



ETHIO NEWS

Politics

GUINEA'S PRESIDENT VISITS ETHIOPIA



President Alpha Condé and PM Abiy

Photo: mfa

The President of the Republic of Guinea, Professor Alpha Condé, arrived in Ethiopia for a three-days working visit on February 6. During his visit, President Alpha Condé held talks with President Sahle-Work Zewde on bilateral, regional and international matters. Ethiopia and Guinea signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement and held the first meeting of the Joint Ministerial Commission.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed received President Conde on arrival at Bole International Airport, and during their bilateral meeting the two leaders discussed on ways to consolidate the relationship in all areas of cooperation in a spirit of mutual benefits. Their talks covered issues of mutual interest, focusing on the need to reactivate existing bilateral mechanisms and to expand cooperation in the areas of social and economic sectors in the spirit of friendship and solidarity between the two sisterly countries.

Welcoming the President, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy expressed his belief that the visit would pave the way for realizing their common thoughts for strengthening and deepening already existing strong and historic ties. Ethiopia and the Republic of Guinea have long-standing relations, dating back to the 1960s, when President Sekou Toure, supported Emperor Haile Selassie's efforts to reconcile the Monrovia and Casablanca groups in the course of establishing the OAU. Dr. Abiy applauded their respective efforts in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid, in promoting a Pan-Africanist vision and bringing together the diverse peoples of African continent.

Prime Minister Abiy said the existing friendship between the two countries served as the foundation for strengthening Ethio-Guinea

relations. President Condé commended Prime Minister Dr. Abiy for the reforms being undertaken in Ethiopia and the democratization processes he is currently spearheading. He also acknowledged his role in untying the knot that had kept Ethio-Eritrea relations stalled. The two leaders also witnessed the signing of a Strategic Partnership Agreement by Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh for Ethiopia and Foreign Minister Mamadi Toure for Guinea, allowing for the establishment of a joint ministerial commission and a series of other agreements on agriculture, air services, health, science and higher education, as well as culture and tourism were also signed.

The first meeting of the Ethio-Guinea Joint Ministerial Commission was held during the visit. The delegations were led by the respective Foreign Ministers and attended by other high-level officials. It offered the opportunity to discuss ways of strengthening bilateral cooperation, particularly on areas including education, agriculture, health, tourism, mining, aviation, among others. Dr. Workneh told the first meeting of the Ethio-Guinea Republic Joint Ministerial Commission meeting that he was satisfied with the general and bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Guinea and the way they supported each other's agendas in multilateral venues. He added: "We need to explore mechanisms to evaluate and follow up the implementation of our existing agreements and the MoUs in different sectors between our two countries." The Minister stressed the need to enhance people-to-people ties between Ethiopia and Guinea, and to further scale up cooperation on continental peace and security issues, as well as enhance investment promotion, capacity building, livestock sector links, mining and geology. He underlined that both countries were committed to diversifying their bilateral trade and investment ties, as well as establishing cultural and tourism exchange programs.

During his official visit President Conde and his delegation visited Ethiopian Airlines facilities in Addis Ababa; and made a visit to the Eastern Industrial Zone, at Dukem in Oromia Regional state, sharing Ethiopia's experience in the investment and aviation sectors and identifying areas for future cooperation. In 2016 Former Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn visited Guinea and signed an aviation service agreement; last year Ethiopian Airlines also agreed a strategic partnership in management, maintenance and training with Guinea Airlines.

ETHIO-ERITREAN PEACE CELEBRATIONS



Ethiopia and Eritrea resumed diplomatic relations on June 18 last year after 20 years of hostility, with Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed making a landmark visit to Eritrea and Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki visiting Ethiopia. Despite fighting a bloody two-year border war from 1998-2000, the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea share numerous complementarities in terms of culture, history and livelihood.

Indeed, the people of the two countries are basically one people living in two countries on the ground. It was in line with this that an Eritrean Public and Cultural Diplomacy Delegation arrived in Addis Ababa on February 14.

