

A Week in the Horn

20th January 2012

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A Joint Ethiopia Kenya Consultative Meeting on Somalia....

On Thursday and Friday last week [12th and 13th Jan], the IGAD Secretariat, through the Office of the Facilitator for Somali Peace and National Reconciliation, convened a two-day meeting between Ethiopian and Kenyan military and other officials. Those attending included officials from Ethiopia and Kenya's Ministries and Departments of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security. Others present included representatives from DfID and the IGAD Secretariat. The meeting was chaired by the IGAD Office of the Facilitator for the Somali Peace and National Reconciliation and it was facilitated by an expert on Somalia.

The meeting was held under the process of implementing various IGAD resolutions, including those contained in the communiqués of the 15th and 19th Extraordinary sessions of the IGAD Assembly of the Heads of State and Government on Somalia and the 41st Extraordinary meeting of IGAD's Executive Council of Ministers. The aim was to work out and articulate coordination and cooperation mechanisms and produce a common strategy to build on and extend the gains made by the forces of both countries in support of the stabilisation of Somalia. Both countries, sharing long borders with Somalia, have a common interest in helping bring about a stable state in Somalia by combining diplomatic, political and military strategies in support of AMISOM and the TFG.

The discussions centred on the objectives and priorities for the overall political and military resolution of Somalia's problems, but it also included detailed consideration of the stabilisation of the specific theatre of operations in Gedo, Middle and Lower Juba regions. The talks were guided by the need to weaken the capacity of Al-Shabaab, one element of which involves denying it the capacity to extract revenue from Kismayo. Other factors include the need to provide for the protection of the local population, the necessity to engage the local elite and to support the establishment of an inclusive and broadly acceptable local administration.

Overall, it was agreed the objectives needed to include the creation of common, legitimate and mutually acceptable political arrangements; political reconciliation; co-ordinated security arrangements; legitimate, representative and effective local administrations or institutions both at regional and district level; and a commitment for the area also to engage in the national process. All of this must inform and complement military operations in the three regions. The meeting also decided that a joint Ethiopia-Kenya committee should be established under IGAD to facilitate the implementation of these stabilisation objectives in these regions. It was agreed that one of its first priorities will be organizing a conference involving the main regional actors including the TFG, the militias of Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a and Ras Kamboni, political elements, and representatives and elders of the clans which are resident in the three regions.

Meanwhile, Kenya's Minister, of State for Defence, Yusuf Haji, has underlined that while Kenya's assistance to the TFG has created conditions that would allow the international community to help bring lasting peace, Kenya is unwilling to continue underwriting the financial burden of an open-ended war. The Minister said the notion that Kenya's ultimate goal was Kismayo was imaginary. "The Kismayo question is for the international community to decide. Kenya was not going to fix the entire Somalia problem. We did not have the intention of going into Somalia if we were not provoked. We feel we have attained our intention of pushing Al-Shabaab away from our borders," said Mr. Haji. Last Saturday, Al-Shabaab named a new administration for Kismayo after dismissing both its governor, Sheikh Hasan Yakub, and its head of preaching, Sheikh Abdinasir.

A Kenyan military spokesman has stressed that Kenya's mission has always primarily been to degrade Al-Shabaab and reduce its capacity to threaten Kenya. Colonel Oguna told a press conference in Nairobi on the occasion of the ninetieth day of Kenya's activities in Somalia that Al-Shabaab was demoralized and in total disarray. He claimed Al-Shabaab had lost some 700 militants since the start of the Kenyan operation. This week, according to Major Chirchir, the Defence Forces spokesperson, the Kenyan air force was in action on Sunday [15th Jan], targeting Al-Shabaab positions at Jilib, 120 kms north of Kismayo and at Bibi south of Afmadow where eight vehicles, including four technicals were destroyed. Al-Shabaab defences around Afmadow were also hit on Tuesday [17th]. In an attack on Tatar, Major Chirchir said, Kenyan gunships destroyed an Al-Shabaab command centre and logistics base, killing six commanders and destroying four vehicles.

