

AFAR FORUM 2016 CONFERENCE RESOLUTION

The Afar Forum conference took place between *September 2 – September 4, 2016*. This year's conference theme was: *“Managing vulnerability to recurrent drought and building a resilient community: The case of Afar people in the Horn of Africa.”*

The conference was attended by dignitaries such as Sultan Hanfare Alimirah, scholars, activists, leaders of political organizations, civil society organizations and community elders from Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Afar forum continues its advocacy efforts to bring the Afar case closer to policy makers in the horn of Africa as well as to get the attention of the international community. Preparing a platform for discussions and expressing concerns need a neutral platform and Afar forum has been trying to fill that gap since 1991. The conference delegates express their willingness and involvement in future activities of Afar forum.

The Afars are among most exposed population to droughts in the Horn of Africa. The past five years have been particularly challenging for the Afar pastoralists because of the El Niño climate phenomenon that affects the rainfall. Recurrent droughts and the vulnerability to climate change is the single most pressing factor that threatens the livelihood of the majority of Afars in the Horn of Africa and the non-existence of viable and far-reaching government policies to mitigate drought related loss of lives and animals.

It's a well-known fact that the Afar people are facing intertwined waves of burdens that threatens the very existence of this indigenous nation. Some of these burdens need an immediate response while others are identified as a long terms determinants that could be handled simultaneously. The choice of this year's conference theme was made with ambition to reflect over the recurrent drought, preventable socio economic- and environmental challenges; to draw the attention of policy makers of governments of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti on the dangers the Afar people are facing; and to reevaluate development and settlement activities in the Afar land. A further aim was to elaborate on solutions to our common challenges through coordinated actions of policy maker, communities and many other stakeholders.

Challenging issues were first addressed as clusters of social, economic, environmental, safety and security. The workshops were focused on addressing immediate response needed to promote access to education, primary health care, and economic empowerment of pastoral communities hit by drought.

Summary outcomes

- ***Civil Society Organizations:*** Afar people are severely affected by the impacts of current climate change. The Afar people possess wealth of knowledge about how to adapt to the climate challenges. This type of indigenous knowledge could be harvested through a systematic involvement of civil society organizations. Civil society organizations can play key roles in preserving the indigenous knowledge and disseminating preventive strategies to alleviate the impacts of the climate change. Moreover, the civil society organizations can act as agent for policy making, mobilizing, educating and empowering vulnerable pastoralist communities. Hence, Afar Forum believes and would like to encourage long term investment on civil society organizations. The conference addressed that existing legal restrictions on civil society organizations limits the role they can play. Most active organizations are not free to address and advocate real issues of their communities. A better coordination will benefit the Afars and attract more people to get involved in different projects led by civil society organizations.
- ***Political Organizations:*** The current predicaments Afar people face are the outcomes of exclusive policies and bad governance. The impact of recurrent drought and environmental challenges could be minimized if there has been an inclusive political climate and the Afars have a voice in development of commercial farming which resulted in deforestation. The Afars are victims of political marginalization, exclusion from a discussion making process, an even distribution of resources and forced displacements, which has become a common practice in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. Therefore, wise political decision-making and putting forward different political options that reflects the people's aspiration is important. The Afar political organizations should assume their responsibilities and need to focus on the leverage of their political agenda.
- ***The role of afar diaspora:*** In a globalized world diasporas are viewed as important agents of economic and social development in countries of origin. The immigration patterns among Afars to Europe and North America started in late 1970s and compared to other communities from the Horn of Africa, the Afars are fewer in number and remain weak in mobilizing resources. However, since 2004 there are positive initiatives that need support among the diaspora itself and governments. The governments in the Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia) are often reluctant in harnessing the capacity of the diaspora and lack knowledge or capacity of engaging them effectively. The role of diaspora should be considered beyond their remittances. The diaspora could play the role of strategic partnerships between states, international organizations, civil society and private sector. Therefore, it is important to create a framework for diaspora engagement to facilitate transfer of resources and know-how sharing, especially in the fields of natural resource management, draught mitigation, Health, Education and Human Rights. The Afar Forum conference calls upon the Afar diaspora to unite, engage, and work towards better integration in their new host countries and their countries of origin. Particularly, increased participation in the political process of their host countries and with better knowledge of the mother tongue. Afar Forum believes that the Afar diaspora community should help

and encourage in the creation of institutes or research foundation in their perspective countries to commission research on issues that are important to the Afar people and for advancement.

The unity and working together for the benefit of our people was among the major outcome of the session.

- ***Safety and Security:*** Safety and security has always been a pressing issue for Afar population. The Afar triangle has been a place where many bloody wars have been fought between regional states. Most of the time they are caught in between crossfire, which had a detrimental impact on the socioeconomic development of Afar people. The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and between Djibouti and Eritrea displaced many people from their homes making them refugees without international recognition. The dialogue also contained discussions on justice and how to bring a sustainable development to a cross-border pastoral community. Therefore, the need for a comprehensive and inclusive settlement agenda has been identified as a key factor to ensure the existence of Afar community. Moreover, the conflict between Afars and neighboring regional states with expansionist agenda and territorial claims has been addressed as core concern for regional peace, security and sustainable development for all. It is highly important and imperative that border demarcation between neighboring states and regions with Afar land to be resolved to ensure the safety and security of the people and to further eliminate on going conflicts.
- ***Human Rights Violations:*** The conference addressed the worsening human rights abuse in all three states (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Djibouti), where Afars are systematically targeted to intimidations, imprisonments, arbitrary killings. This act of inhuman treatment has to stop immediately and all political prisoners should be released without conditions.

Afar Forum
September 4, 2016