

A Week in the Horn – 17.08.2018

Headlines

***FINAL ROUND OF SOUTH SUDAN TALKS IN KHARTOUM STARTED THIS WEEK***

***ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THE PROSPECTS FOR EXPANDING TIES***

***ETHIOPIA HANDS OVER CHAIR OF NILE BASIN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS TO BURUNDI***

***AFRICA'S 1ST CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS DAY COMMEMORATED.***

News in Brief

## **Africa and the Africa Union**

Africa's first Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Day was commemorated on Friday last week (August 10) under the theme: "Promoting Innovative Universal Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System for Good Governance and Better Lives". A statement from AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, underlined the critical importance of effective use of accurate statistics for achieving Agenda 2063. He said this needed statistics to guide policy and planning, and inform decision-making processes. **(See article)**

The 26th Nile Council of Ministers, the annual meeting of the Nile basin Initiative, was held in Bujumbura, Burundi on Monday this week (August 13). Ethiopia's Minister of Water, Irrigation and Electricity, Dr. Sileshi Bekele handed over the Chair of the Council to Dr. Deo-Guide Rurema, Burundi's Minister of Environment, Agriculture and Livestock. The meeting was attended by ministers from Burundi, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda; DR Congo, Egypt, Sudan and Tanzania were represented by high level government officials. **(See article)**

## **Ethiopia**

President Dr. Mulatu Teshome visited the Chinese-built Eastern Industry Zone, in Dukem, south of Addis Ababa on Monday (August 13). Noting that Chinese investment played an indispensable role, he said the zone, with more than 80 factories, was a showcase of the way right management and planning could successfully manage Ethiopia's transition from an agriculture-based economy into an industrial powerhouse in the next decade. The President hoped local entrepreneurs would learn from the success of the Eastern Industry Zone. The Chinese Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Tan Jian, said the bilateral relationship could be seen as a model for China-Africa and South-South cooperation.

Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed visited the operational Industrial Park in Dukem (the Eastern Industry Zone), the new IP in Jimma and coffee forests around Jimma and Bonga – places that are known for being the "Origin of Coffee" – to encourage and support investors who seek to create real value in Ethiopia's economy. The Prime Minister's visit attests to the fact that, the private sector is the main partner in the nation's development endeavours as it builds a more dynamic economy.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu held discussions with President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh of Djibouti on Tuesday (August 14). Dr. Workneh assured President Guelleh that the Strategic Partnership and time-tested relationship between Ethiopia and Djibouti is longstanding and well entrenched that it will not falter in the face of incidents, adding that the

ties between the two countries will continue to be strengthened further ahead. Dr Workneh expressed his profound sorrow over the death of Djibouti nationals, while also noting that Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed has sent letter of condolences to President Guelleh. Taking note of the fact that the peoples of Ethiopia and Djibouti have strong, historic and cultural bonds, including blood ties, Dr. Workneh underscored that the incident in Dire Dawa does not whatsoever reflect the bigger picture and of their time-tested relationship. The Minister further revealed that police has detained the perpetrators and investigations are underway so that justice shall be served.

Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mrs. Fozia Amin opened a cultural symposium that aimed at strengthening the people-to-people ties between Ethiopia and Eritrea on Friday (August 17). The symposium which brought together 500 participants drawn from Ethiopians and Eritreans residing in Addis Ababa was also attended State Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mrs. Bizunesh Messeret, Director General of Public Diplomacy and Communications at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, Ambassador Nega Tsegaye and officials from both countries as well as invited guests. Mrs. Fozia Amin underscored the importance of such cultural events, which she said, was vital to advance the people-to-people ties between the two friendly nations.

State Minister of Foreign Affairs Mrs. Hirut Zemene received copies of credentials of the Ambassador of the State of Qatar to Ethiopia, Ambassador Hamad Al Dosari on Tuesday (August 14). The two sides discussed on ways of further strengthening the bilateral ties between the two countries. They further emphasized the need to enhance the trade and investment ties between the two countries.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Prof. Afework Kassu bade farewell to the outgoing Canadian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Philip Baker on Wednesday (August 15). Prof. Afework thanked the Ambassador for the good job he has done in strengthening the cooperation between the two countries on both bilateral and multilateral issues. The State Minister emphasized “We are undertaking deep reforms and we need that reform to be institutionalized and we want to learn a lot from Canada as country with long democratic experience.”

