

A Week in the Horn of Africa 28th August 2015

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News in Brief

Ethiopia

The new railway line connecting Ethiopia and Djibouti will open from early 2016, the head of the Ethiopian Railways told the press. The 450-mile line, which is being built by the China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC) and China Civil Engineering Construction (CCECC), at a cost of \$4 billion is a key major project towards creating new manufacturing industries in Ethiopia.

A two-day Call to Action Summit-2015-Ending Preventable Child and Maternal Deaths, organized by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India and the Ethiopian Ministry of Health, was held on August 27, 2015, in New Delhi, India.

Yū Shī Shī Ueshima Kōhī Kabushiki-gaisha (UCC Ueshima Coffee Co., Ltd.), a Japanese company is set to undertake Coffee Quality Contest, the first of its kind in Africa, in Ethiopia in March. The main objective of this Coffee Quality Contest, according to Tetsuya Seki, Director of Supply Chain Management of the company, is supporting coffee farmers.

Germany commits 750,000 Euros for the purpose of helping hundreds of thousands of refugees hosted in Ethiopia, announced the German Embassy to the press on August 22, 2015. The Embassy stated the funds will also ease the burden on relief organizations who are struggling to cope with the ever growing numbers of refugees arriving from neighboring countries.

The 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (ICES) opened at the University of Warsaw, Poland on Monday (August 24), under the theme: "Ethiopia – Diversity and Interconnections through Space and Time". (See article)

The inaugural Meles Zenawi Symposium on Development was held on Friday (August 21) in Kigali, Rwanda under the theme "African Democratic Developmental State". (See article)

Genzebe Dibaba, who set the world record in July, won the women's 1,500m at the 2015 World Championships in Beijing to claim her first world outdoor title. Gelete Burka took the silver medal in the women's 10,000 meters; Yemena Tsegaye took the silver medal in the marathon.

Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Demeke Mekonnen declared 2015/16 the Amhara Diaspora Festival year and called on all parties to work for a successful festival that would help to underline and expand real changes in the region`s development. (See article)

Djibouti

The Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Zakaria Sheikh Ibrahim, said in a statement at the beginning of the week that Ethiopian and Djibouti troops had been cooperating well, especially in the Hiiraan region of Somalia. Their only objective was to bring peace and stability and neither country had a hidden agenda nor any interest in destabilizing Somalia.

Eritrea

Nineteen-year-old Eritrean, Ghirmay Ghebreslassie, became the youngest ever winner of the Marathon at the IAAF World Championships and the first Eritrean athlete to win a gold medal at the championships in Beijing.

Kenya

Kenya`s Ezekiel Kemboi, Conseslus Kipruto, and Bromin Kipruto took the gold, silver and bronze medals in the men`s 300 meter steeplechase at the 2015 World Championships in Beijing. Hyvin Kiyeng Jepkemoi won the gold medal in the women`s 3,000 meters and David Lekuta Rudisha also won the gold in the men`s 800 meters. Julius Yego won gold in the javelin. Geoffrey Kamworor and Paul Tanui took the silver and bronze medals in the men`s 10,000 meters. Vivian Jepkemoi Cheruiyot won the women`s 10,000 meters; and Faith Kipyegon took the silver medal in the women`s 1,500 meters. Munyo Solomon Mutai took bronze in the marathon.

Somalia

The degrading of Al-Shabaab capacity and territory is continuing on the ground with the Ethiopian contingent of AMISOM playing a major role in these activities, together with the Somalia national army. While military activity against Al-Shabaab continues to progress well, corresponding political developments are less impressive. (See article)

The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and head of AMISOM, Ambassador Maman Sidikou, condemned the “barbaric” and “heinous” Al-Shabaab attack on Somali army recruits at their training camp in Kismayo on Saturday (August 22) which killed 20 and left another 50 injured, and said this and other attacks would not derail efforts to stabilize the country.

President Abdiweli Mohamed Ali of Puntland launched a four-day Puntland Grand Consultation Conference in Galkayo on Tuesday (August 25). Traditional leaders, selected members from civil society and government officials attended. They heard President Ali call for unity and trust as well underlining the need for radical change.

The first Mogadishu International Book Fair opened in Mogadishu on Wednesday (August 26) with participants coming from America and from other parts of Africa as well as from Somalia. Poetry is figuring largely in the coming together of writers and artists of different genres for

literary sharing. The Book Fair lasted for two days and featured paintings and dance as well as literary works.

Somaliland authorities in Hargeisa reburied the remains of 42 people on Monday (August 24). The chairman of the Somaliland War Crimes Investigation Commission said the skeletons, found in a mass grave, were refugees fleeing mortar shelling “when they were massacred with machine guns mounted on cars and anti-aircraft missiles,” in the late 1980s during the regime of Siad Barre.

Somali-born Mo Farah retained his 10,000m gold medal to win Britain's first gold of the 2015 World Championships in Beijing on Saturday (August 22).

The Supreme Court of the Republic of Somaliland delivered its decision on 18 August 2015 concerning the election dates. The court has suspended the agreement between the national political parties of Kulmiye, Waddani and UCID claiming that the agreement has no validation since the Guurti has rejected the opposition’s recommendations. The court has declared that the House of Elders - Guurti can extend the term of office of the President, the vice President and the parliament when the five-year term ends as per the constitution. The opposition and the ruling party have all accepted the Court’s decision.

South Sudan

The international community welcomed the signature of the “Negotiated and Revised Version of the Final Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict of the Republic of South Sudan” by President Salva Kiir of South Sudan in Juba on Wednesday this week (August 26). (See article)

The 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Warsaw

The 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (ICES) opened at the University of Warsaw, Poland on Monday (August 24), under the theme: “Ethiopia – Diversity and Interconnections through Space and Time”. The Conference is the most important scholarly event dedicated to research on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. It was organized by the Department of African Languages and Cultures, supported by the Faculty of History of Warsaw University, the National Museum in Warsaw, the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw and the Polish Africanist Society, in cooperation with the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University.

