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SURPRISE RESULTS IN NIGERIAN ELECTIONS UNPRECEDENTED IN AFRICA AS PRESIDENT CONCEDES VICTORY TO OPPOSITION

Ethiopians, along with Africans all over the continent, are stunned! Out of 55 countries in Africa over the last 65 years, only five incumbent African leaders, according to [one report](#), have ever conceded victory to a political opponent. That is why it took so many people by surprise this past week when Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan of the *People's Democratic Party (PDP)*, who has been in office since 2010, conceded the 2015 election to the former Army General Muhammadu Buhari of the *All Progressives Congress (APC)*.

We in the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE)** both salute and congratulate President Goodluck Jonathan for making a decision unique to the continent of Africa. In fact, the election board had not even announced the results when President Jonathan called President-elect Buhari to graciously concede his own defeat and to congratulate Buhari on his win.

In an [official statement](#) to the public, President Jonathan said, "As I have always affirmed, nobody's ambition is worth the blood of any Nigerian. The unity, stability and progress of our dear country is more important than anything else."

Jonathan's extraordinary statement that personal ambition is not worth the bloodshed of any Nigerian is all the more incredible on a continent where power struggles have led to the loss of countless African lives, as power holders claim electoral victory despite the actual results—year after year after year. African elections are known for the bloodshed of the people and the brutal suppression of any who challenge them. This has been a nearly unprecedented move among many African countries like Ethiopia where their regime strongmen see democracy as simply a slippery word to grandly toss around in public while privately undermining any political space for their opponents.

This application of democratic values—rather than only empty rhetoric—from a defeated African president gave the people of Nigeria the victory. It will make President Jonathan a winner among Africans and his decision one that may be influential in encouraging freer, fairer, and more peaceful elections in at least some of the remaining 30 elections scheduled in African countries in the coming year. President Jonathan makes note of this in his statement:

"I congratulate all Nigerians for successfully going through the process of the March 28th General Elections with the commendable enthusiasm and commitment that was demonstrated nationwide....Today, the PDP [his party] should be celebrating rather than mourning. We have established a legacy of democratic freedom, transparency, economic growth and free and fair elections."

Ethnic, regional and religious differences could have triggered a backlash, particularly in the case of religious differences due to ongoing conflicts between Christians and Muslims in the north and also because Goodluck Jonathan is a Christian and Muhammadu Buhari a Muslim.

Many were worried the elections would bring about a religious-based bloodbath of violence that could lead to instability and chaos, like happened in the last election, but this decision helped avert potential problems. *It shows to everyone that when people and their leaders endorse God-given principles, valuing all Nigerians as people deserving of rights and liberty—putting humanity before ethnicity, religion or other differences—it can bring greater peace, freedom and justice to all—for no one is free until all are free.*

This is one of the best electoral outcomes for Africans since the formation of the African Union in the early nineteen-fifties. People who think that democracy cannot work in Africa due to tribal, religious and other differences can now see an example of success that proves it can be done—but it must continue, both in Nigeria as well as in other countries. The situations in these countries may differ, but the underlying principles do not. For example, among the many countries scheduled to hold elections this year, how many will put their people first, following the current example of President Jonathan? Current power holders, opposition leaders and even the citizens of the country should play a role in preventing ethnic, religious, and/or political-based violence and killing from breaking out. Yet, the best prevention is to open up political space and other democratic supports that will result in a free and fair election. Power holders should not give unlawful political advantages to their own groups.

In light of this, what lessons can Ethiopia, a country known for its strong, ethnic-apartheid policies and its brutal suppression of its citizens, learn from Nigeria? It may be too late for Ethiopia to remedy what has already been done in anticipation of the upcoming national election on May 24, 2015 because the outcome has already been determined by the illegal closure of all political space. The result would have been totally different if the sitting the ethnic apartheid regime of the TPLF/EPRDF allowed open participation, genuine debate regarding the issues, access to a free media, an independent election board and non-politicized institutions that were free to operate independently. Sadly, the regime in Ethiopia is known for its harsh suppression against any who oppose them and their manipulation of laws to ensure that Ethiopia's democratic leaders and activists are blocked or jailed. For example, the only current member of the opposition in the 547-member Ethiopian Parliament will not run this year as his party's leadership has been hijacked by the ruling party, even while maintaining the same name—Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)—a clever maneuver in a country where access to information is difficult.