Similarly, Professor Afework bade farewell to the outgoing Danish Ambassador to Ethiopia, Mette Thygesen, on Tuesday (August 14). The State Minister appreciated the contribution of the Ambassador in strengthening the relations between the two countries during her tenure in Ethiopia. They discussed about the reform process unfolding in Ethiopia and the advent of peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Ambassador reiterated that Denmark is committed to provide any appropriate support in this regard.

Implementation of the agreements signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea last month have continued apace. The two countries have recently agreed to increase the flow of bilateral trade through Eritrea’s port of Assab to Addis Ababa, with Ethiopia and the UAE agreeing to build an oil pipeline between Assab and Addis Ababa. **(See article)**

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) announced a unilateral ceasefire on Sunday (August 12) in consideration of “the positive steps taken by the government to lay the ground work for talks and peaceful negotiations to find an available and lasting solution to the Ogaden conflict” in the Somali Regional State. An ONLF delegation arrived in Addis Ababa the same day. **(See article)**

Sultan Hanfare Alimirah, a former President of the Afar Regional State, returned to Addis Ababa on Tuesday (August 14). He and his delegation of the Afar People's Party, were warmly welcomed at the airport by The Minister of Construction, Aisha Muhamed; the Afar Regional State President, Haji Seyoum Awol, State Minister of Foreign Affairs, Professor Afework Kassu, diplomats and other officials. Sultan Hanfare said the APP would actively participate in a peaceful political struggle on the ground in Ethiopia.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on Tuesday (August 14) that the number of Internally Displaced People in Ethiopia had reached 2.8 million, up from 1.6 million at the beginning of the year. UNICEF also pointed out Ethiopia currently hosts more than 920,000 refugees, mainly from neighbouring Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea. UNICEF added that it so far received 31% of the US\$111.8 million needed to provide assistance.

## **Djibouti**

President Ismail Omar Guelleh held talks with Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu on Tuesday this week (August 14). Dr Workneh expressed his profound sorrow over the death of Djibouti nationals in Dire Dawa, and noted that Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed had sent letter of condolence to President Guelleh. Their discussion covered security issues for each other's nationals. In a press conference, Dr. Workneh stressed that the longstanding strategic partnership between Ethiopia and Djibouti would continue to be strengthened. During his visit, Dr. Workneh also met with Djibouti Foreign Minister, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, and held discussions on bilateral and regional issues of mutual concern.

## **Eritrea**

Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab headed a delegation to visit Somalia on Tuesday (August 14). They carried a message from President Isaias and held talks with President Mohamed Abdullahi. (**See article**)

## **Kenya**

President Uhuru Kenyatta has vowed that the government would not relent until the battle to rid Kenya of corruption and impunity had been won. Speaking on Sunday (August 12), he said "Let us develop a nation that has a conscience and one that is driven by God-fearing people." He said corruption was one of the forces that keeps frustrating national dreams including access to quality education, quality health care, decent meals for all, and quality jobs to give pride and dignity to Kenyans. At the end of last week, senior officials from the agency managing public land and of the state railway were arrested on suspicion of corruption over land allocation for the new \$3-billion Nairobi-Mombasa railway. They were among 18 officials, businesspeople and companies named in a statement listing arrests on Saturday.

## **Somalia**

Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi arrived in Djibouti on Thursday (August 16) for an official visit. He held talks with President Ismail Omar Guelleh on bilateral relations between the two countries and discussed strengthening their "shared strong brotherly bonds." The Somali government announced earlier in the week that it was ready to mediate to resolve the dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea. Foreign Minister Ambassador Ahmed Isse Awad said:

“We will mediate between Eritrea and Djibouti. Somalia believes reconciliation between Djibouti and Eritrea will also help to end the hostilities that engulfed the Horn of Africa.”