Participants were welcomed by Dr Hanna Rubinkowska-Anioł, President of the Conference Organizing Committee, by Dr Ahmed Hassen Omer, Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University and other dignitaries including Ambassador Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Ethiopia, Ambassador Ibrahim Idris, Director-General of the Boundary and Trans-boundary Resource Affairs Directorate-General in Ethiopia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador Piotr Mysliwiec from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The conference, which takes place every three years, is the largest gathering of scholars and academics interested and involved in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Keynote speeches were given by Professor Adam Łukaszewicz of the University of Warsaw on “Encounters with Ethiopia: Towards Ethiopian Studies in Context”; by Professor Baye Yimam on the “Movement, Contact and Diffusion of Features in the Ethiopian Language Area”; and by Dr Yaqob Arsano on “The New Hydro-diplomacy of the Nile: Prospects for Peace and Security in Northeastern Africa.” The Conference ended on Friday (August 28).

The five-day conference included 18 general panels and another 36 panels covering virtually all aspects of Ethiopia’s art and literature, history, archaeology and linguistics, social and political affairs, and development as well as Ethiopia’s place in Africa and the world, and, of course, Poland’s links with Ethiopia and Polish archaeological research in the Nile Valley. The number and spread of topics and the number of presenters underlined the continuing scholarly interest in Ethiopia and emphasized that it was alive and well. It also demonstrated Ethiopian Studies is a discipline that is properly inclusive and representative of its subject with scholars from around the world and from every continent. Encouragingly a significant number of Ethiopian scholars and graduate students continue to underline just how far Ethiopian studies have come since the first International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, held in Rome in 1959, when there was only one Ethiopian present.

The last conference in Dire Dawa in 2012 noted that Ethiopians can only engage wisely and usefully with the outside world if they have a sense of who they are and where they came from as well as an extensive understanding of their history and “the values and the diverse constituent components of the modern-day Ethiopian identity.” The growing number of Ethiopians involved in research that directly relates to the country and to the necessary diverse aspects of development encourages greater domestic interest in the history, cultures, religions, linguistics, arts, and all other disciplines represented at the Conference.

A good deal of emphasis was laid on civil society and factors involving or dedicated to social reform. Panels covered such subjects as “Land, agriculture, natural environment, urban and rural patterns” looking at climate change impacts at both national and rural level and considering possibilities for climate risk management, the way in which specific communities have responded to these challenges as well as at the government policies to deal with them. Panels such as “Tackling contemporary social problems”, and the “Promises and perils of commercializing small-holder agriculture” emphasized the interest in the challenges of development. They included studies of a variety of gender issues, problems in education as well as the highly topical issues of “Labour Migrations” and of the recent national elections. These areas have particular importance as they help provide the basis for legislation, raise awareness, galvanize the public, and ensure that the values of the state and government remained intact.

One of the main elements of the conference, as always, was the way in which presenters and participants linked their research and the theories they embody with possible practical activities and suggestions for policy action. This was particularly apparent in the discussions on the place and role of women and youth as in a panel on “Taming contingency, anticipating progress: Ethiopian youth attempts to carve out a future.” These concerns also came out strongly in a panel on “Labour Migration in 20 rural communities – evolution over 20 years and its implications;” as

well as in the Roundtable discussion on “Beyond the vote liturgy: continuities and contradictions in Ethiopia’s 2015 national elections.”

The conference, as usual, underlined much of the country's unique elements and its distinctive qualities. There were panels on the architectural, historical, religious and literary perspectives of the relationship with Jerusalem; on Islamic literature in Ethiopia; on promoting tourism. Equally, participants also demonstrated how much Ethiopia was deeply, intrinsically African, with its cultures and identity shaped by interactions and cross-border links with neighbors. The question of the future relationship with Djibouti was a subject for discussion, and papers in a panel, “the role of Ethiopia in the international relations of the Horn of Africa”, considered relations with Eritrea, Somaliland and the United States. Relations with Yemen was the subject of another panel.

One group of panels and papers covered archaeology, with detailed consideration of the “Genesis and Development of the Axumite Kingdom: archaeological and historical analysis”; as well as archaeological research and conservation of the cultural heritage. A group of history papers looked at “New findings and methods on the field of Ethiopian History”. Cartography, which has recently become a subject of interest for Ethiopianists, had a panel covering some historic records and the use to which these can be put by historians and others. Anthropological interests were covered by a panel on “Historical anthropology: an assessment of on-going research and debates,” by “Ethno-ecology, eco-cultural: Conflict and political ecology approaches to changing ‘resource use’ in Southwest Ethiopia”, by “Culture and rhetoric in Ethiopia”, and by “From periphery to mainstream? And recent observations on status changes of so-called minority groups in Ethiopia”. Another extensive set of papers and panels considered various aspects of linguistics and language and socio-linguistics, dealing at length with “Spatial expressions in Ethiopian languages” and “Time in the languages of the Horn”. Tradition and modernity in Ethiopian literatures” and “Ge’ez philology and manuscripts” were also the subject of panels.

