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## A CALL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

### WILL YOU URGE THE GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PRINCIPLE-BASED ACTION PLAN TO BRING POLITICAL STABILITY AND A PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO DEMOCRATIC REFORMS IN ETHIOPIA?

March 20, 2018

To whom it concerns:

Ethiopia is in political turmoil. After 27 years of increasingly autocratic rule under the **Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)**, Ethiopians are demanding change. As a means to that change, they are seeking an inclusive national dialogue, leading to reconciliation and genuine democratic reforms. We are pleased that many members of the international community have already endorsed this plan as the best means to bring democratic rights and stability to this strategic country in the Horn of Africa. Unfortunately, at the same time, the government seeks to declare a state of emergency, adding further restrictions to an already tense environment that could backfire, causing greater instability and even violence.

The purpose of this letter is to call on you to urge the current Government of Ethiopia to engage in an inclusive national dialogue with the people of Ethiopia, leading to the development of a principle-based road map and action plan to bring political stability and peaceful transition to a more democratic, reconciled and just Ethiopia.

My name is Obang Metho. As the executive director of the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE)**, I come to you on behalf of the SMNE as well as on behalf of countless Ethiopians who seek greater freedom and justice in their country of birth.

The SMNE is a non-violent, non-political, grassroots social justice movement of diverse Ethiopians, formed in 2008 to advance truth, justice, freedom, equality, reconciliation, accountability and respect for the human rights of all Ethiopians; motivated by the truth: “**no one will be free until all are free.**” We have been working to mobilize Ethiopians in the Diaspora and within Ethiopia to unite in a coalition across ethnic, regional, political, cultural, gender and religious lines to build a society where “**humanity comes before ethnicity**” or any other differences.

Our work has included international human rights advocacy, raising awareness, refugee advocacy, investigation and analysis, reconciliation work, networking and coalition building. Our goal is to be a catalyst in bringing about a “New Ethiopia” where robust freedoms, the rule of law, transparency, respect for human rights, equal opportunity and good governance are grounded on the God-given dignity and worth of every human being.

## **CONDITIONS ON THE GROUND DO NOT MATCH EPRDF NARRATIVE**

The EPRDF's publicly acclaimed narrative does not match the desperate inner conditions of the country. The crisis of today does not come by surprise, but has been building for years; yet, the autocratic rule of the EPRDF has recently come up against the greatest and most effective resistance of its 27 years rule, with its end in sight.

To the international community, the 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 as a critically important partner in the War on Terror.

To most of the people of Ethiopia, the ruling party of the EPRDF is an authoritarian political coalition of four ethnic-based party members, controlled by one of the four, the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). The other members include the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement (SEPDM). These represent four of the nine regions in Ethiopia. Three out of four of the parties represent the one major ethnic group of the region they represent. Only the SEPDM has multiple ethnicities attached to them. In the last national election in 2015, the unpopular EPRDF won 100% of the seats.

This political arrangement leaves little representation for the majority of the 80 or more ethnic groups that make up Ethiopia. The TPLF, as the dominating party, plays favorites with those from their own ethnic group, the Tigray, who have access to opportunities, privileges and power, denied to most others. As a result, they dominate and control almost every sector of society, including the military, causing great resentment.

Political space has disappeared, opposition leaders and democratic voices have been jailed or forced to flee the country, independent civil society has been closed down through laws like the Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSO), 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 EPRDF has used deception, exaggeration, lies, threats and salesmanship to convince the international community that no one but the EPRDF could be trusted as a partner in the War on Terror in the Horn of Africa, nor capable of running the country. Repression of alternative voices created a handy vacuum to other alternatives to this autocratic regime.

## **THE EPRDF—ESPECIALLY TPLF CONTROL OF THE EPRDF— IS CRUMBLING BEFORE OUR EYES AS INCREASING PROTESTS CONTINUE WITH THE DEMAND FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS**

The repressive nature of the regime has been largely ignored in the past by the US and other members of the international community. Its core foundation—based on a type of ethnic-apartheid governance— has never been strongly challenged. *The 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 continuously prop up the weakening foundation of TPLF-dominated EPRDF rule, in spite of all its faults. Ironically, the critical flaws of the EPRDF system have been building over the last 27 years and they have now become the source of their own instability. The TPLF domination of the 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 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 in the past with detrimental effects to the country. Though some want to call another state of emergency now; this time it is being challenged.

In the last two weeks, 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 week, the EPRDF has released thousands of political prisoners, including some of the strongest leaders and democratic spokespersons, although, thousands of other political prisoners still remain in custody. Yet, this is an encouraging development. We hope this newly taken direction will open up the alternative that did not exist earlier.

### **CALL TO THE PEOPLE FOR CALM**

We know the future looks grim and that what happens next is 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.

We, in the SMNE, have called on the people to remain calm and restrained. We trust our people will rise above the fears that Ethiopians will commit ethnic-based or religious sectarian violence. The EPRDF, including the former prime minister, Meles Zenawi, used this threat to sell outsiders on the need to continue to support the EPRDF. Yet, it is the EPRDF that is most likely to be the perpetrators; yet once started, violence could be ignited.

The EPRDF has incited fear that without them in charge, Ethiopia will descend into chaos. On the other hand, they have repeatedly incited conflict and division. This has been a key part of the narrative used to maintain EPRDF control; without ever acknowledging their own role in stirring up dissension or committing the acts themselves under hidden pretenses so as to blame others.

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. When the EPRDF has tried to incite violence, on the majority of occasions, the people wisely 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. Emotional outbursts of anger or revenge for injustice might surface here and there; but in general, our people impatiently, but non-violently, wait for justice and restoration of their institutions and rights.

We, in the SMNE, have also called on the Ethiopian people to take a stand to protect the Tigrayans, many who do not agree with the TPLF, but fear being targeted, as the TPLF has wrongly used their name to advance and protect their rule.

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

We should also take note that Ethiopia is 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 care about all the people of Ethiopia. They represent a growing number of Ethiopians 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 EPRDF is the only group 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, Ethiopians can do it!*

## **CAN WE WORK TOGETHER?**

We believe reconciliation and restorative justice could mend much of the conflict between the people of Ethiopia. We do not need to be 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.

## **THE EPRDF COULD HELP CHANGE THE OUTCOME FOR GOOD**

Right now, the EPRDF has 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 to ours.

We have called on those in the EPRDF, to work together to find a peaceful solution to this crisis. The 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 EPRDF from establishing military rule in the country as it could backfire. It is a dangerous alternative that could lead to destruction; however, a non-politicized military could play a positive role in protecting the people instead of protecting and prolonging a dying regime. The military is made up of our people. We have invited the military to be part of the solution for democratic change in Ethiopia.

## **A CALL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

In the last few days, especially since the news of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn's resignation and the initial declaration of a state of emergency, we are pleased to see the international community clearly voicing its stand against it. We welcome this support; but yet, we call for more. We hope the international community can provide needed pressure on the TPLF/EPRDF to engage in an inclusive national dialogue resulting in the creation of a road map to a peaceful solution to the conflict and one which will bring robust democratic freedom and more sustainable peace to all Ethiopians. We urge the international community to strongly call for such a process to begin where by all stakeholders in Ethiopian affairs are meaningfully involved in a transparent process.

## **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 that will begin the process leading to a national dialogue, reconciliation and robust democratic reforms. This is not about political party, but instead, it is 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](#)**