President Mohamed Abdullahi met and held talks with an Eritrean delegation led by Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and Presidential Advisor Yemane Gebreab that visited Mogadishu this week. Foreign Minister Osman delivered a message from President Isaias to President Mohamed Abdullahi. The delegation was met by Prime Minister Hassan Khayre at Aden Adde Airport. President Abdullahi visited Asmara last month when the two leaders declared an end to differences between the two countries and announced restoration of relations including exchanging ambassadors. The Office of the Prime Minister said: “Regional cooperation for stability and economic progress is crucial for common prosperity of the Horn.”

President Mohamed Abdullahi made a number of security changes on Thursday, appointing Dr Amina Said Ali, Deputy Chief of Staff at Villa Somalia, to be the new Chief of Staff to replace Fahad Yassin who was moved to be Deputy Director of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), replacing Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur, sacked earlier. The Somali National Army chief, Abdiweli Jama Gorod has been replaced by Dahir Adan Elmi, and Zakia Hussein Ahmed and Said Ahmed Kadiye were appointed as deputies of the Somali Police Force Commander. Hassan Nur Ol-u-jog has been appointed as the Commander of the Somali Navy Forces. The President called on all the newly appointed officials to carry out their new roles “transparently, diligently and professionally”.

A report from the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and the UN Human Rights Office had urged Somalia to build on the gains already made in its peace process over the last five years and take steps to ensure future elections are not marred by the human rights violations and abuses committed during the 2016-2017 electoral process. Its recommendations include a call for the development of the necessary legal and institutional frameworks to hold free, fair, transparent, inclusive and credible elections in 2020-2021. **(See article)**

Lt. General Owoyesigire, AMISOM Force Commander, has carried out a week-long tour of Forward Operating Bases in all of AMISOM’s six sectors, assessing the security situation and civil-military projects undertaken by AMISOM in support of local populations. He also talked to the troops in Jowhar, HirShabelle State; Baledogle in the Lower Shabelle region; Dhobley in Lower Jubba region; Belet Weyne in Hiiraan region; Baidoa in the South West State and Kismayo, in Jubaland State. During his tour, he awarded outgoing troops with service medals in recognition of their distinguished service and sacrifices. He called on SNA and AMISOM commanders to accelerate the fight with joint operations to liberate areas under the control of Al-Shabaab. This, he said, would improve peace, security and also equip Somali forces with the necessary skills for the sustainable stability.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the April-June (*Gu*) rains started earlier than normal and were significantly above average. A statement on Tuesday (August 14) said the favourable weather conditions combined with a large-scale humanitarian assistance had improved the food security situation in Somalia, having a “relatively positive impact on livestock conditions, water, and pasture availability in Somalia.” However, the lack of resources continued to restrict a sustained response across the country, and the report said donor support was “urgently needed to avoid another deterioration of the humanitarian situation.”

The fourth annual Mogadishu Book Fair took place over three days this week, attracting local and international participants, including scholars, playwrights, poets, journalists and book enthusiasts. It has offered book reading, plenary discussions, book signings and presentations by authors. It is funded by USAID and the money transfer company, Dahabshiil. Other cities in Somalis which hold similar events are Garowe and Kismayo. Haregisa, the capital of Somaliland held its 11<sup>th</sup> Book Fair last month.

## **South Sudan**

The IGAD mediation formally launched the final phase of talks on the South Sudan peace process on Monday (August 13). These will cover pending issues and the modalities of implementation of the revitalized peace agreement. The parties have a week to finalize their discussions before August 19. **(See article)**

Sudan's Foreign Minister El-Dirdeiry Mohamed Ahmed met with the Troika (US, UK and Norway) and the European Union ambassadors to Khartoum on Monday (August 13). He briefed them on the outcome of the meeting of the IGAD Council of Ministers in Khartoum on Friday (August 10) last week and on the final phase of the South Sudan talks that started on Monday. **(See article)**

Foreign Minister El-Dirdeiry Mohamed Ahmed made a two day visit to Turkey this week for the first meeting of the Joint Strategic Planning Group, co-chaired with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. In their talks the two ministers also discussed bilateral relations and ways to develop an economic partnership. Minister Ahmed also addressed the 10th Conference of Turkish Ambassadors. When Turkish President Erdogan visited Sudan in December last year, they agreed to increase trade links and to establish a higher political committee headed by the two presidents to meet annually alternately in Khartoum and Ankara.

