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PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN ETHIOPIA:

THE ROAD FROM WARFARE TO WELFARE

I. Background.

Years back, when the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 began to get distorted and went astray, a B.B.C. Radio Commentator Lamented:

It is always sad to hear of a dream being shattered. But it is sadder still to have witnessed a people, drained of initiative by centuries of feudalism, stir themselves and clutch at a dream of freedom, and then to see the dream crumble to dust...Saddest of all for the millions of ordinary Ethiopians who almost exactly a year after the dawn of hope have little to look forward to, except the darkness of increased chaos.

Needless to emphasize what has happened to the country and its people in the last 18 years. However, it is worthy to note that the degree and extent of the inflicted destruction en toto stands true to both the letter and spirit of the commentator. Sadly enough, we are once again heading for a perilous road to predicaments with far reaching implications of adverse nature due to the reinstatement of follies and malpractice of the past.

Two pertinent questions at this decisive junction of the Ethiopian Odyssey come to the forefront-what has gone wrong again, and more importantly why can't we learn from the undoing of the past? Theoretically, these are not difficult questions to answer. Unfortunately at the center of the general Ethiopian scene there still prevails what is euphemistically known as the "War culture and the habit of being violent". The Ethiopian peoples have time and again seen the dawn of hope but to no avail. Without recourse to our history of the remote past, this can be ascertained by making a cursory glance at state of affairs relating to the last half century where democratic governance (though limited and confined to form) has found its way to the political modus-operandi as a legitimate demand for dissent.

As is to be recalled, in the Post World War II period, Emperor Haile Selassie had faced serious challenges to his authoritarian rule from three quarters in the main: conspiracy against and antagonism to his rule from some leading notables and resistance leaders; demands for changes in the socio-political structure spearheaded by forces of modernization which the system had tried

to coopt in its own interests, and ethnic based challenges precipitated by groups allegedly speaking and acting on behalf of oppressed peoples and subjects in the empire state. Motivated by the impulse of consolidating centralized rule, the emperor's responses were basically repressive save few instances. The major cases in point could be understood by examining the modes and manners of how he dealt with individual resistance leaders firmly opposed to him, the leaders of the 1960 coup attempt and the Ethiopian Student Movement of the 1960s.

"Other important factors that significantly contributed to the deepening of the current crisis include: the unilateral abrogation of the federal arrangement as regards Eritrea with the aim of super-imposing absolutist feudal rule over the region, failure to resort to democratic reforms that could gradually lead to a modest transformation of Ethiopian Society, subsequent attempts at brutally suppressing nascent resistances in Eritrea, Tigray, Oromo area..., among others. In doing so and behaving as such, what the emperor achieved was exactly the opposite of what he intended to." At the end of the day, Ethiopia and the World at large have witnessed the disgraceful removal of the "Elect of God" supplanted by Mengistu and his gangs left at large to perpetrate their heinous crimes that have vividly surfaced over the years.

Haile Selassie's legacy that out lived his superficial grandeur and imperial rule has carried the multifaceted problems accumulated over the years to their logical conclusions. The military junta, due to its irresponsible and amateurish handling of things, fared worse than its predecessor. Among others, Eritrea remained the problem child of Ethiopian politics ever since. Other turmoil and upheavals that are bred and multiplied as a result followed suit to the extent of threatening the very survival of the country as a formidable entity.

Despite repeated opportunities rendered available to us to redress old wounds and build the New Ethiopia on a New foundation following the upsurge of the events of the 1974 Revolution, things by far turned from bad to worse. Mengistu, who emerged as one of the most ruthless tyrants in the African continent used "Socialism" and other catchwords Congruent with the aspirations of the people to climb to the pinnacle of power. This curse of history took the existing "Culture of violence and war making" to its perfection through the instrumentality of his faulty and defective policies and practice. Most regrettably, in what appears to approximate Thomas Hobbes' "state of nature", he succeeded in physically liquidating a good proportion of the country's dynamic and patriotic generation while at the same time luring Ethiopia to the bloodiest civil war unprecedented in the country's long history. In the seventeen years that marked his preponderance, the tyrant reorganized and perfected the Ethiopian state and government in the arts and crafts of repression and genocide. This was accomplished by creating and developing an elaborate system of security apparatus backed by a huge military establishment that carries out his fiendish orders without an iota of dissent and non-compliance.

