

Week in the Horn

5th October 2012

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Prime Minister Hailemariam at the UN General Assembly

Prime Minister Hailemariam addressed the 67th UN General Assembly on Friday last week (28th September) at UN headquarters in New York. In his maiden speech to the UN General Assembly as Prime Minister of Ethiopia, he underlined the trauma of the country at the untimely and sudden death of Prime Minister Meles in August, emphasizing that: “the passing of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is a huge loss for Ethiopia and undoubtedly for Africa as well”. Prime Minister Hailemariam praised the late premier’s selfless and dynamic leadership role in the region and to determine its own destiny: “he was a man of prodigious intellect and was uncompromising in his insistence that Ethiopians and Africans should own and protect their development strategies and their approach to governance and democratization”. Reflecting on Meles Zenawi’s wise leadership skills at home, he went on: “The late Ethiopian prime minister and the party he led have facilitated the emergence of a new Ethiopia which has rekindled the hope of Ethiopians in the future and strengthened their confidence to overcome their adversaries”.

Prime Minister Hailemariam thanked all those who had stood with Ethiopians in their grief, saying “we cherish our friendship”. He praised Ethiopians for the unity and the civility that all had shown: “Ethiopians proved their mettle and what they are made of when they were told the tragedy that the nation faced so unexpectedly,” adding that “It is an honour and a blessing to be a leader of a people who are so generous in paying tribute to those like Prime Minister Meles who served them selflessly, a people who have the maturity and wisdom to see and articulate so lucidly who did what for the nation and for the people.”

Prime Minister Hailemariam also spoke of the country’s development efforts over the last two decades. “Never in its entire modern history has Ethiopia had the kind of rapid economic development; it has begun to see a bright light at the end of the tunnel in terms of the real prospects of economic transformation” The future holds a bright future for Ethiopia as it is “on a hugely promising trajectory”. The “Growth and Transformation Plan to which our late Prime Minister was devoted and which is now embraced by our people is designed to catapult our nation to that destination which has eluded our people for so long but which is now within reach.”

Prime Minister Hailemariam underscored unequivocally that poverty was the biggest challenge to the nation today. He called on the international community to help Ethiopia’s efforts against poverty to ensure sustainable development, emphasizing that there was a huge deficit in international cooperation for the development of low income countries and the least developed. “At the end of the day, without ignoring other impediments to development, the major bottleneck for countries such as Ethiopia for ensuring sustainable development and successfully achieve the Millennium Development Goals is related to

shortfalls in development finance.” He said the current global economic situation should never be allowed to detract from the critical need for development finance in low income countries. He noted that Ethiopia’s challenge in this regard was compounded and worsened by climate change. It, therefore, sought “effective cooperation” in its endeavour, adding that this should rest on a full commitment to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. He highlighted Ethiopia’s exemplary efforts in building a green economy and called for continued assistance to realize Ethiopia’s dream in that regard, adding “it might be boring to repeat something that is universally acknowledged [but] while not having contributed to climate change, countries such as Ethiopia nonetheless happen to be the most affected.”

Prime Minister Hailemariam also spoke of regional integration in the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia’s efforts to encourage this. He said: “we foresee huge possibilities for bringing the countries of the greater Horn of Africa together” and noted that Ethiopia was playing a “catalytic role in laying the infrastructural basis for consolidating economic ties with the countries of the East Africa region”. He spoke of the electric power interconnections and the road networks that “we have built, and are in the process of building with Djibouti, Sudan, Kenya and South Sudan; [these] are emblematic of our resolve to play our part in regional integration. We are confident that Somalia and others, without exception, will follow suit.”

Speaking of the issues of peace and stability and the challenge of extremism in the region, Prime Minister Hailemariam noted that Somalia was undergoing a striking process of peace and national reconciliation, with a series of landmark steps over recent months helping to bring an end to the country’s eight-year political transition period. These included the adoption of a provisional constitution, the establishment of a new parliament and the selection of a new president. Somalia, he said, is gradually coming out of the woods,” but “much more needs to be done there to ensure that the new Government stands on its own feet.” He said that despite the recent advances in peace and reconciliation, Somalia, with the support of the UN-backed African Union Mission in Somalia, was still dealing with the impact of Al-Shabaab. This had been pushed out of Mogadishu but it still controlled some areas in south-central regions of the country. “We would be naive, however,” he said, “if we believed that the enemies of peace and of Somalia and the region are completely defeated. That is why it is so critical that the momentum is not lost in Somalia and Somalia’s ownership of the process of national reconciliation is strengthened.”