This year’s Conference is only the second time that the ICES has taken place in East-Central Europe, and the choice of Warsaw was symptomatic of the steadily developing cultural and economic ties between Poland and Ethiopia. In recent years, following the re-opening of the Polish embassy in Addis Ababa, economic relations have been growing with Polish companies making direct investments in Ethiopia. A cooperation framework agreement was signed between Ethiopian Foreign Affairs State Minister, Berhane Gebre-Christos, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Beata Stelmach, during an Ethio-Polish business forum in Addis Ababa in 2013; and a double taxation avoidance agreement was signed during the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa last month. Historically, Polish interest in Ethiopia was largely limited to academic circles. Ethiopian languages have been taught at Warsaw University since the 1930s and a number of Polish scholars, notably Stefan Strelcyn or Stanisław Chojnacki contributed greatly to Ethiopian studies. The links were underlined by a panel on “Polish interest in Ethiopia; Ethiopia studies in Poland and Polish collections of Ethiopian artefacts. Conference side events also included an exhibition of paintings by the Ethio-Polish artists, Barbara and Worku Goshu. Another was a visit to the extraordinary paintings recovered from the medieval Christian cathedral of the Nabata kingdom in the Nile Valley and now in the National Museum on Warsaw. This was also the subject of a panel.

The International Ethiopian Studies' Conferences discussions mix theories with practicalities, ensuring the Conference, today and in the future, can have a direct impact on the political, socio-economic, cultural and artistic environment in Ethiopia. As usual, at this conference its 250 or so participants did exactly that. It was disappointing that nearly 500 people had registered to attend and only half eventually arrived, something that underlined the cost of holding such conferences and the difficulties of funding participation abroad by younger scholars from Ethiopia. Equally, the meeting continued to demonstrate the capacity of scholars of Ethiopian studies to provide broad and open discussions in which all and every topic received serious consideration, with nothing ruled out. Its consideration of the long-term historical dynamics as well as the social, economic and cultural factors that contribute to the making of current Ethiopian identity and diversity was impressive and notable.

Discussions throughout the Conference were lively and interesting, and mostly, if not always, based on sound empirical and fact-based study. The conference provides a most valuable meeting of minds and exchanges of value among participating scholars of all areas of expertise. It also offers a highly stimulating environment to younger scholars and those just beginning a scholastic career in Ethiopian studies, as well as affording a significant number of suggestions for development in various areas. This year the Conference, in fact, continued to keep its reputation as an exceptionally practical as well as theoretical occasion.

Makelle University will be hosting the 20th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in 2018.

The Meles Zenawi Foundation's inaugural Symposium on Development in Kigali

The inaugural Meles Zenawi Symposium on Development was held on Friday (August 21) in Kigali, Rwanda under the theme "African Democratic Developmental State". The Meles Zenawi Symposium on Development, which will be held annually in future, is co-sponsored and hosted by the African Development Bank and the Meles Zenawi Foundation as a platform for rigorous intellectual deliberation and in-depth analysis of issues related to development. The Symposium's keynote panel under the theme "The State and Africa's transformation" featured Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn and Ghana's vice president, Kwesi Amissah-Arthur. Other participants at the Symposium included high-level government officials including Ethiopian Foreign Minister Dr Tedros Adhanom and Rwandan Foreign and Cooperation Minister Louise Mushikiwabo, and representatives of development institutions, multilateral agencies, regional trade bodies, and civil society organizations.

President of the Meles Zenawi Foundation, Azeb Mesfin, in her welcoming remarks to the symposium, noted that the people of Rwanda have done extraordinary things since the dark days in 1994. She said the two nations, Ethiopia and Rwanda, were no longer the poster children of famine and genocide. They were now pioneers on the development state approach. She said President Kagame and the late Prime Minister Meles had charted new courses that had begun to bear fruit for their countries, and both countries had been developing fast as a result of integrating home-grown solutions in development processes. Inspired by the late Prime

Minister's commitment to the state's role in building robust accountable institutions and facilitating rapid sustainable development, the aim of the symposium is to foster rigorous intellectual debate on issues related to development.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame thanked the Meles family and the Meles Zenawi Foundation for honoring Rwanda by hosting the first Symposium on Development in Kigali. President Kagame who underlined his great friendship with Meles and Meles' inspiration for the people of Rwanda during their struggle and afterwards, said the Forum was a fitting tribute to Meles' vision and intellectual legacy. President Kagame said that Ethiopia was charting its own course and that was the key factor behind its success and the pivotal role that it now played on the continent. Highlighting the two elements of Meles Zenawi's thought, President Kagame said Meles rejected the choice between the state and the market in which every developed economy, without exception, was the fruit of a free market and a strong developmental state working in tandem. The second element President Kagame mentioned was that democracy and development are actually inseparable. In this regard, he said, there is no trade-off, no choice to be made between them.

In the discussions, Prime Minister Hailemariam said that every developmental state has to be obsessive to bring about radical transformative change for the people in order to progress towards eradicating poverty. It needed full commitment within the ruling party and the governing bureaucracy, inclusive and accelerated broad-based growth, fighting corruption, as well as espousing democracy. He added that the most important element to successful development was the presence of strong leaders who could build the institutions and deliver transformation. He noted that neoliberalism, as a strand of thought, and liberalism as economic policy, like any fundamentalism, "became a religion which tried to baptize African leaders." However, it wasn't a policy that did what it said on the label. By the 1990s, said the Prime Minister, it had become clear that its policy-based prescriptions had produced "miserable results." The writing was on the wall and it underlined that if Africa was to pull itself out of this quagmire, it'd better start thinking for itself. Only the tone deaf, insisted Desalegn, refused to see that "it was not just the African state that had failed, but the neoliberal prescriptions that had been given as a cure had also failed." The Prime Minister stressed that the idea of developmentalism had to be inclusive and shared by the majority of society in order to be effectively implemented. He said there should be policy spaces for developmental state not only from the private sector but also from international aid organizations, which normally try to insist on policies that require domestic policy change. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of the late Prime Minister Meles' ideas that there is no inherent incompatibility between democracy and development and that it was possible to bring about democratic developmentalism in Africa.

