

Ethiopia and Somaliland set for a new chapter of cooperation

By: Yusuf M Hasan 12-21-14

HARGEISA (Somalilandsun) – The Government of Ethiopia is the first in the world in opening the General Consulate in Somaliland with duties to enhance the historic and longstanding overall economic and security cooperation. Of particular emphasis include infrastructural interconnectivity through roads, railway, affordable electricity and broadened transit services which would pave the way for more balanced trade flows, shared growth as well as mutual economic and social interdependence.

This was revealed by the Ethiopian Consul General in Somaliland Brigadier General Berhe Tesfaye during an Exclusive and Candid interview with Somalilandsun at his office in Hargeisa where he gave



relevant information on the policy of his government in relation to inter-border security, economic development, and make brief account of his personal history among many.

More poignant General Berhe who is credited in elevating the relations between the Ethiopian and Somaliland governments' relation to a higher level Said that Ethiopia shall never allow any entity to compromise existing cooperation between Ethiopia and Somaliland on peace and security as well as on trade and infrastructure.

Below are the verbatim excerpts of the interview:

Slsun- General Berhe a lot of people including me are very curious about you in lieu of the non-existent bio of yourself, can you kindly brief on your age and marital status as well educational and professional background?

Gen Berhe – Am awed to know that my humble background is of interest to many in Somaliland and to solve this, my full name is Berhe Tesfaye born 54 years ago and Bred in Adowa region of Ethiopia.

I am married and the proud father of two children who spent their school days in Addis Ababa and their vacation in Hargeisa.

My career in Government started after the defeat of the Dergue regime by the Ethiopian Peoples Liberation Front -EPLF and the later TPLF and EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Revolutionary Front) in which I served as fighter during the lengthy liberation struggle.

After the collapse of the Mengistu's dictatorial Dergue regime, I was absorbed in the Ethiopian army and stationed in Addis Ababa where I joined various higher learning institutions where I gained a Diploma and subsequent Bachelor of Degree in management. After a short break I pursued further studies and earned a masters degree in Transformation Leadership.

I am originally a paratrooper trained soldier who worked for the Ethiopian Ministry of Defense for **eight** years before my appointment to the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which appointed me as the Ethiopian Consul General to Somaliland five years ago.

Q-How is your professional and social life in Somaliland considering that you are serving as a diplomat in a country yet to be recognized internationally?

A- I am, very comfortable in Somaliland where I share similar ideals with citizens especially with regard to their love of peace that forced them just like me to wage war on tyrants.

I always think that my appointment here is as a result of my passion for peace and security of any people and the ideals held by Somalilanders compliment this superbly thence my ease of comfort not to mention the good rapport that has developed within the administration and all political establishments in Somaliland as well as with the Ethiopian community living and working in different cities and towns of Somaliland.

On the professional front I manage a very big office that is considered by my Government among its busiest and most valued diplomatic missions abroad.

Q- Do you think your duties would have been easier if you were the Ethiopian Ambassador to a country like may be Kenya and not one emerging from Conflict like Somaliland?

A – I have never served in any other country but I believe that I encounter minor challenges similarly with those other Ethiopian diplomats serving their country elsewhere who most likely face more encumbrances than me.

It's, by the way, very inspiring to tell openly to the international community how the Somaliland government and its people which emerge from conflict but manages to build a democratic system of governance as well as ensure development, peace, security and stability in a very short period of time.

On the issue of the statehood of Somaliland, I and my government believe that such an internal issue should be dealt with by the direct stakeholders with homegrown peaceful means. In fact the international community and regional multilateral organizations such as the African Union (AU) and IGAD shall discharge their role of supporting homegrown peaceful efforts spearheaded by the direct stakeholders' (Somalia and Somaliland) diplomatic engagements being monitored under the umbrella of international laws. And we are encouraged by the continuing negotiations taking place in the UK and later in Turkey.

Meanwhile I believe that the people and government of Somaliland deserve broader international support and aid as they are contributing a lot in improving the peace and stability of this part of the volatile Horn of Africa region where extremism took deep roots and posed clear and present dangers to the whole world until recently.

That's why the Ethiopian Government has advocated and continues to advocate in all its diplomatic engagements on the need for the international community to provide meaningful financial support to Somaliland and others with relative and stability regardless of any status of statehood. This has so far been showing an encouraging result as the international community starts providing direct budget support to the Somaliland government to improve services and infrastructure to its people through the Somaliland Special Arrangement Framework.

At the same time I personally believe that the prevalent status of strong relationship between our two governments will improve to better things. (Read Recognition-Editor)

Q- Having been the Ethiopian resident Diplomat in Somaliland what do you think has been the impact of your five year's tenure, considering that a lot has been personally attributed to you?

A- The existing relations between Ethiopia and Somaliland at various fronts among them economic, diplomatic and security have been won through the concerted efforts of many people from both governments with my part being genuine and timely facilitation and the like.