On relations between Sudan and South Sudan, the Prime Minister said Ethiopia was pleased at the significant progress in the peace process. He said “What has been achieved by the two parties over the last few days, which culminated in the signing of the much anticipated agreements on vital matters, is a significant breakthrough which needs to be consolidated and be used as a basis for resolving the still remaining outstanding issues.” Prime Minister Hailemariam added: “We are confident the two parties appreciate how much their joint effort for a win-win outcome is so vital, not only for their peoples, but also for us all;” and he was confident they would maintain the momentum towards “durable” peace.

Kismayo captured: Somalia's security situation visibly improving

The long efforts by the TFG and other pro-government forces, including AMISOM and Ethiopian units, to clean Somalia of the terrorist insurgency of Al-Shabaab are at last making real progress as the country’s overall security situation is visibly improving almost everywhere. The provision of security support to Somalia from neighbouring countries following requests by the TFG and AMISOM, and subsequent endorsement by bodies such as IGAD and the AU has played a major role in these peace-keeping efforts. However, the reluctance of the international community to venture into Somalia left neighbouring countries with no option but to provide their own support for the then Somali Transitional Federal Government’s efforts to free the country from Al-Shabaab. This was the fact behind the lifting of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development’s resolution that had banned front line states from deploying their forces into Somalia. Now IGAD states after these successes are also calling for more coordinated and continued support to the new government of Somalia, to enable it to deliver on its security, stability, reconstruction and development priorities.

The signs of improving security in Somalia are clear. A high-level Somali government delegation, headed by newly elected President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud visited Belet Weyne, 330 kilometres north of Mogadishu, on Tuesday this week [2nd Oct] following heavy rains and flooding which claimed the lives of over fifty

people. The president's office said the President wanted to see for himself the problems of the city's residents and of the flood victims. The rain has forced hundreds of families out of their homes; many are now living in temporary camps built on the outskirts of Belet Weyne. The previous day, the President also visited Baidoa, another town also liberated by Ethiopian troops and local militias allied to the Transitional Federal Government. This was his first trip outside Mogadishu following his elections last month, and the President assessed the security and humanitarian situation in Baidoa and held talks with regional leaders, military officials and traditional elders. He also visited a military training camp and met with National Army soldiers as part of his promise that his government would give special priority to building the armed forces.

On Wednesday this week [3rd], a high-level delegation led by recently appointed British Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, visited Somalia. Speaking at a joint press conference held at Villa Somalia, the presidential palace in Mogadishu, Secretary Greening said that the UK government welcomed the latest military progress being made by the African Union military forces against Al-Shabaab militants at Kismayo. She also expressed the UK government's readiness to provide political and economic support to Somalia's new federal government.

It was on Saturday last weekend [29th Sep] that Al-Shabaab admitted that it had withdrawn from Kismayo following the surprise assault by African Union and Somali troops. It appeared the Kenyan troops of AMISOM landed from the sea and with the active engagement of clan leaders and of the local communities casualties were small. AMISOM and Somali forces quickly took up positions at the airport and the harbour to secure these strategic points. AMISOM rapidly organized patrols through the different areas of the city, and a Somali military spokesperson said government soldiers were being deployed "everywhere in Kismayo" including the police headquarters, the administration compound and in such places as the meat plant and the presidential palace. Kismayo, of course, is the second-largest port in Somalia and Al-Shabaab had been using it as its major financial resource for the last five years, controlling all goods passing through the port and taking very high taxes from local merchants. Its loss will certainly have a serious impact on Al-Shabaab's economic prospects.

Kismayo is now gradually returning to normal despite some residents' fear of more attacks by Al-Shabaab supporters. The allied forces are being cautious of possible explosives planted by Al-Shabaab before they left the city, and have been identifying possible areas where it may have planted improvised explosive devices. There were several bomb explosions on Tuesday in the city which according to Somali military officials came from devices planted in several places including the port, at allied forces' bases and in the centre of the city. A spokesman for Somali government forces, Colonel Adan Ruffle, confirmed that "there were two civilian deaths in the bombings on Tuesday and many more injured...[but] there were no military casualties." Al-Shabaab's spokesman, Abdiaziz Abu Musab, claimed the group's responsibility for the attacks and said Al-Shabaab agents would continue their fight "until doomsday."

