

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties: A landmark for peace and democracy in Ethiopia

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In its November 6, 2009 "A Week in the Horn" report, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) raised issues on the conference in Nairobi while Al-Shabaab threatens to spread terrorism, successful Kenya-Ethiopia cross-border meeting and the signing of Code of Conduct.

Minister Seyoum opens the 17th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (I.C.E.S.) The Seventeenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies has been held in Addis Ababa this week. This meeting is the Golden Jubilee of the I.C.E.S. whose first meeting was held in Rome in 1959 with just over 30 scholars attending, only one from Ethiopia. This is the fifth time the Conference has been held in Addis Ababa, the other meetings being in 1966 (3rd Conference), 1984 (8th), 1991 (11th) and 2000 (14th). Hundreds of scholars from Ethiopia and from all over the world now attend what has become easily the largest and most important meeting of Ethiopian studies. Foreign Minister Seyoum spoke at the opening of this week's meeting, held at the Akaki Campus of Addis Ababa University, welcoming delegates to the Conference's Golden Jubilee. He noted that delegates to the I.C.E.S. Meetings had seen many changes in Ethiopia over the half-century, most notably since 1991 with the introduction of a democratic constitution and a federal government founded on universal democratic values and norms, the basis of the new Ethiopia. Looking back eighteen years, the minister noted there had then been uncertainty, even apprehension, about the future of Ethiopia as it became obvious the country could not continue with its former relationship between the centre and the regions, and the lack of rights and privileges for the nationalities and peoples of the state. Today, he stressed, things were very different. Ethiopia was moving on a fundamentally different trajectory. It had never been so ready as it was today to defend its legitimate interests, to be a reliable ally to its partners and able to take advantage of the opportunities available. Certainly Ethiopia would be unable to overcome all sources of vulnerability as long as its democratization is sufficiently broadened and the war on poverty has succeeded. In the economic sphere, growth over the previous six years had been unprecedented in Ethiopia's modern history. There was no reason why this should not continue. The Government did not claim to have achieved food security yet. It was a daunting task further complicated by the effects of worsening climate change.

Equally, the agricultural sector was in the middle of a huge transformation; health and education sectors appeared in line to achieve the Millennium Goals by 2015. There had been impressive growth in tertiary education sector with the creation of new universities. Here, the minister said, involvement of friends of Ethiopia would be critical for quality improvement.

The minister emphasized that Ethiopia could never be properly viable or secure without "high quality democratic government" allowing for full ownership and popular participation, and based on full and genuine commitment to the individual and group rights, the values and principles on which the Constitution was based. The minister said that greater progress would have been made towards the strengthening of democracy had post-election problems not occurred in 2005. This was a subject yet to be given fair and objective academic scrutiny, but even so lessons had been learnt. One obvious example was the Election Code of Conduct and its Implementation Mechanism agreed only a few days earlier by four of the political parties. This, Minister Seyoum underlined, was an important indication of the development of critical traits such as tolerance, mutual respect, adherence to principles of give-and-take, and the rule of law; in fact, the very foundations of a democratic political culture, the vision driving the Government for the last eighteen years. Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, or indeed Africa, cannot allow this process to be reversed. Minister Seyoum said the support of the friends of Ethiopia was critical, even indispensable, to deal with the many challenges the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia still faced. He adduced Somalia, where Eritrea's 'spoiling' behaviour continued to help provide a space in which extremism could thrive, and the way that absolutely anything, however outrageous, might be reported about the region without any loss of credibility. All this, the Minister concluded, emphasized the point that scholars and academics, and legislative and executive practitioners, should work together in good faith to ensure that Ethiopia, its people, and indeed Africa as a whole, could continue to thrive. An Ahlu Sunna conference in Nairobi while Al-Shabaab threatens to spread terrorism This week, leaders of Somalia's main Sufi movement, Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a, have been holding an unprecedented conference in Nairobi to discuss further response to the activities of Al-Shabaab. Nairobi was chosen as the venue to allow Somali Sufi leaders living in western countries to attend as well as those from Somalia itself. Ahlu Sunna's chairman, Sheikh Sharif Muhieddin Eli, described Al-Shabaab as "misguided people who have misunderstood the true values of Islam." Ahlu Sunna took up arms last year when Al-Shabaab started hunting down Sufi leaders and desecrating Sufi graves particularly in and around Kismayo which Al-Shabaab currently controls. Ahlu Sunna's chairman says his forces are not a regular army but a force dedicated to defending themselves and other Somalis whose way of life is threatened by Al-Shabaab. Ahlu Sunna which has signed a MOU with the TFG on cooperation between the two parties has successfully driven Al-Shabaab out of large areas of central Somalia. Ahlu Sunna has partly gained support from the violent punishments being inflicted by Al-Shabaab in the towns they control as Al-Shabaab attempts to impose its authority through violence and the threat of violence. Al-Shabaab militants have recently publicly executed two teenagers as alleged spies; alleged thieves have had their hands and feet cut off. Women accused of adultery have been flogged and stoned; in some areas those failing to wear socks or even bras have been whipped. Men have been arrested and beaten for chewing khat; barbers threatened with death for trimming beards. Local populations have been made to watch the more extreme punishments carried out in public. Most recently Al-Shabaab has even turned its attention to trying to stop relief supplies from the 'wrong' source. It has banned the World Food Programme from distributing any relief supplies which come from some countries. Sheikh Muktar Robow, Al-

