

## **Seven Days, Vol. 18 No. 40, December 5, 2011(\*)**

Ethiopia launched a National Accelerated Plan for Scaling up Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) Services. Health Minister Dr. Tewodros Adhanom said the plan helps to step up ongoing efforts to reach many more millions of mothers and babies with PMTCT services in the coming four years to ensure an HIV-free generation in the country. Ethiopia is one of 22 sub-Saharan African countries that succeeded in reducing their national rate of new HIV infections by 25% between 2001 and 2009. According to a study conducted in 2010, nearly 1.2 million people were living with HIV in Ethiopia including about 90,000 expectant women. Despite progress in the national HIV response, only 9.3% of pregnant women are currently receiving HIV counseling and testing services. The national accelerated emergency plan includes three targeted objectives including reaching 90% of pregnant women with access to antenatal care services, ensuring that all pregnant women have access to delivery by a skilled attendant and providing antiretroviral prophylaxis to at least 80% of HIV-positive pregnant women (*WIC, Dec. 3*).

Over 1.2 million Ethiopians are living with HIV. In a statement it issued, the AIDS center said that out of these, only 267,000 use the drugs. About 2.4% of the people living with the virus are adults who are able to work. In the last one year alone, over nine million people took tests to find out their status. This is a remarkable improvement in comparison to the situation before, the statement said. It was also reported that the mother-to-child transmission rate had dropped from 3.5% to 2.3% as confirmed by tests undertaken during pregnancy and child delivery (*Sendek, Nov. 30*).

The Shabaab Islamist insurgent group has warned Ethiopia that any military intervention in Somalia will result in 'heavy' losses for its neighbor. Ethiopian troops, who ended a three-year incursion in Somalia in 2009, were reported to have once again crossed the border last week, as part of an offensive against the Shabaab, a claim denied by the government in Addis Ababa. East African leaders urged Ethiopia on Friday to support Kenyan, African Union and Somali troops battling Shabaab rebels in the war-torn Horn of Africa state. Kenya deployed forces in October to fight the Al-Qaeda-linked insurgents in southern Somalia, while the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is based in Mogadishu, where it protects the weak Somali government from the rebels (*The Moment, Nov. 28*).

The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has disclosed its agreement to send troops again to Somalia in response to a request submitted to it by IGAD. An official request to that effect was made at last week's IGAD Summit. The request asked that Ethiopia once again take part in the campaign to destroy the terrorist activity of Al-Shabaab. Foreign ministry spokesman Ambassador Dina Mufti told that Ethiopia has accepted the request to provide all the needed assistance to Somalia. It was agreed during the IGAD summit that Ethiopian troops be deployed and work together with AU peace keepers as well as with Kenyan troops that were also dispatched to Somalia recently. Ambassador Dina Mufti said that according to the agreement, Ethiopia will provide military, political, diplomatic and other assistance to Somalia's Transitional Government, the AU peace keeping forces in Somalia (AMISOM) and Kenyan troops. Indicating that Ethiopia will provide all-round assistance, Ambassador Dina said IGAD firmly believes that Ethiopia's involvement in the anti-Al-Shabaab campaign is significant. He said IGAD leaders have expressed their admiration for the successful role already played by Ethiopian troops in Abyei territory between South and North Sudan. Ethiopia has labeled Al-Shabaab a terrorist group which works hand in glove with Al-Qaeda (*Reporter, Nov. 27*).

The 22nd session of the African Commission on Agricultural Statistics (AFCAS) kicked off in Addis Ababa. Opening the session, Agriculture State Minister, Wondirad Mandefro, said since its inception in 1962, AFCAS has contributed to the improvement of food and agricultural statistics by providing advice to member countries. Wondirad said that Ethiopia has been conducting a timely and reliable agricultural statistics for the use of effective strategic formulation, planning and monitoring of various development interventions in the sector. The Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia through its Integrated Household Survey Program has been collecting agricultural statistics since 1980's, he said. The State Minister said this practice makes Ethiopia one of the few African countries which collect agriculture related data in a sustainable way. FAO Regional Representative for Africa, Assistant Director-General, Maria Helena Semedo, said reliable and timely statistics are more than ever needed to face uncertainties resulting from ongoing economic and financial crisis that is affecting most regions of the world (*ENA, Nov. 30*).