B- But to cap all was the recent MOU signed between senior officials from the two governments in Hargeisa advancing various agreements from the negotiation to implementation stage in relation to official and planned cooperation towards infrastructural development and economic inter-dependence between Ethiopian and Somaliland citizens.

The importance of the MOU to Ethiopia can be ascertained by its delegation that was led by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, H.E Ato Sufian Ahmed, and also included the Minister of Transport , H.E Ato Workneh Gebeyehu, State Minister of MoFED H.E. Ahmed Shide, Brigadier General Berhe Tesfaye, Consul General of Ethiopia in Somaliland, H.E. Ato Ahmed Tussa, Director, Maritime and logistics services, Dr. Getachew Betru, Director General, National Railway Corporation, Amb. Solomon Abebe, Director General, African Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ato Kokeb Misrak, Director, Bilateral Cooperation, MoFED, Ato Wassihum Abate, Director, Legal Service, MoFED, Ato Bekele Negussie, Deputy Director General Ethiopian Road Authority and Ato Takele Getaneh, a business counselor of the Consulate General.

If anything can be termed as the most impactful of my tenure as the Ethiopian Consul General in Somaliland, then it is this currently operational [Pact Enhancing Economic interdependence](#) between the two neighboring and friendly sides, and this is so because of the wide scope encompassed in it such as infrastructure, security, economic, cross border movement and resource sharing among many others.

Q- What is the situation as pertains to the large quantity of electricity availed Somaliland as announced by you during commemorations marking the Gimbot-20 here in Hargeisa few months ago?

A- Though the Ethiopian Government has supplied to the Wajale border town electricity amounting to 9 megawatts for use by Somalilanders as revealed by me almost a year ago the same is yet to be availed here since the government of Somaliland is still establishing relevant mechanism.

Following the creation of a “Joint Ministerial Commission” during the signing of the MOU in Hargeisa last month and of a “Joint Coordination Committee” that is set to meet soon in Addis Ababa, I am quite optimistic that 2015 or 2016 may see some amount of Ethiopian electricity in use by Somalilanders.

Q- While Somaliland is home to many Ethiopians of various status be it as refugees, Expatriates, Traders and illegal’s, what is the nationality status of their children born and bred in this country?

A- It is a fact that many Ethiopians of all the calibers you mentioned are in the country the issue of which nationality their Somaliland born children acquire is a personal choice as per arrangements between our two governments. In addition to this, I wish to state that not a single Ethiopian has ever complained of non registration as a Somaliland citizen. Fortunate for them is the fact that Ethiopia shall register anybody of Ethiopian origin born in a foreign country.

Q- With the economy of Ethiopia reportedly growing at over 10% annually, literally translated as removing Ethiopians from victims of Hunger to giants in Africa, it is a wonder that the very popular slogan of “Ethiopia Tikdem” is no longer heard, why so?

A. The dictatorial regime of the Dergue used the “Ethiopia Tikdem” slogan meaning Ethiopia is first as a propaganda slogan when citizens were dying of hunger from poor administration and the entire populace was up in arms against tyranny of the Dergue. As the current Ethiopia federal administration has improved the livelihoods of its citizens to unimaginable levels in a short time after taking power from the brutal Dergue regime, the

slogan has gone to touch more heights every now and then focusing on the theme of “Ethiopia’s Renaissance” with the recent one as we celebrate the 9th Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and Peoples day was "Our Constitutionally Accentuated National Tie for our Renaissance". Our vision for the country is to change the tag of Ethiopia from a developing to that of a middle income nation in less than the coming ten years.

Q- Is this possible with the threat of invasion from Egypt that claims the construction of the “Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam” is a warlike activity, for the dam shall cut off Nile waters supply that the government in Cairo says is Sacrosanct?

A- The threat of attack from Egypt is another propaganda from the likes of late Sadat and Hosni Mubarak that shall never happen because rational minds seem to have taken over there and have not only realized that Ethiopians have a right to use their equitable share of waters as they deem fit and that the dam construction shall not impinge on the supply of Nile waters but ensure a more sufficient regular flow as well as improve livelihoods in all neighboring countries including Somaliland, Djibouti, Rgypt, the two Sudan, Kenya and Eritrea including through availability of sufficient and cheap electricity.

Q- General Berhe what of the much touted theory and myth that Ethiopia agitates for a fragmented former republic of Somalia i.e. lower and Upper Juba, Puntland, Galmudug and Afgoye land among others and Somaliland in the lot thence counter any Nile waters related aggression from Egypt which is known to be in the fore front of opposition to the recognition of Somaliland for fears it could be a strong base in case of war with your country?

A- The issue of Ethiopia gunning for a Fragmentized former Republic of Somalia is the myth because my country desires for peace within its boundaries and peace within its neighbors as the two are practically inseparable.

