

CONFERENCE DE PARIS

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PARIS CONFERENCE

September 1998

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A CALL FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE
MADE BY THE SECOND PARIS CONFERENCE

AFAR DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONARY UNITY FRONT ---- COUNCIL OF ALTERNATIVE FORCES FOR PEACE & DEMOCRACY IN
ETHIOPIA ---- COALITION OF ETHIOPIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES; ---- ETHIOPIAN MEDHIN DEMOCRATIC PARTY; ---- OKOMO
NATIONAL CONGRESS ---- SOUTHERN ETHIOPIAN PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC COALITION; ---- TIGRAN ALLIANCE FOR NATIONAL
DEMOCRACY; ---- TIGRAI-TIGRIGNI ETHIOPI ETHIOPIANS FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRACY;

A CALL FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE **MADE BY THE SECOND PARIS CONFERENCE**

The problems of democracy, justice, national unity and equality of nationalities, which had plagued the country for long, have become so aggravated in the last seven years that they have reached a stage where they have become like primed bombs. Though these myriad problems are too many to list they can be generally presented as follows:

Primarily, the economic system that has been put in place under the cover of the free economy is actually a discriminatory policy aimed at enriching the leaders of the ruling party, its supporters and loyalists and has, in the process, created a never seen level of social inequality emanating from the social injustice that exists. In the ill conceived and confused economic system, local and foreign investors are harassed and impeded from investing in peace and security, citizens have been laid off en masse under the guise of adhering to structural adjustment demands, the few loyalists of the ruling group have become overnight millionaires by fleecing the wealth of the people, as a result of an economic policy not geared to bring wealth, progress and development to the country, millions of our compatriots, specially the youth, have been thrown on the streets denied of the right to work, unemployed and deprived of rights in general. Such is the mission of the present economic policy.

In short, this confused economic system, far from entwining development and social justice to assure that the country's economy moves onto the right tracks speedily, is actually putting the people into a vicious circle of indescribable poverty, hunger, suffering and hopelessness. As long as this disastrous economic system continues it is certain, as it has been evidenced in systems where injustice and inhumanity have prevailed, that situations which promote the explosion of social problems are getting a fertile ground.

On the other hand, the questions raised by Ethiopian democrats to seeks a democratic solution to the issue of Ethiopia's unity and the rights of nationalities have not yet found the proper remedy or the correct solution. In fact, due to the fact that the TPLF/EPRDF leaders and others had tried to exploit the noble issues of equality and fraternity of peoples, unity and sovereignty of Ethiopia for their own power mongering ends, the problems have become aggravated to an extent that they have now reached the stage where they effectively threaten to pit the country into a dangerous and destructive crisis.

The Regionalization (KILIL) policy out in place by the TPLF/EPRDF is based on ethnic hatred and on the divide and rule policy, and it has no relations with the rights of nationalities. Actually, both the principles it is based on and the aims that have been put in practice show that they are based on pitting one Kilil or people against another, and that, even in the Kilils, it tramples on and violates the

citizenship rights of Ethiopians, and that it is based on discriminating between citizens and has in all this manifested clearly the dangerousness and destructive essence of the ethnic politics of the TPLF/EPRDF.

The TPLF/EPRDF has created a dangerous situation for our country by failing to realize that the regionalization policy can lead to grave conflicts or by deliberately applying it to endanger the survival of the people and the country. There are those who use the serious problems caused by the Kilil policy to deny the right of nations/nationalities, the historical legitimacy and the inalienable right of the nationalities to administer themselves. There are also those who present the national question as one without any remedy and who inflate the problems out of proportion and propose unique and exclusive solutions to this or that nationality. Both these groups will not bring unity or equality but will knowingly or unwittingly take the country into a mire of increased chaos.

The appropriate solution for this longstanding and main problem is, through a democratic dialogue between the representatives of the people, to harmonize the actualization of individual rights, nationality rights and the right of Ethiopian citizenship.

Complicated problems and the conflicts caused by them are present at all times and are not unique to certain societies. The crux of the problems does not lie in the existence of differences and conflicts; in fact a sane society needs differences for its progress and dynamism. The main problem of our country is that the differences of opinion, economic interests or rights that appear in our society are not handled in a way which contributes to the stable progress of our country. This is due, on the one hand, to the long existing culture of violence and, on the other, to the total absence of Constitutional or other related stable institutions which assure the lasting resolution of such problems. That in societies where such institutions are absent even minor and insignificant problems lead the society and country into a terrible state of war has been adequately proved by the grim experience of the Ethiopian people who had been scarred for long by violence and destruction.

We take note of the aggression committed by Eritrea against our sovereign country and analyze the chaos and damage that the EPLF is prepared to unleash against our country by observing the critical situation in which Ethiopia is found at the present time. Leaving aside the desires and stands of the leaders of the TPLF/EPRDF, every Ethiopian knows full well that the aim of the EPLF, which involves the destruction of Ethiopia, extends far and wide from the confines of Badme and Sheraro. Our struggle is not only with this armed force of the EPLF but with its evil plot to destabilize Ethiopia, to pit her people against one another, and their aim to engulf Ethiopia into chaos and carnage by impeding Ethiopians from solving the country's problems in a democratic manner. Thus, the frontline is all over Ethiopia and not confined to the Badme border area, it is political and not limited to armed confrontations. As a consequence, the solution is, aside from defending the country with arms, to close the doors on the anti-Ethiopian, destructive and divisive plot of

the EPLF and their hidden agents by avoiding the pitfalls of sectarianism and upholding as the key factor and solution the need to engage in a democratic and national dialogue. This is the message of the historical and decisive moment we find ourselves in.