Somali President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, on Monday praised AMISOM "for forcing Al-Shabaab to vacate from the city". A statement released from the President's Office said the Somali government commended AMISOM and the Somali troops for the bravery they had shown. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Johnnie Carson, on Monday also described the fall of Kismayo as a major step forward, and said AMISOM and the Somali forces deserved every credit for driving Al-Shabaab out of its last stronghold. Ethiopia's Minister of National Defence, Siraj Fergessa, speaking at a Joint Consultative meeting of AU peacekeepers and the Somali government said that the weakening of Al-Shabaab would contribute significantly to the advance of Somalia's politics. He added that AMISOM's victories in taking over Al-Shabaab's strongholds, including Kismayo, opened a new chapter for the advancement of peace in Somalia. He took the opportunity to assure those present that Ethiopia would continue to exert every effort towards the consolidation of peace and stability in Somalia. The meeting was called to discuss ways to sustain gains for peace and stability in Somalia following the take-over of Kismayo and other areas through the joint AMISOM and government operations.

The liberation of Kismayo underlines the significant progress being made by AMISOM and the government – the one "who controls Kismayo controls southern Somalia". This also underlines the equal importance of

the next step, that is for all stakeholders to agree on what will be the future of Kismayo. It is important for stakeholders to support Somalis to organize settled direction for control of the city and for the establishment of a local administration in Kismayo. The government is now setting up a group of elders to come up with a settled and agreed option for the future of the city. More widely, there is also widespread agreement on the importance of urgently supporting and providing the necessary financial assistance through organized channels for the establishment of genuine Somali police and national military forces. These will be indispensable when AMISOM and other elements which currently provide necessary professionalism eventually have to leave.

Sudan-South Sudan Consultative Forum

The Sudan–South Sudan Consultative Forum (SSCF) held its fifth meeting last week on the sidelines of the 67th UN General Assembly in New York. The Forum, founded as the Sudan Consultative Forum in May 2010, was co-chaired by UN Secretary-General, Ban ki-Moon, and outgoing AU Commission Chairperson, Dr Jean Ping. Also present was the Chairperson-elect of the AU Commission, Madam Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. In addition to UN and AU officials, representatives from various interested states and organizations participated.

The meeting was convened to review the progress made in post-secession negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan following the adoption of the AU Roadmap on 24th April and its endorsement by the UN Security Council in Resolution 2046 on 2nd May 2012. Participants commended President Al-Bashir of Sudan and President Kiir of South Sudan for the breakthrough achieved during the latest negotiations. In particular, they praised the two presidents for demonstrating the constructive leadership and political will to reach the agreements achieved on security, border issues (including demarcation), oil, the status of nationals of the other state and other economic arrangements. The Forum also praised the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) for facilitating resolution of the outstanding issues between the two parties. It acknowledged the contribution of the AU Border Programme to the on-going negotiations.

The Forum commended the Parties for reaching agreement on the administrative and security map presented by the AUHIP in November 2011. This was necessary for the establishment of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ) and for the activation of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM). Participants welcomed the comprehensive agreements reached by the Parties on the critical issue of oil and on the transitional financial arrangements which will enable the resumption of oil production and oil export from South Sudan. The implementation of these agreements will alleviate the sharply deteriorating economic conditions in both countries. The other agreements on trade, banking, assets and liabilities, pensions and the joint approach to the international community will greatly contribute to the economic viability of the two States, and were also welcomed by the Forum.

During the Forum, the Parties were strongly urged to continue their negotiations on the issue of Abyei, which is being referred back to the AU Peace and Security Council. Forum participants suggested the two sides should work to reach agreement before the Peace and Security Council meets to consider the report of the AUHIP. The two governments were also encouraged to implement the remaining provisions of the 20th June 2011 Agreement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area, including, *inter alia*, the establishment of the Abyei Area Administration, the Abyei Executive Council, the Abyei Police Service and the Intergovernmental Taskforce on Humanitarian Assistance.

Speaking at the meeting, Ethiopia's State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos, said the international community needs to extend continued support for both Sudan and South Sudan if the two states are to reach a comprehensive and final agreement on the few remaining outstanding issues. He praised the recent breakthrough but called on the international community to encourage the two parties to implement fully the agreements reached and to finalize the remaining post-independence issues particularly the status of Abyei and other border areas. The State Minister emphasized Ethiopia's firm commitment to continue extending all necessary support to help Sudan and South Sudan reach a final and comprehensive agreement. He stressed the new Ethiopian leadership under Prime Minister Hailemariam would keep its position as a neutral and honest broker between Sudan and South Sudan. This position had been achieved by Prime Minister Meles who had earned the trust and confidence of both parties as a

neutral and honest interlocutor on whom they could rely for advice to narrow differences. Ambassador Berhane said: "The new leadership of the Ethiopian government is equally determined to maintain the legacy of the late Prime Minister and will continue to play a constructive role, based on strict adherence to the principle of neutrality, in order to assist both Sudan and South Sudan in dealing with the few outstanding issues."

