

A Week in the Horn

20th April 2012

- **Prime Minister Meles responds to MPs' questions**
- **Ethiopia and South Africa's Joint Ministerial Commission Meeting**
- **Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs visits Ethiopia**
- **Spreading Conflict between Sudan and South Sudan**
- **The Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa**
- **Somalia: a new constitution for Puntland**

News and Views (page 11):

- **The 13th International Congress on Public Health to be held in Addis Ababa**
- **Extra-ordinary Session of IGAD Ambassadors Forum in the US**
- **Djibouti and Somalia discuss telecommunications cooperation**

Prime Minister Meles responds to MPs' questions

On Tuesday this week, 17th April, at the 25th regular session of Parliament, Prime Minister Meles answered questions and queries from MPs on various issues ranging from the recent teachers' salary scale adjustment, the measures taken to control inflation, resettlement issues in the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, and on matters of regional peace and security.

Responding to a question on whether matters might escalate to an all-out war with Eritrea and on ways to stop Eritrea's destabilizing activities, the Prime Minister defined the four pillars of Ethiopia's strategy. First, he said, was to try to resolve outstanding differences through peaceful means. In that regard, he noted, all possible avenues towards a peaceful solution had been explored but all, unfortunately, had been turned down by the Eritrean regime, apparently hell bent on destabilizing the region. Nevertheless, despite the repeated flat rejections by the Eritrean regime of all initiatives, the Ethiopian government would continue to keep on knocking on the door. It remained unwaveringly committed to a peaceful solution.

The second element of the strategy focused on trying to distance the Eritrean people from involvement in the destabilizing strategy of the regime and to nullify its attempts to sow seeds of animosity between two brotherly peoples. In that regard, the Prime Minister said the friendly hospitality provided to the ever-increasing numbers of Eritrean refugees crossing into Ethiopia was to be commended. It was a real achievement. In an unprecedented manner, Ethiopia is offering numerous scholarships to Eritrean students among the refugees, and this, and other initiatives, was by and large successful in containing the Eritrean regime's efforts to spoil people-to-people relationships.

On the diplomatic front, the third pillar of the strategy, Prime Minister Meles said significant progress had been made in isolating the regime and identifying it as a regional spoiler. He told the House that during the entire history of the African Union there had been only one occasion when the continental body had passed a resolution requesting that the UN Security Council impose sanctions and that was over Eritrea. It was passed with a near-unanimous vote. The Prime Minister also welcomed the actions taken by the Security Council in imposing sanctions against Eritrea twice as well as the uniform stance taken by IGAD members in condemning Eritrea's destabilizing activities throughout the region. He noted that when it failed to manipulate IGAD in 2007, Eritrea had withdrawn from the regional body, essentially turning itself into a pariah state. He explained to the House that unless the regime clearly quit its destabilizing activities the government would continue its diplomatic pressure to enforce and tighten the sanctions previously imposed on Eritrea.

The final element of the strategy as outlined by the Prime Minister was the taking of proportional, calculated self-defence measures in response to the repeated terrorist acts of the Eritrean regime and its surrogates. In that regard he said, Ethiopia's recent measures, including the attack on terrorist training camps inside Eritrea, were designed to stop the regime from sending groups across the border to kill and kidnap tourists. He also mentioned the recent kidnapping of more than a hundred young gold miners in the north east and added "we have taken proportional measures in both locations," though he gave no further details. The Prime Minister stressed that the possibility of an all-out war was out of the question, adding that the Eritrean regime has no capability to wage a full-scale war. However, he said, given its belligerent nature the possibility that it would continue to engage in fragmented terrorist activities in an attempt to destabilize Ethiopia could not be ruled out and he reaffirmed the government's readiness to respond proportionally to control any such activity.