In other words, to destroy his potential and real enemies and opponents, to avert perceived and actual threats posed against his misrule, he not only built a colossus military machine unparalleled in Black Africa but also militarized the entire Ethiopian Society. Such regimentation of society was undertaken by distorting and perverting the making of mass organizations and public associations (peasants, Women, Youth, Professional) blended in the model of a corporate military structure. By the 1980s, for all purposes, Ethiopia became the incarnation of appalling maladministration misery and horrific misdirection of resources. Data on the following table could be cited as one of the numerous indicators supporting the above statement.

Soldiers or Teachers?

Armed Forces as % of Teachers

Some Worst Examples:

Ethiopia	494
Iraq	428
Oman	275
Chad	233
PDRY	200
Pakistan	154

Some of the Best Examples:

Costa Rica	0
Mauritius	10
Ivory Coast	13
Ghana	14
Jamaica	24
All Developing Countries	68

It can easily be gathered from the above that Ethiopia by far excels even all of the countries whose concentration on military build up is astounding. Moreover, as one recent study quoting official sources has shown, the country's military budget (excluding purchase of ammunition) increased from an estimated amount of 109.5 million Birr at the time of seizure of power by the military in 1974 to 2,272 million Birr in 1990/91 when the dictatorship was on the verge of its demise. This drive has shown a rise of 1975%

According to the same source, if the total costs of ammunition were included, the overall expenditure could have been 35,782 million Birr out of which more than half was in foreign currency.

Source: HUMAN RIGHT DEVELOPMENT REPORT, 1990.

For a poor country like Ethiopia, this was too high a sacrifice, especially when viewed in terms of its opportunity cost. Far worse was of course, the destruction entailed in terms of human and material scarce resources as a result of such a massive investment aiming at winning a futile civil war. The attendant effects of such a misadventure are to remain a hazard hanging like the "Sword of Damocles" on the necks of subsequent generations.

The committee For Peace, Democracy and Rehabilitation (CPDR) based in the Addis Ababa university has the following to say with regard to the predicaments that have befallen the country:

Although precise estimates are not available to us at the time of this writing, between fifty and seventy percent of the annual national budget went to the military in the last seventeen years. Clearly, the man power and material resources squandered on this wanton exercise could have been used for the betterment of the lives of our people and for prolonging life rather than cutting it short

- through an endless cycle of war, violence, and political irresponsibility. Important indicators of the quality of life such as the general infant and maternal mortality rates, life expectancy at birth, daily calorie intake per capita, primary school enrollment ratio,...etc.all indicate that Ethiopia is at the bottom of the list of the least developed countries.

An all important question at this point of our discussion is, did the departure of Mengistu bring the Ethiopian people anywhere near to the promised freedom, social justice, peace and prosperity? Before providing a definite answer one remark from the outset: it seems that once again we are marching on the wrong road to yet another catastrophe of our own making. As to be shown subsequently, albeit some political liberalization as opposed to democratization, we are heading for the same disaster out of which we have allegedly just emerged.

The EPRDF in general and its omnipotent and bellicose leadership in particular, who as opposition forces in the bush made loud cries about peace, democratic tolerance and pluralistic accommodation, once inside Mengistu's palace, began exhibiting their true nature-displaying the same political traits and maladies of the forces that they have displaced. The self extollment, the blind obsession and lust for absolute power, hyper-sensitivity even to constructive criticisms, the presumptuous pretensions all found comfortable sanctuaries in the power that be. This is compatible to the saying "the spirit may will but the "flesh is weak". Without exaggeration, what we see around us, therefore, to use the popular phrase gaining wider currency now-a-days: "from Dergue 1 to Dergue II" in all its essentials.

