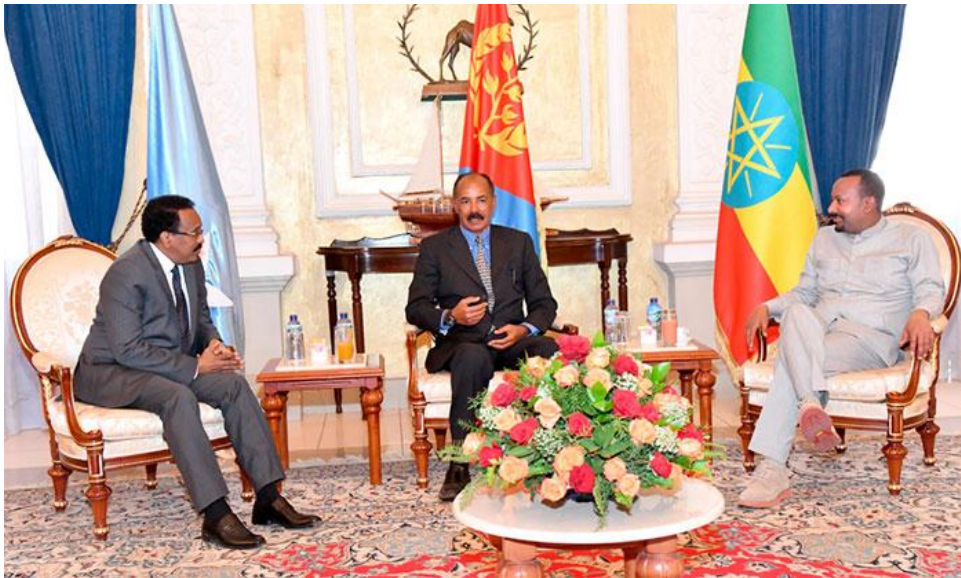


Eritrea: 2020 Year in Review



By Dr. Fikrejesus Amahazion

January

The first month of 2020 in Eritrea began like other years, with festivities. In Asmara, colorful cultural and musical performances were held at Cinema Roma on New Year's Eve. President Isaias Afwerki also made a public statement conveying his best wishes to Eritreans for the year ahead.

A week later, Christmas celebrations took place across the country. In Gahtelay, a large celebration, with performances by the “Rim Stars” and other renowned artists, was organized. It was attended by throngs of locals, as well as government officials. His Holiness Abune Petros, Archbishop of the Eritrean Tewahdo Orthodox Church, also gave benediction. In his sermon, he wished peace and prosperity for Eritrea and he called on citizens to support the disadvantaged.

On 20 January, Epiphany (Timket) was celebrated nationwide. A number of religious leaders, government officials, and thousands of the faithful took part in the religious observance conducted at Asmara's Bahti Meskerem Square. As part of the event, a prayer service led by His Holiness Abune and His Holiness

Abune Lukas, Secretary General of the Holy Synod, was conducted at the Epiphany Holy Water site.

In addition to these celebrations, the Chinese Embassy in Eritrea celebrated the Spring Festival heralding Chinese New Year on 18 January, while on 26 January the Indian Embassy in Eritrea celebrated the 70th anniversary of Republic Day at the Asmara Palace Hotel. Both events featured artistic entertainment programs and were attended by ministers and high ranking officials, among others.

The month also saw several education-related events. These included: a workshop in Asmara delivered by the Department of Environment on waste management and environmental conservation, the completion of a three-month long vocational training program for civil servants and students in Mendefera, and the completion of a six-month vocational training program for youth in Segeneiti sub-zone.

In terms of development, a newly-constructed school in Gedem- Lahzen administrative area, Foro sub-zone, opened its doors, while Harat Transportation Company opened a new route connecting Teseney with Adibara. As well, construction and maintenance activities were begun on several roads in the Gash Barka region.

Several significant local meetings were conducted during January, including the annual assessment meeting of the Eritrean Police's, held 9-10 January in Asmara. The meeting, which reviewed the past year's activities on crime prevention, public cooperation, traffic safety, and other issues, as well as established an annual action plan, was attended by high-ranking police officers and commanders. The Eritrean Medical Association, comprising over 180 members, held its 25th Congress on 18 January at the Asmara Palace Hotel. Research papers were presented and extensive discussions were held. The following week, on 25 January, the College of Medicine and Health Science announced it would soon commence post-graduate studies. The announcement came during a ceremony at the Asmara Palace Hotel, attended by Amina Nurhussen, Minister of Health, Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab, and experts from the Buffet Foundation.

