

A Week in the Horn **28th December 2012**

- **Prime Minister Hailemariam's shuttle diplomacy between Sudan and South Sudan**
- **Somalia's President on official visits to Kenya and Uganda**
- **An ONLF faction to hold talks with the government**
- **Oxfam calls for a new image for Africa**
- **Lionizing journalists and demonizing the judicial process**

News and Views (page 10):

- **Ambassador emphasizes Ethiopia's huge bamboo potential**
- **UN Special Rapporteur urges Eritrea to cooperate**
- **Somali MPs ask for re-submission of 2013 draft budget**
- **Spokesperson says power deals reinforce Ethiopia's regional position**
- **President Guelleh decorates Speaker Abadula**
- **Somaliland announces its national parties for the next decade**

Prime Minister Hailemariam's shuttle diplomacy between Sudan and South Sudan

This week, Prime Minister Hailemariam led a high-level delegation which included Foreign Minister, Dr Tedros Adhanom, on working visits to the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan. The Prime Minister arrived in Khartoum on Wednesday (26th December) for talks with Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir, as part of the efforts to coordinate and facilitate face-to-face discussions between the Presidents of Sudan and South Sudan. The aim is to encourage the leaders of the two countries to complete consultations on unresolved outstanding issues. Ethiopia, which brokered the September peace deal between the two countries, has been working closely with the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan (AUHIP) since then to encourage both sides to implement the associated security and economic agreements which are crucial to peace and prosperity in the region. Sudan's Presidential Press Secretary, Emad Sayed Ahmed, described the Ethiopian Prime Minister's visit as coming "in the context of the Ethiopian endeavours to push ahead the peace process between Sudan and South Sudan".

The joint Ethiopian and AUHIP-led peace agreements signed between the two Sudans on 27th September called for a jointly-monitored demilitarized buffer-zone in the disputed areas along their common border, the reopening of the border for general trade, the resumption of South Sudanese oil exports through northern pipelines and an end to the support of rebel groups in one another's territories. Although the implementation of the agreements on cooperation, security and post-secession matters has proved difficult, the Prime Minister's visit this week emphasized Ethiopia's unwavering commitment to the peaceful mediation of conflict between the two countries. Most recently, the two sides agreed to the establishment and implementation of the demilitarized buffer zone along their common border. The Joint Political and Security Mechanism (JPSM) is scheduled to meet on 13th January next year, to discuss issues proposed during the discussions held in Addis Ababa last week. There is broad consensus that facilitating a direct discussion between the presidents of the two countries would pave the way for greater optimism over the outcome of the upcoming JPSM discussion.

The Prime Minister and President Al-Bashir held talks regarding increased bilateral coordination on issues of mutual concern to both countries, and the Prime Minister explained to reporters that the meetings were part of ongoing efforts by both countries to strengthen relations based on the foundations laid down by the late Prime Minister Meles. After the meeting, Sudanese State

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Salah Wanasi, stated that "the talks [focused on] the relationships between the countries, [and] the role of Ethiopian peacekeepers in Abyei". 4,000 Ethiopian peacekeepers for the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) were deployed in the disputed region on the common border in June 2011 as part of a deal covering the interim administration and security of the region. The discussions also covered efforts to boost coordination and collaboration on social and political issues.

The Prime Minister also held talks with Sudanese Minister of Defence, Abdel-Rahim Mohamed Hussein, on security matters. These included the obstacles facing the Sudanese government in implementing the security agreement with South Sudan and the activity of rebel groups in Blue Nile and South Kordofan states. Following the meeting, Abdel-Rahim Mohamed Hussein said "Sudan appreciated the vital role that has been played by Ethiopia to converge the different views and find ways to implement the agreements between Sudan and South Sudan". He underlined that "the Security Agreement is the foundation of continued collaboration with South Sudan".

The following day (27th December), Prime Minister Hailemariam travelled to Juba to hold similar discussions with South Sudanese President, Salva Kiir, and members of his government. The visit, the first of its kind since the Prime Minister took office, was aimed at encouraging the South Sudanese to agree to the organization of a Presidential summit aimed at reviving dialogue on the implementation of the cooperation agreements with Sudan.

The Prime Minister urged members of the Government of President Salva Kiir to use the upcoming meetings to work closely with their counterparts in the north to set in motion a mechanism to implement the September agreements. The Prime Minister cautioned both sides not to allow any future disagreement to escalate into the sort of conflict witnessed earlier this year.