On the current situation in Somalia and the planned withdrawal of Ethiopian troops, Prime Minister Meles said the current situation in Somalia had shown significant improvements following the series of defeats sustained by Al-Shabaab forces. The Ethiopian troops, he emphasized, were operating within the framework of IGAD along with AMISOM. Accordingly, military measures taken in south western Somalia, in the Baidoa area, and in central Somalia, in Belet Weyne, had led to a swath of territory being freed from Al-Shabaab. Operations out of Baidoa had cleared Bay and Bakool regions, while troops centred in Belet Weyne had freed Hiiraan, Galgudud and Mudug regions. Al-Shabaab had been unable to put up serious resistance except for a few hours at Belet Weyne and it was now limited to engaging in a few terror attacks aimed at its own people. In fact, the Prime Minister said, Al-Shabaab as a group was now too weakened to stage any significant military offensive, and in the liberated areas the public were actively engaged in establishing police units and peace and stability committees. With the support of the TFG, a Hiiraan provincial administration was being established in Belet Weyne and a Bay and Bakool administration in Baidoa. He hailed the encouraging participation of the public in support of peace and to protect itself from Al-Shabaab as the most important achievement of the military operation. On the withdrawal of troops, he said Ethiopian troops will be replaced by troops from Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Djibouti. Djiboutian troops are currently finalizing preparations to take over in Belet Weyne while Ugandan troops are conducting preliminary studies to replace Ethiopian forces in Baidoa. The Prime Minister reaffirmed to the House that Ethiopian

government troops would leave Somalia as soon as AMISOM forces were ready to take over.

Responding to a question about religious extremism and its possible danger, the Prime Minister said there were a few extremists working to erode the age-old tradition of tolerance between traditional Sufi Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia. This had remained despite the divisive and discriminatory policies of previous regimes. However, with the implementation of the constitution and the principle of secularism, every Ethiopian was free to proselytize their religion within the bounds of the constitution. The government did not interfere in the affairs of religious groups nor should they do so in government. He told the House that the government had no mandate or knowledge to invite Salafi or Abash sects into Ethiopia. This falls squarely in the domain of the religious authorities and the government has neither the power nor the intent to deny their presence in Ethiopia. Equally, however he noted that there were a few Salafi members who were engaged in subversive acts aimed at establishing an Islamist state, just as there were a few Christians calling for a one religion-one nation motto. A few Salafis had even formed clandestine Al Qaeda cells in Arsi and Bale. Reiterating the importance of maintaining the tradition of tolerance the Premier underscored the importance of nipping in the bud any such terrorist activities at the outset. Such views were unconstitutional as there was no state religion in Ethiopia, nor was it a religious state. So the government has confined itself to teaching the constitution and punishing illegal acts and ensuring the freedom of religion. He stressed the government has no preference between traditional Sufi views, or Salafi doctrines or those of any other sect. This is something to be left to the public. Not all Salafi are Al Qaeda and as long as they respect the constitution they can exercise their freedom of religion as can any other sect in Ethiopia. However, he called on the public to counter any extremists working to obstruct constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression.

On the efforts made to control inflation, the Prime Minister told the House that inflation was on a downward trend but he was disappointed that the country would miss its June deadline for reaching single figures. Overall, however, he said the government's efforts to reduce inflation had registered more success than expected. The Prime Minister said global economic instability, and significant increases in minerals, agricultural products and petroleum contributed to the increase in inflation. Absence of competition in the market system in the wholesale trade in the country had also contributed. Efforts were underway to stabilize prices through import substitution and controlling export of domestic products. Other measures taken include controlling the money supply to the market and decreasing public borrowing from local sources as well as targeting unfair trade competition. To ease the burden of price rises of food and non-food items, he promised the government would continue to distribute wheat and edible oil to low income earners and the unemployed. There were, he said, sufficient stocks of edible oil, sugar and wheat at national level though there had been a distribution problem.

Speaking on the recent resettlement difficulties that have arisen in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, in Guraferda, the Prime Minister told the House that the accusations were largely politically motivated and baseless. Similarly, he explained that the confusion around the recent teachers' salary adjustment had arisen because of a lack of understanding, though a few people had also had a political agenda. It had been a salary scale adjustment not a salary increase. He added

that Certification of Occupational Competence, which helps to increase the quality of education, would soon be implemented.

Ethiopia and South Africa's Joint Ministerial Commission Meeting

Ethiopia and South Africa held their second Joint Ministerial Commission meeting on Tuesday this week, 17th April. The purpose was to review the status of bilateral relations, to discuss the progress of draft agreements exchanged earlier, to explore further areas of cooperation, and to develop a clear programme of action with a time-frame for the implementation of decisions taken. The meeting was co-chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hailemariam Desalegn, and South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane. It was preceded on 15th and 16th April by a meeting of senior officials from various departments and ministries including Trade and Industry, Transport, Agriculture, Forestry and Tourism.

