

## **A Week in Horn Africa**

**23/10/2009**

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### **Continued intransigence of Somali extremists**

Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam clashes continued this week with fighting between their respective militias west of Kismayo, control of which has been the aim of much recent fighting between the two groups. Al-Shabaab is continuing to try and assert its control of Kismayo and the region around it, and a spokesman said it had driven off attacks by Hizbul Islam. Last week, Al-Shabaab said it would attack any aid agencies if they attempted to restart humanitarian operations in the region. Aid agencies, said the Al-Shabaab spokesman, using language reminiscent of statements by President Issayas, were working and spying for western countries and only came to Somalia to collect information.

Meanwhile over the weekend, Somali Foreign Minister, Ali Ahmed 'Jengali', said that Al Qaeda fighters were now arriving in Somalia in order to attack government bases. Addressing a press conference in Nairobi, he urged African states to fulfill their pledges to AMISOM in order to help restore peace and security. If peace wasn't restored, he stressed, Somalia risked becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups. The Minister said the government had been talking to some opponents but emphasized that

talking to Al-Shabaab extremists was impossible. For its part, Hizbul Islam has recently underlined their total lack of interest in any discussions. Hizbul Islam's chairman, Sheikh Hassan Dahir 'Aweys', said on Wednesday that Hizbul Islam would fight on until Somalia had an Islamic government and administration. It does, of course, have this already and what Sheikh 'Aweys' means is that he wants an administration under the authority of Hizbul Islam, Al-Shabaab and himself, not one under President Sheikh Sharif and the TFG. Sheikh 'Aweys', who alleged members of the TFG were not working for the peace and security of the country, strongly criticized the several hundred Hizbul Islam fighters who have surrendered to the Government in recent weeks. He also attacked the Djibouti Government for providing facilities for training TFG forces, claiming that Djibouti was fueling the conflicts in Somalia. He called on the people of Djibouti to put pressure on its government to stop its “interference”. Earlier, in Djibouti, Djibouti's Prime Minister, Mr. Dileita Mohamed Dileita, attended a passing-out ceremony for 615 Somali soldiers at the end of a three month training course. Another contingent for training is expected to arrive in Djibouti shortly.

### **“It's not true; it's all lies”, claims President Issayas**

Somalia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Ali Ahmed 'Jengeli' has been speaking out about Eritrea at the weekend, telling journalists in Nairobi that Eritrea should be punished for threatening the security of the Horn of Africa region by supporting Somali rebels: “Enough is enough. Eritrea has defied calls from the international community and individual countries to play a positive role”. He added “[It] has to take the right trail or face sanctions which we hope the Security Council will impose soon”. The Minister said that while the region had been trying to engage Eritrea constructively, the Eritrean leadership had been encouraging the enemies of the TFG by its provision of arms and logistical support to the extremist opposition groups, Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam. He noted that Al Qaeda was waging

war in Somalia alongside Al-Shabaab which had appealed to foreign fighters to come and join in the war in Somalia. The Somali website, Garowe Online, emphasized the same point in an editorial this week, arguing that Eritrea was playing a consistently negative role to keep Somalia embroiled in a devastating war. Garowe Online suggested that, “The international community should send a strong signal to Eritrea, that fomenting war in Somalia and supporting anti-government elements is unacceptable, since Eritrea's negative role is contrary to international efforts to help restore national order in Somalia.”

The problem, of course, is that Eritrea is not prepared to accept the views of the international community, or of anyone else. It alone has the key to correct policies. President Issayas Afewerki continues to deny all accusations against Eritrea saying that sanctions should not be imposed without evidence: “If you have evidence, come up and show me”. He continues this stance despite the known facts, including detailed evidence, and in fact, of course, he has been shown the evidence, frequently. It includes the depositions of opposition prisoners trained in Eritrea, eyewitness accounts of Eritrean military trainers active in Somalia, of arms arriving by dhow in Merka, the manifestos of plane loads of arms flying into airstrips near Mogadishu, other numerous items in the very detailed UN Monitoring Group reports and the (undenied) support given to Sheikh Hassan Dahir 'Aweys', chairman of Hizbul Islam from January 2007, culminating in flying him down to Mogadishu and supplying him with the arms to try and seize power from the TFG in an attempted coup together with Al-Shabaab in May this year.