.....and a Preparatory meeting in London for next month's UK Conference on Somalia

The UK is hosting an international conference on Somalia on 23rd February, with the aim, in Prime Minister Cameron's words, of pulling together the international effort. A preparatory meeting was held in London last week attended by most interested countries including representatives from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and the African Union as well as Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Qatar, Sweden, Turkey, the UAE, the UK, the US and the European Union. The meeting considered a host of issues ranging from the political process, security, local stability, piracy, counter-terrorism and international coordination to humanitarian assistance. It emphasized the importance of Somali ownership, the need for implementation of the Roadmap, the Kampala Accord and the Garowe Principles, and necessity of keeping to the transition timelines.

On local stability, the importance of keeping the political and military processes linked and of maintaining the military gains of AMISOM, the TFG and neighbouring countries was stressed. The raising of the numbers of AMISOM and obtaining clear and reliable funding for it was discussed. The roles of the Core Group, the International Contact Group and its various working groups were considered. The need to fight piracy on land as well as at sea was emphasized, as was the setting up of a judicial programme in Somalia and the tracking of financial flows from piracy. The meeting noted the UAE's counter-piracy conference last year and the conference Kenya will host next month to give input for the London conference. Turkey is also holding a conference on Somalia in June.

The preparatory meeting also discussed terrorism and the shared threat it poses to the region and the international community. It recognized the need for close co-operation and partnership to fight terrorism, and there was general rejection of any idea of starting dialogue with extremist groups. On the humanitarian side, there was agreement for continued needs-based support and basic social services for refugees as well to find durable solutions for the crisis.

The Ethiopian delegation was led by Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, who stressed the Political Roadmap, the Kampala Accord and the Garowe Principles had been agreed by a wide spectrum of the people of Somalia and endorsed by IGAD member states. They were the best options to expedite the political process and the security situation. He emphasised that local stability could be achieved by accommodating all those who renounced violence but the notion of giving political space to Al-Shabaab or holding dialogue with it amounted now to giving a lifeline to an organization on the run. Al-Shabaab remained opposed to peace or cooperation and was still a serious threat to the region and more widely. This was a view shared by the US, Turkey, the UAE and others.

Ambassador Berhane also emphasized the necessity of supporting the decision of the AU's Peace and Security Council to expand AMISOM urgently. He noted that the training programmes for TFG security forces outside Somalia had not produced the desired results and emphasized the need to undertake these inside the country in the future with country-specific programmes. On piracy he stressed that the ports currently under pirate control should be brought under TFG and local administrative control. The revenues from these ports should be redirected to benefit the TFG and local administrations. On the humanitarian side, Ambassador Berhane stressed that intervention needed to include reconstruction and reintegration of the Internally Displaced People. He also suggested that refugee-hosting countries, including Ethiopia and Kenya, should be assisted to tackle the multitude of additional challenges they now faced, including environmental degradation.

Five tourists killed in terrorist attack near Eritrean border

Last Monday night [16th Jan] an armed group of between thirty and forty men attacked a group of tourists who were camped on the slopes of the Erta Ale volcano in the Afar Regional State. The attack took place some 30 kms from the Eritrean border and the attackers, who came from Eritrea, retreated back across the border after their attack. Following the incident, the Government issued a press statement.

“On Monday, 16th January, a group of 27 tourists travelling in the Afar Regional State were attacked by gunmen. It was an act of open terrorism resulting in the death of five people with others injured and kidnapped. Those killed were two Germans, two Hungarians and an Austrian. The injured included people from Italy, Belgium and the UK. Two Germans and two Ethiopians were kidnapped.

“The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia would like to express its deep condolences to the families of those killed in this cruel attack. It will do everything possible to try and get those taken prisoner released as soon as possible. It is already clear that the attack was carried out with the direct involvement of the Eritrean Government. There is concern that the people who have been kidnapped might be taken across the border into Eritrea. On previous occasions when tourists have been kidnapped, the Eritrean government had tried to use the prisoners as a bargaining chip in its diplomatic activities.

“Monday’s incident is yet another indication of how determined the regime in Asmara is to continue its destabilizing activities in the region. Indeed, it is an indication of the failure of the international community to rein in the regime. The Government of Ethiopia believes that this terrorist act is intended to coincide with the upcoming African Union Summit being held in Addis Ababa at the end of the month. It might be recalled that it was almost exactly a year ago that a major bombing plot was foiled in Addis Ababa, intended to disrupt the African Union Summit last January.

“It is an open secret that the regime in Asmara focuses its ‘diplomatic’ efforts on trying to intimidate and terrorize the international community rather than operate through normal diplomatic norms. It is also becoming obvious that the international community's failure to take serious action against the regime is effectively reinforcing Eritrea’s recalcitrant behaviour.