Shabaab's leader in Bay and Bakool regions has told WFP it cannot hand out any foodstuffs bearing US flags and told people "to stop being dependent upon assistance from infidels". There are over three million Somalis currently needing food aid, and one in five children are malnourished. Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab has also been trying to emphasize its own strength and importance. Last weekend, it carried out a roadside bomb attack in Las Anod in Somaliland which killed a senior security officer and four others, and a grenade attack in Bosasso in Puntland, demonstrating its reach within Somali areas. It has also now threatened to extend its attacks to a number of countries around. Prominent among them were Uganda and Burundi who provide the 5,200 troops of AMISOM. Kenya and Djibouti have also been threatened. An Al-Shabaab spokesman in Juba region said on October 25th "we have recently said our fighters will do horrible actions in the cities of Uganda and Burundi, and now we are informing the governments of Kenya and Djibouti to stop offering training to Somalia soldiers or else they will see the consequence in their respective countries." Djibouti, which has been training Somali security forces, recently announced it was also planning to send troops to join AMISOM. Last weekend Ambassador Robleh, Djibouti's new ambassador to Somalia, submitted his credentials to President Sheikh Sharif. He was welcomed to Mogadishu by the President who praised Djibouti's efforts to resolve Somalia's problems and welcomed this sign of solidarity. The President said that if the international community was serious in its statements of support to the TFG to stem the savage attacks of the extremist opposition, then they should follow the example of Djibouti and send their diplomatic representatives to Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab has not confined its latest threats to Kenya and Djibouti. Some of the others in their list include Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa. The surprise here is because Eritrea happens to be one of the main supporters of the extremist groups in Somalia. It's inclusion in any list of Al-Shabaab enemies appears to be a rather clumsy effort by Al-Shabaab to distance itself from Eritrea, presumably at the latter's request to try and divert some of the pressure for sanctions against Eritrea for its role as a "spoiler" in Somalia. It isn't likely to carry much weight. Only a couple of months ago, Eritrea leapt to the support of Al-Shabaab when four of its members were arrested in Australia and accused of planning a suicide attack on an Australian army base in Sydney. Eritrea immediately discounted the incident and described the Australian announcement as "a CIA invention". There have also been reports this week that a group of senior military commanders from the other main extremist opposition group, Hizbul Islam, headed by Sheikh Hassan Dahir 'Aweys', have gone to Eritrea for military training. Sheikh 'Aweys' himself, of course, took refuge in Asmara in early 2007 and stayed there until flown down to Mogadishu in April this year together with sufficient arms supplies to join Al-Shabaab in their failed joint attempt to seize power in Mogadishu in May.