Both sides noted the existence of strong political relations between their two countries, and agreed to work towards their enhancement. They agreed to a process of regular consultation to build on the close relations that exist at the highest political levels. It was recognised that these relations should be translated into more cooperation in economic areas by ensuring the creation of an appropriate environment for increased trade and investment. They agreed that the high-level visits that have been exchanged, both at governmental and at party-to-party levels, could be seen as important building blocks towards greater cooperation.

Acknowledgement was made of the importance of the role that both countries play in their respective sub-regions and of their commitments to the maintenance of peace, security and stability. With regard to the situation in Somalia, the two parties recognised the challenges that remain in terms of establishing effective governance institutions in support of a political process in Somalia in order to build on the military gains that have been achieved by the TFG with the support of AMISOM and Ethiopia. They called on all political actors in Somalia to respect the timeframe laid out in the transitional roadmap, the commitments made under Garowe I and II and the deadline for the end of the transitional period of 20th August this year. They also discussed the scourge of piracy affecting a large part of the Indian Ocean as well as impacting on countries of the Horn and Southern Africa, including Seychelles, Mauritius, Mozambique and Madagascar. The importance of the draft Southern African Development Community's Anti-Maritime Piracy Strategy and the patrolling of the Mozambique Channel by the South African Navy was underlined.

The two parties recognised that the recent armed confrontation between Sudan and South Sudan complicated the resolution of the outstanding aspects relating to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and post-independence arrangements. In this regard, they called upon the parties in Sudan and South Sudan to demonstrate their commitment to the negotiation process under the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP). Both countries expressed their full support to the AUHIP in its efforts to implement its mandate and assist in the attainment of two viable states in Sudan and South Sudan.

Ethiopia noted its concerns with regard to the destabilising role of Eritrea in the Horn of Africa, underlining the fact that Eritrea's problems were with all the regional countries. For Eritrea to be readmitted as a member of IGAD, it should halt all destabilising activities in the region (including those in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya), recognise the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, and release Djibouti prisoners of war. It noted that in terms of the security situation in the Horn of Africa, South Africa would continue to be guided by IGAD and the countries of the region, in line with the principle of complimentary and comparative advantage.

The South African delegation in turn provided a briefing to their counterparts with regard to the situation in Madagascar and Zimbabwe; the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the Centenary Celebrations of the African National Congress.

There was agreement between the two parties that there is a need to ensure commitment by the Continent to democracy, elections and good governance and that these principles should be instilled as shared values of the Continent in order to overcome the recurrence of political instability, external interference, coups d'état and unconstitutional changes of government. Both parties agreed to establish a coordination mechanism between their security services with a view to jointly combat anti-peace and terrorist elements working against their mutual interest, and to work closely on issues related to security.

In their joint communiqué, the two ministers also urged all relevant bodies of both sides to redouble their efforts to expedite implementation of signed agreements and work towards the finalization of those pending. They urged senior officials to accelerate their efforts to take the Joint Ministerial Commission and its objectives forward. It was agreed that the next Senior Officers Meeting would be held in 2013 to evaluate levels of implementation, and the next Joint Ministerial Commission Meeting should be in South Africa in 2014.

Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs visits Ethiopia

The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Mr Le Luong Minh, visited Ethiopia on Wednesday this week [18th April]. He was welcomed by Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos, State Minister of Foreign Affairs, with whom he held talks to discuss the means of enhancing the bilateral relations existing between Ethiopia and Vietnam. The State Minister noted that Ethiopia and Vietnam could share each other's experiences. He said that Ethiopia could learn a great deal from Vietnam particularly in the areas of improving agricultural productivity. There are many mutual benefits to be obtained by enhancing cooperation. The Vietnamese Deputy Minister expressed his hope that bilateral relations will be expanded and that cooperation in various areas will be deepened. He indicated that Vietnam is keen to develop its relations with Ethiopia and to share its experiences particularly in such areas as poverty reduction, agriculture and rural development, health and similar areas. He further proposed that the two countries could cooperate in improving trade and investment cooperation. The two sides expressed their willingness to diversify relations between them as well as work closely and cooperate in international fora in order to advance the interests of developing countries in the spirit of South-South cooperation.

