

COMITÉ DE COORDINATION
Conférence Nationale
pour
La Paix et la Réconciliation
en ETHIOPIE

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COORDINATING COMMITTEE
National Conference
for
Peace and Reconciliation
in ETHIOPIA

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STATEMENT ON THE CONFERENCE FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

It will be recalled that the Paris Conference of seven political organizations held from March 11 to 13, 1993, after through evaluation of the situation in Ethiopia, has called for the convening of an all inclusive peace and reconciliation conference to strengthen the on going transitional process and help it achieve its objectives. On the basis of this call all political forces - both supporters and opponents of the Transitional Government - as well as civil associations representing various sectors of the society were officially invited to participate in the peace and reconciliation conference.

So far close to 50 organizations have accepted the invitation. The majority of these organizations operate openly in Ethiopia. The positive response from the political organizations - operating within the transitional arrangement as well as opposition groups - professional, cultural and religious associations is clear confirmation of the need and urgency of such a conference. Hence, today we are pressing hard to prepare the necessary conditions to hold the conference.

In accordance with the resolution of the Paris Conference, the Coordinating Committee has made great efforts to secure the participation of the EPRDF, the leading party of the Transitional Government. From the outset the Committee wrote to the President of the EPRDF, the Transitional Government and the Council of Representatives, Mr. Meles Zenawi. To date this letter has gone unanswered. Following this, the Committee sent letters of invitation

again to EPRDF and to each and every individual organization represented in the Council of Representatives. Although some of these organizations have not responded by the deadline set for September 7, 1993, many others with seats in the Council have accepted our invitation.

The Coordinating Committee has made relentless efforts to elaborate the peaceful and democratic objectives of the proposed conference in the past months. However, deliberate campaign aimed at undermining the proposed conference by attributing distorted and narrow intentions to its initiators and the subsequent decision by EPRDF and its supporters not to participate, saddened not only the Coordinating Committee and the Ethiopian peoples but all friends of the country within the international community.

The Committee is not discouraged by this negative attitude. It will neither be distracted from its main goal nor will it discontinue its peace efforts.

All the organizations who initiated the Paris call are fully aware that the task of building peace is a complex and protracted process. For a long time, the incessant clashes of the ruling elites, the revolt of the nationalities and the entire people aimed at a just order, and the repeated wars of resistance against foreign aggressions had denied the society any opportunity to enjoy peace, stability, economic prosperity and the chance to cultivate democratic culture. Centuries of turbulence did not only cause social and economic devastation, they have also given rise to a culture that valued violence as the normal and first choice to resolve political differences. The inability to work out peaceful alternative to such problems, the inclination to view all opponents as mortal enemies, to exaggerate minor differences as irreconcilable opposing and to consider the expression of dissent as declaration of war... all these are legacies that continue to haunt us even today. Unfortunately, certain quarters remain wedded to that mould to this day. Burdened with such a legacy, it is not possible to attain peace and prosperity in one stroke. To conceive the call for national dialogue as a declaration of war or as a stratagem for power struggle is not only a residue of this political culture but is also manifestation of dogmatic ideological outlook and practice which certain quarters have yet to renounce.

The main objective of the Paris initiative is to bring together representatives of a wide spectrum of our society in an all inclusive conference to seek ways and

mechanisms to break the cycle of violence and ideological rigidity. Our focus on political issues of the transitional process is not for any other reason, but because of our belief that the fate of the transition will determine that of the country for a long time to come. If the transitional period is successfully completed, the ground to building lasting peace and democracy in Ethiopia would be established. Conversely, if the transitional process is prematurely thwarted and the optimism aroused in our people dashed away by undemocratic practices, then we fear that the result will be endless and uncontrollable chaos.

While the intention of the conference is peaceful and democratic, it is unfortunate that some have chosen not to participate. However, the conference will convene as planned. This decision was not only made on the basis of the conviction that if close to fifty political, profesional, cultural and religious organizations participate in a discussion, this will make a significant contribution to the progress of peace and democracy. There are also two other fundamental reasons :

First we do not want to see the great hope sparked by the Paris initiative come to nothing. If this is frustrated by EPRDF's negative attitudes and our efforts are to be abandoned, we fear that the floodgates will be wide open for dangerous confusion, spontaneous or organised violence both by desparate individuals and organised political forces.

Second, should these organizations and those who will register at a future date meet on an open forum and discuss the transitional process and the question of building lasting peace and reach a consensus, it will then be possible to present their ideas for peaceful and democratic alternative to the people. The proposal worked out at the conference could also serve as a basis for thorough discussion with the government aimed at reaching common solution to the country's problems. Convinced that this alternative solution could not be worked out by political organizations alone, the Committee made attempts to include non-political organizations such as religious, cultural and professional groups. The response it got is very encouraging. However, to increase the number of such groups and to ensure even more diversity, the Committee during its meeting held on September 10 and 11, 1993, has decided :

- 1) To renew its call for organizations which did not respond to our previous call and to extend the date of application.
- 2) To invite farmers representatives from different regions.
- 3) To investigate ways of including those capable of representing citizens victimized by armed conflicts and political events both under the Dergue and during the actual transition process (victims of war, the displaced, those fired from their jobs, etc...).
- 4) To invite some elders capable of sharing their experience and wisdom with the participants of the conference.

Based on the commitment made by the Committee to make this conference open and thoroughly democratic, the Committee has to initiate public discussion on main topics of the conference and burning issues facing the country. Hence, a draft proposal of the agenda worked out on the basis of suggestions by the participants and working document to allow for fruitful debates will be published prior to the conference. The participating organizations are expected to hold discussions and debate both with their members and public before attending the conference.

Finally, to further strengthen this democratic process and to allow a grace period for those organizations who for various reasons have not yet registered, we would like to announce the postponement of the conference from October to 18-22 of December 1993. Like all peoples of the world the Ethiopian peoples not only aspire to prosperity and progress through peace and democracy but also have this right that no force can deny them. This conference is one step forward in this march towards peace and democracy. As we are convinced that this historic opportunity should not be missed, we shall spare no effort to ensure its success. In this endeavour, we are convinced that the Ethiopian peoples will be on our side and support us. As the issue is first and foremost the concern of the Ethiopian peoples, we call upon them to openly express their support for the success of this conference.

On this occasion, we would like to express our gratitude for those who have refrained from blind partisanship and endorsed the idea of peace conference from its very inception. In this regard our heartfelt appreciation goes to officials

of the European Parliament, to journalists and scholars both in America and Europe, to NGO's and prominent individuals.

We have repeatedly stated that the aim of this conference is to prepare the ground for lasting peace and democracy in Ethiopia through successful transition. If this effort succeeded in working out an alternative proposal, this should not be viewed by those who claim to have the interests of Ethiopia at heart as an impediment to the transition process but rather as a positive contribution to the process of peace and democracy. If our country is to avoid a Somali-like tragedy, the need for an orderly and open dialogue on all important issues and free political discussions on alternative proposals is, we believe, obvious to all.

We therefore call upon all governments and NGO's to adopt a non partisan attitude and support our efforts.

THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Addis Abeba - Ethiopia
October 8, 1993
1993

London
October 8,