The Sudan–South Sudan Consultative Forum paid tribute to the efforts of the late Prime Minister Meles, and thanked Prime Minister Hailemariam for carrying on this work. It agreed to reconvene on the margins of the next AU Summit to review further progress made in the implementation of the agreements, and encouraged the AU to continue to support their implementation.

The Ethio-Sudanese Joint Defence Committee meets

The 7th Ethio-Sudanese Joint Defence Committee of the Chiefs of Staff concluded its three day meeting here in Addis Ababa on 1st October. The meeting was held under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Defence Ministries with a view to boosting the existing excellent relations for maintaining common security. The Joint Committee was briefed on the performance reports of collaboration in areas of defence. It then put forward observations and recommendations for better implementation. Discussions also covered a wide range of issues related to security as well as the need for cultural and sports exchanges between border area units, peacekeeping issues and training and matters of over-flight and related issues. The Joint Committee identified the strengths and weaknesses of recent performance, and made recommendations in a number of areas. It concluded by signing the Renewed Action Plan to be implemented over the next three years (October 2012-2015), and agreed that the next Ethio-Sudan Joint Defence Committee meeting should be held in Khartoum, in February 2013.

The meeting reviewed the implementation of decisions reached during the previous 6th Ethio-Sudanese sub-committee meeting, held on 6th and 7th February this year in Khartoum. The Committee noted that it appreciated the mutual understanding and commitment both countries had shown in combating and controlling anti-peace elements, arms smuggling, contraband and human trafficking in respective territories and border areas. On security, the two sides discussed the status of joint field patrol activities, noting that joint patrolling had been conducted as scheduled. Both sides made it clear they welcomed the on-going process of information exchanges at all levels and emphasized the need to continue the timely exchange of accurate and relevant information.

On peace-keeping, the Joint Committee noted that both countries were working cooperatively as IGAD member states to achieve their common interests of ensuring both national and regional security. Both sides noted the deployment and rotation of Ethiopian peacekeepers in UNISFA and UNAMID was being conducted efficiently and well. The Committee expressed its appreciation of timely facilitation efforts from the Sudanese side and the readiness to cooperate to solve minor problems. The two sides also agreed, following their previous meeting and resolutions in Khartoum, on the need to ensure planned exchanges of experience in areas of peace-keeping, and especially for the officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Sudanese Armed Forces to make use of Ethiopian experiences in peace-keeping. They urged the early commencement of experience-sharing programmes. The meeting stressed the need for both sides to continue to work closely with the Sudanese Defence Ministry and the Ethiopian Peace-keeping Centre in all areas, including the facilitation of deployment and rotation, and of flight requests by UNAMID and UNISFA.

In its review of previous activity, the Joint Committee identified an excellent level of cooperation in the provision and exchange of continuous, timely, accurate and relevant information, and good cooperation between their respective border units and of a valuable joint patrolling process of border areas. The success of joint control of anti-peace elements and joint patrolling measures was also welcomed. Both sides have also now agreed on the importance of ensuring active participation of the civilian administrations on both sides of the border in any future joint meeting. They will have an important contribution to make to the joint efforts to control anti-peace elements, arms smuggling, contraband and human trafficking. Similarly, as a valuable way forward on issues of security, the two sides have agreed to follow the security situation at border areas very closely and conduct more frequent joint field patrols. They have also agreed

to further increase existing coordination between local authorities, police, customs and armed forces in the border areas. They have decided to maintain timely exchanges of intelligence, and they underlined the importance of improving further the existing information exchange mechanisms, including the use of liaison officers. In other areas, the two sides have also agreed to set up exchange scholarships, and to ensure the continuation of experience-sharing in agreed priority areas through lectures and seminars. The Joint Committee recommended the need to increase the numbers of exchange visits and training activities in areas of mutual request.

Has Eritrea stopped collecting its 2% tax in Canada?

