30th AU Summit launches African Anti-Corruption Year

African leaders from the African Union’s 55 member countries gathered from 22-29 January in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to discuss the continent’s integration agenda. “Winning the fight against corruption: A sustainable path to Africa’s transformation” was the official topic of the 30th AU Summit. On this occasion, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari launched the AU’s 2018 theme, fighting corruption on the continent. He announced that in 2018 the African Union will prioritise three initiatives aimed at: i) organising an African youth congress against corruption; ii) advancing the implementation of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption; and iii) strengthening the criminal justice system across Africa by exchanging information and sharing best practices on the enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Preventing conflict and improving peace and security on the continent remain top priorities for the African Union. At least 18 elections are scheduled for 2018, including presidential elections in Mali and parliamentary elections in Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Sierra Leone and Togo. In terms of institutional decisions, Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame was elected as the AU chair for a one-year mandate, taking over from Guinea’s President Alpha Condé. Kagame is a strong defender of the regional integration agenda and institutional reforms. “Unity must be our starting point, as we do the necessary work of re-defining our plans and ambitions, in continental terms…. These changes need to happen. There is no country on our continent that does not want to be part of a more assertive and visible Africa,” Kagame declared. A large number of events were organised on the side-lines of the summit: The UN and the AU concluded a new AU-UN framework for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Idriss Déby, President of Chad was elected as the African Peer Review Forum’s new chairperson. The OECD Development Centre and the African Union organised a joint press conference to draw attention to recent research findings on migration and development. About 80% of African migration takes place within the African continent and those immigrants make significant contributions to their African host countries. Facilitating intra-regional mobility remains a key challenge for the continent, despite existing treaties on the free movement of citizens (i.e. ECOWAS area). The launch of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), a flagship project of Agenda 2063, is an important step forward. The OECD Development Centre and the AU also announced a joint report, “Dynamics of African Economies,” which will be launched at the next continental gathering in July 2018.
UN UPDATE ON THE SECURITY SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA

Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mohammed Ibn Chambas, who is also the head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, delivered his briefing on the security situation in West Africa on 11 January to the UN Security Council. “The security situation remains a grave concern,” he said. Boko Haram-related violence soared in the second semester of 2017; 295 fatalities were recorded between June and September and another 143 civilian casualties were recorded in November. The use of children as suicide bombers is a particularly worrying development and some 135 cases were recorded in 2017. More than 2.4 million people have been displaced in the Lake Chad area, including nearly 1.7 million in Nigeria. Beyond the terrorist threat, Côte d’Ivoire and Togo also faced several internal security challenges. The Security Council actively supports the establishment of the G5 Sahel joint force. The modalities of the UN’s support for the force are outlined in resolution 2391 (2017) adopted on 8 December. On a positive note, Chambas applauded the Liberian people for its peaceful elections, which have helped strengthen democratic institutions in that country.

THE REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY RESERVE IS TAKING SHAPE

In its first information letter, the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) provided an update on the implementation of the Regional Food Security Reserve. Thanks to the support of partners, notably the European Union, the first physical stock of 11 200 tonnes of cereals (millet, maize, sorghum, rice) has now been established and seven national storage companies have been selected. To date, food stocks are stored in four countries (Yendi in Ghana, Kédougou in Burkina Faso, Dosso and Zinder in Niger; and in Gombe in Nigeria). The aim is to build a physical stock of 60 000 tons for the first 4-year period. The European Union contributed EUR 56 million to the initiative, which supported the purchase of about half of the necessary stock. The rest of the financing is supposed to come from ECOWAS resources. Ultimately, the goal is to achieve a total storage capacity of 1 million tonnes by 2020. However, the physical stock is only one component (one third) of the ECOWAS Food Storage Strategy, which also includes a financial component (two-thirds) aimed at reducing costs and diversifying food assistance. The Regional Food Security Reserve is a third line of response to food crises, after the local/community-level and national food reserves. Adopted in February 2013 at the ECOWAS Heads of State Conference in Yamoussoukro, the reserve is an important instrument of regional solidarity. The food crisis in northeast Nigeria was the first test case for the newly established reserve. Following a request from the Nigerian government, in August 2017, ECOWAS delivered some 1 800 tonnes of cereals to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to help vulnerable populations of Borno, Gombe, Adamawa and Yobe States.