President Issayas, however, claims “all these accusations have nothing to do with the reality on the ground”. For him, the reality is very different. He told Reuters on Wednesday that “a network of [western] intelligence agencies that serve special interest groups globally” have been “the cause of all the problems we see all over the world”. They have been persecuting Eritrea by inventing “lies,

rumours and defamatory reports". President Issayas said he found it very perplexing why people told all these lies, why they made up statistics and statements about Eritrea when they "don't even know what's going on in the country". He was equally dismissive of the IMF whose recent mission to Eritrea found the economy had weakened significantly in the last year. The President said Eritrea had always been skeptical of any comments or judgements from the IMF, adding "I personally don't take them very seriously".

This week, Eritrea was also highlighted by Reporters Without Borders, being named as the worst country in the world for press freedom for the third consecutive year. Eritrea tolerates no independent media of any kind and thirty journalists are in prison. "The world's largest worldwide prison for journalists" says the report, based on a detailed question survey completed by hundreds of media figures around the world. President Issayas's response remains exactly the same as always. There are no facts to prove these allegations. They are all lies. Eritrea is right; everyone else is wrong. Last month the Eritrean government website, Shabait.com, with its usual calm certainty, said "The Government of Eritrea is recognized in the world for its uniquely different views and its courage in openly expressing those views. The fact that the Eritrean government does not refrain from firmly opposing commonly accepted but misguided perceptions is a matter of astonishment for those quarters that are used to meekly conforming to accepted norms. For any new idea or viewpoint, irrespective of whether it is true or not, can at first seem frightening and unacceptable....The Eritrean government's principles and outlook emanate from its independent and just domestic objective and policy. As a continuation of this domestic objective, its viewpoints on the international level are bold and just....And since [its] principles are genuine and not driven by ulterior motives, it is becoming clear there is no choice but to accept and adopt such outlook."

The problem, of course, is that the evidence is there. President Issayas' views are indeed “uniquely different” and his continuous refusal to accept facts known to everyone else is a matter of astonishment. It is simply unacceptable. Eritrea is carrying its supposed independent thinking to dangerous levels. Its actions; pose a real threat to international law, to peace and prosperity in Somalia and the Horn of Africa as well as to Eritrea itself. Above all, President Issayas' actions appear to be driven by one single aim, to try to destabilize Ethiopia. To do this he is apparently prepared to try and destroy the best chance for peace in Somalia for nearly twenty years, and to threaten the peace and stability of all Eritrea's neighbours.

In a speech on the occasion of Eritrea's Independence Day four years ago, President Issayas spoke of the “times of domination, exploitation, adventurism and conceit”, of unprovoked acts of conspiracy and the cultivation of terrorism. He was referring to alleged threats to the sovereignty of Eritrea, as always apparently the main target of super power threats, but his words rather more accurately describe Eritrea's own activities in recent years. Eritrea's meddling in the ongoing conflict in central and southern Somalia is perhaps the most urgent crisis being stoked up by President Issayas, but it is not the only one in the sub-region. As Dr. Pham, Director of the African Project at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, noted last week: “In April 2008, Eritrean troops crossed the border into Djibouti and fortified positions near Ras Doumeira on the Red Sea. Two months later, Djibouti forces came under fire from the Eritreans.....Of course, it should come as no surprise that Isaias Afewerki was willing to pick a fight with Djibouti....Just a decade ago; he was just as prepared to commence hostilities with Ethiopia... [and] the resulting two-year war - which an international tribunal, the Ethio-Eritrea Claims Commission ruled in a 2005 decision to have been due to Eritrea's violation of international law “by resorting to armed force on May 12, 1998 and the immediately following days to attack and occupy

the town of Badme, then under peaceful administration” by Ethiopia – left at least 100,000 dead and cost untold billions of dollars in damages.”