The Vietnam Deputy Foreign Minister paid a courtesy call on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hailemariam Desalegn, and exchanged views on bilateral and international issues of mutual concern. Mr Le Luong Minh also met with senior officials from the Ministries of Agriculture, Information and Technology, Trade and Industry and the Chamber of Commerce to exchange views on ways and means of further enhancing the scope of trade and investment cooperation between the two countries. Ethiopia, he said, was clearly ready to further enhance mutually beneficial cooperation in trade and investment and expand bilateral relations.

Spreading Conflict between Sudan and South Sudan

On Wednesday this week [18th April], Prime Minister Meles received a special envoy with a message from President Omar Al Bashir. The message was brought by Dr Mustafa Osman Ismael, an adviser to President Bashir, who also met with AU officials. It asked Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to mediate in the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan, and for Ethiopia to use its close relations with the two Sudans to broker peace. Both Sudan and South Sudan regard Ethiopia as a neutral partner, and Addis Ababa has hosted the series of talks between the two sides under the auspices of the African Union's High-Level Implementation Panel in recent months. The Prime Minister told Dr Ismail that Ethiopia would do its level best to help Sudan and South Sudan to resolve their problems peacefully, and extend every effort for the peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two countries. Prime Minister Meles also noted that Ethiopia will support the efforts being undertaken by the African Union to solve the problem peacefully.

Dr Ismail subsequently told journalists that his discussion with the Prime Minister had focused on ways to solve the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. He said the trip was intended to "ask those with influence" to persuade South Sudan to withdraw from Heglig. President Al- Bashir had called several heads of states and sent his foreign minister to South Africa to work on the issue. Dr Ismail warned South Sudan that it must immediately withdraw from Heglig or face counter-attacks: "Time is running short, and our army is also getting ready." He said Khartoum was under pressure from Sudan's public to liberate "the invaded territory".

Despite these efforts to encourage mediation, all this week, Sudan and South Sudan edged closer and closer to all-out-war which neither can afford and from which neither would benefit. Increasingly angry rhetoric and support for each other's rebels as well as dangerous brinkmanship risk escalating a still limited and contained conflict into a full-scale confrontation between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army. The immediate priority must be a ceasefire and a security deal between Sudan and South Sudan, but equally important are finding solutions to unresolved post-referendum issues and the unimplemented provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which the AU High-Level Implementation Panel under the chairmanship of Thabo Mbeki has been trying to resolve during the intermittent talks between the two sides in Addis Ababa over the last few months.

The U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Princeton Lyman, said on Wednesday [18th] that the two countries were "at war" and warned that the conflict would be likely to spread if South Sudan didn't withdraw from Heglig, which it has so far refused to do.

His statement came as the UN Security Council has begun to consider actions to take to try and stop hostilities. Earlier in the week, Ambassador Susan Rice, the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations and this month's Council President, said that "Council members expressed grave concern over the situation and committed [themselves] to making every effort to convince the parties to cease hostilities and return to the negotiating table." Ambassador Rice said the Security Council has promised to urgently discuss the crisis. Council members reiterated demands that South Sudan should withdraw from Heglig and that the Sudanese Armed Forces should end all bombardment of South Sudan. Council members were told by Thabo Mbeki that both sides were locked into a "logic of war", and that Khartoum believed that South Sudan was seeking regime change in Sudan. Ambassador Rice said that if that was the case then Khartoum's objective would also be regime change. She hoped this was no more than rhetoric. Members of the Security Council have made it clear they expect the two presidents to meet and negotiate an immediate ceasefire. This should be based on the 29th June 2011 Agreement on Border Security and the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, as well as the 10th February 2012 Memorandum of Understanding on Non-Aggression and Cooperation.

Certainly, there is general expectation that it is time for the UN Security Council to reassert itself to preserve international peace and security, mobilize all possible leverage to get the two parties back to negotiations, and to agree to activate the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM), as well implement the border monitoring tasks outlined for the UN Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA) in Resolution 2024 (2011), particularly near Heglig and Jau. The parties and UNISFA need to operationalize the JBVMM to investigate and verify claims made by each side that the other is undermining peace or violating existing and future agreements.

