

A Week in the Horn

22nd February 2013

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Djibouti goes to the polls for National Assembly elections today (22nd Feb)

The campaigning for Djibouti's legislative elections, being held today (Friday 22nd February), officially closed on Wednesday [20th] at midnight. After a largely peaceful and calm campaign some 173,000 voters are expected to participate in the voting for the 65 seats in the National Assembly. It is the first time in a decade that the opposition has not boycotted the elections.

Three coalitions are competing in the election. The Union for the Presidential Majority (**UMP**), the coalition in power, includes the Popular Rally for Progress (RPP), the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD), the National Democratic Party (PND), the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Union of Advocates of Reform (UPR). The main opposition coalition, the Union for National Salvation (**USN**) is made up of the Djibouti Union for Democracy and Justice (UDJ), the Republican Alliance for Development (ARD) and the Party Djibouti Development (PDD). The smallest group is the centrist coalition, the Centre Unified Democrats (**CDU**), led by Elmi Omar Khaireh which was set up in September last year.

Just before the end of the campaigning, President Ismail Omar Guelleh, called on the people to reject the aims of the opposition which he said threatened to curb the country's socioeconomic development. He said: "there are individuals openly hostile to national unity, a handful of others who seek bribes and a small circle of old barons have lost all credibility." He urged voters to vote overwhelmingly in favour of the UMP.

In its campaign, the USN promised to "promote democracy, fight corruption and nepotism, develop independent media, and restore human rights and individual and collective freedoms." The opposition criticized elements of the election process, claiming intimidation, a chaotic distribution of electoral cards and a lack of access to the national media. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, there were the first ever televised political debates between the leaders of the three coalitions. These followed weekend rallies in Djibouti city.

Djibouti has had a multi-party system since 1992, first for four parties and since 2002 for all parties. However, under the majority list voting system, the government's UMP coalition was able to keep all seats in the Assembly. There were 65 members of the Assembly elected by

plurality votes in six multi-member constituencies with between 4 to 37 seats. However, last November after a proposal by President Ismail Omar Guelleh, the National Assembly voted through a law replacing the majority list poll by a mixed list, allowing for **20% of the vote to be decided by proportional representation**. This will make all the difference to the opposition's chances of winning some seats, and means members of the opposition are likely to be present in the new Assembly. Opposition confidence has also been increased by a surprise victory in the election for the position of Mayor of Djibouti in February last year.

Some sixty international observers will be monitoring the voting, drawn from the African Union (AU), the Arab League, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). The AU's mission, headed by the former Prime Minister of Mali, Cissé Mariam Sidibe Kaidama, will number 40 people and include members of the Pan African Parliament and Ambassadors of AU member states as well as members of electoral commissions from various countries and representatives of civil society organizations. There are ten observers from the Arab League, headed by Deputy Secretary General, Samir Al Qusaïr; five from the Organization of Islamic Conference and five from IGAD. The Independent National Electoral Commission carried out an inspection of electoral materials on Monday including ballot papers and the indelible ink which will be distributed to the voting centres and polling stations.

South Sudan retires over a hundred senior army officers

On Saturday (16th February) General Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan and Commander-In-Chief of the SPLA, issued a decree removing 117 senior officers from active military service and placing them on the reserve list. They included two Lieutenant-Generals, two Major-Generals and over a hundred Brigadier-Generals. Among them were some senior officers serving in the civil administration, including the governors of Unity, Eastern Equatoria, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile states. The move followed the removal last month of some 35 top-level military officers, in what was then the biggest shake-up in the army leadership since South Sudan's independence in July 2011.