Notably, January also saw important diplomatic activities. On 6 January, a high-level Eritrean delegation comprising Foreign Minister Osman Saleh, Presidential Advisor Yemane Gebreab and Hagos Gebrehiwet, Head of Economic Affairs at the PFDJ, participated at the Ministerial Meeting of Arab and African Coastal States of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden convened in Riyadh. At the meeting, hosted by King Salman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, FM Osman Saleh reiterated Eritrea's position that the countries of the region shoulder a major responsibility for the security and development of the Red Sea and that the aim should be to build an effective regional organization. The foreign officials in attendance also signed the Charter of the Establishment of the Council of Arab and African Coastal States of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. As well, Yemane Gebremeskel, Minister of Information, met and held talks in Riyadh the following day, 7 January, with Turki bin Abdullah Al-Shabanah, the Saudi Minister of Media. The two discussed scope and modalities of cooperation between the two countries in promoting multi-faceted investment and trade, as well as security and development in the region.

Regional leaders also visited Eritrea. On 10-11 January, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, visited Asmara and held discussions with President Isaias about the progress of bilateral ties and regional issues of vital interest to both countries. Upon conclusion of the visit, the two leaders released a joint communiqué that, inter alia, expressed their satisfaction with the robust growth in cooperation since the signing of the Joint Declaration on Friendship and Comprehensive Cooperation on 29 July 2018 in Asmara.

Weeks later, on 27 January, President Isaias, Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and President Mohamed held meetings in Asmara focusing on developing relations and cooperation between their countries. The meetings concluded with the leaders issuing a joint communiqué which, among other things, reaffirmed their commitment to the Tripartite Agreement signed in September 2018.

February

Like January, February began with celebrations. From 7-9 February, events were held to mark the 30th anniversary of Operation Fenkil. A memorable exhibition, including historical artifacts and cultural items, was staged, while a half-marathon race, featuring participants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Tanzania, took place in Massawa. Eritrea's Girmai Gebreselasie, a world champion, won the men's race, while Natsinet Amanuel, also of Eritrea, won the women's competition. Additionally, from 1-5 February, Sports and Culture Week for Students was held in Aritay administrative area, Habero sub-zone. Events included football, volleyball, athletics, music, poetry, dancing, and drama competitions.



Regarding development, a new health station in Adi-Nifas administrative area, Akria sub-zone, was inaugurated on 2 February and opened for health service. The seven room health station aims to support women and children's health. As well, in Mai-Aini sub-zone, over 500 residents conducted a community campaign to renovate a 20-km dirt road linking Mai-Aini with Adi-Bari. Nationally, control operations against desert locusts remained ongoing. Additionally, on 6 February, the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM was observed. A large event was held in Barentu, attended by locals,

government officials, health authorities, religious leaders, and representatives of international organizations.

Education-related activities also occurred. In the capital, Asmara Comprehensive High School held a ceremony to award students that excelled in the 2018/2019 national examinations. In total, 19 students received awards. Meanwhile, in Dekemhare sub-zone, an extended vocational training program for 350 young females was concluded. As well, in the Anseba region, multi-day workshops, organized by the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students, were provided for 50 young women and 100 high school students. Training workshops were also completed at the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Energy and Mining.

The month saw several notable diplomatic and political activities. On 6 February, FM Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab traveled to Khartoum to meet with President Abdul Fattah al-Burhan, Head of the Sovereign Council of Sudan. During the visit, the Eritrean delegation delivered a message from President Isaias, and also met with Vice President of the Sovereign Council, Lt. General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, and Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdock.

On 7 and 9 February, President Isaias gave an extensive interview regarding domestic and regional issues. Later, on 17 February, he travelled to Saudi Arabia for a three-day working visit. During his visit, he met with King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, and other Saudi officials.

Eritrea also took part in several regional and global gatherings during the month. At the African Union (AU), delegations participated in the 33rd AU Summit of Heads of State and Government, held from 9-10 February, as well in the 36th meeting of the Executive Ministerial Council of AU Member States, held from 6-8 February. Eritrean delegations also attended the 10th Session of World Urban Forum, in Abu Dhabi, from 8-13 February, and the 75th Regular Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, held on 14 February in Geneva.