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## ***FINAL ROUND OF SOUTH SUDAN TALKS IN KHARTOUM STARTED THIS WEEK***

The IGAD mediation formally launched the final phase of talks on the South Sudan peace process on Monday (August 13). These will cover still pending issues and the modalities of implementation of the revitalized peace agreement. The parties have a week to finalize their discussions before August 19. Under the agenda for the week, the parties will discuss Article 4 of the governance chapter on the number and boundaries of states, the creation of five new ministries and their clustering, judicial reforms, the composition of National Constitutional Amendment Committee (NCAC), and the roles and responsibilities of the presidency as well as any other business. Once an agreement on the modalities of implementation is reached, it will be followed by the draft agreement that will be given to the parties for consideration before it goes to the Council of Ministers of IGAD.

In a statement to the press on Monday (August 13), Sudan Foreign Minister El-Dirdeiry said three subcommittees had been set up to discuss the powers of the president and his five deputies, the functions of the five new ministries and a third committee to improve and develop the text of referendum on the number of states. Also taking part in the sessions are IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan Ismail.

The previous steps taken towards signing of a revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), include the signing on August 5 of the

Agreement on Outstanding Issues on Governance and Security Arrangements. This was preceded by the signing of the Khartoum Agreement (on June 27) providing for a permanent ceasefire and a commitment to withdraw troops from urban centers. A detailed agreement on security was signed on July 6, and on August 8, President Kiir granted a general amnesty to Riek Machar and other opposition rebel leaders.

On Monday, Foreign Minister El-Dirdeiry Mohamed Ahmed also met with the Troika (US, UK and Norway) and the European Union ambassadors to Khartoum. He briefed them on the outcome of the meeting of the IGAD Council of Ministers in Khartoum on Friday (August 10) last week and on the final phase of the South Sudan talks on bracketed issues and the implementation matrix which started on Monday. In their meeting, the IGAD Ministers adopted a draft matrix for the remaining items for the final document of the revitalized peace agreement, and extended the talks until August 19.

The Minister called on the international community to support the peace process and appealed to the Troika countries in particular to provide direct support for the agreement being struck in Khartoum under the IGAD umbrella. The Minister called for a joint meeting of foreign ministers of the IGAD countries and the foreign ministers of the Troika countries as soon as the two sides could agree on a date.

The Troika said in a joint statement last week that they were concerned that the arrangements agreed to date were not realistic or sustainable. They claimed the best hope for sustainable peace was “a process inclusive of ordinary men and women, civil society, religious leaders, ethnic minorities, and other excluded groups.” There are still a number of unanswered questions with some underlying political and security issues unresolved. The Troika underscored the importance of clarifying how resources would be used in a transparent and accountable way for the benefit of all South Sudanese. They also raised the issue of how security would be provided in Juba during the transition period, and the question of checks will be placed on executive power.

There has been a reduction in fighting since the Khartoum Declaration was signed, and humanitarian access to several areas has improved, but there are also a number of armed groups not party to the agreement, and may cause some problems in implementing the agreements. For the third year running South Sudan has been identified as the most violent for aid workers.

A United Nations report this week covering violence against humanitarian actors across the world said that with 24 humanitarian workers killed in 2017 South Sudan was still the most dangerous country in the world for aid workers. It said, “The violence in South Sudan continued to escalate, with record numbers of aid workers killed by gunfire in addition to a rise in aid worker kidnappings.” The report said that attacks on aid workers were mostly caused by shooting and unarmed attacks. The attacks, it said, reflected “a brutal, ethnically driven military campaign, disintegration of command and control, an environment of impunity for offenders and a festering hostility against the international humanitarian community upon which a great many South Sudanese rely for their basic needs”.