To be more specific, the first major political action on the part of the EPRDF is to reinforce Mengistu's ban and repression on the major multi-national democratic opposition forces preventing their participation in the country's political processes. Since then the EPRDF has been busy practicing its stage-managed bogus democracy. This is intended to provide items of consumption for the international community on the one hand, and manipulate domestic opinion with the hope of capturing a commendable legitimacy and constituency of support on the other. All these boil down to the drive for firmly establishing hegemony of a group to which a de facto one party rule is still very attractive.

Of late, even the OLF, a major participant at the London concert and the founding conference of the "Transitional Government" in Addis Ababa, has been systematically forced out of both the government and the alleged "Regional and Local Elections". Not less surprisingly, the EPRDF Government, having cleared its way to absolute power and having declared itself winner in the "elections" which it did not contest with others, is now striving to set up a monolithic "federal" establishment. EPRDF's puppet Organizations and cronies are appointed to take control of the important regions in the same manner Mengistu tried to Control fake autonomous entities that his rubber stamp "shengo" (parliament) sanctioned their existence. Accordingly, the Oromo Region is handed to the OPDO, the Amhara Region to the EPDM, the Tigray region to the TPLF—all vassals of the EPRDF.

What should be clear in this connection is that too much shrewdness to exploit ethnic problems for promoting hidden political agenda and ulterior motives is both immoral and destructive. The drive towards creating superficial federating entities in the manner of South Africa's Bantustans benefits no one including the TPLF at the end of the day. It should be noted that it is the TPLF that is masterminding such a hasty and ill-conceived political project of dividing the country into administrative units structured on ethnic basis.

What is most worrying is not EPRDF's political gimmicks, cosmetic democracy and window-dressings but the implications of these deceptions and manipulations for durable peace and stability. Squandering the meager resources in creating too many unproductive and currently irrelevant structures at a time when the country badly needs them for rehabilitation and reconstruction purposes, is utterly irresponsible and hence criminal. State of affairs at present warrant drawing a parallel between Mengistu's undoing and that of his successors: amidst total economic collapse, civil strife, political chaos, mass starvation and above all the vivid possibility of witnessing the tragedy of a divided polity, the despot and his clowns were busy creating their "Workers" Party, and the "Democratic republic" with an atmosphere of

fanfare and festivities too costly for affluent societies let alone for a beleaguered nation like Ethiopia. Today, with all the horrors of the past still fresh in our mind, Ethiopians and the world at large are forced to watch the repetition of the dramas of the yesteryears with anger, frustration and common disbelief.

At this most trying time in our history, when the call for peace is being echoed across the board, the force that has presided at the helm of state power, endowed with conceit, arrogance and belligerence, is groping in the quagmire of new misadventures. In a nut-shell, the Ethiopian state has once again become privatized-as the sole property of the EPRDf. This is increasingly detrimental, in the negative sense, to prospects for peace, pluralistic coexistence and stability which are essential preconditions for democracy and development.

II. WHICH WAY OUT?: RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been stated all along, the central problem is the persistent prevalence of the "Culture of violence" whose termination appears not to be in sight. This is so because successive Ethiopian Political Regimes have never given room for a legal democratic opposition and tolerant accommodation of differing views. The choice has always been either to comply to the wills and whims of officialdom or run to the bush to try one's fortune. Ironically, even the present incumbents who captured state power by turning to the latter option are provoking the democratic opposition in particular and concerned Ethiopians in general to behave likewise. Nevertheless, such trends are no less than the "suicidal alternative" for all actors, without exception, and the country.

It is with the objective of averting this that we are prompted to embark on offensives for the attainment of peace and a just national reconciliation. It is with ample justification that we affirm the bellicose nature of the EPRDF leadership, that has fallen prey to the alleged "Culture of violence and intolerance" and its own conceited behavior and perverted vision. Its vision is blurred by the excessive lust for power and hegemony as the case was with its predecessors who have encountered disgrace at the end of the day. As a result, what one witnesses around is not the spirit of compromise, tolerance and pluralistic coexistence. On the contrary, there prevails an atmosphere of reciprocal and mutual suspicion which is progressively developing into animosities. Such a situation could undoubtedly grow into psychological and practical preparation for a full fledged confrontation when the time comes.

