

A Week in the Horn of Africa 28th September 2012

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A Mini-Summit on Somalia at the UN General Assembly

A mini-summit on Somalia chaired by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon convened in New York on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly on Wednesday (26th September). Somalia's new President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who is represented in New York by Prime Minister Abdiweli Mohamed Ali, participated by satellite video. Other participants included Ambassador Mahiga of the UN Political Office for Somalia, representatives of the African Union, the EU, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Conference, IGAD, the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the Islamic Bank and of the members of the International Contact Group on Somalia. The UN Secretary-General and participants congratulated President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, the Roadmap Signatories, Traditional Elders, the National Constituent Assembly, the new Federal Parliament and the Technical Selection Committee and the people of Somalia for their roles in providing a peaceful end to the Transition.

The summit welcomed the commitment of the outgoing President Sheikh Sherif to work with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and urged all political actors in Somalia to cooperate with the new authorities: "This spirit of unity should be a guiding principle for all Somali and international actors working towards peace in Somalia". The participants recognized that Somalia "had entered a new political era and committed themselves to forge a new partnership for peace building and state building, which should be based on principles of national ownership, mutual accountability and transparency", pledging support to a peaceful, democratic, stable and prosperous Somalia. They welcomed the new President's vision for Somalia and his intention to ensure formation of inclusive, broad-based governing institutions in accordance with the Provisional Constitution; and his priorities: stabilization, the rule of law and good governance; economic recovery; peace-building and reconciliation; public service delivery; improved relations between Somalia and the rest of the world; and the unity and integrity of Somalia. They noted the importance of further amendments to the Provisional Constitution and to its full adoption by referendum and elections and expressed the international community's commitment to support Somalia's security sector, and the priorities for peace and development, including the establishment of any future Joint Financial Management Board, as foreseen in Security Council resolution 2060 (2012). They expressed support for the continued role of the United Nations and encouraged it to extend its reach especially in newly recovered areas.

The summit welcomed the Secretary General's intention to conduct a Review of the United Nations' strategy and presence in Somalia, and the intention of the African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank and World Bank to renew their engagement in Somalia. It expressed concern about the threat of terrorist attacks by Al-Shabaab and welcomed the determination of the international community to take measures against both internal and external actors that attempt to undermine the peace process in Somalia. The summit expressed serious concern over the numbers still in need of sustained humanitarian assistance and a further 1.8 million at risk of sliding back into crisis. It affirmed the need for sustained and unified support to Somalia and ensure that all parties allowed full, unhindered humanitarian access and prevented misuse of humanitarian aid.

.....addressed by Prime Minister Hailemariam

Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn who is attending the UN General Assembly this week also addressed the Somalia Mini-Summit. Hailing the political and military developments in Somalia, the Prime Minister said that recent developments on the political and security fronts in Somalia had created an unprecedented opportunity for stabilizing the country. The results had "demonstrated how much focused and coordinated national, sub-regional, continental and global efforts could bring the desired result". Speaking on the positive military developments he added: "we are encouraged to note that the multi-pronged military operations by AMISOM and TFG forces as well as Ethiopian defence forces have no doubt decisively weakened Al-Shabaab. This has resulted not only in the forced withdrawal of Al-Shabaab from Mogadishu but also the liberation of a number of areas in central and southern parts of Somalia."

Prime Minister Hailemariam hailed the resolve of the international community as shown by the emerging growing consensus on Somalia, as demonstrated in the London and Istanbul conferences, as well as the International Contact Group Meeting in Rome. "These had all converged to assist the people of Somalia to seize the unique opportunity to usher in a new era of peace and stability in Somalia." Ato Hailemariam welcomed the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2036 (2012), which significantly expanded the size of AMISOM and the support provided to the mission. He further called on the international community to continue to support Somalia while still giving due consideration to Somali ownership of the process. He concluded by emphasizing: "We in Ethiopia will continue, in the spirit of our late Prime Minister, to do the best we can, along with our friends within IGAD and the AU, as well as with the UN and partners, to assist Somalia to proceed with success along this promising trajectory".