UN Agencies estimate that more than six million people in South Sudan are facing “crisis” or “emergency” levels of acute food insecurity. They say that in areas affected by conflict, “it

will be difficult for households... to realise a harvest... and the possibility of extreme food insecurity through to January 2019 will remain”.

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### ***ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THE PROSPECTS FOR EXPANDING TIES***

Since the momentous culmination of the end of the state of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea both Governments as well as their peoples have continued to demonstrate their commitments in scaling up collective endeavours in developing socio-economic and political ties. As we noted last week, developments have already included the restoration of phone links, helping families to talk after two decades, the re-launch of air transport connections, and dialogue to facilitate venues to explore business to business (b2b), business to Government (b2G) as well as Government to Government (G2G) opportunities.

The two countries, in another bid to augment their growing ties, agreed on Friday last week to increase the movement and amount of bilateral trade through Eritrea’s port city of Assab to Ethiopia’s capital Addis Ababa. This was unveiled during a meeting in Addis Ababa between Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and Reem Al Hashimy, the UAE’s State Minister for International Cooperation. Their discussions, according to Fitusm Arega, Chief of Staff of the Office of the Prime Minister, focused largely on investment in sectors including “industries, agriculture, real estate, oil pipeline and resorts”.

The construction of a pipeline would allow landlocked Ethiopia to export crude oil. Some oil was produced on a test basis from the Somali Regional State in June this year, and access to the port of Assab would be one way of exporting it. It would offer significant potential for both economies and assist in their economic integration as well as of the region, helping to create an internationally competitive economy. Increasing use of other ports in the region will also help facilitate a higher output of goods and passengers, paving more ways to boost the service sectors.

The implementation of the agreement between the two countries will advance and speed-up efforts on both sides to forge close political, social and people-to-people links as well as security cooperation. This, in turn, will help ensure regional peace and development and cooperation in the short and medium term.

There is still a huge opportunity to explore in terms of further opening up new venues of cooperation and partnership between Ethiopia and Eritrea as well as facilitating the process of economic integration in the region. As Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has repeatedly articulated, it is through *Medemer*, “coming together” that the previously intractable national and regional challenges will be addressed.

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### ***Ethiopia hands over Chair of Nile Basin Council of Ministers to Burundi***

The 26th Nile Council of Ministers was held in Bujumbura, Burundi on Monday this week (August 13). Dr. Deo-Guide Rurema, Burundi’s Minister of Environment, Agriculture and Livestock, took over the Chair from Ethiopia’s Minister of Water, Irrigation and Electricity, Dr. Sileshi Bekele. The Nile Council of Ministers is an annual gathering of the Ministers of

Water Affairs from each of the member states of the Nile Basin Initiative. The meeting was attended by ministers from Burundi, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda and DR Congo, Egypt, Sudan and Tanzania were represented by high level government officials.

The NBI annually rotated both the chairmanship of the Nile Council of Ministers and the Nile Technical Advisory Committee among member states. The meeting was also attended by Members of the Nile Technical Advisory Committee, and the management staff of NBI as well as representatives of development partners and civil society. The Council of Ministers' meeting was preceded by the 50th Nile Technical Advisory Committee (Nile-TAC) meeting where Burundi's Engineer Renilde Ndayishimiye assumed the chairmanship of the committee from Ethiopia's Engineer Atnafie Teshome.

The Council offered strategic guidance and direction on key issues to encourage Member States to jointly address their common challenges including water scarcity, food and energy insecurity and climate change as well as institutional issues on Nile Basin Initiative. They discussed the financial sustainability of NBI, and "Member States agreed to meet their annual obligations in a timely manner so as to support NBI in meeting its core costs". At a press conference subsequently, Dr Rurema said member states had committed themselves to clear any arrears in "the shortest possible time."

