January 20, 2012 - The Office of the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that Britain plans to host another international conference on the future of Somalia on May 7th. This will build on the conference on Somalia held in London in February last year where some 50 governments and international organizations, including US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and UN Secretary General, Ban ki-Moon, pledged to boost aid for Somalia to help fight Islamist militants and pirates. A follow-up conference, attended by 54 countries, was also held in Istanbul in June. The new conference is intended to help sustain international support for the progress being made by the Somali government. Somalia's Foreign Minister was in London last week, and Mr. Cameron's office said he had spoken with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud on Thursday last week and discussed the progress made against Al-Shabaab forces, as well as President Hassan's priorities in restoring stability in Somalia.

Prime Minister Cameron said he would use the UK's Presidency of the G8 this year to reinforce further support for the efforts of the Somali government to build a strong, prosperous and democratic country. The United Kingdom said last week that it would be working closely with both the African Union and Ethiopia during its G8 Presidency this year on a number of areas including Somalia as well as the New Alliance on Food Security and on improving G8-African Union co-ordination on peace and security matters. Prime Minister Cameron has said the UK's Presidency of the G8 will focus on three ways in which the G8 can support the development of open economies, open governments and open societies to unleash the power of the private sector: advancing trade, ensuring tax compliance and promoting greater transparency. He also noted that the UK intended to lead the battle against hunger with a special event on food and nutrition a few days before the main G8 meeting, to follow up on last year's Olympic Hunger Summit in London. He drew attention to the conditions that enable open economies and open societies to drive prosperity and growth, and identified these as the rule of law, the absence of conflict and corruption, and the presence of property rights and strong institutions. He also noted that transparency and accountability were also vital to lay the foundations of long-term growth and prosperity.

As part of the UK's organization for the conference, the Director for Africa in the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mr. Nick Kay, has been on a tour of main Somalia stakeholders and partners, to reach out and interact with important stakeholders in the region. He has held meetings with the Presidents of Somalia, Kenya and Uganda as well as Ethiopia's Foreign Minister and the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the UN Special Envoy for Somalia. He met with Dr. Tedros on Wednesday (January 16th) this week and briefed the Foreign Minister about the preparation and aims of the May 7th conference. Mr. Kay said the UK aimed to link the conference to the priorities of the Government of Somalia, and identified four priority areas for consultation: security, justice, public financial management and political stability. He said the aims were to endorse the plans of the Government of Somalia in these areas and coordinate ways to support its strategies and resolve gaps in funding. Dr. Tedros expressed Ethiopia's support for the conference, noting that peace in Somalia means peace for Ethiopia. He said it was important to exploit the current opportunities in Somalia as quickly as possible; adding that ensuring the ownership of the Somalia Government was vital and should be underlined by taking their priorities into consideration. The Minister said the international community should

speed up its intervention without delay and support the Government of Somalia in building its own institutions and provide the capacity for the government to provide much needed goods and services for the public. The political process should also be speeded up; Ethiopia, he said, was helping in this regard by providing the required environment in the areas it had liberated.

There is a growing hope among Somalia's partners that the May conference on Somalia will bring about tangible results and provide for the different international actors to give increased and coordinated support to help urgent delivery on the priorities identified by the Somali government. At the same time there is concern of the need to avoid duplication of initiatives, as has happened in the past. This can take up time and divert attention, threatening to lead to developments and assistance falling short of expectation. (Source: MoFA)