AFDB HELPS NIGER BUILD RESILIENCE

The African Development Bank approved on 10 January a grant of USD 43 million to help Niger become more resilient to food and nutrition insecurity. The budget support consists of a USD 23 million grant from the Transition Support Facility (TAF) and another USD 20 million grant from the African Development Fund (ADF). It will support the implementation of the first phase of the Reform and Economic Resilience Support Programme (PARRE) covering the period of 2017-19. “The African Development Bank, Niger’s strategic partner, is holding this budget support alongside the country, not only to reinforce the efforts already made, but also to accelerate results in priority sectors such as agriculture and electricity infrastructure, institutional capacities and governance,” said AfDB Director-General for West Africa Javier Litsé. The programme will place a strong emphasis on improving water management and increasing agro-pastoral productivity. The programme also aims to improve domestic revenue mobilisation, empower women, create jobs for young people and protect the environment. AfDB is active in Niger where it currently manages 15 projects worth USD 510 million; nearly half of the projects support rural development.
MUST READ: RICE, THE WHITE GOLD OF WEST AFRICA?

The most recent issue of Dynamiqques paysannes magazine, published by SOS Faim Belgium, analyses the rice sector in West Africa from a producers’ perspective. Following the 2008-09 food price crisis, ECOWAS launched a regional initiative to support sustainable rice production in West Africa aimed at achieving rice self-sufficiency by 2025. Senegal and Mali increased their rice production by 121% and 30% respectively. However, despite significant increases in domestic production, West Africa still imports 40% of its rice from Asian countries. Demand in rice, especially in urban areas, is constantly increasing. With the exception of Mali, nearly all countries heavily rely on rice imports. Imports are taxed at only 10% placing pressure on domestic rice production. The example of Senegal shows that strong political will, combined with effective support to local producers and import regulation policies, can help develop strategic food sectors. The paper calls for more coherence between agricultural and trade policies and between national and regional policies in order to develop the regional market. The publication is illustrated by a series of infographics with key facts and figures.

MUST READ: “NO CHOICE BUT TO DENY WHO I AM”: VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBT PEOPLE IN GHANA

This Human Rights Watch publication draws attention to the conditions of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people (LGBT) in Ghana. The country has a mixed record on this issue. Laws that date back to colonial times formally criminalise same-sex relationships, but are rarely applied. LGBT people are frequently victims of physical violence, psychological abuse, extortion and discrimination in many different aspects of their daily lives. The report draws on a series of interviews, conducted in early 2017, with more than 100 LGBT people across the country. It offers a series of recommendations to public authorities to adopt measures aimed at raising public awareness of the harm of homophobia that prevails in the country and the need to combat it.

OPINION: HOW NEW TECH CAN PROPEL AFRICA TO THE FOREFRONT OF HEALTHCARE

“Health systems in Africa are rapidly developing and the fourth Industrial Revolution in healthcare could take hold,” writes Patrice Matchaba from Novartis in a blog post on the World Economic Forum’s website. Many African governments aim to establish universal health coverage based on an equitable primary care system - while also developing a high-quality medical system that encourages people to manage their own health. Healthcare systems in highly industrialised countries mostly focus on costly secondary and tertiary care, emphasizing treatment rather than prevention. African countries have an opportunity to develop a strong preventive approach by conducting, for example, massive high-tech driven campaigns against parasitic diseases, malaria chemoprophylaxis and prophylactic antiretroviral medication to prevent HIV infection. The high-tech revolution is already underway. Rather than waiting in crowded hospitals, mobile services at the community-level are being developed. Mobile devices and telemedicine already support community nurses at the village level. For example, Rwanda recently incorporated drone technology into its system for delivering blood for transfusions. Rwanda is also using low-tech solutions to promote health. “Kigali has a car-free day every month to promote prevention and wellness through walking and cycling. Few European or American cities have been able to achieve this,” writes Matchaba.
Seven months ahead of the presidential election, Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta has decided to again change his prime minister. On 30 December 2017, IBK announced the nomination of Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, bringing back an experienced and well-known figure in Malian politics. Maïga becomes IBK’s fifth prime minister since his election in 2013. Born in 1954 in the northern city of Gao, and a journalist by training, Maïga is familiar with the internal politics, diplomacy and security issues of the country. He served as head of the Malian secret services under President Alpha Oumar Konaré and occupied several key ministerial posts, including in the foreign affairs and defence ministries. He resigned as defence minister following the military’s defeat against the Tuaregs during the May 2014 rebellion. Prior to his appointment, he served as secretary-general to the president from 2016 to 2017. While Maïga’s insider knowledge will be useful when it comes to the northern Mali security situation, his key responsibility may be preparing for IBK’s presidential campaign.