

Excellencies, Ambassadors, Heads of mission

Distinguished invited guests,

Fellow Ethiopians,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Twenty five years ago, on May 28 the victorious forces of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) marched into Addis Ababa, heralding the end of the protracted conflict the people of Ethiopia endured for 17 years. This is the silver Jubilee of the victory day we are celebrating.

It, therefore, gives me an immense pleasure to welcome you all to the celebration of the day that ushered the country into a new era of peace and stability, democracy and development. We mark this day not only to remember the untold sacrifices made by the revolutionary democratic forces and the people's of Ethiopia, but also to renew our commitment to Ethiopia's renaissance. Remembering the past is important so long as it inspires to the transformation of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has made significant strides in all spheres of the lives of its peoples in the last 25 years. The country, which was part of the problem in the Horn of Africa, made peace with itself and became part of the solution to the troubles of the region. Today, Ethiopia is number one contributor to UN peacekeeping operations from Africa. Ethiopia's peacekeepers were deployed in 8 sisterly African countries and currently participate in 4 operations. This is a clear demonstration of Ethiopia's commitment to peace, security and stability in Africa. Currently, Ethiopia is host to over 700 thousand refugees from neighboring countries, making it the largest refugee host country in Africa & among the top 5 in the world.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Ethiopia spearheaded several peace reconciliation and negotiation efforts in the IGAD region and actively participated in others to contribute its fair share to the stability of the region. Ethiopia's effort in the South Sudan and Somalia are worth mentioning. Ethiopia undertakes these endeavors because of its national interest which is intertwined with the peace and stability of its neighbors and because of its sense of responsibility to the continent. It is in this spirit that Ethiopia's bid to the non-permanent seat of UNSC for the period of 2017-18 was unanimously endorsed by AU. It is our sincere hope that you lend us your support.

Ethiopia's engagement with its neighbors goes beyond peace and security matters. Economic and infrastructure integration is paramount. Given Ethiopia's comparative advantage in energy production, infrastructure and economic integration with Djibouti and Sudan is fast tracking in all sectors. Ethiopia and Kenya signed special status agreement. Our partnership with these countries is growing from strength to strength. Trade, movement of people, goods and services are well underway. Regular consultation at the highest level characterizes our friendship and partnership with the aim of fostering people to people relations. Efforts are being made to do the same with Somalia and South Sudan, though priority in the two sisterly countries is to bring durable peace and stability.

Among our immediate neighbors, the only challenge we have is with Eritrea. Despite provocations, Ethiopia is doing its level best to restrain and maintain people to people relations. And hence host over 100,000 Eritrean refugees and provide scholarships and skill training to thousands within our limited means. Ethiopia offered for a dialogue to normalize relations with Eritrea but Ethiopia's offer was not reciprocated. The no peace and no war situation is in no one's interest. We hope against hope that some common sense and responsibility may prevail one day to unlock the current impasse. Ethiopia remains committed to global peace and security and its conviction in collective security is second to none.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ethiopia enjoys good relations based on mutual respect and benefit with all countries and regions. This is also true with the EU and its member States. Despite some differences in our values and standards, Ethiopia's partnership with EU is now moving to a higher level of strategic engagement. We are partners in peace and security, counter-terrorism, migration, climate change and sustainable development. Ethiopia is the largest recipient of the 11th EDF. EU remains one of Ethiopia's major trading block. About 400 EU companies are operating in Ethiopia. However there is a realization on both sides that the trade and investment engagement is not commensurate with the potentials of the two sides. Hence preparation is well underway to organise Ethio- EU Business Forum in second half of the year in Brussels. I take this opportunity to call upon the private sector to participate in the forum.

Ethiopia's bilateral relations with our host country Belgium and the Netherlands and Luxembourg, to whom this Embassy is accredited is very

good and we strive to further strengthen it in the areas of private sector participation and in science and technology transfer through cooperation in higher education.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen

The success in foreign policy domain was only possible thanks to our achievements in the domestic front. If Ethiopia were in conflict with itself as it were 25 years ago, the above engagements were inconceivable.