South Sudan's Minister of Information, Barnaba Marial Benjamin, explained that the President had acted in accordance with public demands to transform the national army into a proper professional body adding that the President was "exercising the powers conferred upon him by the transitional constitution". The Minister explained the changes were intended basically "to promote growth in the system, giving responsibilities to a fresh group, people with new ideas which need to be tried since we are living in a fast moving and developing world". He added that there were many other ways retired army generals could now participate in the development of the country: "Some of these generals have an administrative background, they have a security background, they have a business background and they have an agriculture background. It will be an opportunity to utilise their knowledge in establishing and managing private security firms in accordance with the parameters of the law, [and] doing so will bring a positive change in the economy of this country."

The Minister told reporters in Juba that "everybody would be happy to hear that all these retired generals have started producing millions of metric tonnes of food in the next harvesting season which they could not have done while in active service". He emphasized that the President fully trusted that the retired officers would show a good example in accepting the changes, and he planned to give assignments to some of them. Some, he said, had already been reassigned, and those who have requested to go for studies would be encouraged to do so. The Minister said the

retired officers should feel proud that they had witnessed the birth of the new nation and the achievement of the objectives for which they fought so hard during the long civil war with the north.

Officials said the changes were part of a much wider government policy designed to transform the security sector and other institutions to provide effective and efficient government. The changes in the army are expected to be the first in a series of reforms which will deal with the armed forces and then move on to other areas including security and the police, public services and finally the government itself.

Somalia's Speaker of Parliament at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies

As we noted last week, Somalia's Parliamentary Speaker, Professor Osman Jawari, has been on a visit to Ethiopia over the last week. Before he left, he spoke on Wednesday [20th Feb] at Addis Ababa University's Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS). His theme was the efforts of the new Somali Government to bring about internal peace and security in Somalia and the prospects for regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa, and he also responded to questions.

Speaker Jawari said the failure and success of the state building and reconstruction efforts were dependent on winning the hearts and minds of the people. He said his government could only succeed in being the government of the people when Somalis had a say on all the issues that affect their lives. He outlined the activities of the government in removing the security threats posed by the remnants of Al-Shabaab and the conciliation efforts it was making among Somali clans. He noted that Al-Shabaab youth were not born as Al-Shabaab, they were born as Somalis. So, he emphasized, "our focus is primarily on removing the root cause that gave rise to Al-Shabaab and the problems associated with them." He explained his government's reintegration efforts for disengaged Al-Shabaab fighters, noting that there were 250 fighters who had abandoned Al-Shabaab in Jowhar and others in Belet Weyne and in Bay region.

Answering a question on "what caused state breakdown in Somalia?" he related the problem to the lack of institution building in Somalia. He said "politicians come and go and it is institutions that survive the changes." Somalia, he said, had had little exercise in institution building, and even the earlier nascent efforts had been wiped out, twenty years before the overthrow of Siad Barre. For Somalia to rise from the ashes, a lot had to be done to build up the major public institutions. Now, he said, all ministries have been tasked with preparing a four year strategic plan and this will be coupled with recruitment of qualified staff "in due course to build up the institutional capacity." In fact, he said, the government is now readying itself for a massive programme of infrastructure and institutional build up. He added that he was optimistic about this as "the naturally entrepreneurial Somalis are coming back in large numbers to help reconstruction. Changes are sure to come".

In answering questions on the Somali security forces and their capacity to foil the threats from Al-Shabaab and on the general approach of the government towards security, Professor Jawari cautioned against putting too much emphasis on this issue. "If we say security, security, security, we will get bogged down." Security, he said, cannot be separated from reconstruction. It was not a one-time issue but rather an on-going exercise. In other words, it was necessary to combine security with other developments: "what should go along with pacifying a certain area is changing the lives of the people. We are working in that direction". He said the government was currently working towards developing the Somali National Forces into a professional army". Professor Jawari mentioned the commitment of the government to gender equality, and cited the

decision to keep 20% of the parliament seats for women as evidence of its commitment. He also stressed the need to produce qualified staff for the judicial system and said the government planned to hold a conference of jurists from Somalia and from diaspora to address the issue.

