

Deputy Prime Minister meets Gordon Brown, UK Parliamentarians

31st January 2013, LONDON

Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Ato Demeke Mekonnen, met and held talks with former British Prime Minister, The Rt. Honourable Gordon Brown, in his office at the House of Commons. Mr. Brown is also the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education.

The Deputy Premier, who is also Minister for Education, was in London as the head of a high-level delegation attending the Education World Forum, convened to dwell at length on policy making for quantity, quality and impact.

The Forum remained in session from 28th to 30th January and was attended by representatives from over 100 countries. The delegation also took part in the British Council annual gathering for African Education Ministers on the teaching of science, technology, English, maths and ICT.

During the discussion with H.E. Mr. Gordon Brown and his team, H.E. Ato Demeke briefed them on the latest developments in the area of education in Ethiopia, focusing on quality of education, enrolment of students, teacher training, provision of educational materials and the utilization of ICT as part of the modernization and expansion of education.

Ethiopia, as a country on track to achieve the MDGs targets for education, has made significant progress towards the realization of universal education, has bridged the gap between girl and boy students and improved the capacity of teachers to raise the quality of education and student enrolment at all levels.

The former British Prime Minister offered his condolences on the demise of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and noted how much he valued the friendship with Ethiopia and pledged support to Ethiopia's bid to garner every assistance from international organizations, including the World Bank, DfID, USAID, the UN agencies and other global partners, to expedite the implementation of education strategies and road maps drawn on the basis of national priorities.

With a student population of 22 million, Ethiopia employs over 400,000 teachers serving 30,000 schools.



The Deputy Prime Minister with The Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP (left)

Ethiopia devotes up to 23 per cent of its annual expenditure to education, which is 4.3 per cent of the GDP, an indication of its commitment to the opening up of opportunities to its citizens for self-achievement.

The Deputy Premier also met and held discussions with the UK Secretary of State for Education, The Rt. Honourable Michael Gove MP, on issues of mutual interest, focusing on progress in improving access to and quality of education in Ethiopia.

He also had an audience with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, Ms. Lynne Featherstone MP. The two sides discussed the utilization of development finance for the intended purposes and exchanged ideas on how best to further enhance gains made in various development programmes. Ms. Featherstone pledged more support for development in Ethiopia, which has shown resilience in the fight against poverty and has made headway in achieving the MDGs targets.

The Deputy Premier expressed satisfaction at the high quality intervention by the UK which, he said, focused on Ethiopia's priorities. The two parties discussed, among other things, issues related to quality of education and capacity building, the CSO law, the rights of women and democratization.

Meanwhile, H.E. Ato Demeke Mekonnen paid a courtesy visit to the Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Ethiopia, Mr. Laurence Robertson MP and honourable members of the group.

He discussed issues pertaining to development, elections, and Ethiopia's role in the maintenance of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region and steps taken to expand and improve the quality of education in Ethiopia. He also highlighted the constitutional multi-party system, which Ethiopia is building with the support of development partners like the UK, known for its quality development finance that was crucial in lifting millions out of poverty.

Noting the role that Ethiopia plays as a member of the African Union (AU), he highlighted the centrepiece of future activities, focusing on infrastructure and agriculture development, conflict resolution, maintenance of peace and stability and promotion of good governance, as Ethiopia currently holds the rotating AU chairmanship under the leadership of H.E. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn.

Mr. Robertson, on his part, expressed his condolences at the loss of a great leader, former Prime Minister Meles, and appreciated the progress made in various spheres of endeavour as part of the drive to ensure growth and economic prosperity in Ethiopia.

The honourable Members of Parliament and the APPG raised issues related to development, the role and participation of opposition parties, peace and security and bilateral relations with the UK.

Elaborating on the issues, the Deputy Premier said Ethiopia is determined to build a democratic order where the principle of unity in diversity is celebrated as an anchor with which the new Ethiopia would thrive. For Ethiopia to be viable and strong, he said, we have to nurture democracy, learning from best practices of the developed nations.

In the course of his stay in London, H.E. Demeke Mekonnen also met and discussed future links with higher learning institutions, including Northampton and Nottingham Universities.

He appreciated efforts by Northampton University to establish a link with the Addis Ababa University and Addis Ababa Science and Technology College, and expressed interest in encouraging relationships that will boost leather technology, water quality and waste management in Ethiopia.



The Deputy PM with representatives from the University of Northampton, which included Dr. Ian Brooks (second right)

The university proposed initiatives enhancing enterprise and employability in addition to the value chain approach that is in line with Ethiopia's development priorities.

The Ministry of Education has also reinvigorated its agreement for scholarships with Nottingham University, which will take steps to launch the programme next academic year according to the procedures outlined.



The Deputy PM with Prof. Martyn Poliakoff and Mr. Vincenzo Raimo, Director of the International Office, from Nottingham University

Speaking during discussions, Professor Martyn Poliakoff, who is also Foreign Secretary of the Royal Society, appreciated Ethiopia's focus on engineering and technology and encouraged government support for the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences, which is working to develop and embrace younger scientists.

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