



Press Release
Setting Priorities Right
22nd June 2009

In this third statement we succinctly provide our understanding of the state of the Ethiopian Nation, and close by indicating pointers where Ethiopia's national priorities need to focus at the present time. The statement is based on the preliminary study that has been conducted by our Priorities Identification Task Force. The Task Force outlined three interrelated thematic areas. They are (i) civil society and democratization; (ii) conflict prevention and resolution; and (iii) governance and sovereignty. A number of complex issues are enveloped in the three thematic areas. The details are available for review. The priority issues identification process is evolving, and innovative approaches to the process are welcome.

By the end of 2009 the population of Ethiopia is estimated to be more than 80 million. It is expected to grow at an annual rate of 3%; reaching 170 million by the year 2030. Much of the population growth did happen during the last two decades. The population growth is occurring at a time when the country is also engulfed in an endless cycle of conflict and an unresolved election crisis. The country's meager resources are wasted in defending a regime that continues to remain in power through the barrel of the gun. The aid propelled economy is in its worst form. The slight GDP growth is thwarted by hyperinflation due to irresponsible fiscal and monetary policy. The hyperinflation economy has exacerbated the already widespread abject poverty, migration, and hunger that are unrelated to the global food shortage. Distressing images of poverty and hunger continue to come out of Ethiopia. Despite the regime's deafening propaganda about "growth" and "renaissance", the hard reality is that Ethiopia is at the tail end of world development and social and political turmoil.

The regime's carefully designed ethnic politics has been the root cause of death and displacement, and wanton destruction inside Ethiopia and the failed State of Somalia. In an unprecedented twist of democracy, unheard of, and frowned upon in any part of the world, the integrity and sovereignty of the country have been undermined by a regime that captured the levers of political power through violence in May 1991. Shades of differences in culture, language and social values were and are promoted; while the shared commonalities of values and heritage continue to be undermined; leading to a predatory governance system that favors the alliance of minority ethnic groups that excludes and dehumanizes the majority ethnic groups. All these are done not just because of TPLF/EPRDF leadership's gross incompetence, but to ensure the continuation of the tyrannical rule of a regime that has been in power for the last 19 years. This has been reaffirmed by the recent press statements of Ato Sebhat Nega, the founder of the TPLF that is now in control of Ethiopia. This socio-political engineering and horrific crimes have raised a number of local and international concerns. The latest one is Genocide Watch's initiative and the preoccupation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on whether or not Ethiopia's leaders should face international indictment. This is a huge embarrassment to 80 million Ethiopians.

Independent human rights advocacy groups and the broader Ethiopian civil society continue to be attacked and undermined by the regime. Since the Genocide Watch's initiative was made public, the onslaught on civil societies and political parties has increased. It has closed down all the avenues for national dialogue. It has promulgated a repressive law against nongovernmental organizations. It has drafted an anti-terrorism law that can be easily equated as State of Emergency Laws. The closure of the political space is supported by the continued control of the national economy by the TPLF/EPRDF and its supporters, and by the so called endowment companies that are administered by the regime's top leadership; which in turn has demonstrated one of the worst forms of corruption that warrant international investigation. The leaders and members of civil society organizations that are engaged in advocacy work are routinely harassed, imprisoned, forced into exile, and at times assassinated by the regime's security forces simply because the regime sees them as sources of information about gross human rights violations, genocide, crimes against humanity and wanton destruction - serious allegations that have the potential to bring law suit against the TPLF/EPRDF leadership by the International Criminal Court.

On the political front, the winners of the ill fated May 15, 2005 election were thrown to jail; and the fraudsters of the stolen election unashamedly declared a State of Emergency on a twisted logic of "protecting the constitution." TPLF/EPRDF leadership gave the instruction to kill; the result was the massacre of at least 193 innocent civilians, and the mass internment of some 40,000 people in concentration camps. Those who committed this horrific crime continue to operate with impunity. According to the U.S. State Department's 2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, there are tens of thousands political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in the country. The election crisis of May 2005 remains unresolved. New armed groups continue to be created, and there is no indication that the old ones are exiting the political scene. The legal opposition is under extreme difficulty. The regime continues to jail popularly elected political leaders like Miss Birtukan Mideksa, the President of the Unity, Democracy and Justice Party, and others. As of late the political crisis is engulfing the army whose top brass comes from a minority ethnic group.

EPRDF's reckless diplomacy continues to compromise Ethiopia's national sovereignty and interests. The diplomacy followed by the regime is based on appeasement of certain powers rather than the promotion of national interest and regional cooperation. It has been instrumental in the creation of a landlocked country that is inhabited by over 80 million people. TPLF/EPRDF's leadership shamelessly argues that a sea port is not necessary for development. Its wicked policy on Eritrea; the gross incompetence it has demonstrated on the Algiers Agreement; its problematic dealings with the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission, and the senseless invasion of Somalia, have brought national shame not only to the civilian population and career diplomats, but to the army which is now in turmoil. TPLF's involvement in Somalia has internationalized Somalia's internal conflict.

Hence, the root cause of the crisis in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa today is the lack of a competent, visionary and democratically elected leadership. Meles Zenawi has been at the helm of the MLLT/TPLF/EPRDF machinery for nearly a quarter of a century; and all indications are

that he will try to remain in power. EPRDF's inability to make way for new leadership even within its own ranks vividly shows the nature of the organization. In other words, the present leadership is an obstacle to the prevention of conflict and the democratization of Ethiopia. Therefore civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ethiopia and in the Diaspora cannot remain silent when the country continues to be embroiled in a series of conflict, fragmentation, migration and abject poverty. CSOs inside the country and in the Diaspora, without losing their identity and specialization, should resolve to act in unison to bring an end to the suffering of our people, find a space for rights advocacy and development work, engage in conflict mediation and resolution as well as struggle for free and fair election.

We, the founders of the Ethiopian National Priority Consultative Process (www.enpcp.org) are determined to contribute, in whatever way we can, to alleviate the suffering of our people. Let us join hands before it is too late! To this effect, we shall have a preparatory conference in Chicago - ENPCP Chicago Conference, Plenary Session 2nd July 2009, 1:00 to 7:00 P.M., at The Westin O'Hare Hotel, 6100 North River Road, Rosemont, IL 60018, telephone: 1-847-698-6000 and hotel reservation: 1-866-716-8104. Join us in Chicago and deliberate on national issues, review the process and prepare new resolutions. The door is open. The conference program is available at www.enpcp.org and other Ethiopian websites. In our next statement, we will communicate on the deliberation and resolution of the Chicago Conference. Stay tuned!

May God Bless Ethiopia!

For further information contact the ENPCP Secretariat: Secretariat@ENPCP.org

Also visit our web site: www.enpcp.org, www.enpcp.net