March

The third month of 2020 began with the exciting announcement that during archeological excavation in the Gelalo sub-zone, Northern Red Sea region, fossils believed to be approximately one million-years-old were discovered. The discovery was part of the “Engel’ela-Ramud Project”.

In terms of training and education, the Ministry of Tourism in the Northern Red Sea region organized a training workshop for those working in service provision institutions. Weeks later, the annual National School Leaving Examination commenced, with thousands sitting for exams.



In connection with International Women’s Day (8 March) several events were conducted. The National Union of Eritrean Women branch in the Central region organized a seminar for women from various sub-zones and ministries, while in Asmara, celebrations were held at the Expo Compound. Eritrean communities abroad also staged events to mark the special occasion.

Notably, the Eritrean National War-Disabled Veterans’ Association received material support from its branches in Germany and Sweden. Remarkably, the two branches donated medical and transport materials worth over 620,000 euros.

Of course, March will go down as the month that COVID-19 entered Eritrea. The country reported its first case on 21 March, a 39-year old Eritrean national arriving from Europe, making it one of the last countries on the continent to

have a confirmed case. Throughout the month, a number of guidelines and public health and safety measures were put in place in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

April

The month began with the implementation of a nationwide lockdown on 2 April. Initially to last for 21 days, the lockdown was subsequently extended due to the continued threat. Exemptions were made for several sectors, allowing operations to continue with reduced hours and strict compliance with standard preventive measures (e.g., fisheries, household and commercial farms, banking and financial services, food supply chains, freight trucks, and vital transportation).

In a message to the nation on 18 April, President Isaias stressed that it was incumbent on all to work hard and in tandem to fight the pandemic. On the same day, in connection with Easter, His Holiness Abune Petros gave benediction, urged all faithful to adhere to national safety guidelines, reminded citizens to support the disadvantaged, and expressed his wishes for the health of all. Similar messages were also made by leaders from other faith groups in the country throughout the period.

Eritreans coming together during the period was an eloquent testimony of the country's rich culture of compassion and solidarity. Health workers, volunteers, the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF), and others worked tirelessly and selflessly to protect the nation. Illustrating high levels of social cohesion, solidarity, and trust, Eritreans from all socio-economic backgrounds and living in the country or abroad enthusiastically responded during the nation's critical time of need, generously contributing money, precious resources, and other forms of assistance. Throughout the country, workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities, utilizing deeply-rooted traditional forms of mutual assistance and collective support, also strived to ensure that no one, particularly the elderly, single-headed households, disabled, unemployed, and other vulnerable populations, was forgotten or otherwise left behind during the difficult and uncertain period.

While battling COVID-19, Eritrea remained active in other areas. Different regions of the country saw preventative and response activities against desert locusts, conducted by local communities, agricultural experts, and members of the EDF. Additionally, construction and preparation of several health and education facilities continued in Halhal, Asmat, and Habero sub-zones, Anseba region.



- **May**

The month began with International Workers' Day (1 May) commemorated in Asmara. Events saw 40 members of the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) donate blood at the National Blood Transfusion Center. Additionally, Tekeste Baire, Secretary General of the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers, released a statement that, inter alia, declared the NCEW would continue to extend financial and material support to the national efforts to contain the virus.

Days later, on 3 May, President Isaias Afwerki headed to Ethiopia for a two-day visit. During the trip, he met with Dr. Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The two leaders discussed bilateral ties, the fight against COVID-19, combating the regional locust infestation, and other regional matters. President Isaias was accompanied by Foreign Minister Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab, while Ethiopian

officials the Eritrean delegation visited and met with during the trip included Sahlework Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, former Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, Shimeles Abdissa, President of the Oromia Region, Gedu Andargachew, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, and Sileshi Bekele, Minister of Water, Irrigation, and Energy. Remaining with diplomacy, May also saw FM Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab head to Khartoum. There they met with President of the Sovereign Council, Lt. General Abdel-Fattah Al-Burhan, and delivered a letter from President Isaias. The Eritrean delegation also met with the First Vice President of the Sovereign Council, Mohammed Hamdan Deglo, and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdook. Discussions focused on bilateral ties and regional cooperation.

Of course, May is special on the annual calendar because it is the month in which our beloved independence day falls. While COVID-19 meant that the usual festivities were considerably toned down, the pride and happiness of Eritreans, at home and abroad, remained strong. In Asmara, The 29th anniversary of the special day was celebrated enthusiastically at a ceremony at Cinema Roma. As well, Eritrean communities in cities around the world organized colorful, artistic programs. At a ceremony conducted in Addis Ababa, attended by staff members of the Eritrean Embassy and Permanent Representative of Eritrea at the Commission of the African Union, Ambassadors Semere Russom and Araia Desta congratulated the Eritrean people and the Eritrean Defense Forces (EDF).