The Speaker also made a visit to the Somali Regional State capital at Jijiga and in reference to federalism, he referred to his visit as 'educational', saying he and his delegation learned a lot about centre-region relations and issues of fiscal federalism. He was in Jijiga on Sunday (17th February) where he was warmly welcomed by the Regional President, Abdu Mohamoud Omar and other high-level officials. He also visited a number of the major development activities in the region and also went to both Jijiga University and to the Teacher Training College. During his visit to the University, Speaker Jawari talked to Somali students taking courses at the University and also held discussions with high-level officials of the regional government, before returning to Addis Ababa.

On Friday last week [15th Feb], Speaker Mohammed Osman Jawari and Deputy Speaker, Mahad Abdalla also held talks with Dr Tedros Adhanom to brief the Minister about agreement reached between the two Parliaments to strengthen inter-parliamentary cooperation through capacity building, experience sharing and a close working relationship in regional and continental parliamentary forums. Speaker Jawari expressed his government's keen interest to work with Ethiopia in matters of foreign policy, noting the importance of harmonizing the views and positions of the two countries in international policy issues. He noted Somalia's interest in forging a common position with Ethiopia on the major issues of discussion expected at the upcoming London Conference in May. On behalf of the Parliament and people of Somalia, he thanked the Ethiopian government and people for their contribution to the peace and stability of Somalia. Dr Tedros assured the Speaker that Ethiopia is ready to work with Somalia in all matters of mutual interest, and in particular in the six priority areas set by the government. He emphasized that Ethiopia would work with Somalia in encouraging donors to keep their promises, and welcomed the agreement of the two Houses of Parliament and the importance of strengthening people-to-people ties, adding "as we are beginning a new chapter of our history, we need to work hard to build a culture of trust and confidence."

International Rivers and the Omo - short on fact and long on fiction again!

The Gilgel Gibe III Dam is, once again, under fire from environmentalists who had previously raised concerns over dangers they claim are associated with the dam, including allegations that more than half a million people's livelihoods along the Lower Omo Valley in Ethiopia or around Lake Turkana in Kenya could be threatened by the construction of the project. The dam, which will generate more than 1,800MWs of power, is now nearly two thirds complete.

Opponents of the project have claimed that the government is carrying out forced displacement of populations in the lower Omo Valley; that local people were never consulted and have not been compensated, and that decisions were made without involving the people (and it is true that opposition politicians in self-imposed exile were not consulted); that the project could lower the water levels in Lake Turkana by as much as 22 metres, affecting the livelihood of over 500,000 people, and threatening to dry up the lake; and that the government has ignored the environmental dangers.

Some of these allegations are simply false and there is no evidence for the alarmist claims over water levels or Lake Turkana. **Members of the Donor Advisory Group in Ethiopia, for example, have been watching the resettlement projects and developments in the Omo**

Valley closely. Their most recent visit to the Omo Valley was in August last year when representatives of eight countries, including six ambassadors, spent several days in the area meeting senior regional officials, local authorities, and local communities. They were looking specifically at the on-going commercial agricultural developments, their implementation and consequences for local communities, as well as discussing the consequences of the Gilgel Gibe III dam and the wider environmental, social, cultural, and economic effects on the lives of local traditional communities. The report provided no support for the wild claims of International Rivers and had no criticisms of the principles of developing commercial agriculture or the resettlement activities being carried out. It did, however, underline a number of points it felt were important including continued and improved discussion and communication prior to development activities and the importance of ensuring that adequate provision and development of services were in place prior to any resettlement. Government authorities would not disagree. And, as we noted a couple of weeks ago, donor investigations in February 2011 and June last year, looking at the villagisation process in Gambella Regional State, found no evidence of forced relocation or systematic human rights abuses, nor any evidence of previously settled land used for commercial farming.

There is a similar lack of evidence for other claims made including the issue of the water levels of Lake Turkana. Last year, critics of the project were suggesting the fall in lake levels would actually be at least 10 metres and even considerably more – the average depth of the lake is 30 metres. However, according to almost all the environmental studies carried out on the project, any fall is more likely to be a matter of two or three meters at most.