Dr. Pham noted that Africa's leaders had, unusually, managed to get their act together and appeal for help to the UN Security Council, asking for sanctions against Eritrea to stop its current “spoiling” activities in Somalia and bring an end to the “numerous efforts to destabilize countries throughout the Horn of Africa”. It was therefore “bitterly disappointing”, he said, that the AU's efforts were being largely ignored by the Security Council. The failure to act was seriously “to the detriment of both the African states immediately bearing the brunt of the assaults from Asmara and the broader interests of the international community.”

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## **The revised figures for those in need of emergency food assistance**

On Thursday, the Government issued revised figures for humanitarian requirements for emergency food and non-food assistance for the period October to December. Following the poor performance of the belg/gu rains and the consequent continuing food insecurity earlier this year the number of potential beneficiaries for emergency food aid rose from 4.2 million in January to 5.3 million in May. Subsequent findings by the multi-agency livelihood security assessment in June and July and other monitoring showed a further increase in the numbers needing emergency assistance to the present total of 6.2 million. About 29% of these are from the Somali Regional State, 22% for Oromia, 17% from the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, 16% from Amhara Regional State and 12% from Tigray. The increase in numbers follows the delay in the onset of the main meher rains in June and July and a mid-meher mission to assess the impact and evaluate the necessary assistance required. Ethiopia

is suffering from drought conditions like the rest of East Africa, and these are currently affecting more than 23 million people in seven countries.

The cost of the total net emergency requirement for food and non-food needs for October to December has now been assessed at US \$ 175 million. The net food requirement amounts to 159,410 tonnes, at a cost of US\$121 million with another US\$8.9 million for 11 tonnes of targeted supplementary food requirements for malnourished children and women and a further US\$45 million for non-food needs – health and nutrition, water and sanitation, agriculture and livestock.

The food security situation was weakened by last year's challenges and then exacerbated by the poor performance of the belg/ganna and gu rains. Food prices, although down significantly from the previous year, remained above the long-term average, and as a result the 2008 nutrition emergency spilled over into the first half of this year. The food situation was also affected by the reduction in food aid distribution following complications over the international assistance food chain and the global economic crisis. Only five of six planned distribution rounds were completed by the end of September, and with reduced ration sizes due to the shortage of resources. Substantial funding shortfalls were accompanied by serious logistical problems at Djibouti port, and a shortage of trucks for overland transport. The Government managed to arrange an additional dedicated berth in Djibouti port for relief food shipping, and used both Port Sudan and Berbera for supplies. It purchased another 20,000 tonnes of cereals and facilitated the provision of trucking capacity. It also focused attention on the Outpatient Therapeutic Programme under the National Nutrition Strategy to achieve full woreda coverage for the programme. Overall between the periods January to September, a total of 453,113 tonnes of relief food was despatched to intended beneficiaries, amounting to 57% of overall requirements. Of this some 98,000 tonnes (22%) was made available by NGOs. Following a joint Government/Donor/WFP mission on utilization, a task force has been set up to establish a food monitoring system and design a capacity

building programme to support it. The Somali Region posed particular problems of food delivery, following security issues in 2007 and transport difficulties. WFP in collaboration with the Somali Regional Government and the Federal Government bodies developed a new logistical set-up last year including several logistical hubs, Jijiga being the most recent following the opening of a new transport corridor to Berbera. This has provided for the pre-positioning of targeted supplementary feeding and shortened the time of delivery as well as significantly improved overall food delivery this year.