In much the same way, Ethiopia enacted laws since the last election to take political control of civic institutions, effectively paralyzing a crucial sector of society necessary to any democracy. Similarly, an anti-terrorism law has silenced democratic voices with the very real threat of imprisonment should they not self-censor. Compared to Nigeria, the regime in Ethiopia has made it impossible for the people of Ethiopia to become the winners. The verdict is already in and they have nailed the final nail on the coffin of democracy. Ethiopia is run by a clique of tribal-based autocrats who put their own and their tribe's interests ahead of all others.

In Nigeria, the loser has become the winner who will be positively remembered for what he has done, but in Ethiopia the winner—the ruling party of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), controlled by the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF)—will be the loser along with all of the people of Ethiopia. There are no real winners in such a rigged election. So, what should Ethiopians do to change the future, even if it is not feasible for this election? What can Ethiopians learn from Nigerians to bring this kind of victory to the people in the future?

First, Ethiopians must understand that what is at stake is not a leader or a political party, but the whole system, meaning the national interests and the well being of all citizens of the country, including the minorities and majorities.

Secondly, those who are currently in leadership or wanting to lead Ethiopia must be humble, seeking to serve the people so that even if they lose the election, they can still be the winner. We said this in a letter to Kinijit or CUDP leaders in 2007.

This united party of the people had almost defeated the TPLF/EPRDF in the 2005 election, leading to their imprisonment for 18 months. However, after being freed, they became deeply divided in an internal power struggle that destroyed the movement. We urged them at the time to resolve their differences for the sake of the people, even if it meant significant compromises. What was at stake as a whole was greater than the achievement of individual goals. They did not do it. However, this is exactly what is now being displayed in Nigeria and it is working. ***Had the Kinijit or CUDP remained strong and united around common principles, we Ethiopians would not still be in this battle today. Let us heed these lessons so we uphold the best interests of the people of the country rather than goals for only our own groups.***

Every sector of Ethiopian society has been divided so to move ahead, those organizations and their leaders, should think about how the greater good can be accomplished even if they are not in power or in positions of leadership. Had Meles done this in 2005, he could have won the admiration of the people of Ethiopia and more than 200 precious lives of Ethiopians would have been saved. He would have gone into the history books as a winner.

Today in Ethiopia, the way things are heading is worrisome and the future looks grim. The ethnic apartheid regime of the TPLF/EPRDF has nurtured the hatred of the people as a way to stay in power. We, the people, should not be drawn in by it, becoming people filled with hate towards others. That is the outcome of this poison which can endanger all of us and lead to mutual destruction. Ethiopia has reached a tipping point that we must overturn in order to save Ethiopia from ourselves. It is not only the TPLF/EPRDF that must do this even though much of it originated there. To build a different future, we need opposition leaders, religious leaders, stakeholders, factions, secessionists and the average Ethiopian to rise up and do the unexpected—like has been shown to us in the example of President Jonathan. It is in our hands. May God help us.

Yet, the personal influence of leaders, for good or for bad, cannot be diminished. This is a lesson for those in such positions, from the top to the local community level. People follow leaders and when those leaders do the right things—putting personal ambitions aside, it has benefited many.

We in the SMNE believes that the means to bringing a lasting solution to Ethiopia can start by talking to each other, leading to a dialogue and then eventually to reconciliation among the people. As people see each other as fellow human beings, they are more likely to feel accountable to each other. Peace will probably not come to Ethiopia in the same way it did in Nigeria, but the principles are there from which to learn. The biggest one is that personal ambition in the public sphere nearly always leads to wrongs against others—including the loss of lives. Personal ambition never justifies the loss of even one life. The TPLF/EPRDF does not have a monopoly on personal ambition. It is a human flaw that must be kept in check by moral conscience, social expectations and by the rule of law.

May God help us Ethiopians honestly examine our hearts and minds so we might humble ourselves and do what is pleasing to God. ***Let our motives be more honorable and less self-serving so even personal defeat does not stand in the way of bringing a more lasting victory to all of the people of the country. It is such individuals, hopefully too many to count, who are willing to give up personal ambition for what is right who will be the real winners!***

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