



Open Letter to the Sons and Daughters of Ethiopia

May 28, 2010

Dear Sons and Daughters of Ethiopia,

The election is over and the EPRDF states they have won 99.6% of the positions; winning every seat of Parliament except one and they call this a multi-party system. A figure such as this leaves no doubt of the lack of any political space in Ethiopia. It is surprising though because it shows little attempt on the part of the Meles-run regime to pretend that the election process was free and fair.

Tell me, what real democratic country ever ends up with election results that are this unbalanced? Instead, it simply proves how this one-party government would rather exert such total control and look bad rather than risk having any opposition in positions where they might threaten their system.

We all knew that the outcome was established before the votes were ever placed; however, against such odds, with nearly a zero playing field, some courageous Ethiopians did not give up, but did their best to stand up against the EPRDF. Let us applaud their effort! Some among us have even been killed, imprisoned, harassed and tortured as a result. We know about Birtukan Mideksa, Bekele Jirata and some of those who have been killed, like Mr. Aregawi Gebreyohannes, Mr. Biyanza Daba Gadisa but there are many other unsung heroes and heroines who have experienced many forms of retaliation.

Now, following the election, we can expect that Meles may take subtle and not so subtle revenge against his opposition; like he is already doing in an attempt to block any opposition from further participation in government; however, this will only more clearly prove the dishonesty of the electoral process. I hope he reconsiders such actions as they will only intensify future resistance; ultimately undermining his control.

We Ethiopians should show great appreciation for all of those in the opposition parties for their valiant contribution to this struggle! It dramatically demonstrated the truly undemocratic nature of this regime. ***Let us not criticize, blame or demean any of their efforts. Though some may fault them for not doing it in one way or another, they did take action and operated under extremely difficult circumstances. Thanks to all of them!*** One thing they have accomplished, among many others, is that they have shown that there is no democracy in Ethiopia! Now, reports coming from all over the world have meaty factual substance to the woes and hardship inflicted on those determined to challenge the EPRDF! This brings in a new period of possibility!

This is why I am writing this letter. Some of you may be discouraged and hopeless, but ***I want to reassure you we have now entered a new period of time where the results of the election are known and now we can put competing political platforms aside and collaborate together to bring about political openness.*** As the African proverb wisely instructs, *“the greatest darkness exists just before the dawn”*

Right now, in the minds of Ethiopians, we are in the greatest period of darkness of our time because people do not know what is coming next. The people are still suffering and must be defended. As the vision of the SMNE states, when some among us suffer, we all suffer. When something is inflicted on the people, it is our obligation to speak out for others, regardless of distinctions.

Right now, we are unhindered by having to focus on an upcoming rigged election. ***It is no longer about which political party one supports or about debating a peaceful versus armed struggle. Instead, it is about challenging the uneven and politically manipulated playing field that has brought unfair electoral results and given another five years to an unelected and illegitimate regime.*** This should make our job less complicated and more unified! ***We will have a stronger message to donor countries about the true nature of this regime,*** based on how this undemocratic regime terrorized the opposition and killed the democratic process down to the grassroots level, similar to the Gestapo. What kind of a partner in the War against Terrorism is this?

Secondly, ***this gives us an opportunity to send a message to any elders who Meles has been using to mediate between the EPRDF and opposition groups,*** but who cannot truly be effective because they cannot say what really needs to be told in order to resolve the crisis. These elders have only given him what he wants to hear, contributing to the manipulation of the mediation process, which ultimately is meant to prolong his power and our oppression.

With the fiasco of the election now comes new opportunity so my advice is to **CALM DOWN!** Roll up your sleeves and get ready to work. ***Now is the time to come together as people with our consciences as our guide.*** The misery of what is going on must be changed. Some of you, or others around you, may be afraid of change, wanting to keep the status quo rather than to advance what is unknown; however, the truth is, nothing will be worse than what we have had over the last 20 years. We are the people who can bring the change. This is not about politics, but about reviving our dying nation and surviving as a people.

It is time to regroup and stand together. What Meles has been doing has now been revealed to the world, which is to our advantage; yet, ***it is not the "world" who will bring freedom, peace, justice and democracy to Ethiopia, but us, the Ethiopian people. It is time to advance a people-to-people movement that will build a road to effective collaboration.*** We certainly can come up with some overarching goals and values upon which to agree that rise above personal, political, regional or ethnic agendas. Even though Meles has the guns, we have the people. He does not have enough guns to kill all of us.

If we do not regroup and collaborate, then we deserve what we have. The time for blaming is not now. Enough is enough! I am not talking about Meles now, I am talking about how ***each of us must start cleansing ourselves of wrongful attitudes, of hatred, of divisions and of those attitudes that interfere with building a country where humanity comes before ethnicity or any other distinctions and where we care about the wellbeing of all our citizens for "no one will be free until all are free!"*** It is on such a firm foundation of respect for the God-given rights of all our people that we can finally find success in dealing with Meles.

We are country of 80 million and there is no way that 80 million people can be pushed around by one man and his party. Think back in history. There are brave Ethiopians who have given their lives and sacrificed. This is still the case. Just look at this election. ***We must be willing to stand firm for values, policies and actions that will create a healthy, well-functioning society.*** Meles has convinced many of his supporters to believe in a system that is intrinsically flawed. In this system, the payoffs they are seeking are brought about through destroying not only the lives of others, but ultimately, their own as well.