Certainly, the growth in the number needing emergency food assistance has been a disappointment but is not entirely a surprise in this, an El-Nino year, when drought often precedes flooding. As the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction said recently “Africa and in particular the Horn of Africa suffers more and more from the impact of climate-induced hazards”. Oxfam calculates drought costs Ethiopia a billion dollars a year, and in the face of climate change, longer-term climatic projections predict drought is likely to increase. This is one reason why a much more co-ordinated approach to Disaster Risk Management, with all relevant actors, including donors, cooperating to respond to vulnerability and risk, and linked especially to climate change, would be critical. This would help ensure all those affected by humanitarian crises get the right assistance at the right time, and would encourage donors to assist building the resilience of communities to problems and produce alternatives to imported aid through investment in local and regional production, as well as allow the WFP to consider making its emergency food programmes contribute more to sustainable development projects in areas of need.

Ethiopia would like to see more accurate and less alarmist reporting of the situation, more considered reporting and significantly less exaggeration. This is a serious challenge but there is no reason to believe the situation will turn into “a catastrophe”, even though more assistance may be needed. The

Government has made the scope of the challenge very clear. It detailed on several occasions what it believes has been needed in terms of emergency food assistance. There is no reason for exaggeration, and no reason for the BBC to issue reports contradicting the reality on the ground or to claim that the drought is “the result of policies designed to keep farmers on the land” as a way to prevent large-scale unemployment. The State minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ato Mitiku Kasa, who yesterday launched the latest Humanitarian Requirements Document October to December 2009 in Addis Ababa, expressed his disappointment to state television yesterday that the BBC and some other media outlets appeared to base their reporting more on their own interests and objectives than on the reality. They had been listening too much to players with their own interests, who were more interested in appealing for more aid to cover their operational costs, salaries and expenses. The Minister also speculated that there might also be other elements of dependency, politics and economics at work behind such reports.

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## **Irresponsible reportage on the current drought situation**

Food security and food self-sufficiency form one of the important elements of our Agriculture Led Industrial Development Strategy. The people and government of Ethiopia approach this agenda from two angles. The first is to address the immediate emergency requirements. To address these requirements it has put in place a robust monitoring and surveying mechanism which is executed in partnership with the international community. As a result of this exercise, there is a periodic monitoring report which is made public to all stakeholders. This enables the government to mobilise in advance its domestic resources as well as appeal to the international community to fill the gap in food assistance. This early warning and monitoring mechanism has been working effectively and have made

it possible to address emergency requirements before the situation worsens. As a result, no life has been lost because of drought, which manifests itself in an increasing frequent manner. The drought, which has its genesis in global climate change, has been impacting negatively on the agricultural potential of Ethiopia for the last three decades. The international community came to grips with this fundamental factor of climate change rather late in the day. It should have been factored into the global development programme a long time ago so that a lasting solution would be found to the problem.

The second approach which the people and government of Ethiopia have continued to implement for the past ten years, is geared towards finding a lasting solution to recurring drought through a sustainable agricultural development strategy. The strategy focuses on strengthening agricultural infrastructure such as small- and medium-scale irrigation, the provision of improved agricultural implements and inputs (such as better seeds and fertilisers), agricultural technology packages and multi-faceted extension services. This has significantly improved agricultural productivity and extricated several million farmers from poverty. Due to these multi-pronged measures taken in the past, Ethiopia is able not only to manage emergency requirements, but also to ensure a sustainable path to food self-sufficiency.

The media coverage of the current drought in Ethiopia, as presented by certain media outlets such as the BBC, does not put the current situation in the context of these national endeavours. Some of the BBC coverage is misleading at best and deeply damaging at worst. It is very difficult to contemplate that a media outlet as big as the BBC can be largely ignorant of this national endeavour. The BBC programme refers repeatedly to the 1984 catastrophic situation which, by no stretch of the imagination, is comparable to the current situation in Ethiopia. To use the 1984 drought footage to explain the current situation demonstrates a marked lack of respect for the Ethiopian people and an ignorance of the

negative consequences it will have on Ethiopia's overall endeavour to transform itself into a democratic and poverty-free nation.