AMISOM enters Kismayo; Al-Shabaab suffers other setbacks

On Friday morning (28th September) a Kenyan military spokesperson, Colonel Cyrus Oguna, announced that Kenya Defence Forces and the Somalia National Army (SNA) had moved into the port of Kismayo in a combined operation involving naval, ground and air operations. "I can confirm the port city of Kismayo was taken over by KDF and SNA forces this morning (Friday)," he said. Details remain sketchy, but it seems that an airstrike on the airport on Tuesday, which destroyed an armoury and warehouse used by Al-Shabaab, a barrage from the sea on Wednesday, and the destruction of a control and command centre, was followed overnight on Thursday by a seaborne landing. Al-Shabaab had previously been building up its defences on the landward sides of Kismayo in recent weeks. Colonel Oguna said details of the operation would be given later and that there was still a lot of consolidation that needed to be done. He urged residents of Kismayo "to remain calm and stay away from Al-Shabaab targets." Al-Shabaab claims the battle for the city is still going on. An Al-Shabaab spokesman, Sheikh Abu Musab, said on Friday: "Ships have brought Kenyan troops on our Kismayo beach last night; fierce fighting between us and them is going on now."

The loss of Kismayo will be a major blow to Al-Shabaab. It has been using Kismayo as its "most lucrative source of internal revenue", raising money from the export of cattle and charcoal from the port. It was also its last major stronghold in southern Somalia after it had been driven out of Mogadishu and Merca and is now apparently abandoning Jowhar. It had been using the port as a strategic military base to house recruits and train terrorists from around the world.

Last weekend, AMISOM reported that over 250 Al-Shabaab fighters had surrendered at the town of Garsaale, fifteen kilometres south of Jowhar on the road from Mogadishu. AMISON forces have been advancing slowly and steadily from Mogadishu towards Jowhar from which reports last weekend suggested Al-Shabaab forces had begun retreating. Jowhar has been a major Al-Shabaab base since Al-Shabaab was driven out of Mogadishu. From Jowhar, the road runs north up the valley of the River Shebelle to Bulo Burto and then to Belet Weyne. Ethiopia forces drove Al-Shabaab out of Belet Weyne last December, and the town's security is now under Somali Government Forces and AMISOM's Djibouti troops.

The surrender of the Al-Shabaab fighters at Garsaale apparently came after fighting between rival militant groups. Eight Al-Shabaab fighters, including two senior Al-Shabaab commanders, were killed, and AMISOM forces subsequently recovered over 80 weapons at the scene of the clash. Those who surrendered will be sent to Mogadishu for rehabilitation. AMISOM's Deputy Operations Commander, Brigadier Michael Ondoga, said the incident confirmed the reports of divisions in Al-Shabaab. He said: "We call on all those who want peace not terror to lay down their arms. A number have contacted AMISOM indicating their wish to cease fighting. We have assured them of their safety if they give themselves up peacefully to AMISOM forces, as those surrendering in Garsaale have done".

Somalia Interior Minister, Abdisamad Mohamed Hassan, has said that the Somali Government is ready to find civilian jobs and training opportunities for former Al Shabaab rebels if they abandon the group and surrender. He called on the estimated 6,000 Al-Shabaab fighters still active in occupying areas in the south of the country to give up working for a terrorist group known for civilian killings and bloodshed, and start to live a new and peaceful life. The Minister said that anyone who gives up would be treated well. They wouldn't just be left on the streets. If they return voluntarily, the Government would take care of them. It would offer training to improve their skills and would protect them. However, if they were captured in fighting then they would be turned over to the Justice Department and would be jailed.

In recent months, following the increasing loss of towns and bases to AMISOM and Somali Government forces, increasing numbers of Al-Shabaab fighters have been surrendering. In addition to those surrendering, many other fighters have been quietly returning to their communities to lead a normal life. At the same time, others, particularly foreign fighters who had been deployed in Kismayo, have been reportedly fleeing the country or retreating into the remote and isolated Galgala Mountains in Puntland.

There are now reports that Hizbul Islam, one of the extremist factions allied with Al-Shabaab, is quitting the alliance it has had with Al-Shabaab. A spokesman, Mohamed Moallin, announced that Hizbul Islam was leaving Al-Shabaab because "Al-Shabaab fighters are no different than unbelievers" and that "Al-Shabaab has misinterpreted Islam". The spokesman said Hizbul Islam was ready to hold talks with the new Somali government, if the government was ready to be "an Islamic government". Hizbul Islam merged its forces with Al-Shabaab in late 2010. The leader of Hizbul Islam, Sheikh Hassan Dahir 'Aweys', was appointed military commander for southern Somalia for Al-Shabaab last year, but he later said that Hizbul Islam did not welcome Al-Shabaab's links with al-Qaeda. He later disagreed with Al-Shabaab over the killing of civilians, saying in March 2012: "I warn my jihadist brothers in Al-Shabaab against [spilling] the blood of the Somali

nation and killing innocent civilians in the name of Islam." The UN Special Representative to Somalia, Ambassador Mahiga, said the withdrawal of Hizbul Islam offered the government an opportunity which "the new government will pursue constructively in order to engage in political outreach and reconciliation by many more elements within al-Shabaab."