Despite deafening government propaganda about the need for democratic exercise and prevalence of peace, politics of

command and a mentality of a state of siege continue to occupy a central place in the mode of thinking and operation of the regime. To most Ethiopians, being loud about peace and democracy without national reconciliation is absurd and a mere fantasy. This is true particularly in light of concrete conditions prevalent in our country where such catchwords and phrases as "democracy" and "peace" are utilized as smoke screens to hide motives with negative traits. In this connection, we vehemently oppose the current stereotype of the day that alleges "Ethiopia is better than Somalia and Yugoslavia". The reason why what came to pass in the two countries failed to occur in Ethiopia is solely attributed to the farsightedness and commendable wisdom of our peoples and not to the EPRDF and its cronies.

The EPRDF along with some self-centered and short sighted groupings, on the contrary, have strived to exaggerate differences of all kinds among Ethiopians thus fanning ethnic unrest which could have assumed horrific implications. Trying to find solace by comparing incomparables and by fabricating success stories is to the interest of none other than the evil designs of the present incumbents. Though the immediate dangers emanating from the unholy drives of the EPRDF and Co. appear to have been averted at least for the present, Ethiopian society is potentially divided more than any time in the past. It is to mitigate the developing of this potential that we take pains to hint on means and ways of preventing adverse Consequences that could be bred by the existing tendencies, inclinations and state of affairs.

Once we grasp the gist of these hard facts, it won't be difficult to suggest series of solutions presumed to help in identifying leeway leading to the resolution of underlying and fundamental problems. Without claiming to have a monopoly of absolute truth alla EPRDF & Co., we propose the following as alternative basis for durable peace, stability and National reconciliation:

1. Political Measures

Series of political measures need to be taken to resolve the crisis currently apparent in the sphere of governance and high politics. The existing politics of command based on a zero-sum game (get all or lose all) is in short very dangerous and hence calls for rectification in terms of both mode of thinking and way of doing things. As things stand now, we believe that the only way to bring about fundamental alterations with regard to the preponderant climate of stresses and strains is the establishment of an **All-inclusive transitional Government**. In this, all Ethiopian democratic Organizations and groupings should be allowed to participate without any form of parochial and sectarian qualification as used to happen hitherto. This presupposes the declaration of

good will to the effect of promoting views and action within the context of the democratic process and on the basis of rules, procedures and norms to be adopted by the consent of concerned actors. The duties of the envisaged Transitional Government would include:

1.1 Organize an Ethiopian National Defense Force

As the private armies of the different former guerilla organizations are the major threats to peace and main sources of pending conflicts, the Transitional Government would embark on encamping them in quarantines to effect their piecemeal disbanding and/or integration (as the case may be) into the various units of the national army to be organized. The Transitional Government should simultaneously initiate the process of Organizing an Ethiopian National Defence Force that is non partisan (in terms of ideology, ethnicity...etc) and depoliticized. The allegiance of the Armed Forces should strictly be to the anticipated democratic constitution and to democratically elected government.

1.2. Guarantee respect for basic civil and democratic liberties and human rights to all citizens and groups regardless of political positions, religious creed, sex, ethnicity...etc.

1.3. Facilitate fora and avenues for free and open public debates and exchange of views on major issues affecting the destiny of the people and the country with the objective of eliciting alternative options and approaches to solve problems as a result.

1.4. Create an independent judicial system and other law enforcing bodies as may be necessary. Such public institutions aimed at maintenance of law and order should not be intervened with except by the spirit and provisions of the constitution and other laws to be enacted.

1.5. Stop all measures and moves aimed at artificially dividing the country and establishing the form of state for the mere sake of the political convenience of some groups as arbitrarily undertaken at present. The Transitional Government should instead sanction an in-depth study of the issue based on the history, economics and socio-cultural aspects of life of Ethiopia's various ethnic groups the result of which is to be articulated to serve as proposal for rearrangement that will be endorsed before taking effect by a democratically elected national parliament and/or popular referendum.