There are those who are hoping to relaunch their professional ambition on the backs of the 1984 famine. This puts their credibility in question at best and demonstrates a marked disregard for the welfare of many Ethiopians. They have an obligation to the public to keep to the facts as they stand and report accordingly, thereby ensuring their journalistic integrity and credibility.

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## **Destabilization using the pen**

It is not clear why some scholars find it difficult to exercise sound judgment when they write about the Horn of Africa, and Ethiopia in particular. It might appear to be undiplomatic and not all that fair, but it might be necessary not to mince words when talking about those sorts of experts: They don't care for the truth.

Kjetil Trenvoll is a scholar who appears to have honed up his skills as a scribe by seeking sinister motives for everything that the EPRDF Government has done over the last 18 years.

His latest writing co-authored with Lovise Aalen – *The End of Democracy? Curtailing Political and Civil Rights in Ethiopia*. – is an example not only of bad scholarship but also of how much damage could potentially be caused by non-citizens to a complex and difficult democratization process in developing countries such as Ethiopia.

It is impossible to deny that the 2005 election in Ethiopia, while it began with full of promises and with all the indications of being able to be historic, nonetheless ended up further polarizing Ethiopian society and failing to fulfill the promises that had appeared within easy reach until polling day.

Reasonable people could disagree on what weight should be given to what factor/factors as major causes for the violence that marred the post election period. The authors of this article themselves admit that the Government had no need to rig the election, arguing that it was structurally determined that the EPRDF would win. Obviously, one of the major reasons for the post-election violence was, to put it mildly, the unconstitutional behavior of the opposition, including their refusal to take the seats in parliament that they had won. It is impossible to deny that the opposition did, again putting it mildly, try to make it impossible for the Government to govern and for the results of the election to be implemented. But Alaen & Trenvoll are absolutely and mind bogglingly mum on this. Nor do they utter even a word on whether election monitors might have played some role – at least a tiny bit – in complicating the post-election period and even in contributing to the violence. This neglect is not perhaps without reason, rooted in the fundamental assumptions of the writers about who is and who is not committed to the democratization of Ethiopia. The EPRDF cannot, by definition, in their view, be inclined to be democratic. Accordingly, it cannot be given credit for whatever positive aspect the pre-polling period of the 2005 election might have had. Why? Because, for the ruling party “The elections were ... seen as tools not for enhancing democracy in Ethiopia, but for consolidating EPRDF’s power.” Under this circumstances, it should not be too surprising if the authors saw no wrong if election monitors had in fact violated their code of conduct and had behaved in a dangerously intrusive manner in an election which had a huge meaning for the democratic destiny of the country. If the ruling party is defined from the outset as only interested in “consolidating” its power, it might appear legitimate for non-citizens, in the interest of democracy, to act as a countervailing force. The authors perhaps

inadvertently betray this hubristic mentality when they describe in a rather distorted and pessimistic manner the post-election situation in Ethiopia. The following is what they underline with little shame and democratic pretence:

The only constituency left in Ethiopia which may have political leeway to work as checks-and-balances towards the government's unaccountable exercise of power is the international donor assistance group (DAG), which actively engaged in the 2005 electoral process.

Then the authors proceed to argue that even donors have subsequently been silenced. The example given for the intimidation of donors into silence is the hiccup that Norway and Ethiopia had in their diplomatic relations. But the facts relating to the case are presented in such a distorted and self-serving manner that the renditions have nothing to do with the truth. Those privy to the case – both from the side of Norway and Ethiopia – know this to be the truth because they know that relations between the two sides were normalized in a civilized manner and in way that highlighted the decency of the Norwegian people and their democratic culture. And that is the truth about that unfortunate episode in total dismissal of which the authors build a case for how the EPRDF Government has obliterated all opposition, including, paradoxically, in their view, foreign opposition. But how in the world can foreigners be regarded to have the role as an opposition in Ethiopian domestic politics? Perhaps it is the slip of the pen and they don't mean what they say, but this is what they say:

By suppressing criticism from the donor assistance group, the Ethiopian Government has managed to silence or contain all opposition. The only opposition avenue remaining open appears to be that of armed struggle.