The announcement by Hizbul Islam is another serious problem for Al-Shabaab, already threatened by substantial defections and under severe military and political pressure from AMISOM and the new Somali government. Equally, the comment that Hizbul Islam was ready to talk only if the new government should be Islamic, **suggests that it has not moderated its extremism, even if it has split from Al-Shabaab.** There has been concern over efforts to bring extremist elements into the peace process in case their inclusion might derail a peace process which has been making considerable progress, not least with the adoption of a new constitution, founded on Sharia law, the successful end to the Transition and the successful choice of members of parliament, the election of a Speaker and of the election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, inaugurated on Sunday 16th September.

Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Somalia's newly elected president has made it clear his number one priority is "security". Al-Shabaab's forces have consistently failed to fight to hold any towns in recent months, and its recent activities have been largely confined to the use of suicide bombers and random grenade attacks. These will no doubt continue, but it is clear that Al-Shabaab cannot sustain a conventional war against the militarily superior forces deployed by AMISOM, the Somali government and Ethiopia. The successes of AMISOM, government forces and pro-government militias have resulted from coordinated efforts of regional powers through IGAD and international support. Al-Shabaab faced coordinated operations from Ethiopian forces, the Somali government and AMISOM troops, and pro-government militias. These have threatened Al-Shabaab's hold on much of the countryside and led many of the clans and local leaders who were prepared to accept Al-Shabaab in the absence of any alternative to decide they had had enough of its draconian policies.

The improvement in conditions can be seen in the fact that Somalia, for the first time, has hosted the Social Good Summit in Mogadishu, a global discussion uniting a community of innovators and change-makers from all parts of the world. Latest high-profile international visitors to visit the new Somalia President and offer support included fifteen diplomats from the UK, Italy, France, Sweden, Holland, Slovakia, Spain, the US and other countries last week. Recent visitors included General Sir Peter Wall, Chief of the General Staff of the British Army and the British Ambassador to Somalia, Ambassador Matt Bough, who met with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud last week. President Mohamud asked for British help in bringing Somalia's army and state institutions up to standard, and underlined the urgent need for direct support to Somali state institutions: "Assistance and collaboration from experts in various fields and capacity building is what is required in order to help and upgrade the civil servants and state institutions," he said. On Saturday last week, President Mohamud also received the new EU Special Representative to Somalia, Mr. Michele Cervone D'Urso, who said the EU was ready to help the new permanent government. The EU recently decided to provide additional support amounting to 82 million Euros to AMISOM. This will allow AMISOM to continue to fulfil its mandate and to reach its total strength of 17,731, as authorized by the UN. The High Representative and Vice President of the EU Commission, Lady Ashton said Somalia had opened a new chapter in its history with the election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, the adoption of the provisional Constitution, the selection of the new Federal Parliament and the election of its Speaker, Mohamed Sheikh Osman Jawari. She said the EU would continue to contribute to the stability and development in Somalia.

Sudan/South Sudan talks: good progress but no complete agreement

Efforts to reach a deal between Sudan and South Sudan continued for much of the week, with agreement only being finally reached on Thursday (27th September). Earlier optimism that a deal had been reached on Wednesday [26th] proved premature and the negotiations stretched into a fifth day. The future of the contested border area of Abyei, where the Ethiopian troops of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) are stationed, was a key sticking point. There had been original hopes that a comprehensive deal covering issues including oil, security, a demilitarized border buffer zone and the contested border regions could be reached, but as the week went on it became clear that any deal would be only partial.

Both sides were under strong international pressure to reach agreement, particularly after missing a UN Security Council deadline for agreement on 22nd September. The negotiating teams spent days in discussion trying to narrow their positions while mediators from the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) whose chairman Thabo Mbeki was due to report to the Security Council on Thursday, shuttled between the two sides. The UN Security Council set a deadline for a deal after border fighting broke out in March, when Southern troops briefly seized the Heglig oil field from Khartoum's control, and Sudan launched bombing raids in response. It has threatened sanctions if the negotiations fail to make sufficient progress.

