



Let Us Take Warning: It is a Dangerous Time for Ethiopia

SMNE Press Release

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Washington, DC- On Wednesday, December 9, 2015 a group of courageous Oromo students from the Addis Ababa Science and Technology University made a strong statement of protest on behalf of Ethiopians at risk throughout the country!

As planned in advance, these students arrived early at the school's dining room. They took their food, sat down and then prayed together to God for their fallen brethren who had been killed and for the nation under attack. They then got up from their tables and left the food untouched; asking how they could eat while 15 million Ethiopians were at risk of starving in the coming months; while millions of farmers were losing their land; while thousands were in jail; and while tens were being killed for peacefully demanding their rights.

Their model of prayer, followed by peaceful and compassionate convicted action, is inspirational and one from which we can all learn. Its message, perhaps by plan, is not only geared to one ethnicity, one region or one religious group. Instead, it gives acknowledgement to the present and potential suffering of countless diverse Ethiopians due to famine, displacement, imprisonment and death at the hands of a government that is supposed to protect its people.

Ethiopia has been a country of disconnected parts; grieving, protesting, and suffering within those parts during one's own season of difficulty. When the current ethnic apartheid regime of the TPLF/EPRDF came into power in 1991 the TPLF targeted their own people who opposed them, then it was the Amhara they viewed as the enemy, then the professors at the University of Addis Ababa followed by the students who protested in reaction to it; then the Sidamo, the Anuak, the Kinijit election protestors, the Ethiopian Somalis in the Ogaden, the Afar, the Majanger, the people of Benishangul-Gumuz, the Berta in the South, the farmers on the border with Sudan, the Muslims, the journalists, democracy activists, opposition party leaders, city-dwellers, people of the Omo Valley and all along, the Oromo and too many others to mention them all.

The actions and words of these students connect the *parts* and the *seasons* together. **Can we Ethiopians see the suffering of our people as a whole or only as it happens to us or our own ethnic groups? Could God use the tragic images of our young people, whose bodies have been riveted with bullets and their blood covering their stilled bodies, as a bridge to feeling the sorrow of someone outside our own ethnic background? Could God use the threat of a far-reaching famine to help us to see the value of all our people—that someone else's "season" of suffering is of concern to oneself?**

Do members of the TPLF Central Committee grieve for the starving children? Do they see their own son's and daughter's in the death of the promising university student who was shot dead for simply standing up for their God-given rights, many of these rights being part of the Ethiopian Constitution?

Do they put themselves in the shoes of the student activist, recently arrested for peacefully protesting? Do they feel ashamed of robbing the poor farmer of his land or the city-dweller their homes so they can individually prosper? Are they convicted of pretending that the voices of strength are terrorists so their influence can be eliminated? Are they afraid what might happen in reaction to the injustices, corruption and lies they have committed? Will they be able to face reports of millions of Ethiopians dying largely because of their lies, inaction and failure to care about others? They could have helped create the breadbasket of abundance in Ethiopia; but instead, they stole the land, the dreams and the future of our people. How will they deal with this in the quiet moments of their lives?

Lest any of the rest of us feel superior, judgmental only of the TPLF/EPRDF; we, the people of Ethiopia, must also question ourselves. Have we simply dwelt on our own *part* or ethnic group? Have we cried only during our own *season* of grief, suffering and persecution and ignored the rest? What kind of people are we to be? Let us cry for our lack of caring. Let us weep for those we hated so much we forgot about their humanity. Let us repent of our callousness.

The ethnic apartheid regime of the TPLF/EPRDF can serve our impulse to project all the blame on them; thereby minimizing our own inaction, lack of compassion or unwillingness to forgive whole groups of people within our country. They are an easy target, but let us think about who God wants us to become rather than how we can advance ourselves at the cost to others. We need reconciliation; not only between our people, but with God—do we not? Let us not only blame the TPLF/EPRDF. **Let us look into our own hearts, souls and minds and be convicted of our own shortcomings. We Ethiopians are failing at many points. How can we recover, or be made anew, since many will question if we ever had what we seek now? If we do not change, how can we bring about a New Ethiopia? Think on these things as we enter a very dangerous period of time ahead where our action or inaction could either bring about the destruction of our people and country by our own hands or a country where we can live and thrive together.**

Ethiopians are in crisis and we see a reaction to it unfolding before our eyes; not only among these students, but in protests igniting across Ethiopia. They are taking place on many university campuses like in Ambo, Haromaya, Bule Hora, Addis Ababa, Mekelle, Jimma, and Dila. Although our youth are leading these protests; it is not only our youth who can no longer hide their growing frustrations with the repressive TPLF/ERPFD regime. Others are joining them from the local communities. The simmering tensions of the past years are erupting, but mostly in peaceful demonstrations like the one mentioned; however, federal police, military and security agents who see it as a threat to their power, have used fatal force in some cases, killing some students and injuring many others.

Let us take warning. It is a dangerous time. This is not only because of the likely strong-armed reaction from the TPLF/EPRDF; but also because a disjointed movement without a central command, shared goals and foundational principles based on God's truth about the value of every human being, regardless of our differences, can easily be defeated, hijacked by power-hungry and self-seeking others or devolve into something catastrophic that none of us want to see happen to our people and to our country.

There is reason for serious concern related to all three possibilities. What will you do? **As for us in the SMNE, we will try to continue to do our share and encourage people to start crossing bridges to talk with each other rather than about each other. This is the beginning of building a harmonious, more just, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous society for all; not only for one ethnic group or a few elite from that group.**

We call on the TPLF/ERPFD to restrain yourselves. **Do not kill or injure our precious students. Too much blood has already been spilt on this land and too many tears shed by our mothers.** Today, this text was received from one of these mothers. She said: *“I sent my son to school in October; I received his body back for burial in December.”* **This could be any mother or father. This could be anybody’s child, including your own—the daughters and sons of the TPLF leaders. How many more Ethiopians will receive their loved ones coming back to their homes in boxes? It must stop.**

You, the leaders of TPLF rose up to take on injustice when you were young. **Just like your own children, these young people are full of dreams and hope for a better Ethiopia; but if they are thwarted at every turn, we will all lose, including you. Rend your hearts, make changes and bring reforms. Do not hold onto empty, meaningless things that will make you empty people; holding “everything” but having no hope or future. Reform yourselves first and let us Ethiopians do the same. We are in an impossible situation to resolve without violence unless God convicts each of us of what we must do and we listen. Ask for forgiveness and forgive your brothers and sisters. Correct wrongs done in the past to the best of your ability.**

Think about the death toll from the famine and of the dying or orphaned children. Can you handle the accusations once all is known? Can you face yourself, your family, your Creator? The outcome from repressing the reality of a famine and hunger is unthinkable! Do not do it! Change! You can be restored! Give freedom and justice to all people equally. Think on these things! Not just you, but let us all think on these things! Put humanity before ethnicity or any other differences; caring about their freedom as we care about our own because no one ethnic group is free until all ethnic groups are free!

May God bring healing to the wounds of Ethiopians so we can rise up, not alone, but together; not in protest, but in joy!

Thank you for what each of you is willing to do to bring God’s peace, justice, freedom and love to Ethiopia.

May the ancient and living God who watches over Ethiopia teach us a better way! May He renew our land and restore His people! Let us open our eyes and our ears to the truth that truly sets us free at last!

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