Developments in 2008 seemed to indicate that this is a possibility that may be pursued through new organizational frameworks and platforms.

The only example they adduce for this outrageous conclusion cum incitement to violence is the behavior one erratic politician from among those prominent opposition politicians of the 2005 elections. Otherwise, as can empirically be verified what we see in Ethiopia currently is dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition – groups that are in no way entirely united within themselves – on ways and means of ensuring a fair, free and peaceful election.

At the risk of being called unfair, the temptation about being frank can hardly be resisted – the authors appear to be much closer in their sentiments to the violent Ethiopian opposition than to those who seem to have opted for a peaceful democratic transformation of Ethiopia. It is therefore impossible to be surprised by their conclusion:

Interviews conducted outside Ethiopia with other opposition leaders during 2008 corroborated the impression that initiatives to coordinate a broader armed struggle against the EPRDE regime may be under way.

No doubt, Ethiopia has challenges, including from those that see a democratizing Ethiopia as a threat, working in tandem with extremist forces in the Horn of Africa. These are challenges also faced by other countries of the region. These countries have no problem identifying the sources of the danger to the peace, stability and democratization of the Horn of Africa. Nor does the entire Africa have any illusions about this. All these countries also know what role Ethiopia plays currently in the region and in Africa as a whole and the staying power of the country. Sadly, the authors fail to see all this.

## **Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy**

Two weeks ago, looking at foreign policy challenges in the coming year, we emphasized that one of the difficulties facing Ethiopia (and indeed other countries in the region and in Africa) is one of perception, of how we are perceived by others and of how such views are reached. Together this makes up a central element of public diplomacy. In part, of course, the results may be a reflection of our own failures to inform others sufficiently clearly of the aims and objectives of our policy and of our diplomacy, and, equally, important, of our impressive achievements in the democratization of society and in economic and social development which together have completely changed the trajectory of development in Ethiopia. In the absence of such information, others for political reasons can and will fill the gap with outdated and inaccurate images, portraying Ethiopia as mired in war, conflict, and famine. As we have discovered it is difficult to change these perceptions, even when there is goodwill which is in any case often unfortunately lacking. It is very clear that many media outlets and commentators make little effort to discover the realities of policy and government actions, being all-too-often content to repeat existing mantras and statements, however improbable or outlandish, even when these have been comprehensively challenged and corrected. We have to say elements of the international media and of the advocacy industry are particularly prone to this.

Ethiopia's overall foreign policy goals are very clear, centered as they are on the acknowledged need, indeed the necessity for peace and stability in our sub-region and in Africa, without which development and the defeat of poverty cannot succeed. Ethiopia is, of course, the current chair of IGAD, and the African Union has its headquarters in Addis Ababa. At the same time foreign and domestic policy goals and aims are becoming more interdependent, directly and indirectly, with globalization and the expansion of technological change making this inevitable. Increased global links and international engagement bring the increased need to explain and engage with the public here and abroad, both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian. There is an obvious need to ensure our aims and intentions,

our policies and actions, really are clear and intelligible. We also need to understand those of others. Global issues, like climate change, extremism, terrorism, affect us all, if in widely different ways, but they can certainly be interpreted differently. This is where understanding, explanations and indeed dialogue becomes paramount. We may need to search out the motivations of others, but they also must look at our interests and policies. The process of achieving development of solutions to problems requires genuine engagement by all parties.