The United Nations Environment Programme report of February 2012 on the Gibe III Dam and its Potential Impact on Lake Turkana Water Levels, for example, noted that without any significant climate change the Omo River would continue to provide some 80% of the inflow into Lake Turkana, and that depending upon rainfall scenarios the median effect would produce a 2 metre fall in the lake levels over a seven-month period while the reservoir was filling. Should the rainfall levels remain the same, there would be no change. Alternatively, with below average rainfall, there would be a fall in the lake level of up to 4.3 metres during a period of eight to sixteen months while the reservoir was filling. The report also noted that the lake levels actually fluctuate three to four metres seasonally in any one year at the moment in any case. The most comprehensive study of the impact of the dam, done in 2010, calculated that the hydrological impact would be a fall of up to 2 metres, no more. Only one study, by the African Resources Working Group in 2009, suggests anything more, and its claim of a fall of 10-12 metres is five times higher than others. It isn't clear how it reached this figure.

With no evidence for forced resettlement or of a massive fall in water levels, opponents of the Dam have been searching for other 'concerns'. International Rivers, in the forefront of looking for objections to the development of the Omo Valley, is now warning that the dam's completion will likely "generate a region-wide crisis for indigenous livelihoods and biodiversity and thoroughly destabilize the Ethiopia-Kenyan borderlands around Lake Turkana". It is suggesting that a reduced flow of sediment into the lake will "lead to the loss of the ecologically productive floodplain used by wild species, fish, domestic stock and agriculture". The author of International Rivers' latest report, who remains anonymous, warning of "inflamed cross-border tensions" between Kenya and Ethiopia, adds that the people losing their livelihoods and homelands are then "likely to seek out resources on their neighbours' lands in the Kenya-Ethiopia-Sudan borderlands. Well-armed, primed by past grudges, and often divided by support from different state and local governments, these conflicts can be expected to be bloody and persistent." There are no such tensions and there is absolutely no evidence for a wild scenario of bloody and

persistent conflict all along the border area, embroiling Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Ethiopia; it remains in the realm of fantasy on the part of those with ill-will towards Ethiopia and the Ethiopian peoples.

In its nefarious machinations, an attempt to derail the project even at this stage, International Rivers is now trying to target the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and the China Development Bank which have approved loans for turbines and for the construction of sugar factories in the Lower Omo Valley. Incidentally, these will not threaten any World Heritage Sites as International Rivers' claims. It notes that Ethiopia is an important friend and partner of China but, it warns, so is Kenya, adding threateningly that once the dam and irrigation projects are complete, China may find itself at the centre of an escalating conflict: "The destruction of Turkana, if it proceeds, will become as notorious as that of the Aral Sea, tainting all those who perpetuate it", the report says, claiming that given these "evident" social, environmental and security impacts, the Chinese government should reconsider its interest, and ask its banks to withdraw their support for a social and environmental disaster in the making.

The problem with this extreme scenario is that there is simply no evidence for any of these alleged social, environmental and security dangers. It doesn't exist. Far from a social and environmental disaster in the making, all the evidence suggests a major and controlled social and beneficial transformation is in process. Certainly, it will impact on the local population and, yes, it will mean changes – but these will provide major improvements in living conditions and the environment. International Rivers' assertions remain no more than just that – a series of assertions and alarmist claims, short on fact and long on fiction, by and large the trademark of this NGO. As Albert Einstein famously said "doing the same thing again and again, and expecting a different result, is the definition of insanity."

As the Government has underlined, the social benefits of the Gilgel Gibe III dam and associated developments are extensive and, yes, there will certainly be some impact on the peoples of the Lower Omo Valley, as with any major development project anywhere in the world. Indeed, this is why the government has been careful to ensure that environmental studies have been carried out and the issues carefully explored and explained in advance to all stakeholders, and this is why it is working to ensure provision of infrastructure and development, schools, health centres and clinics and availability of jobs.

