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The Third Criminal Bench of the Federal High Court passed a guilty verdict on 20 people in the case of Andualem Aragie et al who were accused of inciting terrorism. In an interview in connection with the verdict, the Prosecution and Investigation Director in the Ministry of Justice, Michael Tekilo, told that the court had produced 35 evidences including prosecutor witnesses and more than 500 written pages and five CDs. The director said the defendants failed to defend the six charges filed against them. The court adjourned to give final decision on July 13, 2012. The court passed the verdict on eight of the defendants who appeared before court while the rest were pronounced guilty in absentia (State media, June 27).

An Ethiopian court convicted writer Eskinder Nega, a senior opposition activist and 22 others of terrorism offenses including plotting to overthrow the government. Judge Endeshaw Adane found members of the group, 16 of whom were tried in absentia since they are abroad, guilty of offenses including conspiracy to commit terror acts and having links with a banned U.S.-based opposition group, Ginbot 7, and neighboring Eritrea, which has hostile relations with Ethiopia. Eskinder "wrote articles that incited the public to bring the North African and Arab uprisings to Ethiopia," Endeshaw said. Evidence against the defendants was drawn from speeches, articles, e-mails, phone calls and social-media messages, he said to the Federal High Court in Addis Ababa (Bloomberg, June 27).

The Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) announced that the election of Muslim councils would be held at all levels for 14 days beginning August 26, 2012. The Council said the Muslim community would take part in the election freely and democratically. The Council also called on the Muslim community to elect capable leaders. The polling stations will be established at kebele and other administrative offices. The president of the Ethiopian Ulemas Council, Haji Mohammed Yusuf, said the polling stations, to be established outside mosques, would allow Muslim women to take part in the election (Ethiopia Radio and Television Agency (ERTA), June 28).

Ethiopia has secured over 1.2 billion birr from investors engaged in mine exploration and production projects licensed over the past nine months, the Ministry of Mines said. The ministry's Public Relations Director, Bacha Fuji, told that the investment projects were requested in 2003 E.C. He said some 51 investors are engaged in exploration and the remaining in production. The Director said the revenue generated from the mine investment has reached 14 billion Birr in the country. The Director said the ministry has not been licensing investors since last November due to limitation of institutional capacity (ENA, June 24).

Ethiopia has signed two deals worth \$3 billion with Chinese and Turkish companies to construct a railway to link the land-locked Horn of Africa nation to Djibouti's Tadjourah port to export potash, officials said. Ethiopia hopes to exploit growing business ties with China, India and Turkey to boost its expanding economy. Under a five-year development plan launched in 2010, the government aims to pursue power projects and boost infrastructure, including building several new railways (Reuters, June 28).

A five-year Agricultural Cooperatives Sector Development Strategy (2012-2016), aimed at developing an integrated scheme that enhances the support of agricultural cooperatives to contribute towards increasing the yield and income of smallholder farmers, has been launched by the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA), the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and the Federal Cooperatives Agency. The strategy is said to be the first of its kind in Africa. Agriculture State Minister Wondirad

Mandefro said the Ethiopian government has identified cooperatives as a key instrument in improving livelihood by mobilizing people's small and fragmented resources to address basic societal needs (Ethiopian Herald, June 27).

Since 2008 in Ethiopia, the Urban Gardens Program has strived to improve the general health and incomes of women, orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS, through urban agriculture. Sisay, an elderly widow works in a community garden established in 2010 in the town of Debre Zeit. "By working in the garden I now have some income to help support my children and my grandchildren," she explains. Since 2008, the Urban Gardens Program has reached over 34,200 households in Ethiopia through community and school gardens. Municipalities donate a piece of land to be worked by people selected according to HIV/AIDS status and economic vulnerability. The USAID program also provides drip kit technology for irrigation and often digs wells to increase the likelihood of sustainability. The gardeners either work as a group before dividing the resulting crops, or as individual gardeners. In either case, the gardeners regularly meet at the garden site and share experiences. With their new income, the gardeners form savings groups whereby they can loan money to each other. Today, over 350 urban gardens are spread across Ethiopia. As the cities become denser, access to land and resources becomes more competitive and the urban poor usually prove to be the most vulnerable. But now they have Urban Gardens as one viable - and sustainable - solution (Radio Netherlands Worldwide, June 25).