President Paul Kagame reminded participants that Meles Zenawi thought that the government and private sector go hand in hand and so does democracy and development. "He (Meles Zenawi) rejected the false choice between the state and the market. Every developed economy, without exception, is the fruit of a free market, and a strong developmental state, working in tandem. The orthodoxy of shrinking the state to the bare minimum, and replacing it with externally-funded non-state actor (here you can say NGO), left Africa with no viable path out of poverty." President Kagame said, "Meles' starting point was that democracy and development are actually inseparable. There is no trade-off, no choice to be made between them. Indeed, they

are almost the same thing.” He said while there might be some examples of non-democratic developmental states, they should not be seen as the example for Africa: “You cannot make sense of the development gains that have been recorded in parts of our continent without understanding how deeply our citizens are involved in governance and accountability.”

President Kagame told the Symposium "It is time for clarity. The democratic ideal has been at the heart of our various liberation struggles from the beginning, and it has guided us ever since, as we build new modern institutions. Ours is the true democracy of citizens, not the false one of institutionalized corruption and division. We cannot be bullied into accepting policies that misrepresent us and do us harm in the end, as we have seen over many years. If some of us took up arms to fight for our future, it was so that our children would never have to do so. But make no mistake about it; the challenges we face today require just as much fighting spirit and resilience. We cannot afford to apologies for the very things that work for us and make us strong."

Dr Donald Kaberuka, the outgoing President of the African Development Bank, said African leaders were given economic fundamentalist ‘advice’ that basically said that ‘the state is bad; the market is good,’ which effectively “dismantled the state into a night watchman.” What was surprising, however, was that the apparent failure of the market fundamentalism did little to temper the confidence of the prescribers. Instead, said Dr Kaberuka, they shifted the goal posts: the problem was not the market dogma, they claimed, but the African state, its lack of capacity and governance”. Dr Kaberuka said that a developmental State is not a choice between a command economy and free markets, but rather about finding a consensus on how the State and Markets can work together to achieve better results. He praised the democratic developmental state as a form of governance model that leaders in Africa could emulate to back up their efforts at economic development.

Participants at the Symposium emphasized that, in addition to honoring the intellectual achievements of the late Meles Zenawi, the Symposium should aim to spread his well-articulated treatise that offers a “conceptual clarity that Africa can have a developmental state that is democratic.” This includes the set of ideas that have helped to shape the concept of the African Democratic Developmental State, a new development paradigm that seeks to build an effective state that is capable of propelling Africans out of poverty. Participants explored the concept of a democratic developmental state, debunking the notion that development and democracy hardly thrived alongside each other. They observed that while not all developmental states necessarily embraced democratic governance, there are many examples, including a number in Africa, where states have actively pursued both economic growth and democracy in equal measure, with positive outcomes. There is, indeed, a growing consensus today that the one-size-fits-all premise may not be practical after all, as it has been built around false assumptions of homogeneity. It also emphasized the importance of continuously discussing the kind of model that works best in a given context, with a view to making people’s lives better and broadening freedoms. Democracy is about the legitimate free expression of a people. When people are truly empowered to freely and fairly pursue their aspirations, they partake most effectively in the development process. Participants agreed that there’s ‘no one size that fits all’ and that a key fallacy to break was that where democracy is often measured using a single yardstick for all countries in total disregard of their special national contexts.

In addition to the keynote panel, participants took part in two additional panels entitled “Developmental State in a Globalized World” and “Development, Participation and Institutional Design.” Deliberations from the one-day symposium will be submitted to the African Union, with the expectation that these will feed into the main AU development strategy, Agenda 2063.

Amhara Diaspora Day Forum in Bahir Dar

The Amhara Diaspora held two days of discussion in Bahir Dar on Tuesday and Wednesday last week (August 18-19). As we noted last week, the first day of discussions focused on what was needed in socio-economic development in the Amhara Regional State and on the business opportunities available. Over a thousand members of the Diaspora travelled to Bahir Dar by different routes to get the fullest picture possible of developments in the region, visiting projects in various parts of the region. On the first day of the discussion forum, participants heard from Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonnen who spoke of the different areas in which the Diaspora could make a real difference: attracting Foreign Direct Investment and image-building, education and knowledge transfer and, in particular, in support of the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The President of the Amhara Regional State, Ato Gedu Andargachew, welcomed them to Bahir Dar and underlined the important role played by the Diaspora in development efforts. He said members of the Diaspora could now make decisions to invest in the region, and he reminded the Diaspora of their importance in playing a role to attract foreign direct investment.

The second day of the Discussion Forum was devoted to discussions on the performance, achievements and challenges of the Growth and Transformation Plan 1 (2010/11-2014/15) as well as consideration of the prospects for the Growth and Transformation Plan II and on the potential for investment in the region. Ato Melaku, the Head of the Amhara National Regional Investment Bureau gave a detailed presentation of the results achieved during GTP I. In the social sector, for example, the region now had a total of some 4,286,202 students in primary schools and 400,000 in secondary schools. There were seven universities open. In health, 7,014 extension workers were deployed in different localities to provide health education for the community; and there were 3,336 health posts, 820 health centers and 74 hospitals in the region. Child delivery service coverage had reached 44%; and child vaccination coverage 93%, with resultant reductions of maternal and child deaths.

He said the regional government and the people of the region had been exerting every effort to build a prosperous region and reduce poverty, backwardness and disease. Between 2003 and 2015, the region, like Ethiopia itself, registered a double-digit economic growth rate and provided a significant contribution to national economic growth. For example, nearly half a million hectares had been terraced; forest coverage had risen to 15%, up from no more than 1% before; and cereal production had reached 87.6 million quintals from 28.6 million in 1995/6. To help achieve these developments, extension workers had been deployed on a large scale to assist farmers and provide support for different technological applications and new agricultural practices. Overall, due to the integrated development efforts, poverty had been reduced from 40.1% to 22.9%; and the region had managed to achieve food security at the regional level, but not, he added, at the family level.

