



A CALL FOR ETHIOPIANS TO LAY OUT STEPS LEADING TO A TRANSITION TO INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY: THE ONLY REAL WAY OUT OF THIS CRISIS

PRESS RELEASE. FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 15, 2018. (Washington, DC)— Ethiopia is in political turmoil. The desperate inner conditions of the country have not matched its publicly acclaimed narrative for many years; so, the crisis of today was to be expected. The autocratic rule of the TPLF/EPRDF has come up against the greatest resistance of its 27 years rule, with its end in sight.

To the international community, the TPLF/EPRDF cited double-digit economic growth, the unity of the people around its governance model of ethnic federalism, its role as a beacon of peace and stability and a critically important partner in the War on Terror.

To most of the people of Ethiopia, the TPLF/EPRDF is an authoritarian regime that is dominated by one of its four ethnic-based party members, the TPLF. The TPLF has shown favoritism towards its own ethnic group over all others; doling out opportunities, privileges and power accordingly, until their representatives dominated every sector of society.

Political space has disappeared, opposition leaders and democratic voices have been jailed or forced to flee the country, civil society has been closed down through laws like the Charities and Societies Proclamation, land and resources have been grabbed, and economic advantages have been reserved for the entitled few, contributing to the perception of double-digit economic growth, despite the majority remaining in poverty.

The TPLF/EPRDF used deception, exaggeration, lies and salesmanship to convince the international community that no one but the TPLF/EPRDF could be trusted as a partner in the War on Terror in the Horn of Africa. Repression of alternative voices created a handy vacuum to other alternatives to this autocratic regime.

THE TPLF/EPRDF IS CRUMBLING BEFORE OUR EYES AS THE DEMAND FOR RIGHTS INCREASES

The repressive nature of the regime has been largely ignored by the United States of America and international community. Its core foundation, based on a type of ethnic-apartheid governance, has never been strongly challenged. **The TPLF/EPRDF's claim to be the only ones capable of maintaining the stability of the country and of the Horn of Africa, have convinced the United States of America and international donor community to shore up the weakening foundation of TPLF/ERPFD rule, in spite of all its faults. Ironically, the critical flaws of the TPLF/EPRDF system have been building over the last 27 years and they have now become the source of their own instability. The TPLF/EPRDF is crumbling before our eyes and we are witnesses to that.**

The demand by the people for their freedom and rights has been intensifying over the last three years and shows no signs of diminishing. The TPLF/EPRDF has used lethal force against unarmed people, including many youth, which has resulted in the death of thousands of people. A state of emergency has been put into effect twice in the past with detrimental effects to the country. Though some want to call a third state of emergency now; this time it is being challenged.

Now, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn has given his notice of resignation as prime minister and as the chair of the EPRDF. The people are worried about the future, especially because there has been a vacuum of leadership and significant fear that ethnic divisions will explode.

On a very positive note, in the last two days, the TPLF/EPRDF has released many political prisoners, including some of the strongest leaders and democratic spokespersons. This is encouraging and this newly taken direction may open up the alternative that did not exist earlier.

CALL TO THE PEOPLE FOR CALM

We call on the people to remain calm and restrained. Let us rise above the expectation that Ethiopians will commit ethnic-based violence. The TPLF/EPRDF, including the former prime minister, Meles Zenawi, used this threat to sell outsiders on the need to continue to support the TPLF/EPRDF.

Let us prove to be different from what the TPLF/EPRDF has threatened and tried to repeatedly incite. This has been a key part of the narrative used to maintain TPLF/EPRDF control; without ever acknowledging their role in stirring up dissension or committing the acts themselves under hidden pretenses.

The Ethiopian people have shown an overwhelmingly strong commitment to peaceful demonstrations of protest, despite harsh crackdowns over the last three years, with only a few exceptions. The TPLF/EPRDF have tried to incite violence, but most of the time, the people have not responded as they expected.

We, the people of Ethiopia, have lived together for centuries. We are family and neighbors; not only sharing land, but sharing blood. We can restrain ourselves and do the right thing. Emotional outbursts of anger or revenge for injustice will easily backfire; instead, let us be patient for justice until our institutions are restored. We especially want to take a stand on behalf of Tigrayans who fear being targeted. This cannot be tolerated and will never be accepted. All of us should deeply care for the safety and protection of these fellow Ethiopians.