On arrival at Bole International Airport, the delegation was warmly welcomed by the Ethiopian Ambassador to Eritrea, Ambassador Redwan Hussien, Eritrea's Ambassador to the African Union, Ambassador Araya Desta, Head of the Addis Ababa Culture and Tourism Bureau, Professor Nebiyu Baye, and the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nebiat Getachew, as well as dozens of members of the Ethiopian Public Diplomacy team.

The Eritrean Public and Cultural Diplomacy team, composed of over sixty Eritreans from different cultural, professional and other walks of life, came to further strengthen historic relations and people-to-people ties between the two sisterly countries. They provided cultural and musical concerts, under the theme of the "Grand Musical Concert to Celebrate the Peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea"; celebrate and strengthen peace between the two countries in Bahir Dar, Adama and Hawassa and as a finale at the Millennium Hall in Addis Ababa on February 21. In these cities, the Eritrean cultural and musical groups, performed their concerts and held meetings and discussions with their Ethiopian counterparts to further deepen people-to-people links, relating to different fed-



eral and regional government officials and community representatives at all the venues. Indeed, the Eritrean Public Diplomacy Delegation delivered a very clear message from the people of Eritrea to the people of Ethiopia. The two countries have a long-time relationship and the people of Eritrea are committed to raise the people-to-people relations to a higher level. In addition, they underlined that the people of Eritrea are committed to the mutual growth of both peoples, and they would like to have an even closer and stronger relationship with the people of Ethiopia. The closing ceremony of the Eritrean Public and Cultural Diplomacy delegation's visit took place at the Millennium Hall in Addis Ababa on February 21. The event had been graced by Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, his Eritrean counterpart Osman Saleh, Special Advisor to the President of Eritrea, Yemane Gebreab, Ethiopia's Minister for Culture and Tourism, Dr. Hirut Kassaw, Deputy Mayor of the Addis Ababa City Administration, Engineer Takele Uma, Addis-based ambassadors, members of the international community and diplomatic corps invited guests and residents of Addis Ababa. The visit of the delegation was particularly timely as it would have a positive impact in building on the positive momentum launched by the leaders of the two countries. And last but not least the "Grand Musical Concert to Celebrate the Peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea" and the Eritrean Public Diplomacy and Cultural Team visit had visibly strengthened the long-standing and historic relations and people-to-people ties between two sister nations.

STATUE OF EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE I UNVEILED



The bronze statue designed by Bekele Mekonnen

Photo: mfa

A commemorative statue of Emperor Haile Selassie I was unveiled on February 10 at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa. The unveiling took place in the presence of the African Union Chairperson, Moussa Faki; the President of Ghana, Nana Addo Akofo, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Dr.

Abiy Ahmed; the outgoing Chairman of the African Union President Kagame of Rwanda; Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu, representatives from the former Imperial family and the Rastafarian community, AU officials and members of the diplomatic corps and other invited guests.

AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki, said the statue recognized the Emperor's contribution to Africa's liberation and unity leading up to the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963. Earlier, Deputy Chairperson, Ambassador. Kwesi Quartey, noted Addis Ababa was Africa's diplomatic capital and symbol of Pan-Africanism, and extended the AU Commission's appreciation to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the people of Ethiopia, for their commitment to the AU.

The 3-meter high statue, cast in bronze, shows the Emperor making his signature hand sign with the thumb and index finger in a triangular shape. The statue reflects the history of African liberation, integration, and his part in the evolution of Africa's development. Emperor Haile Selassie played a major leadership role in the establishment of what was then the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Together with Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, Emperor Haile Selassie promoted Pan-Africanism and African Unity and spearheaded the creation of the Organization of African Unity on 25 May 1963.

The statue is the second to be erected inside the AU Headquarters along with one commemorating Ghana's first leader, Kwame Nkrumah, another champion of pan-Africanism, which was erected in 2012. Haile Selassie's statue was designed by Bekele Mekonnen, an Ethiopian sculptor.

PM ABIY'S HALF-YEAR REPORT AND Q&A

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy delivered an address on the half-year performance of the federal government to the House of People's Representatives on February 1 and answered MPs questions on the economy, security, the rule of law and the reform process.