From the beginning of the talks which have been going on for several months, key issues have included ownership of contested regions along their frontier, especially Abyei, and the question of setting up a demilitarized border zone. Any comprehensive deal would have to include a final settlement on Abyei. The creation of a buffer zone along the border would also potentially cut support for rebel forces in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States. Khartoum accuses Juba of supporting these forces; South Sudan also accuses Sudan of arming rebels in its territory. A delegation from the SPLA-North, fighting in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States was present in Addis Ababa but any discussions revolved around the humanitarian situation in those two states and were separate from the main negotiations.

Sudan President Omer Al-Bashir and President Salva Kiir Mayardit managed, after another long round of talks on Wednesday, to finally strike a deal on border security issues. They have however failed to reach agreement over Abyei which is being referred back to the AU Peace and Security Council. Problems remain on other contested border regions.

The areas of agreement were outlined at a press conference on Thursday (27th September). The two sides agreed to establish the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone along the unmarked 1,800-km border in accordance with the AUHIP November 2011 map, and to redeploy their troops out of the 10 kilometre-wide buffer zone. The "Mile 14" area, a disputed territory occupying 23 kilometres between Western Bahr El-Ghazal State in South Sudan and East Darfur State in Sudan will have special arrangements. South Sudan forces will withdraw from six areas it controls along the borders, including "Mile 14". Sudan's army will also withdraw from "Mile 14" which will revert to being run by a traditional joint administration system between Al-Riziygat Arab tribe of Darfur and Dinka Mulawl of South Sudan until the area's final status is determined. This will enable the two countries to implement the 3rd August deal on the costs of exporting South Sudan oil through Sudan and other related financial agreements. Oil experts say it will take several months before oil flows can be fully resumed as the two pipelines were filled with water to prevent the oil congealing in the pipelines; some oil facilities were also damaged during fighting earlier this year.

The deal eventually signed on Thursday afternoon, also includes a number of agreements: on security arrangements; on the status of nationals of the other states; on border issues including demarcation which commits to two sides to the 'soft border' principle; on trade and trade related issues; on a framework for cooperation on central banking issues which commits the two to cooperate on fiscal issues; to facilitate payment of post-service benefits; on division of assets and

liabilities, arrears and claims and a joint approach to the international community; on oil and related economic matters; and a cooperation agreement which affirms the commitment of the two sides to the principle of mutual viability and working towards a prosperous relationship. These agreements include the four freedoms which will allow citizens of each country the freedoms of movement, property ownership, work and residence in the other country. The issue of citizenship covers the issue of citizens of both nations resident in the other's country, but it has particular relevance for the hundreds of thousands of Southern Sudanese who still live in Sudan. The agreements will come into effect after being endorsed by the parliaments of both countries. The two countries have also agreed to implement the demarcation of their agreed border areas which represent 80 per cent of the border. The remaining 20 per cent are the five disputed territories of Hofrat Al-Nuhas, Mile 14, Kaka Al-Tigaria, Al-Muqaines, and Goda. The final status of these will be determined either through political agreements or by international arbitration.

No agreement was reached on Abyei after Sudan rejected an AUHIP proposal to hold a referendum by October 2013 to determine the final status of the area. This proposal was suggested by AUHIP last week. South Sudan accepted it; Sudan said it “categorically rejects the proposal in its entirety” because the proposal says that eligibility to vote in the referendum should be based on “permanent” residence in Abyei. Sudan says this favours the Dinka Ngok of South Sudan but excludes the nomadic al Messriyah of Sudan who reside in Abyei for a few months each year to graze their cattle. South Sudan rejected a Sudan proposal to include al-Messriyah in the vote or divide the area so northern Abyei would be administered by Sudan and the southern part by South Sudan. Sudan and South Sudan did, however, agree to continue implementation of the agreement of June 2011 on Abyei which provides for joint administrative and legislative bodies to run the region. They also agreed to keep the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), made up of 4,200 Ethiopian peacekeepers, deployed in the region. The issue of Abyei will now be referred back to the AU Peace and Security Council. Abyei was one of the issues on which UN Security Council’s resolution 2046 demanded action. The UN Security Council gave 22nd September as the final deadline for the two sides to reach a comprehensive agreement. Under resolution 2046 the Security Council could impose sanctions on both sides should it feel that Thursday’s meeting failed to deliver sufficient agreement. The chair of the AUHIP, Thabo Mbeki, has now told Sudan and South Sudan that he would be addressing the UN Security Council and would ask for another extension of the deadline to settle outstanding issues. The two sides are expected to resume discussions within two weeks.