Ato Melaku explained that there were three metropolitan cities, 106 lead municipalities, 85 sub-municipalities, 190 towns and 26 small towns and hundreds of villages in the region. The government was encouraging the process of urbanization and providing housing schemes as part of the substantial program of construction and comprehensive infrastructure development activities to allow cities and towns to grow faster. This included the creation of extensive employment opportunities for women and youth. Ato Melaku said over 2 million jobs had been created during GTP I. Equally, he agreed that much had to be done, adding that the possible role for the Diaspora in this respect was ‘immense’. He also underlined the wealth of the region’s tourist attractions and heritage sites: during GTP I there had been a total of 8,814,206 domestic and 223,949 foreign tourists. The average length of stay had risen from 10 to 13 days.

Ato Tadesse Tinksho, Head of TIRET, the Amhara region equivalent of EFFORT in Tigray Regional State, also made a presentation on the company’s development and success. TIRET, he said, was established in 1993 with ten trucks; it now had some 400 trucks and owned a range of different enterprises, factories and companies, including the Gondar Malt Factory, Tana Communications, Tekrarawa Plastic Products Manufacturing, Metema Ginnery, Azila Electronics, Tikur Abay Transport S.C., Ambassel Trading House, Belesa Logistic Pl.c. Zeleke Mechanization and Woldia Fruits and Vegetables. It is registered as a charitable endowment in the Amhara Regional State; and it operates in the fields of investment and social development. Ato Tadesse said that TIRET’s investment companies were licensed for trade and investment activities as legal profit-making entities. It was now one of the largest investment corporations in the country and was actively engaged in income-raising activities, including investment, to achieve economic and social development, the main purpose of its establishment. It also allocated a budget for social development out of its profits. Any income or property generated from investment is not distributed among the TIRET companies or taken by individuals; it must “purely be used for the sustainable economic social development of the people of the National Regional State.” Ato Tadesse said TIRET aimed to become an investment concern, able to play an important role in the development of the Amhara Region by raising Birr 61 billion by 2020. It was, he said, already contributing substantially to the rapid development of the Amhara Regional State and the country by establishing development-focused, profitable and competitive enterprises as well as profits to stimulate development and help eradicate poverty.

Ato Tadesse said the core values of TIRET were accountability, synergy, job opportunities, social development, innovation, scaling up best practices, transformational collaboration and partnerships. Its objectives were to play a leading role in building up a strong manufacturing capacity in the Regional State; encourage investors, create strong ties between domestic investors, particularly in agro-processing industries, help to transform agriculture into agro-industrial industries, and establish strong partnerships with small and micro enterprises. He said TIRET was very interested to set up joint ventures with foreign investors and encourage direct investment in the Amhara National Regional State. He mentioned the state offered strong support to assist development in organization and training for committed management and staff; dealing with the capabilities gap; scarcity of skilled manpower; lack of limited international business experience; or lack of access to international markets. Equally, the Amhara National Regional State was ready to work with the Diaspora in the areas of consultancy, joint investment, purchase of shares and networking for training centers and investors. He said TIRET had an established a

partnership agreement with an overseas agent, an America company; and had now set up Abay Channel, an institution tailored to Diaspora Banking. It was working to identify additional potential agents in Europe, the Middle East, and South Africa. It had also, signed an agreement with Tsehay Real Estate to provide members of the Diaspora with services for apartments and villas.

Regional President, Gedu Andargachew, also briefed the forum on the directions for GTP II and the role of the Diaspora in supporting the Regional and National goals of the country which would, he said, ensure popular and democratic participation to benefit the people of the regional state on these overall socio-economic development activities. The President said the GTP II called for doubling the productivity of main cereal crops, to provide agricultural inputs for agro-processing industries, and produce more exportable produce. He underlined the need for providing irrigation schemes to support every smallholder farmer to reduce their dependency on rain, and ensure the necessary agricultural transformation. The regional government would, he said, also be giving due attention to industrialization and, in particular, manufacturing to provide for the necessary structural transformation and enable the industrial sector to take the lead in the future. The President said that to maintain the accelerated, sustained, all-inclusive economic growth, human resource development, capacity building in technology and innovation and research and development were critically important. It was also important to combat corruption and maladministration. Economic growth for the GTP II period was set at 11.3%, which meant that agriculture would grow by 8.3%, industry by 18.4%, service by 11.2% and savings by 20.2%. The President invited the Diaspora to engage themselves in these development efforts to benefit themselves and their countries.

After the two days of detailed discussions, Deputy Prime Minister Demeke, addressing questions raised by the members of the Diaspora, emphasized that the government, as a result of its appropriate policies and strategies, had demonstrated its commitment to the creation of a suitable investment environment with special privileges for domestic investors. This was demonstrated by Ethiopia's place as one of the ten fastest growing economies in the world. There had been tremendous changes in the Regional State, he pointed out, including the creation of industrial economic zones in Burie, Kombolcha and Bahir Dar for manufacturing, agro-processing developments, hotels and tourism and other sectors. The Deputy Prime Minister advised the Diaspora to engage in investment, education and technology transfer and financial support as well as image-building. While appreciating the Diaspora commitment, he underlined the importance that all Ethiopians should work for peace, development and democratization. This would help the regional government speed up "the renaissance journey." He assured participants that the Government and people of the region and of Ethiopia and the region would support them in every possible way. The Deputy Prime Minister declared 2015/16 the Amhara Diaspora Festival year and called on all parties to work for a successful festival that would help to underline and expand real changes in the region's development.