The ministers approved the NBI Financing Strategy and the Resource Mobilisation Action Plan, which will enable the NBI raise more funds for core costs and for programme work as well as implementation of regional investment projects. They also agreed to institutionalize and regularize the Nile Basin Heads of State Summit. Dr. Rurema pointed out that the Heads of State Summit was a platform that "the Nile Basin Initiative will utilise to promote Nile Basin development."

The objectives of the NBI are: to develop the Nile Basin water resources in a sustainable and equitable way to ensure prosperity, security, and peace for all its peoples; to ensure efficient water management and the optimal use of the resources; to ensure cooperation and joint action between the riparian countries, seeking win-win gains; to target poverty eradication and promote economic integration; and to ensure that the program results in a move from planning to action.

The highest decision and policy-making body of NBI is the Nile Council of Ministers (Nile-COM), comprised of Ministers in charge of Water Affairs in each NBI Member State. It is supported by the Nile Technical Advisory Committee (Nile-TAC), made up of 20 senior government officials, two from each Member States, Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, The Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Eritrea participate as an observer. The Nile Basin covers 250 million people in these riparian countries, and the NBI, established in 1999, is a focus for their collective effort.

The NBI has identified six strategic development priorities to emphasise for the next decade. These are: Enhancing availability and sustainable management of the trans-boundary Nile water resources; Enhancing hydropower development and increasing interconnectivity of electric grids and power trade in the basin; Introducing and promoting, through analytical work, an approach that examines and proposes options for addressing the water-food nexus; Conducting diagnostic studies and preparing inventories to promote the wise use and sustainable management of wetlands of trans-boundary significance; Improving basin resilience to climate change impacts; and Addressing the issue of trans-boundary water governance.

Its 10 year Strategy Document for 2017-2027 identifies overall strategic directions, addressing challenges to which the NBI can respond, the contributions it might make and how it might position itself to discharge its mandate. The Strategy, a product of widespread consultation, defines strategic water resources development and management priorities and identifies and articulates Nile Basin priorities. It also aligned the NBI to global and regional processes as well as the commitments to which NBI member countries are party, including SDGs and the Africa Water Vision 2025.

Underpinning the strategic priorities is the increase in cooperation between member states and dialogue with NBI's broader stakeholders as well as regional actors. The strategy translates the shared vision objective "to achieve sustainable socio-economic development through equitable utilization of, and benefit from the shared Nile Basin water resources" into basin development goals that NBI will work towards. It also defines the contributions the NBI will make over the period. Implementation will be through 5 Year Programs funded by riparian countries with support from development partners.

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### *AFRICA'S 1<sup>ST</sup> CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS DAY COMMEMORATED.*

Africa's first Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Day was commemorated on Friday last week (August 10) under the theme: "Promoting Innovative Universal Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System for Good Governance and Better Lives".

There's been general agreement that awareness of the multi-sectoral importance of CRVS systems for legal, administrative and statistical purposes hasn't been adequate among the policy makers, service providers and the public at large in Africa. Equally, there has been growing consciousness of the importance of commemorating the day to raise awareness and encourage countries to create appropriate national legal frameworks and IT infrastructures as well as improve innovative business processes improvement. These are necessary to make CRVS systems responsive to public demand, improving accessibility and quality of civil registration and related services.

It was in 2010 that the first Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration marked the beginning of a coordinated and integrated effort towards CRVS improvement in Africa. It was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Since then, Conferences of Ministers have been held every two years, underlining the high-level political commitment of African countries. It was the fourth Conference of Ministers which declared August 10 to be African Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day, and advised African Union member States to observe it. The AU Executive Council, at their 32nd Ordinary Session, in January this year, endorsed the recommendations set out in the Ministerial Declaration and decided August 10 should be designated Africa's Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day.