Following the meetings, the Secretary General of the ruling Southern Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM), Pagan Amum, explained that the Prime Minister had come to Juba with the aim of removing the obstacles currently hindering the implementation of the cooperation agreements. Amum, who is also South Sudan's lead negotiator with Sudan, expressed optimism that the organization of a summit between Presidents Bashir and Kiir would bear fruit in addressing the current stalemate.

Following this round of shuttle diplomacy, the Presidents of both the Sudan and South Sudan have assured Prime Minister Hailemariam of their commitment to engage in substantive discussions on the implementation of the peace agreements at an upcoming presidential summit. This, to be held in Addis Ababa by the end of next week, will be facilitated by the Prime Minister in his role as the current chair of IGAD. The Prime Minister's meetings in Khartoum and Juba with President Omar Al-Bashir and President Salva Kiir have succeeded in bridging the gap between the two sides. They underline the warm brotherly relations between the three countries at a time of increasing economic interdependence and diplomatic collaboration in the region.

Somalia's President on official visits to Kenya and Uganda

On Tuesday this week (25th December), Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud returned to Mogadishu after a five-day tour to Kenya and Uganda. The President told reporters that his tour to Nairobi and Kampala had been successful. In Uganda, on his second visit since elected this year, President Hassan met with President Museveni and other officials. Uganda is, of course, the biggest contributor of troops to the AU peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM). He had gone to HassanKampala from Nairobi where he was received by Kenyan President, Mwai Kibaki, on Friday (21st December). He was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign

Affairs, Fauzia Aden as well as the Ministers of the Interior, Abdikarim Hussein Guled, and of Information, Abdullahi Elmooge Hirsi, and the Minister of State for the Presidency, Farah Sheikh Abdikadir.

The two Heads of State held wide-ranging consultations on various issues of bilateral and regional interest and at the end of their meeting issued a nine-point communiqué. They welcomed recent political developments in Somalia including the installation of a new Parliament and Government. They acknowledged that Kenya and Somalia shared a common destiny and noted the importance of enhancing and deepening bilateral ties and therefore stressed the need for regular bilateral consultations. They emphasized the need to revitalize the Joint Commission for Co-operation (JCC) signed between the two countries, in September 2005, as a key framework for bilateral engagement, and they mandated the respective Foreign Ministers to begin preparatory work on this immediately.

They underscored the need to co-ordinate efforts at bilateral, regional and international levels towards consolidation of peace and security in Somalia as well as for the reconstruction of the country and building of new institutions of governance. The issue of Somali refugees living in crowded conditions in camps in Kenya was raised, and they pledged to work together to come up with modalities for their orderly return to Somalia to rebuild their lives and participate in development there.

The two presidents commended the role of IGAD in the Grand Stabilization Plan for South Central Somalia and other liberated areas. They stressed the need to support the process which has, of course, been endorsed by IGAD Heads of State and Government, by the African Union and by the UN Security Council. They also noted with appreciation the role of AMISOM in liberating large areas of Somalia from Al-Shabaab. They called on the United Nations Security Council to consider favourably extending AMISOM's mandate after 7th March 2013, so it can continue to help with the process of consolidation of peace and security. In conclusion, the two presidents noted the negative impact on IGAD states of the breakdown of law and order in Somalia, and "acknowledged as legitimate the consensus and interest of the sub-region in ensuring peace, security and stability in Somalia."

In a subsequent press conference, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said that "Somalia is very grateful for the unwavering support from Kenya, in particular for it sending its troops to Somalia to eliminate the threat of Al Shabaab and for hosting Somali refugees in this great country". He said his government is "hopeful that Somalia will reclaim its role in the international landscape", living "at peace with itself and at peace with its neighbours, where people can go about their daily lives with safety and provide for their families with dignity".

He said Somalia is "aiming to contribute positively" to the development efforts in region and to the world. He noted that "Somalia is emerging from a very long and difficult period" and that it is "moving away from chaos, instability, extremism, and piracy", heading towards "a new era of peace and development". President Hassan also noted that instability emanating from within Somalia poses a threat to the country, to the wider region and to the international community. He said "Al Qaeda and its affiliates, piracy, and the impact of refugees on host country" are among the threats in Somalia.

