



Ethiopians Call on the Donor Countries and International Community to Break the Silence and Condemn the Killing of Unarmed Student Protestors

Press Release

*December 15, 2015, Washington, DC, --*Tensions have broken out in the Oromia region of Ethiopia in reaction to the Ethiopian government's implementation of the Addis Ababa Master Plan, which will force Oromo farmers from their land, with little or no compensation. In response, over the last several weeks, thousands of young Oromo students across the region have held peaceful protests at university campuses; however, the authoritarian ethnic-apartheid regime of the TPLF/EPRDF is panicking.

In historical fashion, they have brought out the guns. Already, some 60 students and other local people who have joined them, have been killed and 600 or more wounded. Such a strong-armed response is highly dangerous, especially in a country where discontent and outrage is already palpable on the streets. No avenues for political expression exist. The Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), controlled by its TPLF Central Committee of less than fifty people, dominates the coalition party of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), in power since 1991. It has become increasingly repressive. **As some will know, the EPRDF claimed an absurd 100% victory in the May 2015 national election, ensuring that every seat in the Ethiopian Parliament is held by an EPRDF member. There is not a single opposition member in that position.**

We, in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), a non-political, non-violent social justice movement of diverse Ethiopians, **have been warning those in the international community for the past year or more regarding the strong likelihood that the hard-lined policies of the regime could become the source of their own instability. It appears to be happening. A deep concern is that it may soon be too late to de-escalate the present situation since the TPLF/EPRDF violence has already served as a rallying cry for others to join. Even if opportunities to intervene are taken, the situation still could easily explode into widespread violence, chaos, and instability in this strategic country in the Horn of Africa.**

To make matters worse, allegedly, the TPLF/EPRDF has warned Western embassies in Addis Ababa against making any public statements or releasing any information regarding the uprising. Reportedly, members of the embassies were told that news of the uprising could result in turning Ethiopia into another Syria. It is amazing how the TPLF/EPRDF's aversion to information has reached to the US, the UK, the EU and others, in an effort to silence them. This may explain why since it started; there has been no condemnation of the killing or calls for restraints from anyone in the West. The international community, especially donor countries, can make a dangerous miscalculation by becoming complicit with the TPLF/EPRDF through their silence. Instead, this apartheid regime of the TPLF/EPRDF should be condemned for the brutal killing of these unarmed students who were not threatening violence.

In a previous SMNE article, [*Let Us Take Warning: It is a Dangerous Time for Ethiopia*](#), a group of students from the Addis Ababa Science and Technology University were highlighted for the way they stood up in protest for what they believed. These students went early to their school cafeteria for their meal. They got their food and then sat down and prayed, with their arms crossed at the wrists and their heads lowered, for their fallen brethren and for a nation under attack.

They then refused to eat, 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 [now 60 persons] were being killed for peacefully demanding their rights.” They then got up and left. They could have chosen violence, but did not. Now these same students are considered a threat to the regime for refusing to eat their food.

They were not alone in their peaceful protest. In other places, students also showed their solidarity by again crisscrossing their wrists and raising their arms while lowering their heads. People recovering and working in hospitals are doing the same—raising their arms from their hospital beds or windows. Farmers are boycotting the market place as a way to show their outrage in a peaceful way, also raising their arms in a unified response.

At a recent funeral, people stood together with the protestors as a means of showing solidarity. The young from elementary schools, along with the old, are informally joining in these peaceful demonstrations of opposition to the regimes’ many injustices. One elderly woman’s picture was taken as she walked with the protestors, holding a cane. Those who care about human rights and advancing the freedom and rights of others should be supporting this peaceful protest. It is unconscionable that donor countries have given in, thus far, to this strong-armed regime by remaining silent.

Despite the efforts of the regime to suppress the information, news of what is happening is spreading quickly and broadly through the social media. The documentation is not lacking, but abundant, as graphic images of new victims of regime atrocities circulate online on an almost hourly basis due to access to new technology. People can identify the victims and their names. Pictures of the dead and wounded are shown next to their past pictures. The majority have died by the bullet from federal security agents. The images are unimaginable.