Notably, in an address to the nation on 24 May, President Isaias also extended his congratulations to the Eritrean people, called on all to adhere to COVID-19 safety guidelines, and expressed his gratitude to those who were working to combat the virus and protect the nation. Notably, leaders of dozens of countries sent messages of congratulations to the people and Government of Eritrea.

On the COVID-19 front, on 15 May, the Ministry of Health announced that all 39 confirmed cases in the country had recovered fully. Two days later, Eritrea launched a random and extensive testing program to comprehensively gauge the spread of COVID-19. The first phase focused on parts of Asmara, towns and

villages in border areas, as well as front-line employees in the Ministry of Health and other relevant institutions.

While COVID-19 was understandably the key focus, development-related activities continued. The National Agricultural Research Institute announced that preliminary trials to introduce liquid fertilizer for farming produced positive results. Further trials were begun with the long-term aim of distributing liquid fertilizers to local farmers. As well, in the Ribda and Alet administrative areas of Forto Sawa sub-zone, it was announced that the construction of two new elementary schools was nearing completion. The new schools will help improve enrolment and attendance in the region, particularly for the rural and nomadic populations.

- **June**

On 2 June, Eritrea completed the first phase of extensive random testing. Final results showed that one single person tested positive for COVID-19.

Subsequently, all immediate and indirect contacts of the patient were promptly traced and quarantined. While results were highly encouraging, citizens were urged to maintain the commendable commitment and adherence to the safety guidelines in order to ensure continued success. As well, schools were partially reopened, while other restrictions were eased slightly.

The month of June sees several important international days related to development and the environment . These are, of course, two areas of critical importance for Eritrea. Accordingly, on 5 June, the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment called for reinforced water, soil and environmental conservation. As well, on 17 June, the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, the Ministry of Agriculture called for promoting community-based agricultural activities in order to improve productivity.

Several important development-related events also took place. In Maret administrative area, Nakfa sub-zone, a new dam with 70,000 cubic meter capacity and cost of 3 million Nakfa had progressed to about 25% completion. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Agriculture continued preparations to modernize and expand honey production and marketization as part of the Minimum

Integrated Household Agricultural Package. Other activities included: residents of Foro sub-zone and Dubarwa sub-zone conducting water and soil conservation popular campaigns, and residents of Nakfa helping to lay 8-km of water pipelines and construct two water reservoirs.

Eritrea also continued to battle desert locusts. Intensive surveillance and control measures were undertaken to deal with threats in winter breeding areas and from invasion from neighboring countries. The response involved officials from various ministries, local administrative and community leaders, citizens, and members of the EDF.



June featured a number of diplomatic activities. On 11 June, Elsa Haile, Director of International Organizations at Eritrea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, delivered a statement at the virtual Meeting of National Focal Points of LDCs in Africa. Her comments outlined Eritrea's response to COVID-19 and expressed solidarity in the global fight against the virus. Weeks later, on 25 June, President Isaias conducted a three-day visit to Sudan. There, he held extensive discussions with General Abdel Fatah Al Burhan, Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok, and Lt. General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, on strengthening bilateral relations and regional issues. During the visit, President Isaias was accompanied by FM Osman Saleh, Yemane Gebreab, Presidential Adviser, and Ibrahim Idris, Charge d'Affairs at the Eritrean Embassy in Sudan. Also in late June, the executive committees of Eritrean national and community organizations in 15 cities in

Italy, including PFDJ, YPFDJ, and the National Union of Eritrean Women, conducted a virtual meeting. During the meeting, in which Dr. Fesehatsion Petros, Eritrean Ambassador to Italy, and Ghirmai Habtemicael, Head of Public and Community Affairs took part, extensive discussions were conducted on organizational progress and challenges.

One of the most important days on the Eritrean calendar – 20 June – was commemorated across the country and by Eritreans around the world. On 19 June, Eritreans held a candlelight vigil, while early the following morning, President Isaias laid a wreath at the Patriots Cemetery in Asmara in tribute of those who fell to bring independence and safeguard sovereignty. Similar events were held at other cemeteries across the country, and at midday a national minute of silence was observed.