Neither country can afford another conflict, although they appear to be in Mr Mbeki's words, trapped in the "logic of war". Both leaders have been stubbornly sticking to their positions, while indulging in increasingly aggressive rhetoric. President Al-Bashir told Egypt's foreign minister he would resume negotiations only after southern forces left Heglig (which produces half of Sudan's oil). He said Sudan reserved the right to respond to the occupation of Heglig "in any manner that guarantees its security, sovereignty and stability".

The two previous civil wars in Sudan each cost an estimated 1 to 2 million lives. If another one war is allowed to happen, the possibility of two viable and peaceful Sudanese states will be lost for another generation and hundreds of thousands more people may die.

The Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa

Last weekend, 14th and 15th April, the High-Level Forum on Security in Africa was held in Bahr Dar, the capital of Ethiopia's Amhara Regional State. Coordinated by Addis Ababa University's Institute for Peace and Security Studies, the Forum is an independent initiative under Professor Andreas Eshete, former President of Addis Ababa University and now Special Adviser to the Prime Minister. This was the first of what is intended to be an annual meeting "aimed at promoting dialogue as a fundamental, peaceful and durable means to resolving conflict, and to demonstrate that

diversity is strength, and not a source of conflict.” Chaired by former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, informality was a key element despite the attendance of several heads of state and government, past and present.

Among those present were Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, President Ismail Guelleh of Djibouti, President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed of Somalia, the foreign minister of Rwanda, Louise Mushikiwabo, former South African president Thabo Mbeki, and Mozambique's former prime minister Luisa Diogo, and a number of other officials past and present from governments and regional and sub-regional bodies across Africa, eminent personalities, representatives of African and non-African non-governmental and multi-lateral bodies, academics and others. Dr Hesphina Rukato, the Forum coordinator, said: "We wanted to create a different type of gathering, more a retreat than a conference, and with the wide participation of people who are concerned and open to share their experiences."

The aim was to provide a free and open discussion and act as a catalyst to raise fresh ideas and insights on security issues. At the opening session to emphasize this aspect, Obasanjo removed his formal traditional robe; and the media were kept out apart from the opening and closing sessions, in order to encourage uninhibited conversations among the participants and open discussion in the sessions as well as in the corridors and around the venue on Lake Tana. It largely succeeded. As one delegate noted “There was real substance as to what was being said. Issues were really coming out in the discussion and that’s very unusual.” There were only very few examples of people confining themselves to stating government positions and the Forum succeeded in its aim of providing equal access interaction for debate between for presidents, ambassadors, academics, activists, AU officials and others.

The guiding themes for discussion were “Managing diversity to promote peace and stability”, focusing on diversity governance as a structural conflict prevention measure, and second, “State fragility and the prospects of peace in Africa”, with a focus on clusters of protracted conflict and regional response”.

A central aspect of the discussions was the need for effective “African-led solutions” to the continent’s peace and security challenges. It was of critical importance for Africa to own and control the processes. Cooperation with others would be possible but ownership must remain in Africa. Diversity in Africa should be seen as a strength not as a source of conflict, though it needed to be managed. It was in any case a fact of life. The opening session noted that overall there had been a decline of conflict in Africa though there were references to Sudan in recent years as an example of how not to manage diversity. Speakers called for more collective efforts to build a united continent. Diversity had been a source of conflict because “leaders fail to identify those diversities, accept them and attend to them in their form”. Recognition and respect for all forms of diversity would promote peace and stability. Africa should follow a political system that entertains diversity of ethnicity, languages, religion and culture equally. The need for political will and committed leadership to avert security challenges in Africa and to realize prosperity and development were stressed. Tolerance, peoples’ perceptions, traditional mechanisms and the need to find a common position were important. It was necessary to avoid imposing solutions. Identity and ethnicity should not be manipulated as a political approach.

The issues that drive fragility were defined as weak institutions, economic pressures, manipulation of issues by elite groups and the failure of development policies. The need to build up institutional structures in the continent was emphasized as was the value of pan-Africanism as an inclusive and comprehensive programme. The Peer Review Mechanism and its benchmarks for effective and good governance and its efforts to help create effective state institutions were praised. The importance of a functional democracy to provide legitimacy and of the developmental state were emphasized, and the necessity of the role of women and youth was underlined. Also important was the way to frame the issue of legitimacy and authority. Most African states were colonial constructs and therefore questioned at birth. They had to build legitimacy in the eyes of their peoples, move away from policies of divide and rule and design or re-design a social transformation, democratizing as well as state building. In other words move to the concept of a democratic developmental state, establishing the social contract. Another issue that led to extensive discussion was the merits or demerits of federalism as opposed to centralism, a matter on which several leaders disagreed. It was suggested that it was the collective responsibility of the global community to provide stability for fragile states.