Similarly, there is a very real necessity for the production of accurate and detailed information and for serious and realistic efforts at analysis based on this. The point has been underlined in recent years by the growth of a pattern of politically driven inaccuracy, based on widespread dissimulation, even outright falsehood, and buttressed by a clear failure to investigate allegations, either from laziness or a refusal to spoil a “good story”. Exaggeration, inflation and hyperbole are used to make political points at the expense of fact. Foreign and private media collect their information from the propaganda of opposition sources committed to violence and extremism. They fail to make the effort to investigate the reality, even to try to question their sources or even attempt to provide any effort at balance. This rapidly turns what should be a process of mutual discussion and involvement into a one-way street based on unacceptable, often false, information. There is always a need for media outlets, human rights and advocacy bodies to provide the balanced output necessary for competent analysis. Nobody doubts the need to listen to informed and relevant criticism, but the corollary is that it must be both accurate and pertinent.

Nations, like personalities, acquire reputations whether deserved or not. These then become difficult to change. Ethiopia is still frequently associated with famine, war and human rights abuse, images linked to the murderous regime of Mengistu and the Derg ousted nearly twenty years ago. These are images that no longer have any validity, but if the word drought is mentioned, or a humanitarian problem

appears, it almost automatic for any international media outlet to refer back to the famine of twenty-five years ago; and this is done at the expense of today's reality. In this they may be encouraged by opposition elements, both inside and outside Ethiopia, which are quite prepared to use such outdated images for their own political purposes. In turn they are frequently encouraged to do this for “the sake of the story” by some international journalists who know no better and care less. Some scholars are no better as the earlier item in this edition of the Week in the Horn has highlighted when reviewing the piece by Alaen & Trenvoll.

The frequent debates and discussions on African topics on the websites of western think-tanks or in western capitals often suffer both in general and in particular from a severe lack of accurate information from the region in question. Much of what reaches the international community in Europe and the US from Somalia, for example, is refracted through the distortions of media reporting from Nairobi, based on Somali opposition sources, many linked to extremist groups. Inevitably, given the failure of alternative information flows, this leads to a failure to understand the political realities on the ground, or regional concerns. This has been especially noticeable in comments on the situation in Somalia over the last couple of years, persistently exaggerating opposition strength, especially that of Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam, marginalizing the TFG and ignoring the role of AMISOM. On the wider geopolitical level, the result has been a surprising disinterest in the role of Eritrea in Somalia and in the region and a concomitant exaggeration about Ethiopia's aims and intentions, or about the dangers of piracy at the expense of terrorism.

Images, it must be noted, are in fact remarkably difficult to change. It can take decades and the efforts to do so must be properly informed by the provision of a truthful and clear account with accurate facts and figures and precise details of aims and achievements. Even then it still remains difficult to get people to read such information. It also requires the building up and maintenance of networks of

contacts to allow for collective action, internally and externally, to develop trust and provide for a genuine exchange of views. Assumptions on all sides need to be considered and tested, and where necessary corrected. This comes back to the necessity of genuine dialogue at every level to complement the strategic objectives of government, as well as the ability to provide an open and listening mind, and for accurate information. It is a process that must emphasize an understanding of national interest, of reason and a preparedness to listen and negotiate. This is what provides the basis for any evidence-based analysis as nothing else can.

Inevitably Ethiopia's own interest is on accurate reporting on and about the Horn of Africa, but any strictures certainly apply very much more widely. Far too much journalism fails the test of intellectual honesty. Journalists, academic commentators and analysts so very often write about matters of which they are simply ignorant, or have failed to consult reliable sources or indeed any sources at all. The absence of real knowledge is rapidly filled by the stereotypes on file in old databases, misrepresentations, misleading and inaccurate claims and simplistic generalizations, perpetuating outdated fiction. This is often, almost usually, coupled with a refusal to make corrections or even to admit to errors. Today, once something gets onto the electronic database of a newspaper or a media outlet, it often remains unchallenged and unchallengeable. Indeed, it is extraordinarily difficult to persuade media outlets to alter items on their database. As a result, errors perpetuate and continue to gain undeserved credence.