- **July**

The first week of July saw President Isaias head to Egypt for a three-day working visit. During the trip from 5-7 July, he held meetings with President Abdel Fatah Al Sisi and other Egyptian officials on bilateral and regional issues of interest to the two countries. President Isaias was accompanied by FM Osman Saleh, Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab, and Ambassador Fasil Gebreselasie.

Less than two weeks later, on 18 July, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, arrived in Asmara. During his two-day visit, in which he was accompanied by Ambassador Redwan Hussein and Speaker of Parliament, Tagesse Chaffo, the PM met with President Isaias to discuss strengthening bilateral and cooperation. Dr. Abiy also toured various development projects in Eritrea and observed rehearsals for the graduation parade of the 33rd Round of the National Service. Shortly after, on 20 July, an Eritrean military delegation headed by General Philipos Woldeyohannes, Chief of Staff of the Eritrean Defense Forces, delivered a message from President Isaias to General Abdul Fattah Al Burhan, President of the Sudanese Sovereign Council. General Abdul Fattah said the visit of the delegation reflected the strong relations between the two countries and thanked Eritrea for its support

during Sudan's challenging transition period. The following day, the Eritrean delegation met and held talks with First Deputy Chairman of the Sovereign Council of Sudan, Lt. General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo on enhancement of bilateral cooperation in defense and security issues.

In terms of development, on 15-16 July, Amina Nurhusein, Minister of Health, accompanied by the Governor of the Northern Red Sea region, Asmeret Abraha, conducted a tour of inspection of health facilities in the towns of Kelhamet and Afabet, Afabet sub-zone. The two officials held discussions with local health officials and administrators. As well, in response to continued threats posed by desert locusts, on 14 July workshops were organized for members of the Ministry of Agriculture and the EDF in Mendefera, while in Anseba, water and soil conservation activities were conducted by residents and EDF members. Meanwhile, in Asmara, members of the first round of national service, the Bulletin Committee of CBSS in Adi Keih, and members of the National Union of Eritrean Women gathered to donate blood at the National Blood Bank. Throughout the month, residents of Habero sub-zone, in cooperation with the EDF, worked to renovate roads damaged by flooding.

Finally, on 31 July, Eid Al Adha (1441 Hijiri Year) was celebrated. Sheik Salem Ibrahim Almukhtar, Mufti in Eritrea and Secretary General of the Higher Assembly of Eritrean Iftae and Islamic Affairs, wished a Happy Eid Al Adha to all and called people to follow guidelines related to COVID-19.

- **August**

One of the most important days this past year took place on 15 August, when the ceremonies for the graduation of the 33rd Round of National Service and the 11th commencement of the Vocational Training Center took place. Held in Sawa, the celebrations were attended by President Isaias, various high-level officials, and military commanders. In his address to graduates, President Isaias commended the efforts of students during a particularly challenging year.

Meanwhile, the development-related activities during the month included: the residents of Segeneity and Emni-Haili sub-zones, Southern region conducting community-based environmental sanitation activities; residents of Adi-Keih sub-zone, Southern region, and Gala- Nefhi, Central region engaged in a community campaign to renovate roads; the villages of Misgad and Adi- Bakokay, Central region renovating roads damaged due to flooding; and the inauguration of two micro-dams in the sub-zones of Gala-Nefhi and Serejeka. Last, in connection with International Youth Day, on 11 and 12 August students from the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students conducted a blood drive to donate to the National Voluntary Blood Donors Association.

Significantly, the battles against COVID-19 and desert locusts continued apace. Regarding COVID-19, despite the arrival of many people at various land and sea borders, infections were contained, while communities and the EDF worked together to minimize destruction caused by desert locusts.