1.6. Declare all agreements between the present incumbents in Ethiopia and the Eritrean Province null and void. The mode and manner in which the recognition of de facto Eritrean secession is undertaken is ill-conceived and utterly undemocratic that did not take into account the interest of peoples. In the

absence of a democratically elected government in Ethiopia and the participation of other Eritrean groups in the political process, and above all, without the expressed wish of the Eritrean peoples, hasty moves and deceptive drives to effect blessings to the EPLF political programme is undoubtedly tantamount to nurturing the bastion of future conflict and instability in the region. We propose that the case be given time for sober thinking and adequate preparation in which both the forces of Dismemberment and Unity in Ethiopia (including Eritrea) expound their views, solicit support for their respective causes without restrictions of any kind whatever. Finally, the Eritrean Peoples should be allowed to express their position on the issue through referendum that meets internationally recognized standard requirements.

1.7. Convene a representative constituent assembly, enact electoral laws and set up institutions and bodies to be engaged in drafting the constitution, supervise electoral processes, regulate modes and manners of undertakings tasks in this regard. The draft constitution should be presented for public debate to be enriched through additional inputs as amendments and further elaboration after which it is to be subjected to a popular referendum for endorsement.

1.8. Declare a general amnesty for those who have been declared outlaws by both the ousted dictatorship and the new incumbents due to their political positions and differing views. The amnesty should extend to all individuals and groups save those who have committed crimes against the people by abusing their powers and other leverages without justifiable force majeure.

1.9. Hand over state power to a party or coalition of parties that have managed to win the mandate of the broad electorate through free and fair nation-wide elections the mode and manner of which is to be based on a democratically and justly established law to be enacted beforehand.

2. Economic measures

The country's economy is so in shambles and there prevails an acute state of crisis that it is hardly possible to speak about an "Ethiopian Economy". Decades of devastating civil wars, recurrent drought and famine, coupled with unprecedented official state corruption has led the economy to the end of the precipice. Therefore, the need to work out a feasible Economic Programme of Recovery Accompanied by tangible actions is a matter of urgent necessity and paramount importance. In this sphere, the New Transitional Government is expected to initiate and accomplish the following:

2.1. Take immediate measures to revitalize the agricultural sector (the major source of livelihood, employment, foreign exchange earning,...etc. in Ethiopia which had been hitherto neglected. Means and ways of allocating investments, encouraging and incentivizing the peasant producer, proliferation of modern farms and improvement of farming techniques should be sought and be given a Central Place in the economic policy frame work. It is an open secret that the degree and extent of prevalent food crisis has progressively assumed alarming proportions over the years. This endemic problem can be surmounted by nothing other than lending the proper foci and attention to the agricultural sector in all possible ways. It WOULD be a folly to think that genuine peace, reconciliation and development could be attained under a situation where mass starvation, alienation and marginalization in economic terms is rampant.

2.2. Reactivate the industrial sector to enable it effect linkages of a reciprocal nature with agriculture by infusing more or less similar measures as prescribed in 2.2.1 above.

2.3. Reconstruct the infrastructural setting that has progressively deteriorated due to persistent neglect and effects of decades of war.

2.4. Convene a comprehensive International Conference on "Rehabilitating the Ethiopian Economy" and aiming at mobilizing all available internal and external resources to this end.

2.5. Strive to curb the growing problem of unemployment by encouraging both the public and private sectors to open up fields of activity that could productively engage the floating labour force and man power in the country.

3. Socio-cultural measures:

The legacy of the past and the aforementioned damages inflicted on all aspects of life, especially in the last two decades, are of considerable magnitude. As a result, Ethiopia is now facing immense problems relating to accommodating hundreds of thousands of refugees formerly forced to flee their homes for fear of repressive policies and measures, millions of internally displaced people due to the civil war and the recently unleashed ethnic strife prompted by the ill advised propaganda of the regime and other sectarian political groupings, hundreds of thousands of demobilized former combatants, etc.