President Kibaki for his part noted that "the Kenyan government stands by the side of the will of the majority in Somalia who want peace to prevail". He said Kenya's decision to join the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was part of the effort to remove the Al Shabaab militant group and to reinforce peace and stability in Somalia. He said Kenya "is a true friend of Somalia" and expressed his Government's readiness to work together with the Federal

Government of Somalia "to return Somali refugees back to Somalia" to help them live in dignity at home as "there is no dignity living in refugee camps".

Meanwhile, on Monday this week (24th December), Kenya's Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, announced the appointment of Ibrahim Ahmed Rashid as Kenya's Political Advisor on Somalia. The Prime Minister said he appointed the political advisor with the intention of bringing the people of Somalia together "in order to find a lasting solution to the conflict". It was meant to strengthen support to Somalia and deal with any threats of major regional challenge. Mr Rashid will be a liaison between the Prime Minister of Kenya and the Government of Somalia. He is no stranger to Somali matters. Most recently, he served on the ODM National Elections Board, Executive Director and founder of the One Stop Development Agency, a national NGO that focuses on development, emergency relief and works for positive change in the lives of vulnerable populations in Northern Kenya and other arid lands. He also worked on the Committee of Experts on Constitutional Review as a Senior Programme Officer on Civic Education, Mobilization and Outreach.

An ONLF faction to hold talks with the government

Last weekend, representatives of a faction of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) arrived in Addis to hold talks with the federal government. The leader of the group, Abdinur Abdulahi Farah, told reporters that the group had arrived in Addis to hold a dialogue with the government and to seek ways on how the ONLF could collaborate on national and regional development. Abdinur, the East Africa representative of the ONLF, and an executive member of the ONLF's central committee, said the group had opted for peace following its growing awareness of the way the people of the Somali region had begun to benefit significantly from the federal system as other nations and nationalities of Ethiopia had.

Abdinur made it clear that this decision arose from the stalled talks last October when ONLF leaders had met with government representatives in Nairobi. The talks made little progress as some ONLF leaders immediately claimed that they would never accept the Constitution, despite the fact that it offers self-determination, a long-time claim by the ONLF. The decision to walk out of the talks caused bitter internal disagreements within the ONLF leadership, and there is little doubt that one reason was pressure from the ONLF's only external backer, Eritrea. According to Abdinur, the question of accepting the Constitution or rejecting it, has now led to the virtual disintegration of the front. He said that only a few members continued to be opposed to talks: "Those members of the front who rejected the National Constitution have no popular support and they are only few, led by Admiral Mohammed Osman who is now hiding in Asmara". Predictably, Admiral Osman's faction has now issued a statement claiming that Abdinur does not represent the ONLF and that there were no talks between it and the Ethiopian government. The statement also claims that Ethiopia sought the help of the Kenyan government to try to broker a peace deal with the ONLF, and that the government stormed out of the talks when it realized that ONLF would not accept unilateral preconditions.

Abdinur stressed his faction's decision to accept the Constitution came out of their understanding that the people of the Somali Regional State **have benefitted a lot from the current system of administration and have been enjoying their right to self-administration over the past two decades**. He also noted that, contrary to the ONLF's expectations, there had been a smooth power transition following the passing of the late Prime Minister Meles. This had helped members gravitate towards peaceful struggle. He said the ONLF had "thought there would be a power vacuum and chaos following the passing of the late PM Meles. Things unfolded another way. After

witnessing the way the transition was handled, we, along with our supporters, realized that we had no better option than to accept the Constitution and resort to peaceful means.”

This is not the first time elements of the ONLF have held talks with the government and the organization has suffered splits before. As one of the few Somali organizations functional in 1991 when the EPRDF came to power, it was able in 1991 to provide the government of what was to become the Somali Regional State. The ONLF held power in the region until 1994. At that point, the organization split over whether or not to call for a referendum on independence for the region. The majority of the ONLF rejected the idea, opting to remain within the political process of the Somali Regional State, subsequently uniting with another party to form the Somali People’s Democratic Party in 1998. A minority, however, decided to take up armed struggle. Their efforts were largely minimal until Admiral Mohamed Omar Osman, a former commander of the Somali navy under Siad Barre, became ONLF chairman. He decided to ally with Eritrea, which welcomed the opportunity to add to its efforts to destabilize Ethiopia. It provided training for hundreds of fighters as well as supplies and other logistical and financial support. A group of around 1,000 trained in Eritrea was sent to Somalia in late 2006 and then passed on into the Somali Regional State by the Islamic Courts Union which had declared a jihad against Ethiopia. It was this group which attacked the Chinese oil exploration camp at Abule in April 2007, slaughtering 74 civilian workers, including women and children and nine Chinese technicians in the camp, most murdered in their beds. The ONLF followed this up with a campaign of terrorist violence across several zones of the region, attacking vehicles and burning villages as well as assassinating local clan elders, officials and civilians opposed to their activities.