EASBRIG Ministers and Chiefs of Staff meet in Addis Ababa

The 5th extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers of Defence and Security of the Eastern Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG) was held on Tuesday, 3 November, in Addis Ababa. It was preceded, on the previous day, by a meeting of the Eastern Africa Chiefs of Defence Staff. The Council of Ministers of Defence meeting was chaired by the Hon. Mohammed Bacar Dossar, Minister of Defence of the Union of the Comoros, and was attended by defence ministers from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Rwanda and the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, as well as government representatives from Kenya, Uganda, Seychelles and the Sudan. Ethiopia's Foreign Minister, Ato Seyoum gave an opening keynote address on the daunting challenges to peace and security in East Africa. Somalia, of course, is the most serious and Minister Seyoum emphasized that it had long ago ceased to be a conflict between Somalis and been hijacked by foreign fighters whose agenda went far beyond Somalia and the region. He noted that the African Union and IGAD has been doing what they could to the limit of their capacity to assist the TFG in Somalia, and praised the sacrifices made by Uganda and Burundi as part of AMISOM. Minister Seyoum said the strong commitment of the region to peace in Somalia and the low priority given to the unfolding crisis in Somalia by the international community was a stark reminder of the need to strengthen regional and continental peace and security mechanisms. He affirmed the establishment and operational activity of EASBRIG as part of the AU African Standby Brigade was of critical importance. The upcoming Joint Force Training Exercise planned in Djibouti at the end of this year would lay a solid foundation for this. The goal of a peaceful and secure East Africa wasn't impossible but it required ever stronger coordination and cooperation among countries of the region. In the context of EASBRIG, this had to be done in line with the instructions and guidance given by the Heads of State and Government in the Memorandum of Understanding signed in April 2005 when EASBRIG was established. Minister Seyoum assured the meeting that Ethiopia remained committed to the objectives of EASBRIG and was determined to ensure its success. The agenda of the Defence Ministers' meeting included the forthcoming Joint Force Training Exercise, the criteria of selection for the secretariat of EASBRIG Director, the rotation of senior positions in the organization and the proposed Revised Policy Framework document, intended to transform the organization's structures, powers and functions. Ethiopia confirmed its participation in the Joint Force Training Exercise starting November 28. It would take full responsibility for transporting its contingent and equipment to the exercise area, and had authorized payment of part of its obligations to the organization. The meeting agreed, following the recommendations of the Experts Working Group, that the appointment of Director should be made on a rotational basis, following the English alphabetical order of member states. Burundi was asked to submit the names of candidates to the next policy meeting in January. The Defence Ministers also considered the revised Policy Framework document together with a position paper from Ethiopia which argued that the proposal violated the memorandum of understanding signed by the Heads of State and Government when they established the organization. The proposal provides EASBRIG with a mandate far beyond force generation and preparation, and the Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia, as well as Ethiopia, have expressed objections. As no consensus has been reached despite two years of discussion, the ministers decided that member states should submit their positions in writing by 17 November, and that the Chair should produce a detailed report explaining the areas of contention, and that the matter be forwarded for final decision to the planned summit in January next year. It is now expected the summit will provide clear and unequivocal instructions on a contentious issue that has been a source of distraction to the organization, and finally close the matter. All in all, the meetings were very successful indeed, opening the way for further strengthening of this process which has enormous