Ethiopia's sugar development progressing steadily

One of the main foci of the Growth and Transformation Plan is development of sugar production. The government intends that Ethiopia should be self-sufficient in sugar by the end of 2013 and increase production almost eightfold to 2.3 million tonnes by mid-2015, leaving a surplus for export of 1.25 million tonnes, making the country one of the world's ten biggest exporters. The choice of sugar for development is based on the potential in terms of climate and in soil and water resources. The expected cost of the development of the planned ten factories and associated plantations is about 80 billion birr (\$4.6 billion).

Included in this are efforts to finalize the expansion of the three existing sugar factories within the shortest possible time. The existing facilities, at Wonji, Metehara and Fincha, currently produce 75,000, 136,692 and 110 tonnes of sugar respectively, though their total capacity should be nearer 300,000 tonnes. To resolve current shortages for the domestic market, the country is currently having to import 180,000 to 200,000 tonnes a year. Domestic demand is running at around 450,000 tonnes.

The major emphasis of the proposed developments, however, is in the ten projects now being built. The new projects are located at Tana Beles in the Amhara Regional State; Welkayt in Tigray Regional State, Kesem and Tendaho in Afar Regional State and the Kuraz project for six factories in the South Omo Zone of the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State. The factory and plantation development, of course, includes construction of dams and roads, irrigation and infrastructural development both in the immediate vicinity of the projects and around them. Studies of the design elements for the factories, irrigation, road construction and other elements have been carried out.

The projects are of differing size and capacity. Tendaho will include a total area of 50,000 hectares of sugarcane plantation, and will be the largest sugar mill in the country able to produce 619,000 tonnes of sugar a year **as well as 55,405 cubic metres (m3) of ethanol and 94 MW of electricity a year for the national grid**. It is expected to start sugar production later this year and ethanol next year. It will be providing a total of 42,000 jobs for the local community.

Welkayt will have one factory able to crush 24,000 tonnes of sugar cane a day. Once full production is reached it is expected to produce 284,000 tonnes of sugar **and 26,750 m3 of ethanol a year**. Following the expression of concern that the development might affect a monastery in the area, the government carried out a series of consultations with all stakeholders, including local farmers and others around as well as technical experts. There was a total consensus that the construction of the dam for the plantation would cause no problems for the monastery, but rather would make a significant contribution to the facilities and development of the whole locality including the monastery.

Of the other projects, Beles will have three factories with crushing capacity of 12,000 tonnes of sugar cane each a day. Kesem is going to be developed in two stages with stage one crushing up to 6,000 tonnes of sugar cane per day and phase two having a 12,000 tonne capacity. The South Omo development at Kuraz will have three factories, each with a crushing capacity of 12,000 tonnes a day. There will be three other factories of similar capacity in the South Omo zone. At full production, these will all be able to produce 278,000 tonnes of sugar **and 26,162 m3 ethanol a year**. The project currently allows for 20,652 residential houses to be built as well as access and feeder roads to link plantations, factories and villages as well as link with the rest of the regional state. A start has been made on all these developments as well as on the required irrigation infrastructure, necessary dams and other support activity.

These projects will certainly bring significant changes for the residents of the region, socially, economically and culturally, and all with their own full consent. Those directly affected by the developments are being compensated for lost earnings **and given land at least equal to their previous holdings**. The implementation of the projects is also allowing for local access to a wide variety of additional developments: **access to schools, health centres, to water and electricity, and telephone links as well as roads and other links**. The Director-General of the Sugar Corporation, Abay Tsehay, has emphasized that previously impoverished communities will become far better off **as they benefit from irrigated land, improved social services, support from agricultural experts and job opportunities**. In total it is estimated that the projects will provide directly more than 200,000 jobs for local people, and associated development activities will provide for doubling that figure to 400,000. Ato Abay said "Groups campaigning against the plans have selfish motives. They want these people to remain as primitive as they used to be, as poor as they used to be, as naked as they used to be, so that they can continue to provide specimens for research and an agenda for raising funds".