All this is coupled with a related assumption among media outlets that journalists, however raw or untrained, know more than genuine academic experts, and indeed more than the inhabitants of the country concerned. It is, of course, true they do know more about one thing – what an editor wants and that is “bad news”. In the US and Europe, Africa is still seen as a “problem”, and no reports are expected to contradict this basic premise. Nor do they usually do so. Media correspondents may in

Africa may be highly professional working journalists, but their view of Africa often owes far more to facile impressions and opinions formed long ago or far away. Far from helping to produce solutions for problems, reports often contribute to the difficulties, perpetuating the errors of the past. The result is that journalistic analyses, advocacy reports and even academic papers add far more to the lack of awareness and understanding about Africa and its problems rather than the opposite. This, of course, is no excuse for our own failures to respond sufficiently to the challenges posed by the need for the provision of accurate and detailed information.

Ethiopia is committed to regional and continental development through IGAD and the AU, and we believe we, and Africa, have a great deal to offer in terms of genuine exchange across political and cultural barriers, a process that can build the long-term mutual trust to underpin real international relations. Mutual trust and mutual benefits must be the vital factors to build and maintain links between, and within, states linking opinion-makers and agents, leaders of change and development. This allows for the regulated activities of INGOs and NGOs and others to complement, not undermine, the strategic objectives of government. This doesn't negate different perceptions of government or evaluations of government. It does emphasize the need for an open and listening mind, to allow for credible and constructive links between stakeholders who are media-neutral.

The briefest look at recent events in the Horn of Africa makes clear that Ethiopia is a 'status quo' power, and has always been. In other words it operates on the basis of the situation as it is, and has been. Its interests are in resolving the struggle against poverty and the building of a democratic society. It is committed to the achievement of peace, security, stability and sustainable development in the Horn of Africa, a project that needs political will, cooperation and commitment. Ethiopia has no irredentist claims nor any ambition for aggrandizement against Eritrea or Somalia as its actions over the last two decades demonstrate. Last week, the UN Resident Coordinator in Ethiopia, Mr. Fidele Sarassoro, noted

Ethiopia's role in mediating regional conflicts and its troop contributions to UN peace keeping; its diplomatic work are widely recognized as positive and constructive, even indispensable, and its efforts in Somalia and Sudan underline its agenda for the promotion of peace and stability, the foundation for investment and sustainable development. Assertions to the contrary simply fly in the face of all known facts. It was, after all, this government which encouraged and accepted the independence of Eritrea in 1993, and which has resolutely refused to respond to continuous provocation from Eritrea. At the same time, Ethiopians have always discharged their patriotic duties in defending their country, but as Prime Minister Meles has underlined again and again, Ethiopia will never start any conflict with anyone. This contrasts sharply with Eritrea, which continues with its policy of “creating havoc” in the Horn of Africa, which has launched aggressive conflicts against Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen and Ethiopia, and is still acting as 'spoiler' in Somalia, is marked. There has been no change in these characteristics, and the regime in Asmara refuses to make any effort to normalize relations. It has indeed continued its aggressive activities in Somalia and Djibouti in deliberate and open defiance of the United Nations Security Council.

Public diplomacy emphasizes human intelligence, the importance of accurate advocacy, the strategic use of the media, of contacts and links with state and non-state actors alike. It underlines the importance of dialogue, the understanding of national interests, of reason and the rule of law, the ability to listen and negotiate as required – creating shared solutions to shared problems and implementing them through joint, or separate, actions as required. Mutual trust for mutual benefit. It all adds up to providing a realistic response to the blurring of international and domestic issues, and the rise of transnational problems including climate change, terrorism, and the increasingly obvious links between development and security.