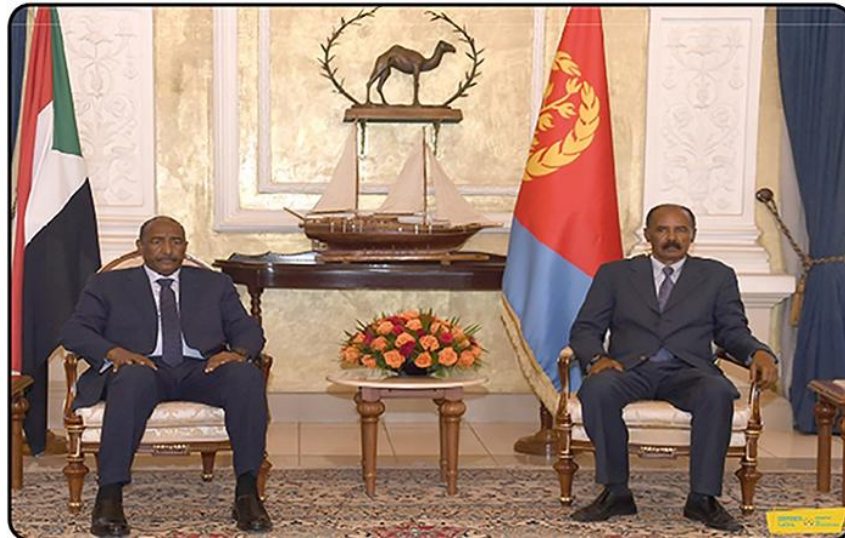
Finally, Eritrean communities around the world conducted festivals. While events and festivities were modified and toned down due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, Eritreans were still able to showcase their deep passion for and commitment to their country.

September

Meskerem, the 9th month, began with Eritreans around the world observing the 59th anniversary of the beginning of Eritrea's armed struggle for independence. In Asmara, events at Cinema Roma included cultural programs, musical performances, drama programs, and poetry reading highlighting the unity and resilience of the Eritrean people.

Days later, on 7 September, the President of Sudan's Sovereign Council, Lt. Gen. Abdul Fattah al-Burhan, arrived in Asmara for a one-day working visit. During his stay, he held discussions with President Isaias about the progress of bilateral ties, and the two leaders agreed to intensify efforts to bolster regional peace. Osman Saleh, Eritrea's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Yemane Gebreab, the Presidential Adviser, also attended the discussions.

Other diplomatic activities included Eritrea's participation at the annual United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). During the 75th session of the UNGA, FM Osman Saleh delivered a message on behalf of President Isaias covering a number of topics, including COVID-19, cooperation, and peace. As well, on 30 September, Tesfai Ghebreselassie, Eritrea's Minister of Land, Water and Environment, delivered a statement at the biodiversity summit. His comments included a call for greater global cooperation.



Regarding development, as part of the effort to expand educational opportunities and eradicate illiteracy, it was announced that eight elementary schools in Sel'a sub-zone, Gash Barka region, were under construction. Additionally, the Governor of Anseba region, Ambassador Abdela Musa, conducted a tour of inspection at the 'Sutur' dairy cattle breeding project in Hamelmalo sub-zone. Other events included: residents of Habero sub-zone conducting soil and water conservation activities; renovation of roads in Mai-Mine sub-zone, Southern region; extensive soil and water conservation campaigns aimed at redressing the environment issues and increasing agricultural productivity in the Northern Red Sea Region; the installation of audio-visual equipment and digital libraries in middle and high schools; and the continued development of a new dam in the Mihdaf administrative area, Afabet sub-zone. As well, on 28 September, the Ministry of Agriculture organized a workshop in connection with World Rabies Day.

September also saw continued efforts to combat the threat of desert locusts. Surveillance demonstrated that locusts had spread to different parts of the country. The response included communities, local and regional officials, members of the Ministry of Agriculture, and the EDF. On 4 September, the Minister of Agriculture, Arefaine Berhe, commended the public and the EDF for their efforts.

Notably, His Holiness Abune Petros, Plenipotentiary at the Office of the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church, gave benediction on the occasion of Kudus Yohanes. In a public message, Abune Petros extended warm wishes to all, especially health workers and those safeguarding the nation's sovereignty. Later, on 27 September, Meskel, which commemorates the Finding of the True Cross, was celebrated at St. Mary's Church. The event was conducted in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions.

Among the highlights of the month were graduation ceremonies held in different parts of the country. On 14 September, Barentu School of Assistant Nurses held its 10th graduation commencement ceremony, with 100 students graduating. Days later, on 17 September, the Gindae School of Assistant Nurses held its 8th commencement, with 93 students graduating. Finally, on 19 September, 117 students graduated from Mendefera School of Assistant Nurses.