Many Eritreans who have taken refuge in Canada have complained for years that the Eritrean government has continued to try and force them to contribute to the government funds through its 2 per cent 'Diaspora tax' and a national defence levy to the government in Asmara, in addition to any taxes paid in Canada, in order to be allowed to access any services from the Eritrean authorities. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the UN Monitoring Group that monitors compliance with the arms embargo on Eritrea have both detailed numerous examples of those who refuse to pay suffering threats and harassment. Refusal can mean reprisals against family members still in Eritrea and refusals or delays by the consulate in providing services for Eritrean citizens.

The UN Security Council passed a resolution last year condemning Eritrea for resorting to "extortion, threats of violence, fraud and other illicit means to collect taxes outside of Eritrea" and for using the "diaspora tax" to procure arms for rebel groups in the Horn of Africa and destabilize other countries.

The Canadian government warned Eritrea in January that such conduct was a violation of diplomatic protocols and "could be criminal." The government repeated its concerns in a 27th July letter to the Government of Eritrea. Eritrea's original response was that the UN investigators were biased and politically motivated, that the allegations of extortion were a "malicious lie" and the diaspora taxes were collected to help the country rebuild after a long war with Ethiopia and protect the nation from "imminent military threats".

However it subsequently changed its mind after the Canadian Foreign Ministry sent a strongly worded diplomatic note earlier this month making it clear Canada would not renew the accreditation of Consul Semere Ghebremariam O. Micael unless Eritrea agreed in writing that the consulate "effectively cease to collect the 2% 'recovery and rehabilitation' tax and the donation for national defence." The note added that if Mr. O. Micael continued "to carry out tax solicitation and tax collection activities in spite of Canada's express disapproval and view that such activities are incompatible with the normal performance of consular functions, it will expect a notification from the Ministry stating that such person has been recalled from Canada." Two days later the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded in a "note verbale" that it had "complied in full" with Canada's demands, and that the head of the Toronto consulate "has been accordingly instructed."

While this appeared to be a *volte face* by Eritrea which had previously insisted on its right to collect such 'taxes', the Consul himself may have different ideas. He was quoted last week as saying the Eritrean Government would continue to collect tax from Eritrean citizens living in Canada despite the demand of the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that this should stop. The Consul, the only Eritrean diplomat in Canada, was quoted as saying "We have to tax our people, it is our right." He told a Canadian newspaper that "I am not going to collect the tax in my office. That's all. That's what the Canadian government was asking and they got the response." He added "It doesn't mean we stop collecting. Now instead of paying to my office [people] will pay it through the bank."

Mr Micael said the taxes were longstanding Eritrean law and payment was mandatory. "If they are going to get a service, they have to pay but I am not the one. I just won't collect it. But they have to pay. Every Eritrean is paying it, so if they are Eritrean they have to pay it on their own way, you know. Instead of paying to the consulate they will send it to Eritrea." Mr Micael denied the money was used for military purposes, even though payment forms specify that it is for national defence. He said that national defence could cover numerous other things including schools and roads.

Human rights sources in Canada said all this suggested the consulate was making light of the government request and was “basically trying to pull a fast one on the government of Canada.” A human rights lawyer also said that Eritrea had failed to address the other concern about the ‘diaspora tax’; “the problem isn’t just the tax but the way they use the money, which historically has been to fund terrorist groups.” A spokesperson for Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird said the Ministry had made its “position on the matter to the Eritreans clear, and we expect that to be respected. The government of Eritrea should not test our resolve on this matter.”

Eritrean critics of the Consulate’s activities said the closure of Eritrean diplomatic activities in Canada should be based on “the character and track record of the Asmara regime which has so far refused to abide by international and regional treaties, standards and accepted norms and continues to play a spoiler role in the Horn of Africa and beyond”. They argue that by closing the diplomatic mission, Canada would be sending a message to the Asmara regime that the brutalization of its citizens is unacceptable and that human rights, civil liberties and the rule of law are rights of the Eritrean people. “The closure of the Eritrean diplomatic mission and the expulsion of its representatives from Canada are long overdue,” concludes an open letter addressed to Canada’s Foreign Minister John Baird of 22nd September.