Because some of the police are taking off their uniforms and joining the people, the TPLF/EPRDF are now blocking roads from public use, while using helicopters to drop off security agents in these regions where they are committing more human rights atrocities. **Now, it is reported that the Oromia region, previously under the control of one of the four ethnic-based parties making up the EPRDF coalition, the Oromo Peoples Democratic Movement (OPDM), has lost its regional authority. No longer will the region be governed by Oromo, even if it was a pro-government party; but instead, the TPLF-run government will assume its control. This is a move certain to outrage the largest ethnic group in the nation, the Oromo. With all of these things happening; as of today, it seems the problem is getting further and further out of hand.**

Right now, the conflict is being played out between increasing numbers of mobilized troops with guns and the students and local people who simply want their rights. At present, it is an uprising contained within the Oromia region, comprised of mostly Oromo and led by people on the ground; but, if it expands into a nationwide protest, it may be difficult, if not impossible to contain. **For donor countries to remain silent out of fear could easily trigger greater instability. It is an unsustainable position. In fact, silence from donors, especially those who promote democracy, peace, non-violence and the rule of law, could backfire as Ethiopians see all avenues to change blocked, making it necessary to take the matter into their own hands. Key stakeholders must be aware of this. The crisis should be contained rather than be ignored.**

The US, the UK, the EU and others foreign policy of delaying action until a situation or country explodes has not worked in many cases, like in South Sudan where proactive intervention could have prevented what is now going on. **In the case of Ethiopia, donor foreign policymakers have been reluctant to confront the unjust ethnic apartheid system of government in the country for fear of creating instability; however, ignoring its basic nature is actually going to also backfire; and when it does, the poor people will be the victims.** It will all be exacerbated as the [impending famine, hunger and starvation worsens in the coming months.](#)

Based on all these things, we call on the donor countries to openly condemn the repression and violence and to use your leverage as a means to bring about a dialogue leading towards a meaningful and sustainable solution in the best interests of all the people. This should include objective media coverage.

The people of Ethiopia are already working to find a way to collaborate together in building a better future for all the people. Once this is achieved and it becomes a nationwide effort; the TPLF regime will be done. **This is a time to side with the people instead of with a dying regime. Support for an autocratic regime, while speaking the rhetoric about caring about Ethiopian's democratic and economic development, must change.**

Recommendations:

- We call on the US, the UK, the EU and others donor countries to publically make a statement condemning the killing of the innocent people and to use your leverage to press for a dialogue leading to democratic change.
- We call on the TPLF/ERPFD regime to demonstrate restraint and to instead enter into serious dialogue, leading to meaningful reforms, the restoration of justice and reconciliation.
- We call on the TPLF/ERPFD to release all the young people arrested as well as other political prisoners.
- We call on the TPLF/ERPFD to open access to roads, blocked by national defense forces, making it possible for people to travel within Oromia.
- We call on human rights groups to become involved.
- We call on the TPLF/ERPFD to cease the implementation of the Addis Ababa Master Plan until there is meaningful consultation with the people and full compliance with the Ethiopian Constitution, as determined by an independent body.
- We call on the people of Ethiopia to work together, including protesting together in a peaceful, non-violent manner. Avoid making this a tribal protest or a tribal issue as this is about freedom, justice, equality, good governance, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, the rule of law and upholding the human rights of all our people.
- We call on Ethiopians to start talking to each other rather than about each other; putting humanity before ethnicity or other differences and caring about the rights, freedom and well being of all our people for no one is free until all are free.

Let us reject ethnic-apartheid ideology TPLF/ERPFD and ethnocentric groups where one ethnic group or a few elite thrive at the expense of everyone else while the majority struggles to survive.

Let us join together in using this powerful symbol of non-violent protest; not for one ethnicity, but for all of us Ethiopians. As we cross our arms and bow our heads, let us to pray to God for the transformation of our hearts, souls and minds and for the wisdom, generosity, integrity and fortitude to build trust among ourselves so we might create a new and true government of the people, by the people and for all the people.

May God protect Ethiopians from choosing the wrong paths that will inflict harm to others and may lead to our mutual destruction.

For more information, contact Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE. Email:
Obang@solidaritymovement.org