In a speech at the signing ceremony on Thursday, Minister Bereket Simon, on behalf of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Government, congratulated both sides on reaching “an historic deal”. It had, he said, been a long process. The negotiations began with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Post Referendum Issues and Arrangements between the SPLA and the NPC signed at Mekelle, Ethiopia, in June 2010. It was a testament to the relentless efforts of the AU High Level Implementation Panel and chaired by former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, and including former Presidents Pierre Buyoya of Burundi and General Abdulselami Abubakar of Nigeria. This represented an exceptional degree of African engagement and assistance at the highest level, particularly in expediting the negotiations of the previous few days. Minister Bereket also mentioned the efforts of Prime Minister Hailemariam and the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who as Chairman of IGAD had been consistently committed to peace in the region, who encouraged the concept of ‘soft borders’ and who, until literally the last days of his life, was closely involved in the progress of the talks. Minister Bereket said Prime Minister Meles would have been delighted to see this agreement, and added **“indeed, in a larger sense, you have acknowledged his memory, and rewarded both him and the government of Ethiopia by taking this bold step today.”** Minister Bereket also stressed that Ethiopia had always been a close friend and ally to both Sudan and South Sudan, and it would remain so. It was committed to bringing peaceful solutions to all the problems of the region; no country in the region could prosper or live in peace while its neighbours were at each others' throats. Minister Bereket

thanked IGAD and the AU for their close involvement and commitment to peace in the region in general and in Sudan and South Sudan in particular. He called on the international community at large and the UN to enhance support to this peace process and to the efforts the region was making to achieve peace and stability. In conclusion he said that Sudan and South Sudan must be true to this commitment to peace; they owed it, he said, to the peoples of Sudan and South Sudan who had long suffered from senseless violence for too long.

The World Bank endorses a new Country Partnership Strategy for Ethiopia

On Tuesday this week [25th Sep], the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors endorsed a new Country Partnership Strategy for Ethiopia to build on the country's development progress over the last five years of its previous country strategy and help Ethiopia advance in its efforts to create more growth, more jobs, better health and education, and assist in the reduction of poverty on a significant scale.

In line with the new Country Partnership Strategy, the Board of Executive Directors approved two International Development Association interest-free credits totaling US\$1.15 billion. One was to support Ethiopia's commitment towards expanding the reach of key services to people in need across the country; the second to develop further the country's road networks to help promote better regional trade integration and internal travel.

One of these credits was for US\$600 million in development financing for the third phase of the Promoting Basic Services (PBS III) programme. This programme is co-financed by the Government of Ethiopia, and other development partners including the European Union, the UK Department for International Development, the African Development Bank, Italy, Austria and others. It covers the whole country and, since 2006, the programme has helped to hire over 100,000 new primary school teachers at the '*woreda*' (district) level as well as more than 38,000 health extension workers across the country and 45,000 agricultural extension workers. The programme has promoted transparency and citizen's engagement by making public its budgets and posting its performance score-cards in virtually all its operating areas, and in encouraging greater social accountability. Results have included the reduction in under-5 mortality rate from 123 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 88 per 1,000 live births in 2010.

Mr. Guang Zhe Chen, the World Bank's Country Director for Ethiopia said that "PBS III will contribute to Ethiopia's rapid progress towards achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals, by providing funding for crucial staff to help to improve key services such as education, health, food production, water and sanitation, and rural roads. Promoting improved access to quality, decentralized basic services is also central to the core elements of Ethiopia's new CPS" he added. The new Country Partnership Strategy will have two main areas of focus: "Fostering competitiveness and employment" including improved delivery of infrastructure, and "Enhancing resilience and reducing vulnerabilities", including developing a comprehensive approach to social protection and risk management.

The second credit is to provide support for the Government's progress in expanding the road network. The Ethiopia Transport Sector Project will invest US\$415 million to upgrade five major roads. These will play an important role in supporting economic growth over the medium to long term by providing better access for industrial, agricultural and tourism development. They will also provide improved access for essential services in project areas. The Country Director noted that the size and quality of the national road network has been a major barrier to more economic growth and less poverty, adding "by improving conditions and safety on these main roads, we believe the project will help stimulate local development, as well as create more jobs and opportunity for people across the country. " An additional priority of the Ethiopia Country

Partnership Strategy will be to emphasize the role of women in development by mainstreaming their close involvement in both these projects.