Canada is not alone in questioning the way Eritrea has been forcing Eritreans living abroad to contribute this 2% tax to Asmara by refusing to provide consular and other services. Earlier in the year the Dutch authorities began to question the way those who tried to resist payment were “threatened, intimidated and had necessary consular services refused.” Last month, Foreign Minister, Uri Rosenthal, summoned the Eritrean chargé d’affaires to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explain why the embassy was collecting taxes and raising funds from Dutch nationals of Eritrean origin and Eritrean nationals living in the Netherlands. Mr Rosenthal expressed his concern at alleged incidences of extortion and intimidation, saying that such practices are unacceptable. An investigation is currently under way into possible incidents in the Netherlands.

The Swedish journalists and journalistic responsibility

It is hardly a surprise that reporter Martin Schibbye and photographer Johan Persson, pardoned and released from an Ethiopian jail at the Ethiopian New Year, should immediately come up with allegations of mistreatment. They claimed they were subject to a mock execution and accused the authorities of using anti-terrorism laws to stifle journalism. And equally, as expected, the two also immediately claimed they had been forced to make an apology on Ethiopian television in order to secure their release. Schibbye, naturally, also said he had not meant what he had said. He also launched into a criticism of Ethiopia's anti-terrorism laws, claiming these were aimed at stifling freedom of speech. This merely indicates his ignorance of Ethiopian legislation, not surprising in someone whose knowledge of Ethiopia is so obviously minimal. Indeed, a year in a jail is hardly a realistic or useful basis for gaining a proper understanding of the country’s legal system or its legislation.

It might be added that another highly predictable result of all this to be expected is that new reports will surface any day now from Swedish journalists, and from Human Rights Watch, making further allegations against the behaviour of the Somali Regional Security Liyu police or the Ethiopian Defence Forces, or more probably both. The allegations will, as usual, be exclusively made by people living outside the Somali Regional State and indeed outside Ethiopia. Again as usual, the reports will avoid any indication that the political interests of the sources used or their reasons for leaving Ethiopia were queried.

It is all very much as expected. The only surprise would have been if Schibbye and Persson had not immediately tried to detract attention from what by any standards was the remarkably naive and stupid behaviour that landed them in an Ethiopian jail in the first place. In fact, Schibbye and Persson were very fortunate in being acquitted of terrorism charges after the court found they had not actually been involved in carrying out any terrorist activity. In fact, luckily for them, as the group they accompanied was clearly on an active mission, they were caught before any such activity took place. They were, however, sentenced in December 2011 by the Third Criminal Bench of the Federal High Court. They received 7 years on the charge of supporting terrorism which they denied, and another 3 years and 3 months for illegal entry into

Ethiopia, a charge to which they pleaded guilty. They were pardoned after serving nine months of their sentences.

Certainly, journalists will often take chances in pursuit of a story, but allowing themselves to be used by a terrorist organization, the Ogaden National Liberation Front, and of one small fraction of it, suggests an amazing degree of ignorance or gullibility, or both. The claim of Schibbye and Persson, and their supporters, that they had merely wanted to report on the effect of the work of a Swedish oil company, Lundin Petroleum, on the local population and political situation in Ethiopia's Ogaden region and that the only way of entering the area was with the rebels' help is nonsense. Lundin in fact sold its Ethiopian oil concessions to Africa Oil Corporation over three years ago, and Lundin now has nothing to do with any activities by Africa Oil in the Somali Regional State. Africa Oil itself is quite open about its activities and is in fact on record as noting that it hasn't seen any of the violence claimed by the ONLF in the areas in which it operates. In this context, it might be noted that Africa Oil has a record of assisting in local development projects, though that is presumably not something in which Schibbye and Persson were interested. There is certainly no difficulty in finding out what Africa Oil is doing in the Somali Regional State, and there would be even less difficulty in finding out what Lundin Oil does in Ethiopia. As with Africa Oil, they only had to ask.

For the record, Lundin Petroleum is also quite open about its activities in Ethiopia. After winning a concession in November 2006, Lundin undertook a number of field studies, carried out by international experts, to assess the economic, environmental and security situation in its concession area. In September 2007, with the help of local Somali NGOs, it held a meeting with 65 clan leaders from the area which confirmed that the local population welcomed Lundin's exploration activities, and that there was no ONLF activity in the area nor would the local people welcome this. Lundin carried out a one week aerial magnetic survey in January 2008. This involved the setting up of a temporary camp in Cherety, and in connection with this Lundin provided medical services to five villages and the installation of a water-well. This was the only activity Lundin carried out in Ethiopia as it decided to change its global strategy, acquiring new concessions in Norway and Malaysia and selling all its East African assets to Africa Oil. Since the sale, Lundin Petroleum has had no presence or activities in Ethiopia. Lundin holds no shares or debt in Africa Oil Corp.