Dr. Abiy told MPs that unity and rule of law were non-negotiable values and asserted there was more to celebrate on the political front than to disparage, including opening up the political space. He noted close to 20 armed and unarmed political parties had returned home from abroad following the government's invitation and most, he said, were working to build democracy and fulfil their responsibilities of generating new ideas to help to pull the country out of poverty and promote peace. He called on political parties to organize themselves and acquaint the people with their policies, warning that the government would take legal action against

those that operated in breach of the law. He said the government would take "all needed measures against anyone that attempts to ruin unity, peace, and development." He urged students of higher education institutions not to be an instrument for political parties; students, he said, should "generate new ideas, not create fire by rubbing stones that affects peace in the country."

The Prime Minister said the contribution of the media to exercise of democracy had been less than expected and some public media had been engaged in escalating tensions and preaching hostility. It had not been playing a constructive role, but he accepted it had a right to criticize political reforms - as long as it did not pose a threat to national unity. He stressed the need for restraint and for reform to embrace the values of harmony and unity. There was a long way to go to improve the culture of discourse and to contain lawlessness. He noted the government had already detained people who were suspected of human rights violation and embezzlement and it was working closely with states to apprehend suspects who remain at large hiding among the community.

Responding to questions regarding displacement of people since the reform process started, he described the large number of internal displacements as "anti-constitutional and immoral". The government had injected a huge amount of funding to support victims and he noted the newly established Ministry of Peace was playing a significant role, stressing "it is far more crucial to focus on dealing with potential conflict issues to ensure lasting peace." He said about 90% of the displaced people had now returned to their villages. He stressed that respecting the rights of minorities is an essential element of democracy, adding people must learn to strengthen the values that keep them together.

Viable political solutions were a better way to control and end the influx of illegal arms trafficking and illicit financial transactions, the Prime Minister said. He said the alarming flow of smuggled arms could lead to a catastrophe and due care should be taken. One response was to strengthen the capacity of the revenues and customs but more important was solving the political problems. He said the government would "exert efforts to entirely control the situation in collaboration with the concerned institutions."

In terms of economic reforms, Dr. Abiy said that by improving national project performance and reducing public expenditure, the government had prevented an economic downturn. It was still working to prevent possible economic stagnation. There had been improvements in tax collection and an upward growth in revenue though more was needed. Year-on-year inflation, which had averaged 14% over the past 15 years, was now down to 10.3%.

Overall, the economic outlook was healthy, he said, but there were problems of smuggling and contraband, unemployment, low



export revenue, state enterprises, debt levels and project delays. Noting the country's economic problems appeared to be "structural" in nature, he said the current budget deficit had been substantially resolved by a \$1.7 billion grant from the World Bank. When parliament returned from recess, it would approve a supplementary budget. The tax system would be modernized and simplified, along with opening up Ethiopia's use of Eritrean ports; roads to these were already under construction with the help of World Bank. The government had done a successful job in reducing the country's debt burden and extending repayment periods; this would help finalize delayed projects and ensure sustainability of development. Dr. Abiy noted there had been increased foreign investment from multinational companies including, most recently, Volkswagen. This would contribute to generation of jobs but it would take at least 10 years to resolve unemployment, currently standing at 10 million.

ETHIOPIA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE PLAN

It was no surprise that the AU Summit, held under the theme of "The Year of Refugees, Returnees, and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa," took note of the fact that Ethiopia's new refugee law is one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa. Certainly, the changed law will enhance the lives of both refugees and host communities; and it is now being supported by the Ethiopia Country Refugee Response Plan (ECRRP), issued earlier this month.

The ECRRP Plan covers the period January 2019 to December 2020, and outlines the intended collective response of 54 humanitarian and development agencies over the next two years in support of all the registered refugee population groups in the country. The Plan aims to ensure that all the support for refugees is carried out within an agreed framework of objectives and performance, allowing for coordination and the provision of timely and effective protection and support for refugees.

The Plan also provides for quarterly sectoral reports, itemizing progress against planned deliverables, and a mid-term review at the end of the year to offer the option of reflecting operational changes.