WE HAVE EMERGING LEADERS AS WELL AS MORE VOCAL LEADERS WHO SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

We should also take note that Ethiopians are not without leaders. Some of these leaders may have been silenced, censored, or imprisoned in the past, but many more are emerging and taking a stand for justice for all Ethiopians. We also know there are capable Ethiopians from every ethnicity, religious group and walk of life, who love all the people of Ethiopia like they love themselves, who could sit down together tomorrow and come up with a plan for a dialogue, reconciliation and transitional plan for the country. Such a plan could bring greater peace and wellbeing; not only to Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, but to the world.

Some of these leaders are those former political prisoners who were just released, as well as other esteemed leaders, elders, religious leaders, our women, and our youth who have given so much as champions of the struggle for democratic change. They could all play a significant role. We also have people in the Diaspora who could contribute, so there is no need to panic. Nor is there reason to listen to short-sighted narratives that attempt to persuade outsiders that the TPLF/EPRDF are the only ones capable of maintaining the peace, stability and the national interests of donor countries. New voices are rising up with new alternatives not readily available before.

What we are saying can be proven by the statements we recently heard from some of the newly released democratic leaders in the country, like Bekele Gerba, Eskinder Nega, Merera Gudina, Andualem Andarge, Muslim leaders and many more. They are calling for discipline among the people, to not destroy property and to protect each other as one people. Instead of hate or bitterness, these voices are calling for a unity around shared values and goals, thus enabling a peaceful transitional approach. This is our country at a crossroads and our people are being put to the test. With God's help, we can do it!

WHAT WILL BE OUR LEGACY TO OUR DESCENDANTS?

We know the future looks grim and things are unpredictable; yet, our history also tells us of other times Ethiopians have been tested for their survival as a people and a country. At these times, the people unified and responded in a way that led Ethiopia to stand together as one people, all created equally in the image of God. Those Ethiopians of the past give us a sense of who we are today. In the same way, how we Ethiopians react now will be recorded by our descendants.

Our response should be nothing less than standing as one family and one people, doing the right thing and protecting every life of all Ethiopians living throughout the country, including those who have done us wrong. We should not take the law into our own hands.

CAN WE WORK TOGETHER? THE TPLF/EPRDF COULD HELP CHANGE THE OUTCOME FOR GOOD

Right now, the TPLF/EPRDF have made the right decision to release the political prisoners. It is a good step, but not good enough. They have to realize that the Ethiopia for which we are fighting, will include them if we are able to bring justice, freedom and reconciliation to the country. It will also be a gift to their descendants as well as ours.

We are not enemies of each other. We are family, like brothers and sisters who disagree. For the sake of our descendants, we can solve this conflict peacefully. We should not be blinded to the humanity of each other. We will be judged by how we handle this crisis.

This is especially the challenge to those of you in the TPLF/EPRDF, because you have the bullets and guns. Do not pull the trigger on your people and country. Do not pull the trigger on our shared future and that of our children. Instead, extend out your hand to ours, to shake hands with us on a better future. Nothing can be solved without talking. Let's start talking to each other, not about each other, seeing our shared, value. Let us embrace each other, not reject each other. Let us humble ourselves before God and each other so that we can avoid the trap of pride, resentment and greed that will lead us to our mutual destruction. We all know what is right to do; let us do it.

We call on all the people of Ethiopia, including those in the TPLF/EPRDF, to work together to find a peaceful solution to this crisis. The TPLF/EPRDF can totally change the future for the better by admitting that they have come to the end of their rule and by becoming willing contributors to a transition to genuine democracy. We highly caution the TPLF/EPRDF from establishing military rule in the country as it could backfire. It is a dangerous alternative that could lead to destruction; however, the military could play a positive role in protecting the people instead of protecting and prolonging a dying TPLF/EPRDF. The military is made up of our people. We invite the military to be part of the solution for democratic change in Ethiopia. It is time.

A CALL TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS

We call on the religious leaders of Ethiopia to encourage our people to pray for a peaceful, inclusive and effective transition to a new Ethiopia where humanity comes before ethnicity or any other differences and where the freedom, justice and wellbeing of all our people are respected for no one is free until all are free.

A CALL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

We call on the international community to support democratic change in Ethiopia and efforts to implement a peaceful solution to the conflict which will bring robust democratic freedom and more sustainable peace to all Ethiopians.

A CALL FOR A COMMON STATEMENT OF INTENT TO LAY OUT STEPS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC TRANSFORMATION OF ETHIOPIA

We also call for the development of a statement of intent from leaders leading to a national dialogue, reconciliation and robust democratic reforms. This is not about political party but instead about establishing a democratic foundation for the next steps necessary to begin an effective and sustainable transition to a free, just and reconciled Ethiopia.

INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY: THIS IS THE ONLY REAL WAY OUT OF THIS CRISIS

May God help us!

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