Martin Schibbye's comment that "We should never forget that it is an international scandal that we were condemned to 11 years in jail for doing our job" is a typical self-inflated journalistic exaggeration. A journalist's job should seldom, if ever, include overt illegal activity and certainly not on the scale of accompanying an armed and active terrorist group on a mission. Crossing the border illegally may be a relatively minor affair but accompanying terrorists on a mission can only be described as the height of irresponsibility.

Equally irresponsibly, or merely totally naïve, was the way the two allowed themselves to be used by one faction of the ONLF in what looked remarkably like an attempt to derail the peace talks that were just beginning to get under way, if only slowly, when the pair crossed the border. It was earlier in 2010 that the first feelers were put out that the remaining ONLF elements, under the leadership of ex-Admiral Osman wanted to talk to the government. This followed the successful negotiations between the government and one major ONLF faction in 2011, and an earlier agreement with the United Western Somali Liberation Front headed by Sheikh Ibrahim Mohamed Xuseen in 2010. The latter, in particular, has been fitting remarkably well into the developmental activities burgeoning in the Somali Regional State.

Schibbye and Persson's trip was apparently arranged by an ONLF faction that was doubtful about talking to the government and wanted the 'struggle' to continue despite the minimal levels of support currently being given within the region, and the collapse of external funding following the growing evidence of successful developments. This element made it clear they were opposed to talks and were using Schibbye and Persson to try and produce reports in support of their view that the Ethiopian government was not sincere in responding to the possibility of talks. Schibbye and Persson were expected to produce 'evidence' of atrocities. No doubt they would have managed to do so. Visits by journalists embedded with the ONLF always managed to find this. As with anyone 'embedded' with guerrilla forces, or with any military units,

official or unofficial, there is a strong tendency to empathize with those they travel with. In any case, Schibbye and Persson were certainly seen as sympathizers otherwise their ONLF mentors would have rejected them. Their prompt retraction of their earlier comments about Ethiopian justice and treatment as soon as they reached Sweden and their attempts to justify their stupidity, underline the point. Someone once coined the phrase guerrilla groupies referring to naïve NGO supporters of guerrilla movements. The phrase could equally well apply to journalists out for a story at any price even travelling on a terrorist mission, and unprepared to accept the most basic journalistic commitments to accuracy, balance, truth and responsibility.

The failure of journalists to apply the levels of responsibility expected of their profession is not confined to occasional foreign maverick elements operating in Africa, though it is common enough there. The Leveson enquiry in the UK into the culture, practice and ethics of the press has been hearing about what one advocate of UK press reform has called “a nightmarish pattern of mistreatment of innocent people, of the cynical covering up of wrongdoing, of the industrial-scale quarrying of personal information from confidential databases, of the corruption of public officials and the intimidation of politicians – all of it in pursuit, not of news that might serve the public interest, but of corporate profit.”

The indictment is a damning one, and there are strong hopes that the Leveson enquiry will recommend the setting up of an independent press regulator. Equally, there is little doubt that many journalists, media organizations, and media advocacy organizations will continue to try to resist any such suggestion of changing the current system of self-regulation of the press in the UK despite its failures. The banners of ‘freedom of the press’, ‘public interest’ or similar slogans beloved of journalistic advocacy organizations will no doubt be raised. What is unlikely to get much reference from advocacy groups is the equally important concept of responsibility. Journalism does not entitle anyone to break laws. Journalists, despite their frequently grandiose view of their own place in the world, are always subject to the law of the land as much as anyone else, wherever they may be and wherever they come from. They should not have to be reminded of it.