On the other hand the desire of friendly and peaceful neighbors which is official Ethiopian policy dictates non-interference in internal matters of other countries.

As per fragmenting the former Republic of Somalia, my country has nothing to do with it and the ultimate outcome of the various administrations formerly united and later formed regional and local administrations are a matter for Somalis to settle among themselves by

peaceful means and the Ethiopian government and peoples shall not only respect their wishes but also helped and continues to help in every possible means necessary and this has been what we continue doing following the establishment of a nominated Federal Government; and I can assure Somalis that we will continue providing any possible assistance requested by them be it political, peacekeeping, developmental, Humanitarian etc.

For Ethiopians who have fought long for their liberties it will be somehow suspect for them to create discordant among neighbors and to answer your questions in a nut shell I shall refer an old English adage “Do unto others as you would wish others do unto you” thus in our instance of demanding peace and security from neighbors it shall be impossible to do the same, while not forgetting that we have managed to establish and sustain a strong Federal system of government that brings together several Ethiopian nationalities under one umbrella.

Furthermore the reality in Ethiopia remains staunch in its non interference with others’ internal affairs coupled with peaceful co-existence and if ever all regions of the former united Somalia facilitate mechanisms to unite under one country, Ethiopians shall deal with them respectfully so long as they managed it by peaceful means.

Therefore the citizens of the former Republic of Somalia should forget the insinuation that Nile waters thence Ethiopia wants their fragmentation and instead work towards reaching a comprise that is peoples driven as per their future status as a united or separated people and nations because Ethiopia has neither nothing to do with it completely nor shall it stop cooperating within the prevalent status. On the same note Ethiopia is ready to share its federated nation lessons with anyone interested including all administrations within the former republic of Somalia and Sudan if requested. Finally on this question I cannot answer for the intentions of Egypt as far as I didn’t heard of any such expressed intent or whatsoever in any side.

Q- What is the official Ethiopian Government policy towards flow of Somaliland criminals into its territory especially in the Somali Zone five administrative region of Ethiopia, a notable case being that of the Khatumoist secession leader Ali Khalif Galayd?

A- First I would like to state that many people don't understand the official policy and position of Ethiopia which shall not allow any individual, group or country to destabilize Somaliland either from within its boundaries or anywhere else not to mention them escaping and securing sanctuary in my country.

But, as you know, the Khatumo issue is difficult because the Dhulbahante people live in both Somaliland and Ethiopia and cross border movement is a common occurrence. And in addition to the clan links that exist with our Somalia zone five administration appears that the problems resulting from this clan bonds was not properly understood, and though currently improving it still remains a constant inter-government headache.

It is a fact that we are solving this family problem in which our zone five administrators share in as per the case of Ali Khalif Galayd and most recently the Gadabursi Sultan who created some difficulties in Awdal region and escaped to Jigjiga where some of his relatives reside.

Our determination and commitment to secure peaceful co-existence with our neighbors including Somaliland, we pursued the issue of the Awdal sultan who was reported to be amassing clan militias in our boundaries and found nothing of the sort and as for the Prof Galayd of Khatumo the Government in Ethiopia facilitates his exit after Somaliland Authorities approached me here in Hargeisa with information that Galayd was in Addis Ababa.

Let me reiterate here that we are very firm in our determination to support Somaliland sustain prevalent security within its borders with us (Ethiopia) thus any aggressor shall take this as precaution.

Q- Brigadier General Berhe what of regular incursions by the Jigjiga controlled Liyuu Police into Somaliland territories especially in the East of the country?

A- There were accusations that the Liyuu police had in the past made illegal incursions into Somaliland but for the last two years such an accusation has ceased following interventions by the federal government that has posted federal troops at the common

borders with Somaliland as national defense is the only body mandated in our Constitution to deal with any cross-border military issues. In fact the accusations might have also been made on accounts of similarities in clan roots as we can't rule out existence of traditional approaches as opposed to strict adherence to official ways.

Q- Brigadier it is a fact that Ethiopia shares common borders with both former British Somaliland and Italian Somalia, demarcated at the same time, yet the Somalia administrative region of Puntland lays claim to some parts of Eastern Somaliland, one never fails to wonder why hasn't your government intervened to set the record straight as per who is the aggressor here, by validating the correct boundaries?

A- Although we have on several occasions urged the two authorities to settle their boundary claims through peaceful means rather than resorting to armed conflict especially by seeking legal international arbitration, Ethiopia is also ready and willing to intervene when requested by them to mediate or provide experiences as we have a good record in handling similar issues peacefully.

Somalilandsun – Thank you very much Brigadier General Tesfaye Berhe, Ethiopian Consul General in Somaliland for your time and Candid views

Brigadier Gen Berhe Tesfaye – As usual you are welcome Somalilandsun