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Ethiopia's use of sweeping anti-terrorism law to imprison journalists and other legislative restrictions are hindering the development of free and independent media in Africa's second largest country, according to a report. Dozens of journalists and political activists have been arrested or sentenced under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation of 2009, including five journalists who are serving prison sentences and who at times have been denied access to visitors and legal counsel. The report, "Press Freedom in Ethiopia", is based on a mission to the country carried out in November by IPI and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) (International Press Institute (IPI), Jan. 13).

A global women's rights and advocacy group, Safe World for Women, has put up an online petition for the immediate release of jailed award-winning Ethiopian journalist with breast tumor, Re'eyot Alemu. Ms. Alemu, 34, who is also a teacher, was jailed under the nebulous Ethiopian anti-terrorism law for her criticism of the intolerant government in Addis Ababa. On June 21, 2011, she was arrested from the school where she teaches and kept in an undisclosed location (AllAfrica.com, Jan. 13).

The former president of Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Ato Yaregal Aysheshum, and five of his accomplices have been sentenced to 6-15 years in prison and were fined 2000-60,000 Birr for abusing power during their term in office. The defendants were put on trial at the request of the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission and they have been defending themselves in the last two years. The Lideta branch of the Federal High Court found the men guilty of using their office to embezzle public money and enrich themselves illegally (Reporter, Jan. 12).

The controversial Ethio-Sudanese border conflict is still giving rise to serious concern among Ethiopians. The issue has become a cause for renewed debate among Ethiopians following the recent visit to Khartoum by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. Meanwhile, some Sudanese media sources have expressed hope that the border conflict could find settlement shortly. Ethiopians at all levels are expressing concern that the current government is trying to give away Ethiopia's land to Sudan (Sendek, Jan. 15).

Japan has provided 500m yen in assistance to Ethiopia to support its efforts to transform the agriculture sector, Prime Minister Hailemariam said. The Premier said the assistance will help the country's efforts to improve agricultural production and productivity. Prime Minister Abe has also agreed to establish the African Kaizen Center which Japan plans to set up in Africa to support the continent's industrial development. Prime Minister Abe has also agreed to double the bilateral trade cooperation with Ethiopia (State media, Jan. 14).

Land lease bid prices and quotations have continued to soar due to scarcity of land. This fiscal year, the government has put on bid 1,220 ha on lease. The result of the fifth land lease bid will be announced on Jan. 18. In the last bid, a sum of 32,000 birr was offered for a sq. m of land in Wello Sefer of Kirkos Sub-city (Reporter, Jan. 15).

The government of Ethiopia and the World Bank (WB) signed a 110m USD loan agreement to support the third phase of the Pastoral Community Development Project. The objective of the project is to improve access to community demand-driven social and economic services for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. Finance and Economic Development Minister, Sufian Ahmedsaid the objective of the project is to ensure the benefit of the pastoralist community from various social services. The money will be used to support the construction of health and educational facilities, veterinary clinics, small irrigation schemes and rural roads. Pastoralists in 113 pastoralist woredas in Afar, Somali, Oromia and South Ethiopia Peoples' State will benefit from the project. Country (ENA, Jan. 18).

World Vision Ethiopia and the World Agro Forestry Center launched a 15m USD Food and Water Security Project aimed at improving the livelihood of the community. World Vision Ethiopia Director Margaret Schuler said that the five-year project will be implemented by focusing on the most vulnerable communities of Tigray and Rift Valley areas. Schuler said the project would focus on semi-arid regions of Ethiopia to transfer rural

households from subsistence farming to sustainable rural development by increasing food and security and better access to markets (ENA, Jan. 15). The University of Gondar is constructing a 1,000-bed referral hospital, expected to be inaugurated next June, at a cost of over 350m birr. Upon completion, it will benefit over five million people in Gondar town and its environs, the university's President Prof. Mengesha Admasu said. Prof. Mengesha said that apart from providing services for inpatients and outpatients, the university plans to open, among others, standard eye care and international fistula treatment and training centers. The construction of the referral hospital is being undertaken with the joint efforts of various bodies - a four-storey building by the government and a five-storey by Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Ali Al-Amoudi and US government support. The construction of the hospital has created job opportunities for over 4,000 citizens. The Gondar Public Health College and Training Center was established in 1954 to produce middle level health professionals (The Ethiopian Herald, Jan. 12).

Angelina Jolie is executive producing the Ethiopian film Difret. The actress described the film, the bigscreen debut from director Zeresenay Berhane Mehari, as "a strong moment for art in Ethiopia". Difret, which was shot in Ethiopia, will have its world premiere in the World Cinema Dramatic Competition category at the Sundance Film Festival on Jan. 18. The film is the story of a young Ethiopian girl who challenges the tradition of "telefa", the practice of abduction in marriage, usually of young girls. - The Oscar-winning actress, who adopted daughter Zahara, nine, from Ethiopia, said "It is inspiring to see such an important story so beautifully illustrated with such creative talent". Angelia is currently directing Unbroken and previously directed In The Land Of Blood And Honey, while her producing credits include Maleficent (The Hollywood Reporter, Jan. 16).