News and views

Ethiopia striving to build green economy, cope up with climate change

The State Minister of Water and Energy, Ato Kebede Gerba, has said Ethiopia is exerting utmost effort to build green economy and cope up with the effects of climate change. Addressing the 10th European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMESAT) Forum on Monday [1st Oct], the State Minister said Ethiopia has formulated a green economy policy that will be implemented until 2025. Ato Kebede said the nation is intensifying effort to reduce emission of carbon and ensure food security through climate-friendly economic activity. The National Meteorology Agency (NMA) Director General, Ato Fetene Teshome, told the forum that Ethiopia, as a member of World Meteorology Organization, was sharing a meteorology satellite with Europe. He said the Forum enabled the country to sustainably process valid climate data, undertake reliable weather forecasting and provide accurate information. The Forum also helped build the capacity of professionals. The EUMETSAT, Director General, Mr Alain Ratier, also pointed out that his organization is providing multi-faceted assistance to African countries related to weather forecasting, noting that EUMETSAT is widening its assistance with time. The Forum is aimed at strengthening collaboration between EUMETSAT and the African user community with a view to facilitating the use of EUMETSAT satellite data throughout the continent. It also provides the opportunity to identify actions and initiatives that can be taken by EUMETSAT and its partners to meet the requirements of its African users. The Forum, which ends on Friday (5th October), is organized in collaboration with the NMA, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA) and the African Union Commission (AUC). This 10th EUMETSAT User Forum in Africa marks two decades of the exploitation of meteorological satellite data in Africa. The EUMETSAT User Forum in Africa is organized every two years. It is an intergovernmental organization created in 1986, and based in Darmstadt, Germany.

Eritrea rejects the appointment of UN Special Rapporteur

The UN Human Rights Council in its twenty first regular session had appointed Beedwantee Keetharuth as Special Rapporteur to investigate the dismal human rights situation in Eritrea. The government of Eritrea however rejected the appointment of the Special Rapporteur. The Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned down the request of the Council to allow the Rapporteur to discharge his duties inside Eritrea. Eritrea's ambassador said: "Eritrea rejected the decision of the Council because it was politically motivated and did not accept the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Eritrea." Ethiopia welcomed the appointment of a Special Rapporteur, and called on the Eritrean Government to comply with the resolutions of the Human Rights Council.

Montgomery County delegation visits Ethiopia

A more than 40-member delegation of community leaders from Montgomery County led by County Executive Isiah Legget has been visiting Ethiopia since 24th September. The delegation in its visit to the city of Gonder signed a sister city memorandum of understanding on 28th September. The memorandum envisages cooperation between the two cities on areas of health, education and other areas of cooperation. It particularly aims to enhance knowledge transfer, enhance economic competitiveness as well as community participation. Montgomery County being home to more than 8,000 Ethiopians and Ethiopian born Americans, the sister city agreement will have a significant role in strengthening the people to people relations between the two countries. In a reception held for the group, Isiah Legget said the County's Sister City Committee which includes an Ethiopian subcommittee is the institutional arm tasked with translating the sister city agreement into action. He said, as part of this agreement Montgomery County will assist schools of all levels in Gonder. Montgomery College in particular will also be twinned with Gonder University, which is undergoing massive expansion. According to him, the County has already sent computers and medical equipment to be distributed to schools and clinics in Gonder. With regard to cooperation in the area of the health sector Montgomery County will help health centres in Gonder through its assistance of medical equipment and ambulances. He further added that "Montgomery County will work closely with the City of Corvallis in Oregon State which is also a sister city of Gonder". Corvallis has been working with the administration of the city of Gonder to alleviate the problem of water shortage in Gonder. Responding to a question Ambassador Taye Atsekesellasie, Director General of the American Affairs Directorate General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion thanked the group for visiting Ethiopia and hailed the signing of the memorandum as a bridge linking the communities in both countries.

UNIDO says Ethiopia Conducive for investment

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization study indicated that Ethiopia has put in place a suitable environment for local and international investment. UNIDO launched its survey carried out by considering more than 7,000 companies on the continent including 570 incorporated in Ethiopia. Tadesse Dadi, National Coordinator for Investment Promoting Activities said in the event that economic and political stability, large local market, transparent laws and regulations and easily trainable and low-cost labour made Ethiopia ideal for investors. Tadesse also expressed that UNIDO is partnering with the Ministry of Industry to establish the Ethiopian Sub Contracting and Partnership Exchange Centre to support the capacity of small and medium level enterprises to meet the needs of consumers and to enhance investment opportunities.

Ethiopian lawyer elected as a member of Human Rights Advisory Committee

The UN Human Rights Council in its twenty-first regular session elected Ethiopian lawyer, Imeru Tamrat Yigezu as a member of the Council's advisory committee from the Africa region. The Council also elected Saeed Mohamed Al Faihani from the Asian region, Mario L. Coriolano for the Latin America and Caribbean region and Katharina Pabel for the Western European and other States, as new members to fill the vacant seats on the Advisory Committee. The newly elected members will serve for three years starting in 2013. A lawyer by training, Imeru Tamrat is a reputed academician, researcher and consultant. He has published numerous publications on water law and environment related subjects. Imeru has also written extensively on the Nile issue.