Unemployment and underemployment that have accumulated over the years are further bolstered by at least five-fold due to the displacement of numerous Ethiopians precipitated by rampant economic inactivity unwarranted and illegal actions of the EPRDF that hires and fires civil servants at will and

the paralysis of the defense structure which was one of the major employers in the country. Problems relating to health care, education housing and cultural activities have grown by leaps and bounds. Concomitantly, therefore, Ethiopian Society has undergone through a major crisis that has fundamentally disturbed the basics of socio-cultural fabrics of life. These and other maladies await curative measures as soon as possible. The present and future generations of responsible Ethiopians are, therefore, condemned to shoulder the burden of the cross.

Without going deep into the specifics, we suggest that a sustained campaign complemented by practical action be launched with the objective of attaining national revival, reconstruction and rehabilitation in general and addressing specific problems that are widespread in order of priority and importance in particular. In disposing such a colossal Herculean task, the New Transitional Government in Collusion with the relatively well to do section of Ethiopian society and other concerned International organizations (governmental and non-governmental) should strive to mobilize all available potential and actual endowments to withstand the onslaught of the predicament.

One of the major factors contributing to the increased leverage of the state in Ethiopia is the progressive weakening of Civil Society over time. The absence of a formidable civil society which could have counter-balanced and checked the negative behavior and practice of the state has forced persistent recourse to the latter as an omnipotent force. The preponderance of a strong state (vis-a-vis the citizenry) has been and still is the rule of the game. Under such a situation, development in terms of socio-cultural aspects of life becomes unimaginable particularly when there is a serious want in benevolence. The state, therefore, should allow through legal endorsement, for the proliferation of various components of civil society imbued with a pluralistic nature.

III CONCLUDING REMARKS

This modest presentation has attempted to show the dialectical relationship between peace and stability on the one hand and positive development and recovery on the other. Given the concrete Ethiopian reality of today, peace and stability can be envisaged if and only if there prevails the political will for the attainment of National Reconciliation.

Therefore:

Convinced that there is no heroism in senseless military adventures and political bravado,

Firmly believing that it is commendable and holy to use our energy, experience, wisdom, time and resources for welfare than warfare, for national construction than destruction, for a rational compromise than ill motivated manipulation,

Convinced that, as our past experience amply demonstrated, no one benefitted from repressions, arrogance, military adventures ...etc. at the end of the day,

Hoping that all honest Ethiopians have deeply felt the plights, misery and agony of their fellow country men,

Hoping also that all Ethiopian political forces in the country or outside, armed or otherwise, incumbents or fugitives, will learn from the follies of the past:

We call upon all political forces to resolve their differences and find means and ways leading to a negotiated settlement within the context of a commonly agreed upon democratic framework and without resort to violence and reciprocal undermining,

We call upon the EPRDF who has hitherto remained adamant to work towards a pacific resolution of differences and prevented the democratic opposition and the pan Ethiopian organizations from peacefully participating in the over all process to desist from its faulty, defective and dangerous stance,

We also call upon the international community, all peace loving peoples, foreign governments and friends of Ethiopia to exert pressure on the concerned actors that resist this and similar other proposals for peace and National Reconciliation.

In this connection, we appreciate the position taken by the European parliament and many other foreign Organizations that have correctly understood the real nature of problems in Ethiopia while at the same time urging others to reconsider their positions immersed in distorted reflections.

Finally, we demand the immediate convening of an All Inclusive Peace Conference in which all Ethiopian organizations without exception (including Organizations from the Region of Eritrea) must participate. We hope that this conference could serve as a basis for the establishment of a New and Democratic Transitional Government of Ethiopia.

1. shiferaw Bekele "Peace As function of Economic Development and Development As A Function of peace", paper presented at the conference on peace, reconciliation and Development, Sept 7-11, 1992, Addis Ababa, p.6.
2. CPDR, " An Appeal for A spirit of Compromise", Addis Ababa University: June 1991, p.2.