This outbreak of terrorist activities led to a series of successful government counter-terrorist operations. Since 2008, ONLF operations have been largely small-scale, hit-and-run terrorist activities, including the laying of landmines on roads and attempts to assassinate local Somali Regional administration officials. Attempts to infiltrate further groups of fighters have been largely unsuccessful, and the ONLF has steadily lost support in the region in the last three or four years in the face of significant economic development, improved administration, expanded health and education facilities and increasingly effective governance. These were also associated with a series of substantial infrastructural and developmental projects launched by the Somali Regional Government.

It was these developments, coupled with its own internal splits, which led the ONLF to propose peace talks last year, using Kenya as an intermediary. It was the ONLF which suggested the talks after dropping hints for over a year and their approach followed the government’s successful negotiations with two other dissident Somali organizations. One was the United Front for the Liberation of Western Somalia, which reached agreement with the government in 2010. In June 2010, an agreement was also reached between the government and the larger faction of the ONLF, the Supreme Council, headed by Salahdin Ma’ow, who had succeeded Dr Mohamed Sirad Dalol in January the previous year. This established a framework for further talks and agreement was reached early last year, leading to the return of many members of the ONLF from abroad and the release of many others from prison.

In fact, the ONLF’s support has been dwindling steadily. For a number of years, in addition to assistance from Eritrea, it has been dependent upon resources provided by Diaspora members of the clan in the US. As the reality of ONLF activity has become apparent and as people have learnt of the political, economic and social developments within the Somali Regional State, this support has disappeared. Senior officials from the Regional State government have made a series of successful speaking tours to inform Somalis in the Diaspora of the reality on the ground. More and more people returned to see what is actually happening in the region.

The Ethiopian Federal Constitution and the continuing progress towards the democratic developmental state provide all nations, nationalities and peoples with the right to self-determination. It has provided fertile ground for all those groups, suppressed for decades, to benefit from the Constitution and gain power within the system and gain political social and economic benefits. Like other nations and nationalities in Ethiopia, the Somali region has benefited greatly from the federal system, and many of the benefits guaranteed in the constitution are now being realized by the Somali people. The development and democratization now prevailing in the country as a result of the Constitution has given rise to the achievement of double-digit economic growth for the last nine years. The people of the region are witness to the changes registered in the country and in their region. It is the people of the Somali Regional State who have comprehensively rejected the rebel group and its claims to represent them.

Oxfam calls for a new image for Africa

This week, a major international NGO, Oxfam UK, launched a new initiative to try and shift away the continuing focus on depressing images of Africa to take a more positive look at the continent's progress. Oxfam is a leading international charity and has itself done much to reinforce the depressing stereotypes of Africa, of famine, war, poverty which have been notably underlined by such organizations as Live Aid and Band Aid. However, it has now decided this approach may be counter-productive and risks driving assistance away. This, of course, is a view that has been long held by many governments in Africa. Ethiopia, for example, while more than grateful for all the help and assistance it has received, has said for many years that images of starving babies and the other familiar pictures and continual claims of nothing but problems in Africa over the last thirty or forty years, can have the effect of desensitizing donors. Such images can lead to claims that conditions in the developing world will never improve and encourage donors to refuse to accept the evidence of their own eyes where development is taking place. Equally, such views are also all-too-often manipulated by devious advocacy agencies and others for their own ends.

The British arm of Oxfam International has now launched an advertising campaign to celebrate Africa's natural beauty and the progress being made towards alleviating hunger. The campaign is being called "Food for All," and shows images of lush green scenery, wildlife and of flourishing African food markets. Its theme is "Let's Make Africa Famous for Its Epic Landscapes, Not Hunger."