Professor Mahmood Mamdani, the executive director of Uganda's Makerere Institute for Social Research, and one of the panelists in the second session of the Forum, said subsequently that one use of the Forum lay in putting politicians in touch with scholars and academics who were not employed by them and who had more freedom to talk. Politicians normally are present-minded, fixed on the moment, impatient with scholarly talk. They use consultants "who know which side their bread is buttered and tread softly when it comes to critiques". Scholars criticize policymakers for rushing to solutions but never solving problems because they never really understand them. The value of the Forum was to straddle this divide and most participants felt the Forum had made a good start in that direction. One youth leader noted that the opportunities he might have to sit and speak in the same room as a prime minister normally were close to zero and it had never happened before. He also noted that the lack of protocol was a big advantage, "you are able to understand how structures, institutions and certain personalities think." Another participant noted that there was acceptable informality with people being "very candid" on sensitive issues. At least one president referred to it as providing "serious brainstorming." In all, participants saw it as a good beginning and a model worth continuing.

Somalia: a new constitution for Puntland

Puntland has a new constitution. On Wednesday [18th April], elders from all regions of the state, as well as from the Diaspora and from government, ended their four-day Constitutional Convention in Garowe with a vote on the new constitution. It was approved by 98.7% of the 478 voters. The voting was carried out by hand raising not by secret ballot. The closing ceremony was attended by Transitional Federal Government (TFG) officials led by Commerce Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Mr Abdiwahab Ugas Khalif, as well as foreign dignitaries included the Italian Ambassador to Somalia, Ambassador Andrea Mazzella, the Slovak Ambassador to Kenya, officials from the EU and the UN and representatives from the Interpeace organization which has supported the Puntland constitutional process. Mr Abdiwahab Ugas Khalif said afterwards that he

had been delighted to have participated in two vital meetings in Garowe. "One was the Somali National Constitutional Conference (Garowe Conference I) and today is the monumental occasion where Puntland's state constitution has been adopted."

Puntland President Abdirahman Mohamed Farole, who attended the closing ceremonies, said that Puntland had moved forward in the right direction: "I can confidently say that Puntland is out of the transitional period that we have been in for 14 years and we have progressed into democratic government, a step in the right direction," he said. "I hereby declare that Puntland has moved on towards political parties and fair elections," he added, and he appealed to other regions to follow the Puntland example of self-government under a federal Somalia.

The new constitution, which has a total of 141 articles, allows for a multi-party system, free and fair elections and is based on Islamic law. Islamic scholars speaking at many Puntland mosques have supported the State's constitution describing it as "based on Islamic Sharia'a law, [and including] progressive ideas that were not present in the Somali constitutions of the past." The Puntland constitution now goes to the Puntland Supreme Court for final approval as the Puntland State Constitution. Since the state's formation in 1998, Puntland has functioned under an interim charter.

Under the constitution the term of office for the president and members of parliament becomes 5 years and critics have argued this has the effect of giving President Farole a one-year extension, and despite the vote, opposition leaders have criticised the fact that the constitution adds another year to President Farole's term of office. His was to have ended in January next year but has now been extended to 2014. The chairman of the Puntland Electoral Commission, Mohamed Hassan Barre, announced the final results of the referendum exercise which was carried out last week. It was, he said, a positive step forward for Puntland's "new era of democracy". Mohamed Hassan was quoted by Somalia Report as saying the exercise had been conducted calmly with various delegations observing from the EU, neighbouring countries and the Transitional Federal Government. "The result was positive and we believe this new constitution will create the opportunity for people to elect their own leaders in future."

Meanwhile, there have been reports this week suggesting that TFG militias and Kenyan troops may finally be moving towards an attack on Afmadow, which along with Kismayo, is the main base of Al-Shabaab in Lower Juba region. Attacks on Al-Shabaab positions near the town have led to locals fleeing towards the liberated town of Dhobley. Heavy fighting was reported at the weekend at the village of Hayo where Al-Shabaab had a base. Hayo is located between Qoqani, captured some weeks ago by Kenyan and TFG forces, and Afmadow. A spokesman for the Ras Kamboni militia said Hayo and other Al-Shabaab bases had been captured with minimal casualties. A TFG official said that the allied forces were now about 20 kilometres from Afmadow.