October

The month of October featured important diplomatic activities. On 4 October, the President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, Mohammed Abdullahi Mohammed, arrived in Asmara for a two-day working visit. During the visit, President Mohammed and President Isaias held talks at State House focusing on bolstering mutual ties and increasing efforts for regional integration on the basis of the Tri-Partite Agreement signed between Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

Less than two weeks later, from 13-15 October, President Isaias, accompanied by FM Osman Saleh, and Presidential Adviser Yemane Ghebreab visited Ethiopia. There, the delegation, which was joined by the Eritrean Ambassador to Ethiopia, Semere Russom, visited the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), various development projects, and the headquarters of the Ethiopian

Air Force in Bishoftu. During the visit, Ethiopian and Eritrean leaders engaged in discussions on bilateral ties and the consolidation of regional cooperation.

Also, on 13-14 October, an Eritrean delegation led by Biniam Berhe, Charge d’Affaires in the Mission to the African Union (AU) and Economic Commission of Africa (ECA), participated at the 37th Meeting of the AU Council of Ministers. At the meeting, conducted virtually, the Eritrean delegation delivered a message outlining the country’s position on a number of issues.

Notably, the nearly month-long cultural competition organized by the EDF concluded on 10 October. At the awards ceremony, attended by General Filipos Weldeyohannes, Chief of Staff of the EDF, and Ambassador Zemedet Tekle, Commissioner of Culture and Sports, various prizes were handed out to individuals and cultural groups in different categories.

Food security is a fundamental concern in Eritrea. During the commemoration of World Food Day, on 16 October, a statement from the Ministry of Agriculture outlined how the Minimum Integrated Household Agricultural Package aims to meet food and nutrition security. Such initiatives have been vital during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Sticking with development-related matters, efforts continued to be taken to enhance the quality of service of Barentu Regional Referral Hospital, including through upgrading equipment, while community programs, such as soil and water conservation activities, road repair, and water diversion schemes, were ongoing in Anseba Region. Importantly, with locusts active in many parts of the country, Eritrea continued to take measures to ensure that damage was minimal.

As with the preceding month, October saw several graduation ceremonies. On 17 October, the College of Business and Social, located in Adi-Keih, held a virtual graduation ceremony. The 13th commencement saw 620 students graduate. Then, on 22 October, Eritrea’s Institute of Technology, Mai Nefhi College of Science held its commencement ceremony, with 352 students graduating. The following day, on 23 October, the College of Engineering and Technology, held its 13th graduation ceremony. On 24 October, Hamelmalo

College of Agriculture had 422 students graduate, while on 25 October, 519 students graduated from the Asmara College of Education.

Finally, October concluded with the celebration of Mewlid al-Nebi on 29 October. Celebrations at Asmara's Grand Mosque Al- Khulafae Al- Rashidin, were conducted virtually and broadcast on Eri-TV, Dimtsi Hafash, Radio Numa, and Radio Zara. Mohammed-Seid Beshir, Chairman of the Awkaf in Asmara, discussed the historical background of the celebration, while Mufti Sheikh Salim Ibrahim wished a happy Mewlid to all and urged patience and resilience in the battle to control COVID-19.

November

As with the rest of the year, November witnessed many development-related activities. These included: soil and water conservation campaigns in South Denkalia sub-zone and Asheti and Sosona administrative areas, Barentu sub-zone; planting of trees in Shelab administrative area, Akordot sub-zone, and Foro sub-zone; seminars on agricultural productivity, use of pesticides, and animal health for locals in the Northern Red Sea region; workshops in the Southern Red Sea region on seed standardization; and efforts to increase provision of social services in Dahlak sub-zone. Additionally, efforts continued to be taken to control the spread of locusts, while in Mendefera and Barentu, citizens conducted voluntary blood donation drives.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture conducted a nationwide livestock vaccination program aimed at ensuring animal health. In total, about 1.5 million animals were vaccinated against various diseases. In Assab, it was reported that efforts were ongoing to upgrade equipment at the Assab Hospital. Reports also revealed that during the past several years, the number of medical doctors and healthcare workers had significantly increased, helping improve health service in the region. Finally, in Asmara, the Office of the Auditor General, in conjunction with the Eritrean Center for Organizational Excellence, conducted a workshop for civil servants and internal auditors from 9-20 November. The workshop, attended by 55 participants, focused on developing skills, improving efficiency and effectiveness, and preparing a five-year national strategic plan.

Meanwhile, diplomatically, on 11 November, Eritrean FM Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab met with President of the Sovereign Council, Lt. Gen. Abdul Fatah al-Burhan, and Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok in Khartoum. The two sides discussed bilateral relations, as well as events in the region, particularly Ethiopia. The Eritrean delegation also delivered a message from President Isaias. Similarly, the following week, on 18 November, FM Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Gebreab met the Foreign Minister of Egypt, Sameh Shoukri, in Cairo. Discussions focused on bilateral and regional issues.

