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ALL ETHIOPIA SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (ME'ISONE)

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AIDE-MEMOIRE
ON ME'ISONE AND THE PERESPECTIVES OF
THE STRUGGLE
IN ETHIOPIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. ME'ISONE's place on the Ethiopian political scene

A. Our differences with the military regime

1. Democratic rights
2. The right of nationalities
3. National independence
4. Economic policy

B. ME'ISONE and the nationality movements

1. Composition
2. Objectives

II. ME'ISONE'S perspectives

A. The assets

B. Short and long-term perspectives

1. Immediate problems and tasks
2. Long-term tasks

III. The need for international solidarity

A. Political support

B. Material support for political work

C. Solidarity with victims of repression in Ethiopia

D. Solidarity with Ethiopian refugees.

AIDE-MEMOIRE
ON ME'ISONE AND THE PERSPECTIVES OF
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I. ME'ISONE'S PLACE ON THE ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL SCENE

The place held by ME'ISONE on the Ethiopian political scene is unique in many ways. It is an "All Ethiopia" and "Socialist" organisation whose political stands and aspirations differ both from those of the military government and the various nationality movements struggling against the regime. These differences with the various political forces in the country can be summed up as follows:

A. Our differences with the military regime:

Among the opposition groups operating in the country, ME'ISONE is the only organisation that once shared state power with the military regime. During this period (December 1975-August 1977), members of ME'ISONE participated in the government as Ministers and high functionnaires, governors of regions, advisors to the Military Council and political cadres in the "Provisional Office for Mass Organisational Affairs". They were also elected to leadership posts in the workers', peasants', neighbourhood associations and other democratic organisations. The break with the military regime came in August 1977, when it became clear that it was abandoning the commitments that were undertaken when the alliance was formed. The differences, as they developed from early 1977, revolve around four main issues which we consider as crucial for the future of Ethiopia and its people.

1. Democratic rights:

ME'ISONE stands for full democratic liberties including the right to organize political parties. Contrary to its promises, the Derg has denied the Ethiopian people all the basic human and democratic rights. It has dismantled the democratic mass organisations, outlawed all political groups, imprisoned thousands of democrats and patriots, and forced over 2 million people into exile.

It has now instaurated a one-party military dictatoship in the country.

2. The Right of Nationalities to self-determination:

ME'ISONE has always stood for the right of nationalities to self-determination and struggled for a united Ethiopia based on democratic principles and the absolute equality of all it's nationalities. On the contrary, the military regime has embarked on a policy of chauvinist repression against the oppressed nationalities in the country. The kind of "unity" advocated by the military regime is one based on the force of arms and the supremacy of one nationality over all the others in the country.

3. National Independance

As you know, Ethiopia has often been portrayed as a country with a glorious tradition of a rich and enduring civilisation. Except for the brief fascist occupation in 1936-41, it is known as a country which has maintained its independance even during the hay days of colonial expansion. There is much the present generations of Ethiopians is proud of in this heritage. ME'ISONE is a patriotic organisation. Revolution has never meant and will never mean rejection of the tremendous and proud heritage of the Ethiopian past. During the years prior to Soviet involvement in the country, we struggled against American domination. After 1977, we strongly opposed Soviet domination and stood for a policy of constant non-alignment. The regime has on the other hand transformed our country into a satellite of the Soviet Union and an instrument of the latter's expansionist policy in Africa.

4. Economic Policy

ME'ISONE stands for an economic policy essentially geared to the needs of the vast majority of the Ethiopian people. It advocates the rational use of the country's immense human and natural ressources so as to stamp out mass famine, poverty, ignorance and disease in the shortest possible time. The appropriate policy to achieve these objectives is a planned economy coupled with the presence and encouragement of a dynamic private sector. The Derg, on the other hand,

has opted for the "Non Capitalist road" of development and is trying to instaure a full pledged "socialist" economy copied from the models existing in the Soviet Union and other East European countries. This explains the forced collectivisation and the repeated attempts made by the Derg to cripple the private sector of the Ethiopian economy.

