation the Eritrean government appears proudest of the long list of wars it has initiated and the troubles it has stirred, and continues to stir, in the Horn of Africa. It has made it clear it does not regret the several border incidents it provoked with Sudan in the mid 90's; it feels no shame at having crossed the Red Sea to pick a fight with Yemen in 1996; it still tries to deny it started the bloody war with Ethiopia in 1998, even though it was unequivocally identified as the culprit by the Claims Commission established under the Algiers Agreement; in total defiance of corresponding UN resolutions calling on it to withdraw its forces, it is sitting on the areas of sovereign Djiboutian territory which it invaded in 2008.

The regime has also pursued its destructive agenda of trying to destabilize Ethiopia and other countries in the region by using funds from other sources with an interest in such an agenda. Indeed, it is hard to find a dissident group, an armed insurgency or a terrorist organization in the Horn of Africa that does not enjoy the hospitality and sponsorship of the Eritrean government. Eritrea is one of the best friends of Al-Shabaab, an organization that openly admits that it is affiliated to Al Qaida. Numerous killings and kidnappings of innocent people and widespread destruction of property in Ethiopia, in Uganda and in Kenya have been committed by groups that are trained, armed and instructed by the Eritrean regime. It is not surprising that it has earned the dubious distinction of being a regional trouble maker, but despite this its president and his regime have chosen to live in denial and self-deception. They appear to believe that their actions can be washed away by simple denials. Indeed, Eritrean government officials show considerable nerve, and a very thick skin, continuing to deny the undeniable and defend the indefensible.

Eritrea is run by a ruthless dictator, whose errant demeanour distinguishes him from other African leaders. He spends most of his time plotting the destabilization of his country's neighbours. When not involved in this, he orders his propaganda machinery to organize marathon interview sessions for him. The views he expresses in those interviews are bizarre. Universally accepted principles such as parliamentary democracy, free press, the rule of law, accountability and transparency are no more than western theatrical performances for which he has no appetite. Instead he harangues his audience about the country's economic progress, freedom, plentiful food supply, all of which have been achieved through "self-reliance", and none of which actually exist. These bogus achievements in fact only exist in the realm of propaganda. They have nothing to do with the reality of Eritrea today.

The line between fact and fiction in Eritrean government statements has become so blurred that the only way to understand the regime and its president is through the looking-glass of

George Orwell. Many of the characters in George Orwell's political satire, "1984", fit all too neatly into Eritrean politics of today. There is a Big Brother, who sees and hears everything (complete with dark eyes and moustache!), the Ministry of Plenty (Miniplenty) whose job it is to churn out grossly exaggerated production figures and deceive people into thinking that their standard of living is rising when in fact it is falling, the Ministry of Truth (Minitrue) which is charged with the task of controlling information, to rewrite history and align it with Big Brother's statements, and the dreaded Ministry of Love (Miniluv) which persecutes, tortures and kills Big Brother's opponents.

The most depressing aspect of Eritrea today is to see how far the regime has been able to get away with so much. The countries of the Horn of Africa have been relentless in appealing to the international community to take the necessary action to force Eritrea to become a law-abiding nation. The African Union, the United Nations, IGAD and other international organizations have made it clear to Eritrea on several occasions that its behaviour is completely unacceptable. An investigation by the UN Monitoring Group found plenty of incriminating evidence linking the Eritrean regime to destabilization activities and terrorist organizations in the Horn of Africa. The result is that the UN Security Council has slapped sanctions on Eritrea passed under Resolutions 1907 and 2023. Eritrea has ignored it all. Its leader and his government have chosen to live in denial and continue to make the lives of its neighbours difficult. Last month's killing of five tourists and kidnapping of others in the Afar region of Ethiopia, very close to the border with Eritrea, is a glaring manifestation of the regime's disdain for the sanctions already imposed for its behaviour. It is apparent that there is need for more effective sanctions, properly applied, that will convince the Eritrean government that its rogue activity entails real consequences. Ethiopia certainly hopes this will happen, and happen soon. Failing that, it will be obliged to consider exercising its legitimate right of self-defence in accordance with international law.

## **News and Views**

### **Sudan and South Sudan agree to resume talks**

Substantial efforts were made by IGAD member states and by the African Union during the AU Summit over the weekend [28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> Jan] to encourage Sudan and South Sudan to continue their negotiations on oil and other outstanding issues. Last week South Sudan rejected any resumption of talks with Khartoum unless the ships carrying the oil impounded by Khartoum were released. South Sudan shut down most of its oil production in protest after Sudan seized oil to compensate for what it said were unpaid transit fees following a dispute over costs. AU proposals to break the deadlock have so far failed to get agreement. On Tuesday [31<sup>st</sup> Jan], however, Thabo Mbeki, chairman of the AU High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), was able to announce that the two sides had agreed to start talks again on 10<sup>th</sup> February. He said the panel had talked to President Salva Kiir and to President Al-Bashir and they had agreed to continue the negotiations. Oil is perhaps the most immediate problem, but other major issues include the meeting of the joint political alliance and security mechanisms to discuss security issues relating to both countries, the steps necessary to demarcate the border and resolve the outstanding problems concerning the disputed border areas including Abyei, and the matter of citizenship and nationality to regularize the position of southerners in the north and northerners in the south as the

agreed interim transitional period ends in two months. Mr Mbeki urged the two countries to return to negotiations in a new spirit of good neighbourliness. It will be needed. Yesterday, President Salva Kiir warned of renewed conflict with Sudan if the negotiations do not include a deal on other key issues, including Abyei. Any agreement South Sudan would consider signing must be comprehensive and cover all the outstanding issues, he said. UN Secretary-General, Ban ki-Moon, said at the weekend that the tension between Sudan and South Sudan and the row over the oil had become a major threat to regional peace and security.

