

A Week in the Horn

20th January 2012

A Joint Ethiopia Kenya Consultative Meeting on Somalia....

On Thursday and Friday last week [12th and 13th Jan], the IGAD Secretariat, through the Office of the Facilitator for Somali Peace and National Reconciliation, convened a two-day meeting between Ethiopian and Kenyan military and other officials. Those attending included officials from Ethiopia and Kenya's Ministries and Departments of Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security. Others present included representatives from DfID and the IGAD Secretariat. The meeting was chaired by the IGAD Office of the Facilitator for the Somali Peace and National Reconciliation and it was facilitated by an expert on Somalia.

The meeting was held under the process of implementing various IGAD resolutions, including those contained in the communiqués of the 15th and 19th Extraordinary sessions of the IGAD Assembly of the Heads of State and Government on Somalia and the 41st Extraordinary meeting of IGAD's Executive Council of Ministers. The aim was to work out and articulate coordination and cooperation mechanisms and produce a common strategy to build on and extend the gains made by the forces of both countries in support of the stabilisation of Somalia. Both countries, sharing long borders with Somalia, have a common interest in helping bring about a stable state in Somalia by combining diplomatic, political and military strategies in support of AMISOM and the TFG.

The discussions centred on the objectives and priorities for the overall political and military resolution of Somalia's problems, but it also included detailed consideration of the stabilisation of the specific theatre of operations in Gedo, Middle and Lower Juba regions. The talks were guided by the need to weaken the capacity of Al-Shabaab, one element of which involves denying it the capacity to extract revenue from Kismayo. Other factors include the need to provide for the protection of the local population, the necessity to engage the local elite and to support the establishment of an inclusive and broadly acceptable local administration.

Overall, it was agreed the objectives needed to include the creation of common, legitimate and mutually acceptable political arrangements; political reconciliation; co-ordinated security arrangements; legitimate, representative and effective local administrations or institutions both at regional and district level; and a commitment for the area also to engage in the national process. All of this must inform and complement military operations in the three regions. The meeting also decided that a joint Ethiopia-Kenya committee should be established under IGAD to facilitate the implementation of these stabilisation objectives in these regions. It was agreed that one of its first priorities will be organizing a conference involving the main regional actors including the TFG, the militias of Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a and Ras Kamboni, political elements, and representatives and elders of the clans which are resident in the three regions.

Meanwhile, Kenya's Minister, of State for Defence, Yusuf Haji, has underlined that while Kenya's assistance to the TFG has created conditions that would allow the international community to help bring

lasting peace, Kenya is unwilling to continue underwriting the financial burden of an open-ended war. The Minister said the notion that Kenya's ultimate goal was Kismayo was imaginary. "The Kismayo question is for the international community to decide. Kenya was not going to fix the entire Somalia problem. We did not have the intention of going into Somalia if we were not provoked. We feel we have attained our intention of pushing Al-Shabaab away from our borders," said Mr. Haji. Last Saturday, Al-Shabaab named a new administration for Kismayo after dismissing both its governor, Sheikh Hasan Yakub, and its head of preaching, Sheikh Abdinasir.

A Kenyan military spokesman has stressed that Kenya's mission has always primarily been to degrade Al-Shabaab and reduce its capacity to threaten Kenya. Colonel Oguna told a press conference in Nairobi on the occasion of the ninetieth day of Kenya's activities in Somalia that Al-Shabaab was demoralized and in total disarray. He claimed Al-Shabaab had lost some 700 militants since the start of the Kenyan operation. This week, according to Major Chirchir, the Defence Forces spokesperson, the Kenyan air force was in action on Sunday [15th Jan], targeting Al-Shabaab positions at Jilib, 120 kms north of Kismayo and at Bibi south of Afmadow where eight vehicles, including four technicals were destroyed. Al-Shabaab defences around Afmadow were also hit on Tuesday [17th]. In an attack on Tatar, Major Chirchir said, Kenyan gunships destroyed an Al-Shabaab command centre and logistics base, killing six commanders and destroying four vehicles.

.....and a Preparatory meeting in London for next month's UK Conference on Somalia

The UK is hosting an international conference on Somalia on 23rd February, with the aim, in Prime Minister Cameron's words, of pulling together the international effort. A preparatory meeting was held in London last week attended by most interested countries including representatives from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and the African Union as well as Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Qatar, Sweden, Turkey, the UAE, the UK, the US and the European Union. The meeting considered a host of issues ranging from the political process, security, local stability, piracy, counter-terrorism and international coordination to humanitarian assistance. It emphasized the importance of Somali ownership, the need for implementation of the Roadmap, the Kampala Accord and the Garowe Principles, and necessity of keeping to the transition timelines.

On local stability, the importance of keeping the political and military processes linked and of maintaining the military gains of AMISOM, the TFG and neighbouring countries was stressed. The raising of the numbers of AMISOM and obtaining clear and reliable funding for it was discussed. The roles of the Core Group, the International Contact Group and its various working groups were considered. The need to fight piracy on land as well as at sea was emphasized, as was the setting up of a judicial programme in Somalia and the tracking of financial flows from piracy. The meeting noted the UAE's counter-piracy conference last

year and the conference Kenya will host next month to give input for the London conference. Turkey is also holding a conference on Somalia in June.

The preparatory meeting also discussed terrorism and the shared threat it poses to the region and the international community. It recognized the need for close co-operation and partnership to fight terrorism, and there was general rejection of any idea of starting dialogue with extremist groups. On the humanitarian side, there was agreement for continued needs-based support and basic social services for refugees as well to find durable solutions for the crisis.

The Ethiopian delegation was led by Ambassador Berhane Gebrechristos, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, who stressed the Political Roadmap, the Kampala Accord and the Garowe Principles had been agreed by a wide spectrum of the people of Somalia and endorsed by IGAD member states. They were the best options to expedite the political process and the security situation. He emphasised that local stability could be achieved by accommodating all those who renounced violence but the notion of giving political space to Al-Shabaab or holding dialogue with it amounted now to giving a lifeline to an organization on the run. Al-Shabaab remained opposed to peace or cooperation and was still a serious threat to the region and more widely. This was a view shared by the US, Turkey, the UAE and others.

Ambassador Berhane also emphasized the necessity of supporting the decision of the AU's Peace and Security Council to expand AMISOM urgently. He noted that the training programmes for TFG security forces outside Somalia had not produced the desired results and emphasized the need to undertake these inside the country in the future with country-specific programmes. On piracy he stressed that the ports currently under pirate control should be brought under TFG and local administrative control. The revenues from these ports should be redirected to benefit the TFG and local administrations. On the humanitarian side, Ambassador Berhane stressed that intervention needed to include reconstruction and reintegration of the Internally Displaced People. He also suggested that refugee-hosting countries, including Ethiopia and Kenya, should be assisted to tackle the multitude of additional challenges they now faced, including environmental degradation.