International community encouraged by President Kiir's signature

The international community welcomed the signature of the "Negotiated and Revised Version of the Final Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict of the Republic of South Sudan" by President Salva Kiir of South Sudan in Juba on Wednesday this week (August 26). President

Kiir's signature came ten days after Riek Machar, leader of the SPLM-in-Opposition and Pagan Amun, representing the former detainees had signed the agreement on August 17 in Addis Ababa. President Kiir, however, noting he had a number of reservations about the agreement, insisted on further consultations with his advisers in Juba before signing. Shortly before he signed, President Kiir, speaking at a ceremony, said that he would sign despite "all those reservations that we have". He said he had accepted the peace deal because the country had a choice of either giving a chance to peace or of continuing war despite the aspirations of the people of South Sudan.

The signature of this final element of the peace deal was witnessed by IGAD Chairperson, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn; Uganda's President, Yoweri Museveni; Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta,; and Sudan's First Vice-President, Bakari Hassan. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, welcomed the signing of the agreement, saying "This is the day the people of South Sudan have been waiting 20 months for." Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni said that "This was not a just war, it was an unjust war. It was a wrong war, at a wrong place, at a wrong time - and the sooner you finish it the better." Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta said that this was a "happy" day that marked the commitment to end the war, adding that this will open the door for South Sudan to continue "its search for prosperity." President Kenyatta, affirming Kenya's willingness to stand by the side of the people of South Sudan, said this would allow the region to stand together for the prosperity of all. President Kenyatta urged the parties to understand that the battlefield should not be the way to fix the South Sudan problem, calling on leaders to "opt for peace so that they can negotiate their misunderstandings." The President, detailing the suffering of the people, stressed that the parties "should be guided not by finger-pointing but by the spirit of reconciliation." He also said that the region was keen to witness "genuine peace and unity for the people of South Sudan." The region, he emphasized, had a firm determination to work with the leaders to find a lasting solution for South Sudan. In a statement, UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon reiterated that this was "a critical and necessary step" towards ending the 20-month-long conflict. Recognizing IGAD's role in the peace process, the Secretary-General commended the IGAD-led mediation for its tireless efforts to bring the peace talks to a successful conclusion. The Secretary General also said that he had been encouraged by "the unity of purpose that regional leaders have displayed in seeking an end to this tragic conflict," adding that their "continued positive engagement remains essential to the achievement of lasting peace in South Sudan."

Equally, the international community, recalling the unspeakable situation that has engulfed the people of South Sudan and the series of failures by the warring parties to live up to their commitments, has strongly underlined that the parties to this final peace deal must firmly meet all the challenges in the implementation period of the agreement. There is no alternative. It will not be possible to return to conflict and further deterioration. It was repeatedly stressed that this action is the defining element to seal the future of South Sudan with peace and reconciliation. The international community has made it clear that the parties who signed the agreement ought to demonstrate action to ensure peace and relieve the people of South Sudan from any further bloodshed and from their earlier failures to abide by the agreements they reached. In this context, the UN Secretary General spoke strongly of the urgency for the parties to take action to put an end to this sorry state of affairs. He underlined that parties needed to be mindful of the implementation required by the agreement. This, he said, will provide the only way for a just

peace and for respect for human rights to surface in the body politic of South Sudan. Towards this end, he said the UN would continue to work in close cooperation with IGAD, the AU and international partners to extend support for the implementation of this agreement.

The Secretary-General did not hide the fact that that “the road ahead will be difficult.” He called upon the parties to “work in good faith to implement its provisions, beginning with a permanent cease-fire and the granting of unhindered freedom of movement to UNMISS and to humanitarian actors working to reach people in need of urgent assistance.” He disclosed that he anticipated successful participation of South Sudan's regional and international partners in the High-Level meeting which he intended to convene at the margins of the upcoming General Assembly, to ensure sustained support for the restoration of peace and security for the people of South Sudan. US National Security Advisor, Susan E. Rice, also welcomed the fact that President Kiir had signed the agreement. In a statement, she made it clear that the US does “not recognize any reservations or addendums to that agreement.” She said the US was of the opinion that this was “the necessary first step toward ending the conflict and rebuilding the country”. Her statement also underscored that “now the hard work begins.” The statement underlined that translating the peace deal into action needed commitment and resolve from all the parties to the conflict, as well as from South Sudan’s regional and international partners. It promised the readiness of the US to support the people of South Sudan as they begin the implementation process and stressed the need to help the people of South Sudan implement the agreement. It reiterated that: “it is imperative that the parties remain committed to peace,” and reaffirmed that the US would continue to work in concert with international partners to sideline “those who stand in the way of peace, drawing upon the full range of our multilateral and bilateral tools.” The statement noted US appreciation of the constructive role played by IGAD and the AU to secure an agreement and underlined the urgency for standing firm and dealing with those who obstruct the search for peace.

Somalia at a crossroads again

The degrading of Al-Shabaab capacity and territory is continuing on the ground with the Ethiopian contingent of AMISOM playing a major role in these activities, together with the Somalia national army. Al-Shabaab have been forced out of many localities in Central Somalia and in the Bay and Bakool regions, which have now been liberated; in the last month Al-Shabaab has suffered some major military loses. The ‘Juba Corridor Operation’, with Ethiopian and Kenyan forces together with Somali National Army, has recorded the liberation of major areas in southern and south central Somalia. AMISOM recently announced the capture of numerous towns and villages in Gedo, Bay and Bakool regions, and, of course, the capture of Badheere and Dinsoor was a major boost to the continuing operation. The population of liberated towns and villages has warmly welcomed the achievement of the joint forces. The people, now able to carry out their daily business freely, praised the joint forces and have shown strong support for further consolidation of the struggle. President Mohamud, who has been visiting recaptured towns and villages accompanied by government ministers and army officials, visited Dinsoor this week on Wednesday (August 26). He hailed the successes of AMISOM and the Somali National Army in regaining the city and pledged that the government would provide the necessary food supplies for the city.