The Sugar Corporation has carried out extensive activities in the last two years to get these projects under way. These have included evaluations of possible problems with all concerned bodies and all possible stakeholders, and making every effort to identify challenges in advance and to create a friendly environment for the developments. Its efforts have also included substantial training for the Corporation's management staff, for project coordinators and for the employees of the new factories and all support staff.

An award for the greatest living Somali poet

The Netherlands' prestigious Prince Claus Awards are given for outstanding achievements in the field of culture and development. The awards are presented annually to individuals, groups, organisations or institutions whose cultural actions have a wide and positive impact on the development of their societies. There are eleven awards presented each year, to artists, intellectuals and cultural activators in recognition of the quality of their work and its impact on the development of society, in a professional and personal context. The awards recognize artistic and intellectual qualities that are relevant in the contemporary context.

One of the latest recipients is the greatest living Somali language poet, Mahamed Ibrahim Warsame, known to all as 'Hadraawi - the father of speech', a master of both classical Somali and of more colloquial speech. The Prince Claus Award Committee said Hadraawi is honoured for "creating proud and beautiful poems that enrich and expand the centuries-old oral poetry tradition that is central to contemporary Somali culture and identity, for sustaining shared historical awareness and include discourse in divisive times, for his lifelong commitment to community development and social justice, and for building bridges, providing inspiration and promoting peace through poetry."

His work has also been categorised as "compelling, with plots that are captivating and intricately woven, his characters are like people in real life - difficult, unclassifiable, humane, exhilarating - and his metaphors strike a chord like some remembrance". Hadraawi has been called a "Somali Renaissance Man- poet, philosopher, professor - traveller, commentator, fluent in three languages (Somali, Arabic, English)", and a man with: "an obstinate obsession with truth and justice".

Hadraawi was born in 1943 in Burao in Togdheer region in what is now Somaliland. He reportedly started composing poetry by the age of five, and has composed several hundred lyric songs, epic poems and plays, notable for their striking imagery and metaphor as well as for their philosophical, social and political content. Many, especially in early years, were set to music. He has been known for his charismatic public recitals and broadcasts for the last fifty years.

Imprisoned for five years in the 1970s by Siad Barre, after his release he organized political poetic debate through chains of poetic discourse. Notable was the Deelley series of poems begun by Hadraawi and another famous poet, his good friend, the late Mahamed Haashi Dhamac 'Gaariye'. Both received death threats from the regime as a result. Many prominent Somali poets contributed to the Deelley chain in the 1980s, all revolving around the politics of the time and critical of the policies of Siad Barre, in particular opposing aspects of a new Somali constitution proposed by Siad Barre. Some were recorded and broadcast but most were oral productions which had to be recited in market places and in other small public gatherings, usually in secret. Memorised by listeners and others, they were spread by word of mouth and had a major impact on Siad Barre's reputation throughout the country. They eventually played a significant role in

events leading to his overthrow in 1991. The eventual number of poems, all alliterating on the letter D, reached between 80 and 120, and there has been at least one collection of the poems published.

Hadraawi himself went into exile in the 1980s, joining the opposition Somali National Movement, and became “the voice of resistance and self-determination”, but his work was not limited to this. Poems like the 800-verse ‘Dabo Huwan’, involve an “anti-colonial critique, satirical passages on Darwin’s Origin of Species and on Barre’s ‘government’ as well as articulating a vision of a modern Somalia.” More recently, in July 2003, Hadraawi led a ‘March for Peace’ which crossed much of Somalia, including both Mogadishu and Kismayo to promote understanding and reconciliation across the Somali regions and in the diaspora. He continues to write and teach, and encourage youngsters and other writers through a Centre in Hargeisa which hosts workshops, programmes and seminars.