Also in November, the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts held its 24th meeting. The meeting, conducted on 24-25 November, was attended by fourteen East African states. Participants gathered under the theme, “Economic and Social impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis on Eastern Africa: Strategies for Building- Back-Better”. In his opening speech, Eritrean FM Osman Saleh thanked the ECA for organizing the meeting and commended countries for tackling various challenges. In addition, Ambassador Tesfamichael Gherahtu shared Eritrea’s experiences during the pandemic.

Finally, PFDJ and NUEW branches abroad conducted meetings. The PFDJ branch in Germany had meetings via virtual format from 24 October to 14 November. Those participating in the meeting included Yohannes Weldu, Charge d’Affairs of the Eritrean Embassy in Germany, Head of the Public and Community Affairs, Kahsai Tewelde, and Head of Public Diplomacy and Media, Teklu Lebasi, along with numerous members. Similarly, NUEW branches in Italy conducted an annual assessment meeting and laid out plans for 2021 in relation to the unfolding era. Heads of the NUEW branches in the Italian cities of Genoa, Milan, Brescia, Parma, Bologna, Pisa, Pistoia, Rome, Napoli, Teramo, Pescara, Catania, and Florence participated at the virtual meeting conducted on 15 November.

December

The final month of 2020 began with the commemoration of World Aids Day on 1 December. In a public message, Ms. Nigisti Tesfamichael, Head of the HIV/AIDS and STDs Prevention Unit at the Ministry of Health, shared that

Eritrea has made considerable progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Also on 1 December, the nation marked the 50th anniversary of the Ona and Besekdira Massacres. Commemoration events, which included laying wreaths, were attended by Ambassador Abdela Musa, Governor of Anseba Region, other government officials, village elders, and survivors.

Regarding development, the EDF was deployed to Tesennei sub-zone to support local communities in crop harvesting activities. As well, in Assab, initiatives were continued to expand water supply projects, while in Haikota sub-zone, tree planting activities were carried out to redress environmental damage. Additionally, in Gash Barka, the Ministry of Agriculture organized a seminar on the environmental impact of agricultural projects, while in Gelalo sub-zone, a seminar was held on health and traditional medicines. Finally, the National Agriculture Research Center in Sheib sub-zone completed a multi-year research project identifying select crop seeds.

Among the most exciting moments of the month was the graduation ceremony held at Orotta College of Medicine and Health Sciences in Asmara on 19 December. In total, 471 students graduated in various fields, including general medicine, dentistry, ophthalmology, pharmacy, public health, and nursing, among others.

Although Eritrea's response to COVID-19 had been generally successful and effective throughout the year, there was an increase in positive cases late in the month. As a result, the High Level Task Force on COVID-19 issued further guidelines in order to curtail the spread of the virus and to guarantee the safety of citizens.

December featured a number of diplomatic and political activities. During the first week of December, an Eritrean delegation, led by Ambassador Araia Desta, then Eritrea's Permanent Representative to the African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa, participated in the 21st AU Executive Ministerial Council meeting and two extraordinary sessions of the AU Assembly. Then, on 8 December, FM Osman Saleh and Presidential Adviser Yemane Ghebreab met with Sudan's President of the Sovereign Council, Lt. Gen. Abdul Fattah Al-Burhan in Khartoum. They delivered a message from President Isaias.



The message and ensuing discussions focused on developments in Ethiopia and their ramifications for regional peace and stability, as well as bilateral ties. Last, on 15 December, a Saudi Arabian delegation led by Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud visited Asmara. The delegation delivered messages from King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to President Isaias. As well, the two sides held extensive talks on bilateral ties and regional issues of mutual importance.

Finally, the NUEW conducted several activities to conclude the year. On 5 December, the European branch of the Union held its annual meeting led by Tekea Tesfamichael, President of NUEW, and Negisti Tsegai, Chairwoman of the NUEW Europe branch. Representatives of the Union from Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, the UK, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland also participated. Then, on 12 December, Tekea Tesfamichael conducted a seminar with NUEW members across Europe, covering a range of topics. Similarly, in Italy, Eritrean communities gathered for meetings to review the year's activities, plan for 2021, and mobilize support for Eritrea's campaigns against COVID- 19 and desert locusts.

Eritrea Profile