“The Government of Ethiopia is of the view the time is overdue for the international community to become serious about the destabilizing role of the Eritrean regime in the region. This latest cowardly attack against innocent tourists clearly shows Asmara’s contempt for the notions of law and customs.

“The Ethiopian Government's tolerance towards a regime that openly supports terrorist activity is inevitably wearing thinner by the day. The Government cannot and should not sit idly by while the regime in Asmara continues to sponsor acts of terror within Ethiopia's territory with impunity. It will be obliged to take whatever action is necessary to stop the activities of the Eritrean regime once and for all unless the international community assumes its responsibilities and takes the necessary steps to bring this abominable behaviour to an end. The Ethiopian Government believes that it is still not too late for international action. At the same time, the Government would like to reiterate that the international community has never been the last line of defence against Eritrea’s destabilizing activities. It should be made clear that Ethiopia has the right to defend itself and it will do so if necessary.”

EAL rejects the Lebanese report into the crash of ET409

On Tuesday 17th Jan], Lebanon's Ministry of Public Works finally released the investigation report into the crash of ET409 nearly two years ago on 25th January 2010. The report was expected to reveal the cause of the crash which occurred shortly after the Ethiopian Airlines plane took off from Beirut airport, killing all 90 people on board. The report claims that the probable cause of the crash was "the flight crew's mismanagement" and a "failure in basic piloting skills." It suggested that chronic fatigue might have affected the captain's performance and that the crew might have been affected by a meal they ate in Beirut. It noted that the plane had taken off in heavy rain and icing conditions but said it did not encounter any severe turbulence or lightning strike.

Ethiopian Airlines immediately rejected the report pointing out that the final report had disappointingly ignored a significant number of important facts and reached wrong conclusions. Ato Tewolde Gebremariam, the Chief Executive Officer of Ethiopian Airlines said that the investigation process over the previous two years had merely been used to justify the original speculation of pilot error made by the Lebanese authorities even before the investigation started. The Lebanese Minister of Transport had speculated a day after the crash that the cause was the pilot's failure to follow instructions from the airport control tower and ruled out sabotage. This indicated that the outcome of the investigation had been prejudged: "The investigation process was guided and was monitored to prove and justify the speculations made by the officials." Ato Tewolde said the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority had added its comments to the report expressing its disagreement with the investigation process and with the final report.

Ato Tewolde said the final report was biased, lacking in evidence, incomplete and did not present a full account of the accident. It contained numerous factual inaccuracies, internal contradictions and hypothetical statements that were not supported by the evidence. He pointed out that significant eyewitnesses, including Air Traffic Control officers and other airline pilots, had witnessed a ball of fire on the aircraft. All recordings of the Digital Flight Data Recorder and the Cockpit Voice Recorder had stopped at 1,300 feet and the aircraft had disappeared from radar at that point. The last sound on the cockpit voice recorder was also a loud noise like an explosion. All this clearly indicated the possibility that the plane had disintegrated due to an explosion in the air related to other causes than pilot error. Indeed, such an explosion could have been caused by "a shoot-down, sabotage or lightning strike." In this context, the Ethiopian Civil Aviation comments note that the investigation failed to follow its own procedures properly, including allowing joint technical reviews and analysis work. In terms of the report's rejection of possible sabotage it also noted that 92% of the wreckage remained on the sea bed and no attempt was made to raise it. The bodies which were recovered were buried without medical examination or autopsy. Lebanon also refused access to passenger profiles, baggage screening records, or airport CCTV records, all of which could have provided checks on the possibilities of sabotage.

The Chief Executive noted that while the report alleged the captain's actions, statements and performance were the result of spatial disorientation and loss of situational awareness, in fact the Voice and Data Recorders showed that the pilot was making inputs in an effort to control the aircraft. This contradicted the assertions of the report that he was incapacitated.

Ato Tewolde also noted that both pilots were properly trained and qualified and the captain had over 20 year's experience and the crew pairing was in accordance with approved policy. The crew duty and rest time was also in accordance with regulations. Ato Tewolde said that any characterization of the pilots contrary to this was "pure fabrication that cannot stand any scrutiny."