Ethiopia, of course, maintains an open-door policy for refugees, and allows humanitarian access and protection to those seeking asylum on its territory. The House of Representatives' revisions to the national refugee law, issued on January 17, allows refugees the right to work and reside out of camps, access social and financial services, and register life events, including births and marriages. Ethiopia now has one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa, providing refugee protection within the framework of interna-

tional and national refugee laws as well as the international human rights treaties that have been ratified by Ethiopia. There are currently over 905,000 refugees hosted in Ethiopia, the majority from Eritrea (173,879), South Sudan (422,240), Sudan (44,620), and Somalia (257,283), though Ethiopia also provides protection to refugees from some 26 countries. The majority of refugees are located in camps in Tigray; Afar; Benishangul-Gumuz; Gambella; and Somali Regional States.

At the close of 2017, the Government formally launched the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Ethiopia, effectively paving the way for the implementation of the nine pledges it made at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees in New York in 2016. Through these pledges, Ethiopia offered to: expand its out-of-camp policy (OCP); provide work permits to refugees; increase enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education; provide access to irrigable land for crop cultivation; facilitate local integration in instances of protracted displacement; earmark a percentage of jobs within industrial parks to refugees; and provide access to vital events documentation to facilitate increased access to basic and essential social services.

The Response Plan allows for innovative, cost-effective and sustainable ways to deliver basic needs and essential services, including life-saving activities. It provides a comprehensive protection and solutions strategy which covers: preserving and enhancing the protection of the environment and living conditions; expansion of improved community-based and multi-sectorial child protection; strengthening access to basic services; expanding labour opportunities; and supporting the implementation of the pledges to expand access to rights, services, and self-reliance opportunities in the longer-term. It will also place an emphasis on the expansion of existing community facilities in health, education, WASH, environmental protection, social protection and gainful employment.

The financial requirements detailed for 2019 and 2020 amount to US\$1,288,604,352. The report breaks the figures down under eight different sectors: Protection, Education, Energy & Environment, Food security, Health & Nutrition, Livelihoods & Resilience, Shelter & NFIs, and WASH. Among the major contributors to the response plan are the Danish Refugee Council, The UN Food and Agriculture Organization, International Organization for Migration, Norwegian Refugee Council, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Oxfam GB; Save The Children International, The International Rescue Committee, The Lutheran World Federation, United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Program.

Society

WOMENS' ROLE IN PEACEKEEPING

President Sahle-Work Zewde has emphasized that Ethiopia will continue its commitment to enhance the participation of women in the military, police and civilian services of United Nations Peacekeeping. The President, who was speaking at the opening of the 3rd United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial preparatory meeting held at UNECA conference hall in Addis Ababa on January 28, emphasized that any peace keeping mission should give priority for the protection of women and other vulnerable groups; and underlined that the mainstreaming of women participation in peace keeping missions require effective coordination among the stakeholders. President Sahle-Work recognized that more was needed to be done to advance women in the peace and security agenda, adding, "Ethiopia welcomes the progress made in mainstreaming the agenda perspective in the works of the UN."

The President said the collaboration of AU and UN should focus on ensuring the active participation of women and women's groups in peace processes, conflict prevention, resolution, and peace building activity as well as promotion of women's human rights. She noted that more than 7,500 Ethiopian peacekeepers are serving under the UN Blue Helmets, and Ethiopia was proud of the fact that it was one of the leading contributors of female peacekeepers with more than 600 deployed under UN Peace Keeping Missions. Equally,

Ethiopia's State Minister of Defense, Ambassador Lelaalem Gebreyohannes said that Ethiopia had deployed thousands of peacekeepers to the eight UN missions in which it had participated, adding, "This record reflects Ethiopia's sustained commitment to support the idea that women truly make a difference in successful peacekeeping." She said this was a clear testimony of an "unwavering commitment to continue playing an active role in peacekeeping in the years and decades to come."

Trade

THE TASTE OF ORIGINS

In February the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) launched the brand: "Ethiopia: Taste of Origins". Derived from the national brand "Ethiopia: Land of Origins", Ethiopia: Taste of origins" will serve as the branding element for all agricultural commodities and food related trade shows. It will ensure Ethiopia is promoted consistently across different sectors in trade fairs, sending a unified message that the country offers a colourful and eclectic menu of things to see and do.