### **The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Report 2011**

The latest IOM Report “Communicating Effectively about Migration” examines the state of migrants across the world. Launched by IOM Director General, William Lacy Swing, on the margin of the AU Summit, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ato Hailemariam gave a keynote address stressing the importance of launching the report at a time when migrants are increasingly suffering from distorted, unbalanced and uninformed perceptions and attitudes of the public both in their countries of origin and their countries of destination. The challenges they face are overwhelming, often life-threatening. Migrants, in particular women and children, are vulnerable to human trafficking and often unfairly portrayed as a threat to local resources. Deputy Prime Minister Hailemariam underlined the need for governments, civil societies, international organizations and the media individually and collectively to play a constructive role in addressing these wrong perceptions. He emphasized the need to make populations aware of the positive impact migrants have on the countries where they live and work. The Deputy Prime Minister noted Ethiopia had a long-standing tradition of hospitality towards foreigners. It always welcomed those seeking assistance, shelter and refuge from violence and natural calamities. It currently hosted some three hundred thousand refugees mainly from neighbouring countries. They included 35,000 Sudanese who had fled from violence in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States, half of whom have recently returned voluntarily to their homeland in Blue Nile State under the auspices of the IOM. The Deputy Prime Minister reiterated Ethiopia’s readiness to continue to collaborate closely with the relevant international agencies and donor community in providing assistance to all those who needed it. He also took the opportunity to thank the IOM for its assistance to Ethiopian nationals who had been stranded in Libya and Yemen in organizing voluntary repatriation programmes and providing transport, shelter, food and medical assistance.

### **Ethiopia opens a new Honorary Consulate in India**

On Tuesday [31<sup>st</sup> Jan], Ethiopia officially opened a new Honorary Consulate office in the city of Chennai in the presence of government officials, business leaders and chamber representatives. Ethiopia’s Ambassador to India, Gennet Zewde, said the new office would enable Ethiopia to attract business and investment in priority sectors such as textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, manufacturing and automobiles, as these areas are found in abundance in Chennai. Ethiopia offered ample opportunities for investment in these areas and in dairy products and tourism and the Ambassador noted that Ethiopia’s Tourism Minister would be visiting India next week to promote the benefits of investment in Ethiopia’s tourism sector. She emphasized that the World Bank, the IMF and the Economist

had all forecast that Ethiopia would be the third fastest growing economy in the world this year after China and India. Ethiopia, she said, is a developing economy planning to transform its economy from an agricultural to an industrial basis in order to join the middle-income economies in the next decade or so. Ambassador Gennet also noted that a number of Indian firms were already involved in agriculture, leather and leather products, mining and manufacturing in Ethiopia. India in fact was one of the major sources of foreign investment in Ethiopia, and would have a significant contribution in lifting Ethiopia to another level. The Ambassador also mentioned that Chennai would soon be connected directly by flights to Ethiopian cities; already there was a cargo connection to Addis Ababa. The new Honorary Consul for Ethiopia in Chennai, Manikam Ramaswami, described Ethiopia as the fastest growing country in Africa, very safe with near zero violence, transparent policies, cost-free transaction administration and good locations. Above all it had India-friendly people and was a favourite destination for Indian investors. He said the key objective of establishing the consulate was to develop the bilateral relationship by promoting trade and investment in Ethiopia. Meanwhile, the second Ethio-India foreign office consultations convened in Addis Ababa last week with a view to further expanding already excellent relations both at bilateral and multilateral levels. Ethiopia has been invited to the India-Africa Technology Ministerial Conference taking place in India from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> March and to the India-Africa Trade Ministers' Conference to be held on 17<sup>th</sup> March when India plans to propose the launching of the India-Africa joint business council.

### **Eritrean Patriarch's health reportedly deteriorating say opposition**

The Executive Office of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change announced on Monday [30<sup>th</sup> Jan] that it had confirmation that the 85-year-old Abune Antonios, "the legitimate Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Eritrea" was "sick and in a worrisome condition." Abune Antonios was illegally removed from his patriarchal position and forcibly detained at an undisclosed location by the Eritrean government in 2007. The Government claims he has retired to a monastery to pray. Last week, the Holy Synod of the Œcumenical Canonical Orthodox Church Worldwide (ŒCOCW) called for the regime in Asmara to free Abune Antonios as well as several thousand other detained Christians in Eritrea. The International Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church Dioceses in Europe and in North America have also called for the Patriarch's release. Now the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change, set up at a recent meeting of opposition organizations, has called for "immediate freedom for his Holiness" and for him to regain "his rightful place" among his compatriots from other faiths who have raised their voices, calling on the entire Eritrean people, Christians and Muslims alike, to unanimously condemn the actions of the Eritrean government against religious freedom. Abune Antonios was removed from office because he expressed strong concern over the growing interference of the government in religious affairs. He refused government demands to excommunicate three thousand members of the Medhane Alem Sunday School movement and in turn demanded the government should release Christians imprisoned for their faith and accused of treason.

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