The history and experience of Ethiopian Airlines provides an unequalled record of 65 years as one of Africa's leading carriers unrivalled for its efficiency, safety and operational success. It can with justice pride itself on the high standards of its workforce including its pilots, technicians and other professionals. The investigation report should have taken note of this and concentrated on uncovering the real causes of the crash rather than apparently trying to hide the facts.

The 3rd Ethio-Saudi Joint Ministerial Commission meeting in Addis Ababa

The 3rd Ethio-Saudi Joint Commission Meeting was held here on Tuesday [17th Jan] with the respective ministers of Agriculture representing their countries during the two days of discussions. During the opening session, Ethiopia's Agriculture Minister, Ato Tefera Deribew, expressed his satisfaction at the existing level of bilateral cooperation between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia which is steadily gaining momentum. The Minister recalled that Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia had signed a general agreement covering economic, trade, investment, technical, cultural, youth and sports issues in October 2002. He added that in order to follow up implementation of this General Agreement which had been ratified by the parliaments of the respective countries, they had agreed to establish a joint ministerial commission to meet every third year. The first and second Joint Ministerial Commission meetings had been held in 2004 and 2009, and based on the outlined areas of cooperation, various project proposals had been submitted to Saudi Arabia and had been or were in process of implementation.

Among these were the Azezo-Metema, Assosa-Kurmuk and Gedo-Menebegna road projects and the Jijiga-Degehabur rural electrification project which had been launched with soft loan support from the Saudi Fund. The 3rd Joint Ministerial Commission meeting outlined further areas of future cooperation between the two countries, and the Minister said it also enabled Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia to identify possibilities of medium-term cooperation for implementation through on-going dialogue with the Saudi Fund. The Minister noted that Saudi Arabia is one of the main importers of Ethiopia's coffee, pulses, oil seeds, fruits and vegetables, live animals, meat and meat products, cereals, spices and natural gum. Ethiopia's main imports from Saudi Arabia include most of its fuel requirements, paper, textile products and carpets. There is an agreement on avoidance of double taxation which will help to facilitate the activities of both airlines as well as increase demand for the movement of goods and people between the two countries. Saudi Arabia's Minister of Agriculture, Dr Fahd bin Abdulrahman Balghunaim, emphasized that cooperation between Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia was continuing to grow particularly in the Foreign Direct Investment sector. The Minister stressed that meetings of this kind contributed to further strengthen the existing bilateral cooperation in all areas. Since the establishment of the Joint Ministerial Commission he noted that there had been successful achievements on both sides, and further and fruitful progress every year in cooperation. During his visit the

Minister also met with Prime Minister Meles and held talks on bilateral relations and on ways and means to further consolidate Ethiopia/Saudi Arabian relations. He said that his government was keen to be engaged in the agro-investment sector, especially in agro-processing. Following agreements between the two governments, several Saudi Arabian investors had engaged in the agriculture and other sectors, he said.

Resettlement and HRW's unsound and shoddy methodology

This week, Human Rights Watch produced yet another of its deliberately emotive reports on Ethiopia, this time claiming the government under its villagization programme was forcibly relocating some 70,000 'indigenous' people in the Gambella Regional State to new villages that lack adequate food, land for farming, health care or educational facilities. In its report entitled "Waiting here for Death: Forced Displacement and Villagization in Ethiopia's Gambella Region", HRW also claimed villagization was intended to clear the way for large-scale commercial land investment and that donors, at least indirectly, were funding the programme.

In fact, the Government resettlement programme is part of its strategy to ensure pastoralist areas of the country benefit from development and are provided with the necessary socio-economic infrastructures. So far some 125,000 households have been resettled in Gambella, Benishangul and Somali regions, and out of these 20,000 are in Gambella region. The Gambella Regional State action plan for the region provides for infrastructural development, including schools, health posts, water schemes and roads. The programme has a three-year life-span and the inhabitants were fully consulted before any action was taken. Under the programme according to the Federal Affairs Ministry in Gambella region alone, 22 health posts, 19 schools, 18 veterinary clinics and 30 grinding mills have been built, over 70 irrigation schemes set up, more than 400 water pumps supplied and some 128 kms of road constructed. The success of the programme can be seen in the willingness of people to be included in it.