One of the most famous poems in the Deelley series is ‘Clarity’, dedicated to Gaarriye. Here are a few extracts, translated here by Said Jama Hussein and by W N Herbert:

“Gaarriye, in this arena where the chess game unfolds –
well worth the watching, promising play – the innocent delight in alliterative war,
our Deelley with its two sides, where tactic is met by counter-tactic –
and here’s where I put my piece.....

“When our debate gets heated loopholes come to light:
that damage done by exploiting the bitterness of tribes, the anguish of clans,
which opens gaping wounds, divisions between the people.
When the hyenas descend upon shallow graves and the shunned bodies of the dead,
that rotten meat nothing else would touch, and pull out the pulp from their bellies,
the flux and the phlegm, and scatter it all around,
the people are dumbstruck, the fresh air is defiled, miasma fills every nostril.....

“Nonetheless, those with virtue, who detest discrimination,
those who defend this country – who value knowledge, the pen and the ink,
those who delivered this Deelley into the light –
will track them down and silence their tapping drum.
The clarion bell we carry will strike, destroying them like lightning,
those huggers of tribalism, grubbers in money, who are everywhere
lusting to turn back all hopeful development and to despoil our nation –
I can’t let that happen.....

“Their farms and their fields crowd the banks of the Shabeele,
shelter by that richest of rivers, fed by its finest cream;
rain directed by the Dirir star washes them clean of dirty sand.
Their buildings are lavishly daubed any colour they fancy,
furnished with the fittest mahogany; five Datsuns are parked out front.
Nothing is earned from distant labour, the sweat of work done while abroad;
nothing from diligence and hard work. Nothing is gained by toil, by the effort of striving
together.....

“Let these few lines be as striking as the stripes on an oryx,
as visible and as lovely – I simply place them in plain view.....

“Those others’ poems are driven by the wind,
like a tornado they turn wherever and in whatever direction:
swelling the banner of tribalism, lifting its deadly spear,
taking the lid off restraint – it’s released in every marketplace.
Is there no regulation that could stop it, no law that might detain it,
no authority to enforce these rules?
I wonder who said to let it spread, this baleful malaria?
Why are those who pipe its praises not brought to trial?”

“Where is that able, well-bred ram who leads the lively lambs
to our betrothed, our princess, the Deelley, whose call brings them all
to the well that is community, both the people and the animals?.....”

“You [Gaarriye] are tempered steel: your speeches satisfy the curious
and your arguments convince. Your horse is named Doolaal, the strong and fast:
let its neigh ring out again, let loose its rein, let our theme spread far abroad.”

News and Views

Prime Minister Hailemariam praises Emir of Qatar’s peace-making efforts

Prime Minister Hailemariam has praised the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, for his strong cross-border initiatives in support of global peace and stability. In an interview published in the Qatari Daily newspaper, *Al Sharq*, on Tuesday 19th February, Prime Minister Hailemariam said Ethiopia had a strategic and evolving relationship with Qatar which he described as an important country at regional and international level. He noted that there was a cooperation agreement between Qatar and Ethiopia to resolve conflicts in the region and said this would deliver positive results. Ethiopia appreciated Qatari efforts to bring peace to Darfur and the significant progress it has made, he said, as “achieving peace in Sudan means achieving peace in the region.” The Prime Minister said Ethiopia welcomed positive changes in Yemen, expressing support for the civilized transfer of power and the national reconciliation process. He praised the progress made in Somalia with the election of a President and a Parliament, and underlined the country’s economic revitalization. The Prime Minister, who is also the African Union Chairperson, stressed the importance of support from the international community but underlined the need to solve African issues within the African context and under an African umbrella. He also called on the international community to provide urgent support for the government and international forces operating under African leadership in Mali. Prime Minister Hailemariam also underlined the strength of GCC-Ethiopian relations, noting that there was close cooperation with all the Gulf States. He expressed his desire for Arab and GCC countries to invest in Ethiopia and emphasized that the doors were open for Qatari investments in private and public sectors. Policies had been developed to encourage and attract investors and provide them with all necessary facilities.