significance for peace and security for the East African region. A successful Kenya-Ethiopia cross-border meeting in Moyale along the Kenya-Ethiopia border is a key concern for the pastoralists straddling the border and affected by the lack of sufficient resources, water and pasture, for their livelihood and secondly by the actions of the OLF in the border area. Conflicts between the communities resulting in loss of lives and property have continued no matter how excellent relations between the two countries are. As a result, various initiatives have been undertaken over conflict mitigation, prevention and resolution by both governments and through the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN-IGAD) and various other agencies. It was CEWARN which organized this latest three day cross-border meeting in Moyale this week, attended by government representatives, members of the two national CEWERU (Conflict Early Warning and Response Unit) structures, local administration officials, representatives of the civil society, peace committee members, community leaders and elders. The aims were to evaluate the situation along the border, propose a sub-regional peace framework identifying various cross-border initiatives and structures, including existing CEWERU structures, and their focal points, as well as identify ongoing community peace initiatives and inform participants about the establishment of a cross border framework. The meeting was addressed by the Minister of Federal Affairs of the FDRE, Dr. Shiferaw Tekle Mariam, and Kenya's State Minister for the Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands of the Republic of Kenya, Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim Elmi. Mr. Mohamed referred to the Kenyan strategy to deal with inter-communal conflict, on the basis that the sole responsibility of any state is to protect its citizens, that all politicians should spearhead the search for peace, that the communities must change any attitudes, practices and beliefs which perpetuate violence, and finally that the government would put in place a comprehensive regional policy to facilitate collaboration and coordination between neighboring states. The State Minister also emphasized the need for changing attitudes, cultural practices and beliefs that perpetuated violence. This could be effectively addressed through a sustained peace campaign and education of the local communities. He emphasized the need for states to adopt and implement regional policies to facilitate collaboration and coordination between the neighboring states. With reference to the pastoral regions of the Somali cluster, the State Minister recommended constructive and comprehensive engagement with the communities using the right actors. Dr. Shiferaw recalled the aim of CEWARN was to be a functional, effective and sustainable sub-regional framework to provide conflict early warning and response and to foster cooperation among the member states of IGAD and relevant stakeholders, enhancing peaceful settlement of disputes and responding appropriately to potential or actual violent conflicts. He emphasized that the Ethiopian CEWERU structures established at national, regional/district and local levels have been trying to address these issues. Two recent projects have been a program to inform the different CEWERU components of their objectives, duties and responsibilities, and a revitalization of local peace committees in the Somali cluster. This has included the reinforcement of previously established peace committees and the creation of new peace committees at the kebele level. All this, the Minister emphasized, can only succeed if supported and coordinated with counterparts on the other side of the border. So Ethiopia's CEWERU, in coordination with the CEWARN office, has drafted a document on cross-border modalities to include a cross-border framework and a sub-regional council for each cluster. He believed the meeting would be able to create such cross-border linkages. The meeting concluded on Wednesday with harmonized strategies for peace building initiatives between the two countries and within the CEWARN Somali cluster. It was agreed to facilitate continuous and enhanced information exchanges between the relevant stakeholders, and put in place enhanced mechanisms for early warning responses to conflict, and for conflict mitigation, prevention and management along the Ethio-Kenya Somali cluster. A joint collaborative framework between corresponding CEWERU peace committees is to be formulated. This can be expected to be endorsed at the next CEWARN policy meeting. Ethiopia elected to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee Last month, Ethiopia was elected to the prestigious twenty-one member World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The election for twelve vacant seats took place during the 17th Session of the General Assembly of State Parties to the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, from 23 to 28 October. It indicates Ethiopia's commitment to both the International Convention on World Heritage sites and their conservation. Ethiopia in fact has the largest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Africa. It ratified the World Heritage Convention as long ago as 1977. There are seven Ethiopian cultural sites on the World heritage list. They include the ruins of the ancient city of Axum near Ethiopia's northern border, the heart of ancient Ethiopia when Axum was the most powerful state between the Eastern Roman Empire and Persia. The ruins, including the monolithic obelisks and giant stelae date from 100-700 AD. The second largest of the stelae was re-erected last year following its return from Italy. Other World Heritage sites are the 17th and 18th century castles at Gondar, and the sacred Muslim city of Harar. Jugol with its walls built between the 13th and 16th centuries, and its 82 mosques and 102 shrines and the town houses with exceptional interior design constituting the most spectacular part of Harar's cultural heritage. There are the eleven monolithic rock hewn churches of Lalibela dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries, the prehistoric site of Tiya with its more than thirty carved stelae, and the notable prehistoric sites in the lower valleys of the Awash and the Omo. It was, of course, in the lower Awash valley where remains date back four million years, that the remains of Lucy were discovered in 1974. Ethiopia also has one natural heritage site: the Simien National Park where massive erosion has created one of the most spectacular landscapes in the world, with jagged mountain peaks, deep valleys and sharp precipices dropping some 1,500 meters and home to some of the world's rarest animals. Ethiopia's election to the World Heritage Committee coincided with the Golden Jubilee of the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Addis Ababa this week. As has been underlined in the first item of this publication of the Week in the Horn, Foreign Minister Seyoum lauded the significant contribution of the Conferences over the previous fifty years to the study of Ethiopia's long history and culture. Ethiopia's election to the World Heritage Committee will undoubtedly open new avenues to inform the wider global audience of its historical and cultural contribution to world civilization. It is a contribution that the research and studies published at the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies will, we are sure, continue to produce in the years ahead.

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties: A landmark for peace and democracy in Ethiopia