HRW's latest report is one of a series over several years either written by HRW itself and by other organizations to which HRW has given its imprimatur, unsuccessfully trying to attack the policies of the Ethiopian government, claiming the use of aid for political purposes, enforced villagization or similar activities. These have even gone so far as to call on the international community to end developmental and humanitarian aid to the country. These reports have been successively and comprehensively demolished by donors and their embassies in Ethiopia and by NGOs operating in the areas where these alleged activities have been taking place. Last year, the UK's Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell, even felt it necessary to emphasize that he rejected Human Rights Watch's methodology as "unsound"; earlier, his department had been obliged to insist that the BBC's Newsnight programme broadcast a correction to a report to emphasize that "DfID officials in Ethiopia did make regular field visits to look into allegations of aid distortion. Those field visits – and dozens of similar visits by other donor agencies – made clear that there was no systemic distortion for political reasons in the distribution of aid." In response to earlier HRW allegations, the Donor's Development Assistance Group (DAG) underlined that it did "not concur with the conclusions of the HRW report regarding widespread systematic abuse of development aid in Ethiopia". Individual donors and NGOs

have repeatedly felt it necessary to disassociate themselves from unfounded and spurious HRW allegations.

Despite these constant and consistent refutations of HRW's reports, and Ethiopia's own detailed rebuttals of HRW's claims, HRW's sole response has typically been to ignore any criticisms, and suggest, as in this latest report, that any other evidence, from whatever source, however reputable, should be disregarded when it disagrees with HRW: "In early 2011 as the programme got underway, several donors were concerned and commissioned their own assessments of villagization. While these assessments underscored concerns with poor planning and issues relating to food insecurity, donors were not overly alarmed with what they found, and deemed the processes, as noted below, to be voluntary. This finding is inconsistent with Human Rights Watch's field research." Again and again, this is the only argument HRW employs in response to the fact that government, donors or other independent bodies have repeatedly investigated these issues and been satisfied. It merely repeats: "this finding is inconsistent with HRW's field research". Everybody else's evidence is to be disregarded. Only HRW's claims should be accepted!

In fact, as Andrew Mitchell indicated, there are very serious questions to be asked over HRW's methodology and these must seriously affect how its reports are considered. HRW, for example, always refuses to provide details of its interviewees, their names or their background, to identify where either interviews have taken place or give any details of when and where alleged incidents occur. It claims this is for the safety of informants, and while this may have some validity in certain circumstances, it does, of course, have the very useful effect for HRW of making it impossible for others to check its findings. It also makes it difficult if not impossible for the authorities to investigate, verify or respond to alleged criminal or illegal activities, which in turn allows HRW to complain about government failures to respond.

It also makes it impossible to check whether HRW is covering a random or representative sample of population, of relevant issues or indeed of areas involved. It claims it tries to interview a wide range of people across gender, age, ethnicity, urban and rural, and geographic lines but there is no evidence of this. Indeed although HRW claims to have carried out over a hundred interviews altogether in the Gambella region as well as in the Dabaab refugee camp in Kenya and in Nairobi, in May and June last year, it is clear from footnotes that well over half of these were carried out in the Dabaab camp in Kenya. So less than fifty interviews were carried out in Gambella to evaluate a programme that HRW claims is dealing with 70,000 people and less than half the districts involved were covered. It is not a level of investigation that can support HRW's claims.

In some respects, the surprise is that HRW found so few critics. It is no secret that there were some problems as the programme got under way and some organizational hiccups. There were some cases where facilities weren't fully in place before arrival, and others had difficulty over water supplies. Not everybody was satisfied when they arrived at the new villages. There was no concealment. Nevertheless, it is clear that the majority is settling in their new homes and it is clear that problems have been neither widespread nor systematic. Despite all its efforts, HRW has simply failed to provide evidence that this is the case. Its statements on government policy as usual are based less on known actions or actual

research than on previously reached positions, frequently related to opposition claims. It is very clear from the pattern of reports HRW has produced in recent years, and indeed from the admission of former HRW researchers, that HRW has long decided that the government of Ethiopia is “bad”. Everything in terms of villagization and other development programmes is to be interpreted in terms of this assertion. It is hardly coincidental that time and again, donors, NGOs and other independent visitors have consistently failed to find any of the evidence that HRW claims is easily available.

HRW never allows independent witnesses to its activities nor is it prepared to accept the normal academic process of ‘peer review’, always demanding that its own allegations be taken on trust. It refuses to accept the evidence of any other organizations, continuing to accept its own claims, even if everyone else disagrees with it. It refuses to give details of its interview techniques which frequently seem to involve asking leading questions and making very clear what answers are expected. Hectoring, even threatening, are words that leap to mind.