While other operations will continue to degrade Al-Shabaab, the current focus is on two major areas of activity. One is clearing Al-Shabaab operatives out of the liberated areas and preventing them from engaging in asymmetrical warfare, or using terrorist tactics of assassination and implanting IEDs to instil terror among the people. The second focus is on the need to dislodge Al-Shabaab from the large swathes of territory it still controls in Southern Somalia, and in particular Middle Juba through which Al-Shabaab is still recruiting manpower, collecting taxation and even managing to gain access to the sea.

While military activity against Al-Shabaab continues to progress well, corresponding political developments are less impressive. A group of nearly one hundred Somali MPs on August 12 formally demanded impeachment of the President and called for a vote of no confidence. This is a highly disturbing development at a time when the elections, due in August 2016, are no more than twelve months away. Long experience in Somalia suggests that such a critical national issue cannot be settled in a short period of time. Any impeachment process means losing time needed for preparations to hold the election in 2016. It raises the real possibility of a political crisis that might derail the elections entirely. The political crisis might be used as an excuse by some elements to put a stop to the progress Somalia has so far achieved under difficult situations.

Stakeholders at the international community level need to engage with the Somali political actors to encourage an amicable resolution so Somalia will be able to hold a smooth election on time. AMISOM, IGAD, envoys of the UN, the EU, the US and the UK have released a joint statement expressing their deep concern that the impeachment motion might impede progress on Somalia's peace and state building strides. In a press statement, they said: "While we fully respect the right of the Federal Parliament to hold institutions to account and to fulfil its constitutional duties, the submission of any such motion requires a high standard of transparency and integrity in the process and will consume extremely valuable time, not least in the absence of essential legal bodies." The statement added: "while recognizing the progress that has been made in Somalia in recent years, especially on federalism, and also recognizing the important and courageous contribution made by the Federal Parliament, often at great human cost, we remain concerned about progress on the legislative agenda and the need to pass key legislation including laws on elections, citizenship, political parties' and the constitutional court." The statement emphasized the need for further consolidated and uninterrupted efforts, pointing out that the emerging institutions were still fragile and required "a period of stability and continuity to allow Somalia to benefit from the New Deal Somali Compact" and prepare for the election in 2016. The statement calls on the Somali federal institutions "to maintain their unity and cohesion during this challenging period and focus on priorities Somalis have set for themselves." It lists these as preparation of the electoral process in 2016; formation of federal member states and the constitutional review process, which are vital for stabilization, governance and state building; and the fight against Al Shabaab, which is now at a crucial juncture.

Problems are not limited to this, of course. There remains the more serious problem of how to conduct the elections in 2016. Political actors at the center and the periphery have differing views on this. If the election is to be arranged through the Federal member states, completion of the process of state formation well in advance of the election is necessary; it will also need to include Hiiraan, Middle Shebelle and Mogadishu itself. Equally, the participation of areas that might be under Al-Shabaab control would have to be carefully considered. Another option is to

hold elections through the traditional elders of each clan and the MPs in Mogadishu as in the three previous elections since 2004. This method also has its own problems and there is considerable opposition to it. Stakeholders and friends of Somalia need to make sure well in advance how they can assist in the elections in the most reassuring way.

Other major problems include the membership and criteria used to select the Parliamentary commissions on elections and boundaries. This again is something that must be resolved in good time to allow adequate preparations for the elections. Federal member states must be fully formed and functional in order to produce the necessary electoral mechanisms. This could also have an impact on some of the existing political problems between Jubaland, Puntland and Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a as against Mogadishu, Central Somalia and Bay and Bakool regions. Last week Jubaland's parliament re-elected Ahmed Mohamed Islan for a four-year term as president. One of the problems he needs to resolve is the on-going complaint of the Southwest region regarding the level of representation of its own clans in the Jubaland assembly. Central Somalia, where former federal Interior Minister Abdulkarim Guled has been elected as president, needs to come to terms with Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a as well as the Puntland administration. Ahlu Sunna has elected its own separate president for the Central region. Resolution of these disputes could serve as a lesson and as encouragement for the possibility of organizing the prospective administration for Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle.

Resolving all these issues is, of course, primarily the responsibility of Somalia's political actors and other stakeholders. Equally, the international community needs to produce better levels of coordination than it currently achieves. If they do not, Al-Shabaab and its international jihadist partners will try to take advantage, directly threatening Somalia militarily or making efforts to infiltrate and destroy it from within. Somalia is at a critical point. It is time to coordinate fully and act effectively together to ensure smooth progress.

The forgotten journalists of Eritrea and PEN Eritrea

PEN International promotes literature and freedom of expression, bringing together writers, journalists, and poets; in fact all who use the written word to promote ideas, in the common belief that it is through sharing that bridges of understanding can be built between peoples. It was formed over ninety years ago, in 1921, and the protection of the right to freedom of expression, the freedom to express ideas without fear of attack, arrest or other persecution, has always been at the heart of its work. Its charter pledges that all members will oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression in the country and community to which they belong, as well as throughout the world wherever this is possible. PEN International holds Special Consultative Status at the UN and Associate Status at UNESCO.

There are nearly 150 PEN Centers worldwide. One of the newest is 'PEN Eritrea' which was set up last year. It is an autonomous, non-partisan organization, and works to give voice to the plight of all jailed journalists, writers and artists in Eritrea, regardless of their ethnic, religious or political creed. PEN Eritrea's President, Professor Ghirmai Negash, recently explained: "In times of abysmally worsening political and human conditions in Eritrea, it was imperative that concerned advocates of human rights initiated PEN Eritrea." He described its formation as "a small contribution in the long road towards liberty and democracy", and described its creation as

“a victory for all freedom loving Eritreans within and outside the country.” Co-founder, Dessale Berekhet said: “We aim to empower, connect and if possible to serve as an umbrella for the ‘destitute’ writers and journalists of the country wherever they are scattered.”