Oxfam UK's Chief Executive, Dame Barbara Stocking, says that Oxfam and other agencies have come a long way since the 1980s and Band Aid's 'Do They Know It's Christmas?', and it is time to get rid of the "the old stereotypes and celebrate the continent's diversity and complexity." She said that the message fostered by Band Aid and other well-intentioned campaigns was patronizing to say the least. She added that for people to understand what's happening in Africa, it was necessary to tell the good stories, and, she added, "there has been good news in Africa." If this isn't done, then "people just feel put off and (believe) there's nothing that can be done; and that's the big worry for us — that people feel it's all hopeless, when it clearly isn't."

Oxfam acknowledges that international aid has made insufficient inroads on hunger, but in a recent report it said that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had made "one of the most remarkable turnarounds in development ... in the last decade." It called the 22 years from 1990 to 2011 an "African renaissance." It added that "economies have been growing even in the face of economic and financial instability elsewhere in the world, poverty has fallen and child mortality has dropped considerably, among the most visible indicators of progress. In other words, as Ethiopia has vividly demonstrated with its double-digit growth for nearly a decade, aid and aid money really is working.

Oxfam based its change of approach on a survey carried out in the UK and nearly three quarters of those questioned said they had become unresponsive to images of hunger, drought and disease. Although they ultimately thought it is possible to bring an end to hunger in Africa, only one in five believed they could play an active role in achieving this. Respondents said media and advertising portrayals of Africa and developing countries in other parts of the world are "depressing, manipulative and hopeless" and just under half said they were left feeling that conditions for people living in the developing world would never improve.

So Oxfam now intends to strike a more optimistic tone in future campaigning. Dame Barbara said: "Oxfam has led the way in drawing attention to the plight of Africa's most vulnerable people and we aren't trying to gloss over the problems that still beset so many of them, particularly levels of malnutrition that remain stubbornly high." She added that the relentless focus on current problems at the expense of a more nuanced portrait of the continent, was obscuring the progress that was being made towards a more secure and prosperous future. "If we want people to help fight hunger we have to give them grounds for hope by showing the potential of countries across Africa; it's a natural instinct to turn away from suffering when you feel you can do nothing to alleviate it," she added.

Africa, Dame Barbara noted, is far more complex than Westerners give it credit for. "Of course, there are floods, droughts, and there is conflict, but that is not in every country at all," she said, adding that "there are quite a number of countries now in Africa that are really doing very well. We want to make sure people have a really better, balanced picture of what's happening in Africa. Of course we have to show what the reality is in the situations in those countries. ...But we also need to show the other places where things are actually changing, where things are different."

This view is something long held in Africa, of course, and we are glad that someone finally appears to be noticing. At the same time, given the past record, it must remain an open question just how far it will encourage people to pay a fair price for Africa's agricultural produce and other products, stop demanding cheap clothes to be sold on Europe and American streets, or provide the funding necessary for mitigation and adaptation for climate change. Oxfam's change of approach is welcome, very welcome, but it must be only the start of very necessary and real change.

Lionizing journalists and demonizing the judicial process

In the history of modern Ethiopia the free press is certainly a relatively recent phenomenon. It is only a little over two decades since press freedom was given a constitutional guarantee and Ethiopians were able to air their views openly through written publications and/or electronic media outlets. Press freedom, along with a wide range of other civil and political rights were legally sanctioned by the Transitional Charter in 1991, issued on the heels of the demise of the military dictatorship. This ushered in a new era in the history of the press in Ethiopia and this was underlined four years later when the new Constitution was formally incorporated.

A look back at the early years of the press which appeared at this time does give the impression of a certain amount of chaos. A large number of tabloids appeared, churned out in profusion with little preparation or competence. The bulk of them, indeed, shared a common level of ineptness. Professionalism was lacking and any objectivity in the writing was largely missing. Many of the papers were run by people who had neither journalistic training nor experience. All-too-often much of the writing frequently publicized and gave credence to false rumours, produced articles which were clearly defamatory, sometimes pornographic, and even offered **open incitement to**

inter-ethnic clashes or supported ethnic conflict. The worst of them were blatant propagandistic works calling for **outright rebellion with the apparent aim of trying to undermine the very system that provided their editors with the legal guarantee of press freedom.**

Many, even most of these papers were frequently in brazen violation of the law, and offered *prima facie* cases for prosecution. The government, however, demonstrated extraordinary tolerance of the offences in many cases. Fully aware of the value of press freedom and cognizant of the infancy of the press, prosecutions were limited and largely confined to the most notorious cases, only taking those who clearly violated the legal code or all cannons of decency to court, despite the fact that similar offences warranted prosecution of many other editors and journalists. The success of this moderate approach was demonstrated by the fact that in the years following the enactment of the constitution many of the papers which had so loudly promoted a mantra of militant journalism steadily lost readers, appalled by their nauseating scaremongering and their writings encouraging hatred and violence. Many of them folded.