The Ethiopian peoples' struggle must be based on something they believe in as a good and worthy value; like saving the lives of Ethiopians, saving our country, bringing peace and security and reviving the lives of Ethiopians. All of us can participate in a peaceful struggle, but it cannot be done without sacrifice or civil disobedience. It cannot be done with hate, bitterness and “tribal” divisions that have infected most all our groups and institutions.

Meles' control has thrived on “tribal” divisions. He is an expert student on how to use our weaknesses for his own survival. We must destroy tribal politics. Recently, when I was speaking to Western decision-makers, I explained that Meles will destroy Ethiopia because his policies have undermined an Ethiopian national identity. People settle for a regional identity or ethnic identity instead of a national identity or one based on their shared humanity. One man spoke up, questioning me. He asked, “*When did Ethiopia ever have a national identity?*” For him, he saw that previous governments marginalized segments of Ethiopians, like me, saying that “*people who look like you [me] had been looked down upon.*”

I responded with a question, asking, “Just because people like me are called derogatory names in Ethiopia does that mean there was never a national identity? Are you saying America did not have a national identity when African Americans could not use the same washroom in the 1950ties? How about the problems between those in so many places in the world where some people are put down within a country in order to make others feel better about themselves? Is Ethiopia alone in this?”

My point was simple. I know people in Ethiopia who look like I do are questioned routinely as to whether we are Ethiopian because do not look like the typical Ethiopian, but yet, we still have a national identity. Look what Ethiopia did in the fight against the Italians, even dating back to the Battle of Adwa. When the hostile Italian forces invaded, ***the Ethiopians did not wait for other outsiders or “donor countries” to help, because it was within their shared national interest to stand up together. This is what brought them victory.*** Despite the unsophisticated military tools, they banded together and never wavered. We know the results.

Now, the national enemy we have is from the inside. It has a name—the TPLF, the EPRDF and their puppets/supporters from every ethnic group; although we must recognize that many of these supporters are not genuine and only are supporters because there is so much repression. Today we are faced with the same threat to the people. We face an enemy from within who seeks to conquer us into submission. Now, it requires the same kind of solidarity.

We cannot use the excuse that we do not have leaders, experts, skills, knowledge or resources. We have what it takes to take this country back. Like the heroes and heroines of the past, who passed on independence rather than colonial domination, we too can work hard to pass on freedom rather than tyranny to the next generation.

The survival of Ethiopia as a nation is in the hands of those alive today. While it must be recognized that there are many legitimate grievances in our past that cause us to feel alienated, isolated or “not a typical-looking Ethiopian;” however, now is the time to put these grievances aside for the higher cause. Those with grievances must join hands with others to free all of us so we can work together to pass on a blessing to future generations. We may find that it will become easier to forgive others along the way, freeing us to better set up the structure for a more respectful, just and free society.

Enough is enough! Again, I am still not talking about Meles, but about the things that are defeating each of us and therefore, all of us. We have to collaborate. ***We must stop creating enemies among us.***

Right now look at the divisions from within and between various groups—Paltalk, religious organizations, civic groups, political organizations, institutions and so on. For the survival of all of us, we must reconcile. Reconciliation is not talk, but attitudes displayed in actions. It is not total agreement, but acceptance of the rights and worth of others. I am saying it once again, we must calm down during this process. With God's help, we can find a way to create a strong people-to-people movement to free the country. When we do this, the outsiders, whether they like it or not, will be on our side.

Like I have said a long time ago, ***each of us is a leader. Know that if we are to save our country, it is time for you the reader to accept the call to help your brothers and sisters of Ethiopia and into the Horn of Africa for we share our humanity with them. Listen to God and fear His ways. Take a moral inventory, be courageous and do right. Care about those who are suffering. Help create that new Ethiopia where humanity comes before ethnicity and where we are not content until all are free.*** This is the mission of the SMNE—to care about those whose rights are being trampled upon. ***Be encouraged! There is much we can do.*** People are in disarray, but this is the time when we can regroup and focus on our shared values and goals. ***You are wrong if you think we do not have the leaders, the skills, the experts and the financial means. We have all of these, but we must be willing to contribute what we can.***

The true sons and daughters of Ethiopia cannot sit by any longer, stuck in the quicksand of our grievances and differences. God created us for much more. ***Enough is enough! Let us focus on the greatest obstacles in front of us—our division—because if we do, Meles will be no match for us! Let us seek to live lives of love, truth, justice, mercy and courage; sacrificing and not shirking our duty to do what is right—not in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of God.***

The grassroots work of the people has already begun. Think about it! A 99.6% electoral victory is absurd in the eyes of anyone! It only gives evidence of the level of oppression in Ethiopia. Furthermore, it makes it impossible for those who would like to pretend that Ethiopia is an emerging democracy to justify that position any longer. Instead, ***it has now cleared the way for us to work together to address the root issue of dictatorship. Will you join others until we are all free? This is a great time of opportunity! Let us seize it together!***

May God help us repent of what we have done wrong to others. May He enable us to forgive those who have harmed or offended us. ***May He give us the knowledge to see that we are all family—the family of Ethiopia. May He help us see a bigger picture than our egos, our pride, our own self-interests, power or material advantages because the future of Ethiopia is in the hands of each of us—the living. Let us rise up together for such a time as this!***

Psalm 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

Long live Ethiopia! I look forward to hearing from you.

Your brother in the struggle,



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