African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights takes up Dawit Issac’s case

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights in Banjul has agreed to take up the case of Swedish-Eritrean journalist and writer, Dawit Isaak who has been detained in Eritrea without charge or trial for eleven years. He is kept in solitary confinement and there are serious concerns

over his health. Last August there were reports that three journalists arrested around the same time had died from lack of care or ill-treatment. Dawit has been consistently denied the right to meet his family, his lawyer, Swedish diplomats or the International Red Cross, and President Isaias has consistently rebuffed all calls for his release. When Isaias was asked about the frequent rumour that Isaak had died in May last year, he said “this question no longer deserves my answer. If Sweden’s government want to make this a huge issue, we can only say that we have other things to do.” Dawit’s lawyer, Jesús Alcalá, said that the fact that the Commission had taken up the submission which showed that the imprisonment of Mr Dawit Isaak runs counter to Eritrean law and is in breach of several African and international conventions, meant the Commission felt the case had substance. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights was created by the African Union to protect and promote human rights and to interpret the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

Eritrean footballers granted asylum in Uganda

Uganda announced on Monday (18th February) that it was granting asylum to the 15 players from the Eritrean football team and the team doctor who stayed in Uganda and asked for refuge in December during the 2012 Cecafta Tusker Senior Challenge Cup. The Ugandan Commissioner for Refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister said that the Refugee Eligibility Committee had found the group’s claims valid and granted them refugee status. The Eritrean team was eliminated in the early stages of the competition after drawing with Zanzibar 0-0 and losing to Malawi and Rwanda. Only three of the 18-strong team and officials opted to return to Asmara. According to reports from Uganda, the players refused to return because they feared being conscripted into endless military training. Thirteen players from the Eritrean team also defected two years earlier during the 2010 Cecafta tournament in Tanzania.

South Darfur Speaker welcomes DDPD implementation progress

The Speaker of the South Darfur legislature, Ali Adam, has said that implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD) is showing noticeable progress. He declared that Qatar has laid the foundation for five model villages to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced people from camps. He also said the Darfur states and the people of Darfur were beginning to see discernible stability following the first steps of the implementation of the agreement. Meanwhile, the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the UN Country Team (UNCT) have welcomed the recent ceasefire agreement between the Sudanese government and Darfur’s Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). UNAMID described the peace pact as “a significant step” towards a comprehensive peace agreement for Darfur. UNAMID and UNCT held a meeting in El Fashir, the capital of North Darfur State, earlier this week to discuss ways of strengthening mechanisms to protect civilians and initiatives to support the implementation of the DDPD. The meeting endorsed three projects focusing on livelihood and water supply, capacity building for the Voluntary Returnees Commission, and support for a permanent ceasefire. It was also agreed to develop a humanitarian access mechanism for Darfur, including a larger UNCT-UNAMID presence”.

38th Anniversary of the TPLF celebrated in Mekelle

The 38th anniversary of the establishment of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was celebrated colourfully on Monday (19th February) in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray Regional State. Speaking on the occasion, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said although the day was marked in the absence of a great leader, the late Meles Zenawi, it was also a time to renew the

commitment for development using the clear policies and strategies he had left the nation. Abay Woldu, Chairperson of the TPLF and President of the Tigray Regional State, said the day was one on which to renew commitment to fulfil the on-going works of development, peace and democracy which are the legacy of the organizations' great leader, Meles. The Central Committee of the TPLF said that the Front and the People of Tigray would strengthen their on-going efforts, in collaboration with the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia, to realize the renaissance of the country. The 38th Anniversary which was marked under the theme, "Meles' campaign for growth and success", was attended by leading members of the TPLF, thousands of residents of Mekelle town and its surroundings and senior government officials.