Its goal, says Pen Eritrea, is to build an open, harmonious, tolerant and free society where the rights of all citizens to access, share, and disseminate information; and freely debate issues and express their views are guaranteed without violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state of Eritrea. It aims to serve as an umbrella organization for Eritrean writers and journalists who have been targeted by the Eritrean government for their writings and who are now dispersed across the world. “Serving as [a] point of contact between the most inaccessible country and the international body, PEN Eritrea also works to promote the cases of journalists held incommunicado in Eritrea.

PEN Eritrea had to be set up in exile due to the “extremely repressive political climate in Eritrea” and it faces an uphill task. According to the annual “Attacks on the Press” of the Committee to Protect Journalists, Eritrea is the most censored country in the world, beating North Korea into second place. The CPJ’s list is based on research into the use of tactics ranging from imprisonment and repressive laws to harassment of journalists and restrictions on Internet access. In Eritrea, the CPJ says President Isaias has succeeded in a campaign to crush independent journalism, creating a media climate so oppressive that even reporters for state-run news outlets live in constant fear of arrest. Even those working for the heavily censored state press live in constant fear of arrest for any report perceived as critical to the ruling party, or on suspicion that they leaked information outside the country. The threat of imprisonment has led many journalists to choose exile rather than risk arrest. The present media climate has been characterized by one newspaper as a “monotonous recycling of official information put out by a paranoid government.”

Eritrea uses a common pattern of media monopoly and control, harassment, spying, threats and imprisonment of journalists as well as restriction of journalists' movements within their own country. The only people allowed to disseminate news are those who work for the state media; the last accredited international correspondent was expelled nearly a decade ago. The regime goes in for extensive signal jamming and tight online control through the sole state-run telecommunications company, EriTel. All mobile communications must go through EriTel, and all Internet service providers must use the government-controlled gateway. Access to the Internet is extremely limited and available only through slow dial-up connections, and some years ago, Eritrea, frightened of the spread of an ‘Arab Spring’, scrapped plans to provide mobile Internet connections, further limiting the possibility of access to independent information. According to the UN International Telecommunication Union, less than 1% of the population go online. Eritrea also has the lowest global figure for cell phone users, with just 5.6% of the population owning one. By comparison, in North Korea 9.7% of a much larger population have cell phones.

Eritrea has, in fact, become the scene of some of the world’s worst human rights abuses over the last decade. After independence, in 1993, a number of independent newspapers were founded, catering for a wide range of views. They did not last long. Some critics of President Isaias, the G15, were arrested in September 2001 for criticizing the president’s autocratic ways, his refusal to implement the constitution and his failures in the war he had launched against Ethiopia in

1998. On the same day, President Isaias cracked down on the media, banning private newspapers. Eleven journalists were taken into custody and it is widely believed that at least four, and perhaps as many as nine, all uncharged and untried, may have died. Many others have been arrested since, including people working for the state media. Today, President Isaias presides over a regime whose widespread and devastating human rights abuses, including arbitrary execution and widespread torture, were itemized in great detail by the devastating 470 page report of the UN Commission of Enquiry into Human Rights Abuses in Eritrea, published in June. These abuses have led to of hundreds of thousands of Eritreans, mainly youths, fleeing the country. The population is hemorrhaging at a rate of up to 5,000 a month, paying thousands of dollars to smugglers and human traffickers risking all sorts of dangers to escape: the prospect of being shot when trying to leave; dying of thirst in the deserts of Sudan, Egypt or Libya; drowning in the Mediterranean; being kidnapped for ransom; or murdered for organ harvesting.

Today, Eritrea is Africa's worst jailer of journalists with currently at least 23 estimated to be behind bars. None have ever been tried in court or even charged with a crime. This is the third highest number of imprisoned journalists in the world, after China and Iran, and it is almost certainly an under-estimate. At various times some have been released, six for example in January this year and seven others last year (all detained in 2009), though no official information has ever been given why they were detained or why they were released. In fact, just how many more journalists remain in detention is unclear as many are held in secret locations and a number are believed to have died after being held for years in horrendous conditions. Swedish-Eritrean journalist and author, Dawit Isaak, one of those arrested in September 2001, is perhaps the best known internationally. Reporters Without Borders has placed Eritrea last on its press freedom index for seven years running.

The UK's Guardian newspaper in a recent week-long series of articles asked the question: Has Eritrea become Africa's North Korea? Its answer was: "Worse, perhaps: journalists routinely face arrest, intimidation, harassment and long-term detention without trial, their families unsure if they are still alive."

The newspaper, quoting PEN Eritrea, profiled six of the writers and journalists who have been held incommunicado in undisclosed locations since September 2001, without trial. Three of them are believed to be alive: Amanuel Asrat, editor-in-chief of Zemen and an award-winning poet; Seyoum Tsehaye, freelance journalist and former TV director and Idris Abu'Are, author and freelance journalist. According to the limited information available, both Asrat and Seyoum are detained in the specially constructed maximum-security prison, Eiraeiro, north of Asmara and both are still alive. Three others are believed to have died: Medhanie Haile, Deputy Editor of Keste-demena, who was working at the Ministry of Justice at the time of his arrest, is reported to have died in detention, according to a former prison guard. His death was attributed to harsh conditions and a lack of medical attention. Fessahaye 'Joshua' Yohannes, poet, playwright, and journalist was co-owner of Setit, the country's first independent newspaper. Setit started out as a bi-monthly publication with a circulation of 5,000, but expanded to become weekly with a circulation of 40,000. By comparison, the government-owned Hadas Er'tra, despite being distributed free, had no more than a circulation of just 10,000. Fessahaye is thought to have died in 2006 or 2007, due to poor health and mistreatment in prison. Another who may have died is

Dawit Habtemichael, assistant editor of Meqalh. Reporters Without Borders believe he died in Eiraeiro prison in the second half of 2010, along with his colleague and editor Matios Habteab.