Ethiopia and the Czech Republic discuss bilateral relations

Last week, a delegation of government and business representatives from the Czech Republic visited Ethiopia. The delegation was led by Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Tomáš Dub and the delegation held meetings with officials from the Ministry of Finance and Economy, of Defence, of Industry, the House of People's Representatives, the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce, the Metal Engineering Corporation (METEC) and other bodies. In his discussion with the State Minister of Finance and Economy, Ahmed Shide, Mr. Dub said the Czech Republic was committed to further strengthen its relations with Ethiopia despite the problems of the current financial crisis in Europe. He expressed the wish to further promote trade and investment ties with Ethiopia and pledged his support for Ethiopia in areas of investment, experience sharing, technology transfer, energy and security. The Czech Deputy Foreign Minister said his government was ready to share its experience on free market issues, and invited representatives from the Ministry of Finance as well as from METEC to see the issues at first-hand. He emphasized the importance of jointly working with METEC to promote Ethiopia's industry, and said the Czech Republic would continue financing projects in Ethiopia and grant low interest loans. Ato Ahmed described the Czech delegation's visit as an important milestone in consolidating and promoting the traditional friendship and all-round cooperation between Ethiopia and the Czech Republic. Ethiopia, he said, is ready to create favourable conditions for Czech businesses to invest and do business in Ethiopia.

The delegation also met with the Ethio-Czech Parliamentary Friendship Committee of the House of People's Representatives. Mr. Dub emphasized that his government wanted to further solidify the existing people-to-people relations between the two countries. He noted that there was a need to share experience and collaborate in areas of mutual concern. Ato Adugna Jebessa, the Chairperson of the Ethio-Czech Parliamentary Friendship Committee spoke of the current changes in Ethiopia's economy, politics and social aspects. They agreed on the need to raise the efficiency of multifaceted cooperation, particularly over issues of investment, technology transfer, green development, and capacity building.

The delegation also held discussions with Ethiopian investors and officials of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Association, focusing on ways to strengthen bilateral trade and investment ties. The Czech Deputy Prime Minister said Ethiopia's trade and investment opportunities were encouraging for Czech investors. Gebrehiwot Gebregeziaber, a representative of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce, said trade and investment ties in industry, technology, agriculture and health sectors in particular had shown a remarkable increase over recent years, noting that conditions were being facilitated where investors can work together to further enhance their relationship. He said Ethiopia was a country of great investment potential and called upon Czech investors to take advantage of the opportunities available. The business communities in the two countries should work aggressively to enhance trade and investment relations, he said, organizing information-sharing schemes, business-to-business forums and trade fairs. The Deputy Foreign Minister said a number of Czech investors were already engaged in projects in Ethiopia and he said the two countries could particularly develop ties in technology and science. Mr. Dub also noted the Czech Republic was offering a number of scholarships to Ethiopians through its institutions of higher learning to enhance bilateral relations.

The Fourth Africa-Cuba Solidarity Conference

The two-day 4th Africa-Cuba Solidarity Conference which was held here in Addis Ababa concluded last Sunday [23rd Sep]. The conference, attended by 129 delegates drawn from 27 countries, was organized by the Association of the Friendship between the Peoples of Ethiopia and Cuba, the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples (ICAP) and the Cuban Embassy in Ethiopia. The opening ceremony was attended by Ato Kassa Teklebirhan, Speaker of the House of Federation, Kenia Serano, the Director of ICAP, Ato Getachew Eyob, President of the Ethio-Cuba Friendship Association, and other dignitaries and ministers. A day before the opening, delegations to the conference held a memorial service at the Ethio-Cuba Friendship Park to honour the martyrs who lost their lives fighting alongside the Ethiopian army following the 1977 Somali invasion. A floral wreath was laid in commemoration of their sacrifice.

Ato Kassa Teklebirhan opened the conference with a welcoming speech that detailed the long and warm relations between Cuba and Ethiopia. He said the relationship had survived changes of regime and indeed had been “knitted in blood” adding that Cuba had been one few countries that stood alongside Ethiopia at the time of invasion by the forces of Siad Barre in the war of 1977-78. The relationship had not been limited to military cooperation and he said: “Cuba has provided full scholarships for some four thousand Ethiopians; it was,” he said, “an extraordinary contribution to the development of our human resources in the last three decades”. Ato Kassa also noted that following signing of a Scientific and Technical Cooperation Agreement there were currently nine medical doctors and eighteen university lecturers helping in health and education efforts in Ethiopia. He expressed Ethiopia’s readiness to continue to work together on bilateral relations and in multilateral fora alongside Cuba in its “struggle to overcome the economic embargo imposed on it”. Ato Getachew Eyob said Africans trained in Cuba were serving their country in numerous and various fields; and there were 30 Ethiopians studying in Cuban Universities at the moment.