Significantly, HRW never appears to investigate the political persuasion of its alleged sources, or consider the possibility that its informants might have political motives or provide information for others to do so. It never appears to consider whether its own informants might have been pressured nor does it evaluate its own local employees, including interpreters, for political interests or vulnerability. In fact, HRW simply never bothers to relate its ‘evidence’ to the political situation. This is an extraordinary omission, particularly as a recent academic paper described the Gambella Regional State as one of the most conflict-ridden regions in Ethiopia. The paper actually claims that “the dominant pattern of inter-group relations in the region is conflict”. This may well be an exaggeration but the fact remains that HRW totally ignores long-standing stresses within the society all of which impacts on the information people are prepared to provide. Equally relevant is the existence of certain opposition elements in the region that have been both armed and supported by Eritrea at various times.

HRW claims it finds “significant differences between interviews conducted outside of Ethiopia, where people are free to speak without fear of retribution, and interviews conducted in Ethiopia, where fear and intimidation limit the freedom to speak openly”. This is hardly true of Ethiopia, but even more it displays breathtaking naivety in the apparent belief that people in the refugee camps are free to speak openly. It is well known that opposition groups operate in all the Dabaab camps as they do in Nairobi and in the Diaspora. This is a point known to seriously affect earlier HRW reports where HRW has allowed itself to be used by terrorist organizations like the so-called Ogaden National Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Front.

HRW repeatedly uses shoddy journalistic techniques, including exaggerated and emotive headlines and phrases designed to attract media or fund-raising attention. One example is the title of this report - “Waiting here for Death: Forced Displacement and ‘Villagization’ in Ethiopia’s Gambella Region”. The ‘evidence’ in the report scarcely supports the claim. At one point the report does briefly, if grudgingly, acknowledge that communities which refuse to move are allowed to stay put. This clearly underlines the voluntary nature of the programme. HRW, which has claimed the programme is involuntary, then immediately adds

the un-provable caveat “thus far”. This is typical of its deliberate, and disreputable, tactics to mislead.

HRW is either terrifyingly naïve and often, quite frankly, stupid. Of course, it is deliberately playing politics. None of this redounds to its credit and it is hardly surprising that it vociferously denies these options. However, its output shows signs of a clear political agenda and of attempts to get foreign support for legislative changes in Ethiopia, neither within the purview of HRW’s ostensible aims. Significantly, in its ‘recommendations’ to the Government of Ethiopia and to the international community, HRW harks back to its repeated efforts to get several pieces of Ethiopian legislation repealed including the Charities and Societies Proclamation, the Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation and the Anti-terrorist Proclamation, all legislation to which HRW has taken violent exception. None of it has, of course, any relevance to villagization in the Gambella Regional State, but the first has very specific relevance to HRW as it insists that organizations like HRW when operating in Ethiopia have to be annually audited and licensed. This is something to which HRW has vigorously objected, apparently believing it should be above any such ‘petty’ regulations.

In sum, this report is a shoddy and prejudicial piece of work, written to buttress HRW’s previously rejected efforts to try to persuade international donors to cut developmental and humanitarian aid to Ethiopia despite its position as one of the poorest countries in the world. In its arrogance, the hallmark of what is in fact a highly controversial approach to human rights, HRW does not bother to try to defend or even explain itself. It merely repeats, parrot-like, that HRW’s research “does not bear this out”. It consistently refuses to provide any opportunity to investigate the reality of its own claims, and has yet to produce any acceptable reasons why it should be believed. Despite HRW assertions, repetition does not render false allegations any more accurate or acceptable.

It is hardly surprising that an article in the liberal UK newspaper, the Guardian, a little over a year ago suggested that human rights had become an excuse for anyone who wanted “to depose the government of a poor country with resources? ... to bash Muslims? ...to undermine governments that are raising their people up from poverty because they don’t conform to the tastes of upper west side [New York] intellectuals?” Human rights, it suggested, had in fact become the catchword of a movement which had lost its way. The article noted that Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Reporters without Borders, and others all promoted “an absolutist view of human rights permeated by modern western ideas that westerners mistakenly call “universal”. In some cases, their work, far from saving lives, actually causes more death, more repression, more brutality, and an absolute weakening of human rights....The problem is its narrow, egocentric definition of what human rights are.” That succinctly sums up the problem with Human Rights Watch’s aims, operations and methodology. It “desperately needs a period of reflection, deep self-examination and renewal”. That comment was written in December 2010. Judging by its recent reports, HRW still needs exactly that today.

