

Snapshot Meetings, Financial Pledges Dominate UN Session



By Kester Kenn Klomegah***

MOSCOW, Sept 23, 2011 (Business Africa) - By the time the 66th session of the United Nations' General Assembly in New York closed, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has had a series of snapshot meetings on the sidelines with his African counterparts dealing mostly on wide range of important issues from foreign policy, economic cooperation, humanitarian issues and conflict resolution on the African continent.

Lavrov, discussing with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, Mourad Medelci, raised issues in the development of Russian-Algerian relations, and they both looked at a schedule of bilateral

activities for the period ahead in the political, economic, commercial, cultural, and other fields. Some other aspects surrounding the situation in the Middle East and North Africa were also examined.

Lavrov also had a meeting with Hailemariam Desalegn, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia to exchange views on pressing international and regional problems. Special attention was devoted to the situation in the Horn of Africa and to the humanitarian plight there resulting from a severe drought.

In discussing questions pertaining to bilateral cooperation, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to further develop Russia-Ethiopia interaction in the political sphere and the humanitarian, trade, economic and other fields.

Further, Lavrov met with the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afewerki. They exchanged views on pressing international and regional problems with emphasis on tackling the hotbeds of tension in Africa. They devoted special attention to the prospects of normalizing Eritrean-Ethiopian relations and to the situation in Somalia.

The two sides reaffirmed their mutual keenness to further develop Russia-Eritrea political dialogue and economic and trade cooperation.

During talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt Mohamed Kamel Amr, both ministers expressed a mutual intention to further actively develop the entire range of bilateral cooperation while keenly exchanging views also on the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the state of affairs in the political process in Egypt.

In related developments, at least \$218 million in new aid for the Horn of Africa was pledged September 24 at a United Nations mini-summit held at the UN headquarters in New York to raise awareness about the region's humanitarian crisis and tackle the root causes of its recurring drought-related food shortages.

According to the UN web site, representatives of 13 countries offered the extra funding during a day-long meeting that brought together officials from more than 60 nations. With those pledges, about \$500 million is still needed to meet the overall humanitarian appeal for the Horn of Africa of \$2.48 billion.

Thanking the governments who made pledges Saturday, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos said it was vital to keep the crisis in the spotlight given the scale of the suffering.

An estimated 13 million people in Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti are facing severe food shortages as a result of the prolonged drought. Famine has so far been formally declared in six areas of Somalia.

"Together we must act to help the millions suffering in the Horn of Africa now, and find sustainable ways to build resilience against future drought and food crises," Ms. Amos said.

Earlier at the mini-summit, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called on the countries of the region and international donors to take a long-term view.

The UN and its partners are providing food, health care and other assistance to an estimated more than one million people and progress has been made in helping those most in need in Somalia, but more remains to be done, the Secretary-General said.

At a news conference to launch the Charter to End Extreme Hunger, which is backed by a coalition of aid agencies and civil society, Kenya's Prime Minister Raila Odinga, the first senior government official from the region to support the initiative, said famine was an attack on the conscience of mankind.

"We should never allow people to starve, sometimes to death, because of famine which is preventable," said Mr. Odinga. "I am hopeful that this charter, which I am aware will evolve over the next few weeks, will make a real difference."

Irish musician and anti-poverty activist Bob Geldof spoke of a "perfect storm of social challenges" that the world seems incapable of dealing with because of the speed with which they have come. He called for the universal adoption of the charter by all world leaders and international organizations. ***With reports from News Agencies. (END)

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