Ms. Kenia Serano, Director of ICAP, in her speech underscored “the unbreakable link forged between Africa and Cuba in their determination to uphold peace, unity and development over the past 50 years”. She thanked all African countries for their solid support to Cuba’s struggle in international fora against the economic blockade that has been imposed for the past 50 years. Detailing Cuba’s strong relationship with Africa, she said that since the Cuban revolution in 1959 “more than 33,000 Africans [had] studied in Cuba while more than 300,000 Cuban specialists have served in Africa”. Speaking about Cuba’s relationship with Ethiopia, Serano recalled “the heroic martyrdom of 163 Cuban soldiers “as an historic link between the two countries and she thanked the Ethiopian government for erecting a statue in their honour, adding that “we may be distant in geography but [we are] united in culture, ancestors and history.” Kenia Serano also expressed condolences on the sudden death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi who she said had worked a lot “to maintain the warm relations between the two countries”. She concluded by calling on all Africans to stand by Cuba’s side in its fight against the US embargo.

Other speakers, including Namibia’s Foreign Minister, South Sudan’s Minister of Education and the heads of various delegations all reiterated the strong relationship between Cuba and Africa and emphasized Cuba’s support in their struggle for independence. Reports of working commissions on a variety of subjects were heard and debated, and an action plan adopted. The conference also had presentations from former Cuban students, cultural shows, and a brief caricature art exhibition; a documentary film about Cuba–Africa relations and African Students was presented.

In the declaration issued at the end of the conference, delegates recognized Africa’s solidarity with Cuba, inspired by the common values of independence, humanism, justice and solidarity and Cuba’s support to Africa’s independence and development. It condemned the economic and

financial blockade imposed on Cuba and among other issues hailed the support provided by the deployment of over three hundred thousand Cubans in 35 African countries, condemned negative media campaigns that distorted reality in Cuba, declared Africa's strong commitment to sovereignty and the rights of self-determination of the Cuban people, vowed to broaden and strengthen Africa's solidarity with Cuba, recognized the activities of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People in promoting global action for just causes based on the principle of solidarity and friendship, congratulated the Cuban People on the 54th anniversary of the Cuban revolution and extended its gratitude to the organizers of the conference including the Ethiopian government and the African Union.

News and Views

WFP relief food airdrops into South Sudan from Ethiopia

The United Nations World Food Programme in Ethiopia has thanked Ethiopian authorities for facilitating airdrops of badly needed food aid to refugee camps in South Sudan. The camps have been set up for refugees who have fled from fighting in Sudan's Blue Nile State across the border into South Sudan. A sudden influx of 35,000 refugees into Maban County brought a sharp increase in food needs just as the rainy season started making the transport of relief food very difficult. The WFP said that there are more than one hundred thousand people in urgent need of aid, and "the airdrop operation was critical to bring food as fast as possible to them". According to Abdou Dieng, WFP Country Director in Ethiopia, more than 1,000 metric tonnes of grain was airdropped in South Sudan's Maban County from planes taking off from Gambella between mid-August and 17th September. In addition to the airdrop, WFP also delivered more food into South Sudan from Ethiopia by barge. During the same period 1,600 metric tonnes of wheat was transported on the Akobo River to Melut in South Sudan's Upper Nile State. Deliveries of food by road will be able to resume at the end of the rainy season in January.