By contrast some papers, however, did manage to grow over the past two decades from infancy to teenagers, and now demonstrate conspicuous marks of professionalism and objectivity in their writing. Indeed, the concept that the press is the fourth estate and offers institutional expression of cardinal constitutional principles of ensuring accountability and transparency in government affairs and has an indispensable role to play in building a democratic state, has continued to attract firm support from the government itself as well as taking firm root more widely in the community. Conversely, the appeal of militant journalism that preaches subversion under the guise of freedom of speech has been fading away.

Despite these very clear gains in the activities of a free press in Ethiopia, there have still been no shortages of claims by self-important, self-styled rights groups, professional associations and, at times, self-aggrandizing western politicians who have made it their business to object to any and all cases against any journalist and condemn the imprisonment of any journalist irrespective of the cause of such incarceration.

Indeed, it is no hyperbole to say that the cherished leitmotifs of all such groups is automatic condemnation of any such imprisonment coupled with demands for the unconditional release of all journalists whatever the causes of their arrest. Acting as if the country has no sovereign rights to bring offenders of the nation's laws and criminals to justice, they have tirelessly demanded the immediate release of every journalist who finds themselves behind prison bars. This attitude displays what one writer once called "a Neanderthal view of sovereignty" by these groups as well as their complete ignorance, and disregard, for the basics of international relations. Their condemnation, it might be added, is often accompanied by a careful campaign of "lionizing" of the journalists, providing them with generous labels to claim they should be considered "freedom fighters", or "prisoners of conscience" to avoid any reference to the fact that they might well be criminals convicted in accordance with due process of law.

The pattern of "demonizing" Ethiopia on the issue of press freedom has recently been given a new twist by the attacks on the enactment of the anti-terrorism law. This is commonly referred to as "draconian", "unconstitutional", "repressive" or "vague" in the writings that condemn the enactment of the law. The aim behind such accusations against Ethiopia becomes all-too-apparent when accusers fail to explain why the anti-terrorism laws enacted in western democracies are not "stifling dissent" in the same way that they accuse Ethiopia of doing. The fact is that Ethiopia's anti-terrorism law is a virtual copy of western laws. To limit criticisms of such laws as "draconian" to Ethiopia is nothing less than employing double standards, as always.

In this context, one might note that the penchant to label Ethiopia as a country in the throes of a complete demise of the press is nowhere more evident than the reticence to report continuous **positive developments to strengthen the institutional and legislative framework augmenting efforts to guarantee full observance of the constitutional rights for free speech.** The coming into force of the Freedom of Mass Media Access to Information Proclamation, for example, was a bold step sanctioning firm and full access to information from all sources. It has not, perhaps, been widely reported, but the proclamation has eased the problems of journalists in accessing information from public offices. Through its detailed provisions it puts the latter under legal obligation to give information. There is indeed the growing practice of government offices issuing regular details of their activities. The formation of a new Ethiopian Media Council is another such development to which these critical groups have failed to give due recognition of the potential to serve as a forum for dialogue between journalists and the government.

Indeed, some have recently called for the immediate and unconditional release of journalists in relation to the arrest of Eskinder Nega, Woubshet Taye and Reeyot Alemu. At one level this call for “unconditional and immediate release” of these so-called “defenders of press freedom” is part of the process of making them heroes. Inevitably, it reminds one of times when colonial rulers from the capitals of the west would order their viceroys in Africa to jail and release whoever and whenever they wanted, irrespective of any legal activity. In fact, in all these cases, for example, there has been a very open judicial process going on with full observance of all rights for the accused under due process of law. They have been fully represented by lawyers defending their cases in open courts who have been able to collect evidence for their defence without constraint of any kind. One very clear indication of this is the participation of the accused in the appeal process. The Federal Supreme Court which heard Reeyot Alemu’s recent appeal lowered the sentence from 14 years to 5 Years. She has now appealed further to the Cassation Bench of the Supreme Court. The same is true with Eskinder Nega. Woubshet Taye has petitioned for pardon.