B. ME'ISONE and the nationality movements

Ethiopia is a country composed of many nationalities. The problem of the economic, political and cultural oppression of most of the nationalities, by the AMHARA and to a certain extent the TIGRAY nationalities of the northern half of the country, is one of the key issues of the democratic revolution in Ethiopia. Both before and after the revolution of 1974, nationalist movements have waged political and armed struggle as a legitimate response to the chauvinist repression unleashed against them. But this struggle against chauvinism and for self-determination is being waged both by multinationality and singlenationality organisations. In the first group we find ME'ISONE, whose differences with the exclusively nationality organisations can be summed up as follows.

1. Composition

This is the most obvious difference between ME'ISONE and the nationality organisations. As its name indicates, ME'ISONE is an "All Ethiopia" movement which is neither dominated by nor struggles for the interest of one particular nationality in the country. Its members, both at the leadership and rank and file levels, are militants drawn from all nationalities in Ethiopia. The various nationality movements are on the other hand organisations whose membership is drawn from one particular nationality in a given region of the country.

2. Objectives

ME'ISONE's objectives as indicated above are clear. We struggle for the right to self-determination of all nationalities and for a democratic and united Ethiopia. Some among the nationality organisations (Oromo Liberation Front, The Western Somalia Liberation Front, etc) have come out openly for the independence of their respective nationalities from Ethiopia. Others like the TIGRAY Peoples Liberat-

ion Front and The Afar National Liberation Movement stand for self-determination without openly calling for independence.

II. ME'ISONE'S PERSPECTIVES

During the years prior to 1978, and especially in 1976-77, ME'ISONE was the most important progressive organisation in Ethiopia, both in terms of its positive influence in the country's affairs and its presence in practically all the regions. The democratic mass organisations were mostly led by elected ME'ISONE members or sympathisers. After the break with the Derg, in August 1977, the organisation fell victim to one of the most ruthless repressions ever unleashed against democratic forces in the country. Thousands of its militants were summarily executed and about 17.000 members or sympathisers were arrested. This has considerably weakened the organisational capacity of ME'ISONE.

A. ME'ISONE's Assets

Inspite of unprecedented repression unleashed against it, we consider that ME'ISONE has numerous "assets" which will help it play a crucial role in future developments in Ethiopia, if and when it overcomes the material problems that it is now facing.

1. Among the various multinationality organisations which existed during the years 1974-78, ME'ISONE is the only one that has successfully survived the repression. The underground leadership created in early 1976 and those members who stayed underground even while the organisation was participating in the government, have continued the struggle inside the country.

2. Among the existing opposition movements in Ethiopia, ME'ISONE is the oldest and the most experienced both in terms of the exercise of state power and the underground struggle.

3. It's clear stand on the question of democratic rights, national independence and self-determination has the support of the vast majority of Ethiopia's democrats and patriots.

4. As the only progressive organisation with a realist and "All Ethiopia" alternative to the military dictatorship, it has the increasing sympathy of all those international progressive forces who support the struggle for a democratic government in an independent, non-aligned and united Ethiopia.

B. Short and long-term perspectives

ME'ISONE has defined both short-term and long-term tasks, which, when implemented, will enable it to play a decisive role in any future developments in the country.

1. Immediate problems and tasks

In the short term, we believe that the economic, political and social crisis in the country is so deep and wide spread that there is a possibility of a spontaneous popular upsurge as the one experienced in February 1974. In the event of such an uprising, it will be very difficult for the regime, isolated as it is, to control the situation. Sections of the Army and the security forces, who are apposed to the presence of foreign troops in Ethiopia, could side with the popular movement. But we also know that the present state of strength and unity of the democratic forces can not be considered to be up to the challenge that such a spontaneous upsurge is bound to create. The conditions that prevailed in 1974 permitted the continued radicalisation of the popular movement even in the absence of a strong organisation capable of leading it. But now the situation is different. The military regime has a "Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship" with the Soviet Union, South Yemen and Libya. Thousands of foreign troops are stationed in the country. The military government has a political organisation which can call in even more foreign troops to crush the popular movement. Ethiopia can be a second Afganistan.

In the absence of a strong, credible and democratic organisation, we also fear that popular discontent could open the way for another dangerous alternative: a fascistic coup d'Etat "à la chilienne" instigated and supported by the Americans. In view of the growing anti-Soviet feelings among all sections of the population, we think that this can be a real danger for our country. Intent on sparing Ethiopia the misfortunes of Chili or Afganistan, we work to create conditions that would

help the emergence of a new and democratic Nation. We strongly believe that democratic forces and governments in Western Europe can play an important role in strengthening our struggle and in the development of the tremendous human and natural resources of our country once victory is achieved.