News and Views:

The 13th International Congress on Public Health to be held in Addis Ababa

The Ethiopian Public Health Association (EPHA) has announced that the 13th World Congress on Public Health will be held in Addis Ababa from Monday to Friday next week, 23rd to 27th April. The theme of the Congress is “Moving towards Global Health Equity: Opportunities and Threats”. The Congress, which is being held in Africa for the first time since Tanzania hosted it in 1997, will bring together an expected 3,000 public health researchers, experts, academics, scientists, educators, programmers, policy makers and student representatives from around the globe. One of the major issues to be discussed will be the health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) such as reducing child mortality rates, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases. Other key areas for discussion will be: global health equity, armed conflict and health impacts, maternal and child health, achieving and sustaining the MDGs, strengthening capacity building for public health, and pandemic and disaster preparedness lessons learned and consideration of challenges ahead. The need for intensive collective efforts to ensure increased, equitable and sustainable health service access to poor and marginalized populations will also be discussed. As an international forum, the Congress is an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience on key public health issues. It will also provide the occasion to discuss Africa’s major public health challenges and consider effective mechanisms to address them. It will in fact contribute towards protecting and promoting public health at global, continental, and national levels. The Ethiopian Public Health Association says it has now completed the necessary preparations for media coverage, including training and a workshop for local and international journalists to increase their understanding of the event, and provide guidance on how best the media can communicate with the public on health issues.

Extra-ordinary Session of IGAD Ambassadors Forum in the US

An extra-ordinary session of the Heads of Missions of the IGAD member states’ Consultative Forum was held on Wednesday this week [18th April] at the Ethiopian Embassy Chancery in Washington DC. Present were the Ambassadors of Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda, and the Executive Secretary of IGAD, Engineer Mahboub M. Maalim. The Joint Consultative Forum was set up in February when it was agreed that Ethiopia should take the chair for the first year. Addressing the meeting, Ethiopia’s Ambassador Girma Birru stressed the need for the Forum to identify the various projects prioritized by IGAD, and emphasized the necessity for the Consultative Forum’s agenda to engage with the bigger mission of IGAD. He said the Forum should coordinate with the resolutions adopted by IGAD and promoting positions taken by IGAD at various fora with a view to maximizing IGAD’s visibility worldwide. The Secretary General of IGAD, Mahboub Maalim, briefed the forum on the broad issues of IGAD’s future priorities including IGAD’s minimum integration programme. These cover peace and security, the environment, economic development and sustainability, trade, investment and tourism and social services such as health, food security and human rights, as well as related political issues and the need of empowerment of women. The ambassadors agreed that the establishment of the forum had created an auspicious climate for member states to improve the public relations image of IGAD. They noted that peace and security, food security and the promising

road to development and trade had been identified as priorities by IGAD and agreed these should figure largely in the Forum's activities. Items identified by IGAD will be incorporated into the Forum's order of priorities for their engagements with US partners. The next regular three-monthly meeting will be on 22nd May, at the Embassy of Djibouti.

Djibouti and Somalia discuss telecommunications cooperation

President Ismail Omar Guelleh and Djibouti's Minister of Culture and Communication, Abdi Hussein, recently held talks in Djibouti with Somalia's Minister of Information and Telecommunications, Abdulkader Hussein Mohamed, at the presidential palace in Djibouti on the issue of cooperation between the two countries in the field of telecommunications. In a subsequent press conference the Somali minister described the visit as "fruitful" and said it would pave the way for better cooperation between the two countries in the field of telecommunications. He also thanked his Djibouti counterpart for the visit which had enabled him to see for himself the modern equipment and technology that was in use in Djibouti in the telecommunications sector, and expressed the view that Djibouti has the most modern equipment and technologies. Mr Abdi Hussein emphasized the importance of the meeting with his Somali counterpart which, he said, "reflects the will of the two countries to forge closer ties particularly in telecommunications". The Djibouti Minister underlined that Djibouti's goal is "for our country to be a regional hub in the telecommunications sector". He noted that it already had six cable links passing through the country and it intended to "do all we can to connect the whole of Africa".