State Minister meets Chinese Business Community Representatives

Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos, State Minister of Foreign Affairs, met representatives of the Chinese business community in Ethiopia on Friday (21st September). Also present were the Ambassadors of the two countries. The State Minister noted that Ethiopia was committed to further strengthen its strategic partnership with China. He welcomed China's enormous contribution to the Growth and Transformation Plan and stressed that China was an important partner of Ethiopia on bilateral, regional, and international issues. Ethiopia's Ambassador to China, Ambassador Seyoum Mesfin recalled the excellent strategic cooperation between the two countries, and the role of Chinese companies in uplifting development in Ethiopia. At the same time, Ambassador Seyoum emphasized that Chinese manufacturing enterprises could benefit from further investment in Ethiopia which is a member of COMESA. Its products can easily penetrate into the European markets and also gain from proximity to the Gulf countries. Ethiopia is planning to establish additional industrial and economic zones and is inviting consortia of Chinese companies to participate as contractors and as manufacturers. China's Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Xie Xiaoyan, underlined the strategic nature of the partnership. He identified areas of cooperation, including agriculture, manufacturing, energy and minerals, infrastructure, science and technology, financial services, and training. He suggested a mechanism should be devised to allow for regular discussions on the areas of cooperation. The Chairperson of the Chinese Companies Representatives in Ethiopia said that Chinese companies in Ethiopia were doing their best to contribute to the Growth and Transformation Plan. He described Ethiopia as a country with a strong leadership, good governance and stable politics, but he also expressed concern over some bureaucratic issues, including delays in customs clearance and matters of tax, as well as issues of licensing, employment, and title deeds.

COMESA's trade facilitation project for the Djibouti corridor

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Secretariat has said it is planning to implement a pilot project for a Virtual Trade Facilitation System along the Djibouti Corridor. Opening a COMESA Trade Facilitation workshop here in Addis Ababa last Saturday, the State Minister for Finance and Economic Development, Ahmed Shide, noted that the project would help to enhance regional competitiveness, expand trade, coordinate activities and exchange information. He said the system allowed for the tracking of cargo, the monitoring and control of the movement of goods, ensuring transparency, efficiency, cost effectiveness and time management. Ato Ahmed said the project would play a significant role in reducing transport time and costs for local, cross-border as well as transit traffic and trade along the Djibouti corridor. The State Minister said the pilot project would also create a conducive environment for the smooth flow of trade transactions between COMESA member states and the rest of the world. Ato Ahmed emphasized that Ethiopia was striving to boost infrastructural development, to facilitate trade and reduce import-export costs of doing business as part of its Growth and Transformation Plan. He said the government was exerting efforts to facilitate trade through the development of roads, ICT and railway infrastructure, to improve weak physical and institutional systems which were key obstacles to intra-African trade and investment. Mr. Sidiso Ngongna of the COMESA Secretariat said the pilot project would allow for development of a competitive, efficient, smooth and speedy system of trade in the Djibouti corridor. The pilot project would be implemented in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan and South Sudan. The project aimed to enhance trade facilitation, competition, efficiency of cross-border trade, observing and controlling procedures that govern the movement of goods across national borders, improving and reducing associated costs and maximizing efficiency and safeguarding legitimate regulatory objectives. The three-day workshop attracted participants from Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan and South Sudan. Officials from the Ministry of Transport and Communication, the Transport Authority, the Shipping Transport and Logistics Service Enterprise, the Customs and Revenue Authority and the Maritime Authority, attended the workshop.

Africa needs to pursue comprehensive Regional Trade Policies

Industry Minister, Ato Mekonnen Manyazewal, told the Africa Trade Forum 2012 on Monday (September 24th) that the continent needed to pursue comprehensive regional trade policies as an instrument of development and transformation. The Minister, in his opening remarks at the Forum, jointly organized by the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank, noted that Africa had to move forward from trading primary products to manufacturing products through mobilizing national investors and attracting foreign direct investment. He said the continent had to learn and take concrete actions to add value to its raw materials and resources through industrial development. Ato Mekonnen also highlighted the importance of attracting Foreign Direct Investment as well as domestic investment. He pointed out that increasing the volume of products could not be realized without proper infrastructure. The theme of the Forum is Boosting Intra-African Trade and Establishing a Continental Free Trade Area and the AU Commission Deputy Chairperson, Erastus Mwencha, also emphasized that Africa needed to develop structures for the implementation of an approved architecture at the national, regional and continental level in order to move forward. He emphasized that Regional Economic Communities needed to present Action Plans that contribute towards the Road map for setting up a Continental Free Trade Area by 2017. The Forum discussed ways of enhancing productive capacities and the improvement of industrial performance. It also looked at ways of enhancing trade facilitation. Stakeholders attending the Forum (September 24-26th) concluded their deliberations with proposals on the way forward for RECs and member states engaged in shaping the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area. They concluded with recommendations aimed at addressing some major impediments to boosting intra-African trade in the areas of

investment finance, enhancing productive capacity and improving industrial performance as well as enhancing trade facilitation, infrastructure for trade and establishing the Free Trade Area.