In other words, irrespective of the verdicts of the court, those charged have been able to fully defend themselves without constraint. Yet, at the same time, certain politicians have continued to demand the release of these journalists, claiming they should be given “immediate and unconditional release” on the basis of their self-appointed assertion of declaring them free of any crimes – and this before they had themselves even tried to contest the evidence.

Such demands demonstrate the way some politicians automatically disparage the behaviour and independence of the country’s courts, denying any respect to the courts and calling as they do for a refusal of all appeal procedures and demanding the immediate release of prisoners without even bothering to look at the available evidence. If there is any purpose to such demands, it is that it serves to undermine the judicial process. It should be a real embarrassment for politicians who pride themselves on their avowed commitment to uphold the rule of law to demonstrate such contempt for legal processes. Indeed, such a demand can only be described as the advocacy for outright anarchy – if, of course, in another country!

In fact, the reasons that apparently make them prepared to make such demands can only be considered laughable. None of their reasons are concerned with the innocence or guilt of the journalists. Rather they are attached to the fact that the charges are made under what they call the “vague antiterrorism law”, and this is often coupled with the hasty and nonsensical generalization that anyone charged for violating this has no chance of being freed. The lack of any understanding of these cases is nowhere more evident than the attempts to portray the charges as cases of journalistic offences **while these journalists were convicted and jailed on specific charges of affiliation with terrorist groups and inciting the public to unconstitutional and violent**

change of government. The journalists, in fact, were accused and convicted for offenses unrelated to any professional duties.

It must be underlined that the power to convict them or to release them lies within the mandate of the courts. The cases should be seen as part of a proceeding in which the rights of the accused are fully respected, from the time of their arrest to the end of any appeal process. Any demands from politicians elsewhere, or from others, that those charges should be unconditionally and automatically released on demand, are totally unacceptable. It tramples on the country's sovereign rights but more important it flies in the face of all the principles of the rule of law.

News and Views

Ambassador emphasizes Ethiopia's huge bamboo potential

Ethiopian Ambassador to China, Seyoum Mesfin, has underlined Ethiopia's huge bamboo potential which, he said, could create significant opportunities of investment for any foreign companies interested in the area. He said Ethiopia's bamboo resource potential is the biggest in Africa, accounting for 67% of the total area of bamboo coverage of the continent. Ambassador Seyoum made his remarks at the launching ceremony of a book compiled by Professor Peng Zhenhua and Professor Jiang Zehui under the title "The Charm of Bamboo" on Saturday (23rd December). The book contains a hundred selected ancient Chinese Poems on the Bamboo. Ambassador Seyoum was representing Ethiopia as the current Chair of the International Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR) Council; and he noted that Ethiopia and China were working together through bilateral and multilateral cooperation and in collaboration with INBAR to develop the vast bamboo resources in Ethiopia. The event was officially opened by a speech delivered by the State Minister of Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China, and those present at the ceremony included State Councillor Liu Yandong, the head of the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party, Liu Qibao, and other high-level Chinese government officials, ambassadors and heads of missions. A series of activities have been taking place as part of the 15th anniversary celebration of INBAR, which has its headquarters in Beijing.

UN Special Rapporteur urges Eritrea to cooperate

Beedwantee Keetharuth, the newly-appointed United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Eritrea on Friday (21st December) called on Eritrean authorities to cooperate with her mandate, as required by the UN Human Rights Council. She, in particular, asked to hold meetings with Eritrean diplomats in Geneva and in London at the start of her mandate. She said "The aim was to introduce myself and present my vision of the mandate in a spirit of openness, as well as to explore avenues for cooperation". Beedwantee Keetharuth has requested to travel to Eritrea in early 2013. In her comments on her mandate she said "I hope that the Eritrean Government would consider the mandate of the Special Rapporteur as an opportunity to start a fresh and constructive dialogue on human rights issues that have been raised by the international community and other stakeholders." The Special Rapporteur also said she trusted the Eritrean Government would view her mandate as an opportunity "to carefully address Eritrea's compliance with its human rights obligations as contained in international treaties to which the country is a party." She also noted that the primary concern of the Special Rapporteur is to provide an objective, fair and impartial picture of human rights in Eritrea.