The dangerousness of the politics of the EPLF is not only in that it has created a new situation but in the fact that it has used the problems which predate the present government's assumption of power and have not been resolved since as a stepping stone to pit Ethiopia into an endless civil war and has pitted its allies both within and outside of the government in a life or death race against those who strive to solve the problems of Ethiopia through democratic dialogue and in this way to save the country.

The dangerousness of the threat posed by the Eritrean leaders is neither gauged from the number of their army, its strength or readiness nor from the number of Eritrea's population, its wealth and strength but from the reality of the division of Ethiopians and the stifling of democratic dialogue. In the same vein, Ethiopia can emerge victorious from her present travails not due to the number of her population, the invincibility of her army or her natural wealth but because of the spirit of responsibility exhibited by her opposition forces and government to launch a meaningful national dialogue to peacefully and democratically give a lasting solution to the problems of the country.

More than ever before, Ethiopia presently finds herself at the crossroads in order to be blessed with this sense of responsibility. Will both the government and the opposition forces take measure of the situation the country is found in, draw appropriate lessons from past mistakes, surpass sectarian interests and thirst for power or will they be ready to take the blame for the crime of pitting the country into a Rwanda-type carnage, a Yugoslavia-type ethnic cleansing or into a Somali-type situation where she will be delivered to the mercy of warlords and thus be a country in which the blood of citizens flows without letup and a terrible civil war shall rage?

To stand today for peace, development and progress in Ethiopia means to strive to speedily seek a solution for the problems of the country through national dialogue well before the enemies of Ethiopia and unity exploit these problems for their own ends. There is no greater and dangerous mistake now than considering Badme and Sheraro as the only battle-grounds and neglecting the other fields of struggle. Even if it becomes possible to expel the invader from Badme it will only be winning a battle and not the multi-front destructive war launched against Ethiopia by Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea. Since the war is all inclusive and affects all parts and corners of Ethiopia, the survival of our country dictates that the government and the opposition forces take the necessary measures to assure peace, democracy, unity, equality and brotherhood. Otherwise, what ensues will be too terrible to contemplate.

The allies of Isaias Afewerki found both within and outside of the government dream and strive and plot so that Ethiopians abandon democratic method and try to resolve their differences through arms and conflicts, that they abandon the path of national dialogue and reconciliation and resort to mutual destruction. This is why they unfailingly oppose, ridicule and disparage the very idea of national dialogue. Unless a national dialogue is held as soon as possible there are problems in all directions that are out of control and on the verge of explosion.

All of us democratic forces struggling with persistence for Ethiopian unity and sovereignty, for the equality, progress of her peoples, for love and fraternity amongst them explain below in general terms what we mean when we call for a democratic national dialogue.

a/ when we call for a democratic and national dialogue, an aspect of our focus is on the internal situation of the EPRDF itself. Just as a people that oppresses another can never be free an organization which imposes a system of oppression and repression can only be an instrument of a few dictatorial leaders and never an island of democracy in a society that is denied its rights. The TPLF/EPRDF is no different, there are serious differences within the leadership of the TPLF. The TPLF leaders do not enjoy now the confidence and trust they had enjoyed a year ago from their own members and from within the EPRDF. Compared to last year, the ruling party and front is more divided amongst itself. When we raise the issue of democracy, it is also to call for the democratic resolution of the conflicts within the ruling party so that the confrontation and conflict between the factions do not spill over to endanger further the whole country.

b/ when we call for democracy and national dialogue it is to impede power-crazed and hate mongering politicians from exploiting the poisoned situation created by the dissemination of the propaganda of ethnic hatred and of carnage, and it is both to struggle against those within and outside the government who strive to pit the people against each other by fanning a destructive politics and to enable the people to use democratic alternatives and solutions to avoid the traps laid by these elements.

c/ when we call for a democratic national dialogue it is not to demand that the government and the opposition forces agree on a lasting solution for the problems which are convulsing our country on all sides. We call for such a dialogue so as to involve the people in a voluntary and conscious effort to create a democratic atmosphere before the problems get out of control and to use this opportunity to genuinely reflect the will and aspiration of the people through a free and fair election. And through the free and fair election to establish jointly and through a common agreement the constitutional and other institutional mechanisms to handle existing or future problems, differences or conflicts of ideology, economic interests in a democratic and peaceful manner and to practically assure our country the methods and means to assure peace, democracy, national unity and fraternity.

We call upon the Ethiopian people, the members of the EPRDF and the international community to back our national dialogue call and to stand on our side to assure its practical implementation. The government should also take this responsible call in good faith. The unilateral cease fire declared by the Afar Revolutionary Democratic United Front (ARDUF) and the Ethiopian Unity Front (EUF) in order to help this dialogue process and to safeguard the unity and sovereignty of Ethiopia has been positively hailed by the Conference as a responsible act. The government on its side should reciprocate this sense of responsibility by releasing all political prisoners, jailed journalists and other prisoners of conscience so as to create favorable atmosphere for national dialogue.

The Coalition of Ethiopian Opposition Political Organizations

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Paris.