AU Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat in a statement on the Day, emphasized "*The continent cannot fulfill its dream of achieving Agenda 2063: "The Africa We Want", unless we know who we are, how many we are, where we live, work and what we need to improve our living conditions. This requires", he said, "that every vital event is registered and related statistics are collected, compiled, produced and disseminated in a regular and consistent manner, to guide policy and planning, inform decision making processes, and track*

*progress to ensure transparency and mutual accountability towards achieving Africa's development agenda."*

He noted most African countries did have civil registration laws for systematically registering vital events. However, he added, "very few countries have maintained a universal registration system that covers all vital events, including births, deaths and other vital events in between, and geographic areas of the country." He said this was a "Scandal of Invisibility", as "an inadequate records system renders most of Africa's poorest people invisible and marginalized. This, in turn, limits their access to socio-economic benefits in their country."

The Commission Chair underlined that efficient civil registration systems contributed towards "improved systems of governance; improved capacity for individuals to claim their human and civil rights; a better information base for Governments to deliver services; and improved capacities for monitoring human development efforts." In sum, the Commission Chairperson stressed that investment in a CRVS agenda was "not only timely, but a strategic imperative for the continent." It should, he said, form an integral part of the regular and routine governance of a country, and, he emphasized that it was primarily the responsibility of Governments to ensure that the necessary resources were in place to run it smoothly and effectively. He also noted that 2017-2026 was the Decade for Repositioning Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Africa at continental, regional and national levels.

He urged all Governments to recognize the importance of CRVS by showing further commitment towards the strengthening of CRVS systems in their respective countries and allocating adequate resources to support CRVS initiatives in line with the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA). The Chairperson also noted that the Union will continue supporting Member States in improving the accessibility and quality of civil registration and related services.

### ***THE ONLF EXPRESSES ITS INTEREST TO ENGAGE IN A PEACEFUL POLITICAL STRUGGLE***

From his appointment in April, Prime Minister Dr Abiy Ahmed has demonstrated his readiness and commitment to change the previously acrimonious and narrow political landscape of the nation through a whole series of reforms. One of these has been the invitation to competing political parties previously labelled as hostile, "terrorist groups". This derogatory nomenclature has been withdrawn by parliament and scores of political prisoners and opposition leaders have been released. In late June, the Government released Abdikarim Muse QalbiDhagahof the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). This was part of the olive branch extended to all previously banned political movements to give up armed rebellion and engage peacefully and politically with the current government.

The ONLF responded in a statement published on its website on Sunday (August 12) announcing a unilateral ceasefire "considering the call for peace by the current Ethiopian government Leader Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed." It said this key decision was agreed after "taking into account the positive steps taken by the Ethiopian government to lay the ground work for talks and peaceful negotiations to find a viable and lasting solution to the Ogaden conflict". The ONLF also affirmed "its commitment to engage in a peaceful negotiated settlement of the conflict."

The announcement of the ONLF's cessation of armed struggle said: "The Ogaden National Liberation Front declares a unilateral ceasefire from today – 12:00 pm, August 12, 2018 and

will cease all military and security operations directed against the Ethiopian Security Apparatus in the Somali territory (Ogaden), until a negotiated comprehensive cessation of hostilities is reached with the Ethiopian government.” The statement said this was in consideration of “the call for peace by the current Ethiopian government leader Prime Minister Dr. Abiy” and the “positive steps” taken by the new leadership in Addis Ababa. It also called upon the Government to reciprocate in kind “in order to halt any further acts that could hamper the initiated peace process and hasten the proposed peace talks”.

Following this statement, a three-member delegation of the ONLF, led by Adani AbdulkadrHermoge, Spokesperson of the Front, arrived in Addis Ababa later the same day. The delegation was welcomed at Bole International Airport by Kassahun Gonfa, State Minister at the Government Communications Affairs Office. In an interview at the airport, the ONLF spokesperson said the Front’s decision to return home followed the open invitation extended by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy to all competing political parties and was with the intent “to silence the guns in the region and to stabilize the regional state.” He also noted that the plethora of reforms undertaken by Government for the last four months, and aimed at ensuring respect for human rights, was another impetus for the ONLF to come to Addis Ababa and engage in the peaceful political struggle. State Minister Kassahun reassured the ONLF that the Government of Ethiopia “would provide the necessary support to these political parties so that they can be prepared for the upcoming election”