News and Views

South Sudan's Cabinet Affairs Minister meets Ato Hailemariam

South Sudan's Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Deng Alor, met with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ato Hailemariam, on Thursday last week [12th Jan]. Minister Deng Alor briefed Ato Hailemariam on the current situation in South Sudan and the efforts being made by his government to alleviate the violent fighting between the Lou-Nuer and Murle communities which erupted last month. He also outlined the issues from the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that remained outstanding between South Sudan and the Khartoum government. The Minister said that the situation in South Sudan remained stable even though the government of Sudan was working to destabilize it. Last week South Sudan accused its northern neighbour of "stealing" its oil by forcing a foreign oil company to load 650,000 barrels of crude onto one of its vessels. Khartoum says that Juba is unwilling to pay fees for use of its pipelines and it will therefore seize part of the oil as payment. The Minister added that the Government of Sudan was making trouble over the transit fees by asking for excessive payment. Efforts to provide compromise proposals by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki have been rejected by both parties. In his remarks, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hailemariam emphasized that the two governments had to work closely and amicably in order to solve the pending issues. He expressed his hope that the AUHIP would bring solutions for outstanding problems in general and for the issue of oil in particular. Ato Hailemariam stressed it was better to work together to make the two states economically viable. He underlined Ethiopia's readiness to help the two countries to negotiate solutions to any unresolved issues

The debate over strengthening the Pan-African Parliament

This week the Pan African Parliament has been holding the sixth session of the second Parliament. The main subject of its deliberations has been to discuss its transformation into a legislative body for the continent. Former Ghanaian President, Jerry Rawlings, told the assembly that difficulties at the continental level were hampering the process as some members states believed Africa "is not ready for a powerful pan-African parliamentary body with full or even limited legal power." The majority of the members themselves believe that the transformation will help parliaments across the continent represent Africans on a common platform. Speaking at the opening of the session, Prime Minister Meles underlined Ethiopia's commitment towards the objectives of the Pan African Parliament. He noted it has been established, in 2004, as one of the ten organs of the African Union in order to ensure full participation of the African people in the process of political and economic integration of the continent and in its efforts to overcome poverty and promote peace. He said it had done an excellent job in this and in providing consultation and advice to facilitate the implementation of AU policies and programmes. It had also provided a unique platform for interaction of ideas and exchanges between national parliaments. The Speaker of Ethiopia's House of People's Representatives, Ato Abadula Gameda, said that Ethiopia had played a significant role in the establishment of the Pan African Parliament and would continue support to strengthen it. The Pan African Parliament has 235 members from 47 countries with each having five MPs. It was established in 2004 and a review process was

required after five years according to the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to the Pan-African Parliament. The review began in 2009 and the on-going AU Summit is expected to see major changes to the Protocol.

Ethiopia is now the world's third largest coffee producer

The International Coffee Organization on Monday [16th] announced that it now expected world coffee production for 2011-2012 to reach a total of 134.2 million bags. Each bag is of 60 kilograms weight. This forecast has been revised from the previous estimate of 128.6 million and the increase largely reflects a significant increase in the expected output of Ethiopia. The ICO previously estimated Ethiopia's production at 6.35 million bags; it now believes Ethiopia's production will reach 9.8 million bags. This revision ranks Ethiopia as the third largest coffee producer in the world after Brazil and Vietnam, overtaking Colombia. Previously Colombia or Indonesia have ranked third in production but both have suffered a series of lower than usual crops due largely to excessive rainfall. This has been blamed on the recent pattern of the La Nina current. This runs off the coast of South America in the Pacific Ocean but it also affects weather all across the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This re-ranking of Ethiopia emphasizes the significance of the **9th African Fine Coffees Conference and Exhibition** being organized here in Addis Ababa by the East African Fine Coffees Association next month, 12th to 14th February. The conference will be considering such issues as sustainable production systems, climate change and market outlook, as well as learning from the experience of Ethiopia. The exhibition is expected to provide an important platform for the country's best coffees, and the event will provide opportunities for creating trade relations and market.