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties, agreed between four political parties last week, is a major step forward in encouraging Ethiopia's democratic processes. The agreement was signed by the party leaders: Prime Minister Meles Zenawi for the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Ato Ayele Chamiso for the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP), Engineer Hailu Shawel for the All Ethiopia Unity Organization (AEUO), and Ato Lidetu Ayalew for the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP). It's the first time in Ethiopian history, political parties have signed up to such a legal framework covering canvassing, voting, mediation, and ways to handle violence and corruption. It is a pre-election agreement and it will be enforceable, underlining the commitment of the parties involved to a peaceful and fair election. A council has been established to oversee implementation of the agreement. Prime Minister Meles said the agreement opens a new chapter, putting the parties on an equal footing, and he hoped all other parties would follow suit. The Code of Conduct has been widely welcomed by members of the public, local media and by Ethiopia's partners who have been closely following the process. UK's Ambassador, Norman Ling, said the Code had been formulated on the model of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and was of international standard. It laid the foundations for a successful national election on May 23, 2010 and its main principles allow the election to be free, fair and democratic. Campaigning is due to start on December 8. Ambassador Ling said there was an opportunity for those parties which had not yet signed the agreement to participate in future discussions, and sign up before the Code becomes law. The four signatories immediately opened discussions with the other registered parties on the Code of Conduct. The first meeting was successful in allowing other parties to enrich the document with their contributions. It was agreed these parties would be given sufficient opportunity to prepare their reactions and these would be discussed at a later meeting to be held at the National Election Board offices under the chairmanship of the NEB. One Coalition of parties designated as Forum has yet to decide if it wants to contribute to this impressive and inclusive initiative or to continue to remain mired in indecision. The violent opposition and its small supporters predictably have also been upset by the successful achievement of the Code of Conduct and the process which led up to it. Almost all who are committed to the realization of a fully democratic Ethiopia have seen this historic achievement as important political milestone in Ethiopian politics. Continued elucidation and development of the text for the Code of Conduct is largely being left to the political parties themselves though there will also be some subsequent input from the House of Peoples' Representatives. It is worth noting that even before it is enacted as law, the Code has already made its mark on the political life of the country. The process of negotiations over the Code set a major precedent providing an exemplary effort in political accommodation and compromise, providing a real win-win outcome. It sets the tone and a solid foundation for free, fair, peaceful and credible national elections. The significance of four political parties engaging constructively, despite their considerable political differences, and without preconditions, to devise rules to bind themselves and eventually others into the electoral process, cannot be over-emphasized. Among the most important aspects of the Code and its implementation are the modalities contributing to the building of the institutions of democratic governance in Ethiopia. Foremost of these is the undertaking in the preamble, repeated in the Code's detailed contents, that all agree to encourage respect for the Constitution and abide by its tenets and by the rule of law. This is emphasized in a number of ways. The signatories expressly agreed to respect the rule of law and to demonstrate respect for human rights. They emphasized the critical contribution they will make to the success of the upcoming election. They noted their responsibility to continuously educate and train the general public and political parties. They also undertook to work together in discharging their common responsibility to enable judicial bodies, organs, the Election Board, the Police, and regional administration provide impartial and independent service to the public. They highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the National Defence Force, the reserve force and local militia in safeguarding the unity of the people and the sovereignty of the country - the Constitution, of course, enshrines the principle that the Defence Force discharges its responsibilities free from partisan politics. The parties also agreed to work together to make sure that public services provide support in an equal and impartial manner to all parties. Under the agreement proposed in the Implementation Mechanism for the Code, financial support is to be given to all political parties. The various principles and standards agreed for the conduct of the political parties during the election process amount to real milestones for the growth of democracy in Ethiopia. The parties have codified their ideals of accommodation and tolerance, the need to pursue civilized, democratic and peaceful struggle, as well as good faith and compromise as a foundation for governing. The potential for a radical transformation of political discourse is obvious. They will base their conduct on the will of all citizens of the country to live in equality, fraternity and unity, and on the determination of the parties to respect the outcome of elections conducted according to the laws of the country. They have emphasized the need to apply the highest standards of conduct and to reject any attempts to assume power through unconstitutional means. They have stressed the need to strive to ensure respect for the freedom of the press for its critical contribution to human rights, to democracy, the rule of law and the overall development of society. The Code provides for the principles applicable to a multi-party electoral system, and for respect for the law as well as the details of conduct to be observed during campaigning, balloting and collection of results. The parties have also made a total commitment to abide by the Code and by the related implementation mechanism drawn up to ensure its observance. This undertaking starts with the determination to take corrective measures as soon as any opposition political party raises well-founded claims that members or supporters have encountered problems. They have agreed to establish a Joint Council as a permanent body with a mandate to implement the Code of Conduct, to resolve any and all problems that might arise during its implementation and to deliberate on ways and means of entrenching democracy, human rights and rule of law. The determination to ensure scrupulous implementation of both the letter and the spirit of the Code is a clear departure from past recrimination and mutual distrust. It means the ground is now firmly prepared for everyone to participate and to enrich a most promising start to next year's election. It would be remiss of the Week in the Horn if it failed to underline one important point here and that relates to the behavior of the Coalition already referred to which has so far declined to

embrace the Code of Conduct. This raises a very fundamental issue with respect to the responsibility for the consolidation of democracy of those who benefit from the existence of democracy and democratic institutions. The Horn of Africa is a region where at present a major struggle is being conducted between two approaches to governance-that based on the will of the people, the rule of law and that which depends on intimidation, extremist politics. The struggle with respect to which approach would develop and consolidate legitimacy is a major historical challenge faced by the people of our region. It is from that perspective that the position being taken by the various parties in Ethiopia towards the Code of Conduct should be viewed and assessed.