Somali MPs ask for re-submission of 2013 draft budget

Somalia MPs have been discussing the 2013 draft budget document prepared by the Council of Ministers and tabled in Parliament by the Minister of Finance and Planning, Mohamud Hassan Suleyman. The Minister distributed copies of the country's US\$ 103,893,000 budget for 2013 to the MPs for approval. Discussions have concentrated on a number of areas including emphasis on the distribution of the proposed budget to administrative matters, social services such as education and health, and infrastructure sectors including state buildings, roads and other basic aspects seen as central to reviving the wellbeing of the Somali people as a whole. As part of their meetings on the budget, the MPs convened on Wednesday (26th December) and finalized discussions with a demand that the Cabinet should re-submit a more refined and acceptable budget proposal. Of the 164 MPs present for the session, 70 voted against the budget, and fifty for, with 44 abstentions. Speaker Mohamed Osman Jawari told the Minister that the government now had thirty days to amend the budget and then bring it back to Parliament for approval. It seems the MPs want to see a different and what they consider a more realistic distribution of resources, more in line with the Provisional Constitution, with greater emphasis on the security sector including stipends for members of the armed forces and on social services (particularly education and health). Overall, the MPs want the distribution to be based on the priorities of the economic pillars of the country. The debates in the Somali Parliament have been welcomed by many as a promising example of healthy debates, leading to a belief that the vibrant atmosphere in the Parliament will pave the way for a more inclusive and mutually acceptable approach on all relevant issues. There is also a belief that this will help produce a more active working relationship between Parliament and the Council of Ministers. In this context, MPs have requested that the Prime Minister submit the names of the recently appointed State and Deputy Ministers.

Spokesperson says power deals reinforce Ethiopia's regional position

Ambassador Dina Mufti, Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said yesterday (27th December) that Ethiopia's power sale deals with neighbouring countries is playing a pivotal role in stabilizing and reinforcing the country's relations within the region. Ambassador Dina explained that the power deals Ethiopia is making with neighbouring countries will also play an important role in supporting the African Union's efforts towards continental integration. He said Ethiopia, which is designated as a power hub for the East Africa-wide power grid connection, is now connected with Djibouti, Kenya and Sudan. Mihret Debebe, the Chief Executive of the Ethiopian Electric and Power Corporation said that these power interconnectivities are being conducted after thorough studies of financial feasibility and of environmental impact assessments of the projects. He said Ethiopia, the major country using Djibouti port, is strengthening its ties with Djibouti. It is now supplying 80% of Djibouti's electric power. He noted that efforts were underway to balance the revenues earned from the sale of electric power to Sudan with expenditure on oil imported from Sudan.

President Guelleh decorates Speaker Abadula

President Ismael Omar Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti has given the Speaker of the House of Peoples' Representatives of Ethiopia, Abadula Gameda, the medal of "the Commander of the National Order of June 27". Speaker Abadula was given the honour in recognition of his efforts to reinforce cooperation between Ethiopia and Djibouti. The Speaker made a working visit to Djibouti last week to discuss ways and means of strengthening the IGAD Inter-Parliamentary Union. During discussions with President Guelleh, Speaker Abadula stressed the need to engage actively to consolidate the Parliamentary Union. He urged member states to pay their

contributions without delay. President Guelleh and Speaker Abadula also discussed the bilateral relations of the two countries already seen as a model for increasing integration in the region.

Somaliland announces its national parties for the next decade

On Tuesday this week (25th December), the Parties Registration and Verification Committee of Somaliland announced the names of the three leading parties in the local council elections held on 28th November. The three organizations were issued with their certificates of official registration; the constitution of Somaliland stipulates that only three political parties are allowed registration as national parties. The local elections, observed by 50 international and 800 local observers, had seven contesting political groups, fielding a total of 2,368 candidates for 350 seats in the 21 local government administrations. The three victorious parties were: Kulmiye, the party of President Silanyo; Wadani, a new party led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Abdirahman Irro; and UCID, led by Jamal Ali Hussein after founder Engineer Faisal Ali Warabe stepped down in October. The Verification Committee noted that the three parties had fulfilled the necessary legal conditions of the Election Law and would be able to operate as national political parties for the next ten years. The other four political groups (Umadda, Rays, Haqsoor and Dalsan) were eliminated as they failed to fulfill the necessary requirements. Another party, UDUB, the party of former president Dahir Riyale, decided in September not to participate in the election, accusing the National Election Commission of bias. It now becomes ineligible to take part in future national or presidential elections.

***In conclusion, may we offer all our readers our best wishes for the
New Year, 2013***