Ensuring peace, security and stability, democracy & good governance and development was priority of priorities on our national agenda. The ratification of the constitution and the subsequent decentralization, respect for human and democratic rights and accommodation of unity within diversity were the pillars of building democratic and prosperous Ethiopia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ethiopia formulated homegrown policies and strategies and focused on resources at its disposal and created enabling environment for the participation of all forces of development. It hugely invested in agriculture and SME's. This resulted in a double digit economic growth in the past decade. The growth is fast, equitable, inclusive and pro-poor. Poverty was halved and met most of the MDGs. With over 25 million students at all levels of school, access to education is impressive and expansion of education facilities and infrastructure is remarkable. 25 years ago, only two public universities were operational and we now have 31 public universities and this number will increase to 41 in the next five years. Public investment in education is as high as 1/4 of the national budget. Health coverage also increased and health

facilities & infrastructure expanded significantly. In both health and education the preoccupation now is on improving quality of services as human development is absolutely necessary for sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we look back, surely there are good reasons to celebrate our hard won achievements. However, we are mindful of the enormous challenges ahead of us. Fighting poverty and backwardness remains still a challenge. Consolidation of democracy, good governance and human rights is top on our agenda. With the essential instruments for democratization in place; namely, constitutional guarantee, policy, legal and institutional frameworks, I believe we are on the right track. However, the need to do more and with a sense of urgency cannot be overemphasized. This is work in progress. I wish to reiterate our commitment and responsibility to democratizing Ethiopia, because the people of Ethiopia deserve it no less than any other human being. We are doing it out of our conviction and not as a fulfilment of conditions for aid. While we are open to constructive dialogue and to learn from best practices, we disagree with the temptation to imposition, simply because it is contradiction with the very idea of democracy and such incentive driven democracy is unsustainable and counterproductive.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Like many ACP states, creating job and employment opportunities for youth and gender empowerment are also very critical. Providing opportunities, especially for the disadvantaged sectors of our society, is not only fair but also just, after all a society can only be just if it protects and defends the rights and interests of such a group.

Our export heavily depends on commodities and value addition and transforming the structure of the economy are given due consideration in GTP2 in the next five years. Ethiopian envisions to join the lower middle income countries in another decade. That is a huge task but we are committed and determined as our people can no longer afford to continue to live in the poverty trap. The resilience we created at household, state and national levels made a huge difference in managing the El Niño induced drought and now flood related humanitarian crisis. To sustain the growth and expansion of the economy, infrastructure is absolutely imperative. That is why we are investing in huge projects like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam financed fully from domestic sources. Such projects are not only beneficial to Ethiopia but also benefit our neighbors and enhance regional integration.

Excellencies,

As we celebrate the successes of the last 25 years, this is time to take stock of our strengths and weaknesses. It is time for reflection. In both successes and failures there are lessons and there cannot be a better lesson than learning from your own failures and successes. This is not time for complacency. It is time for scaling up our best practices and address head on our challenges. It is time for doubling our efforts and keep the momentum even faster and higher.

Allow me to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all who contributed to the progress Ethiopia made. I appeal, once again, on our diaspora members to continue their participation in both development and democratization process back home. In the same manner, I invite the private sector in the BENELUX countries to make use of the opportunities available in Ethiopia for doing business. I welcome more tourists to visit Ethiopia, the land of origins.

While are very grateful to our partners, the EU and its member states for their contribution to our achievements, Ethiopia looks forward for more strategic and constructive engagement

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen

The world is going through turbulent times and faced with formidable threats of terrorism, mass migration and mobility, resurgence of conflicts, fragility of economy and global governance and severe climate change. There is no single country, big or small, rich or poor, south or north or east or west that can do it on its own. Now is the time for genuine unity and solidarity and global partnership. The interdependence on one another clearly informs us that either we swim together or sink together. Ethiopia is optimistic that we can swim together. That is what Ethiopia hopes to do with its ACP group, the EU and the rest of the community of nations.

Finally, may I kindly request you to raise your glasses and toast for the continued cooperation between Ethiopia, the kingdom of Belgium and the EU and for the peace and prosperity of our peoples.

I thank you.