It is in view of these probabilities and problems that we are now reorganising our underground cells in factories, government offices, schools, etc. One important aspect of this organisational work is the special emphasis that we are giving to our work within the Armed Forces and the militia, whose rallying to the popular movement can be a decisive factor in the struggle.

2. Long-term tasks

The long-term tasks defined by the organisation take into account the possible absence of such a spontaneous uprising in the immediate future but also its possible defeat as a result of a massive and open foreign aggression or a fascistic coup d'Etat. We work to create the conditions for the waging of an armed struggle and to expand our base areas in southern Ethiopia. We also work towards the creation of a United Democratic Front composed of nationality and multinationality organisations opposed to the military regime. We consider that these organisations can represent a tremendous force if only they overcome their minor differences and unite in the common struggle.

In this respect, ME'ISONE and the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) have taken some important steps to create a united Front based on a commonly agreed upon programme of action. Since leaders of the two organisations met in Khartoum in December 1980, concrete steps have been taken to increase their all round cooperation.

Contacts with nationality movements in Ethiopia are also underway and we are hopeful that they will lead to the formation of the long overdue Democratic Front which we believe is the only means to achieve a lasting victory and complete liberation.

III. THE NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The various contacts that we have undertaken in the past

with governments, political parties, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, etc., have helped us to ascertain one important fact: ME'ISONE's stand and struggle for a democratically united Ethiopia, free from any foreign domination, has the support and sympathy of most democratic and peace loving forces in the world and especially in Western Europe. On the other hand, forces opposed to the emergence of a strong democratic and united Ethiopia and to peace and stability in the Horn of Africa consider our organisation as an obstacle to the realisation of their evil designs.

We understand that you belong to the first group. Your concern about foreign intervention in the affairs of our country and in the Horn and your positions on democracy and social justice coincide with the aspirations of our organisation and those of the peoples of Ethiopia. That is why we took the liberty to raise issues of political, humanitarian and material support that we need to advance this worthy cause. In this respect, we would like to indicate some of the fields in which your assistance would be most appreciated.

1. Political support

We need your help in our struggle to make known our positions and perspectives to governments, political parties, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and other groups or individuals. The intention is to create a vast current of solidarity based on a clear understanding of past and present events in Ethiopia. This, of course, demands further and wide ranging discussions on the role and position of our organisation. We would like to assure you that the Foreign Mission of ME'ISONE is ready for such discussions and a qualified representative can meet you as may be required.

2. Material support for our political work

The challenges of the underground struggle in Ethiopia and the short-term and long-term tasks that we have set to ourselves cannot be met and accomplished without a sound material base. We also need to launch a systematic and vigorous campaign to explain our position to the above mentioned groups abroad. We have crucial and important political, humanitarian and organisational tasks to accomplish among Ethiopians who live outside the country. At this stage of the struggle, we

need the material support of those who understand our position and sympathize with the cause of our people.

3. Solidarity with victims of repression in Ethiopia

There are over 30.000 political prisoners and thousands of other victims of repression inside Ethiopia. Most of these need the material support of political and humanitarian organisations in order to survive. There are underground solidarity committees in the country, working to render humanitarian assistance to these victims. But as they do not have enough funds and due to difficulties involved in the underground nature of their activities, these committees render assistance only to a limited minority of those in need. More resources would allow us to expand the activities of these committees and to help more victims.

4. Solidarity with Ethiopian refugees

There are at present over 2.000.000 refugees that have left the country over the past years. Emergency assistance from the international community has enabled them to survive. We believe that this assistance should go beyond survival and allow for the economic, social and cultural well being of those concerned. We think that they must be helped to be self supporting in order that they should not be a constant burden to the international community. In view of this, we have created refugees' self-help committees. At this early stage these committees need funds to build schools, clinics, community centers and to initiate self supporting economic activities.

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It should be clear that we do not expect your organisation to help us finance all these activities. The intention is to indicate the various fields of possible assistance in order that you may be able to assess the needs of our organisation. Your aid can take the form of direct and partial participation in support of one particular activity. You may also help by recommending us to other organisations who might be interested in any of the above mentioned projects that we want to realise.

Finally, we would like to point out that we have more detailed notes and concrete projects that we can submit to your consideration once you indicate the particular field in which you want to help.

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