



**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE:
WHAT COURSE OF ACTION NOW WILL GIVE ALL ETHIOPIANS
THE BEST SUSTAINABLE ENDING TO TPLF/EPRDF DOMINATION?**

September 17, 2017

Dear Ethiopian,

We wish you a meaningful Ethiopian New Year, hoping that Ethiopians will join with us in finding an effective and sustainable solution to the crisis as we enter the New Year.

We come to you as stakeholders who care about the future of all of us. We believe sustainable peace will not come until we value the humanity of all our people, *putting humanity before ethnicity or any other differences* and caring about the well being of all *for no one is free until all are free*. Based on these principles, the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) urges you to consider how you might work with us in being part of the solution. Let us first explain how we see the challenges ahead and what cautions we should take so we not jeopardize our future.

THE CRISIS

The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has created a nightmare scenario for themselves and for Ethiopians. What happens next is critical. It could be incited by actions, including a crackdown, initiated by the TPLF/EPRDF due to the rising threat from multiple opponents; or by the opposition in resistance to the continued authoritarian rule of the TPLF/EPRDF. Whatever reason, the potential is high for disaster widely affecting Ethiopians, including the TPLF/EPRDF.

Have you seen the before and after pictures of Syria Iraq, Libya, Yemen, or other conflict zones in the world? What we do now makes all the difference. We are at the edge of crisis. Do we have the will and wisdom to avoid the worst? It is not an easy situation.

The oppression, the unrelenting authoritarian rule, the imprisonment of tens of thousands of political prisoners, the apartheid policies favoring one ethnic group over all others, the widespread human rights abuses, the grabbing of land and resources, the control of every sector of society, the disintegration of the justice system, the despair of people all over the country, the famine, the flood of refugees out of the country, the extreme poverty, the criminalization of dissent, the closing of all political space, along with countless other injustices, have left Ethiopians desperate for change and angry. Everyone agrees on the seriousness of this crisis; however, what everyone does not agree on is what to do about it to bring lasting change in favor of freedom and justice for all Ethiopians. Everyone, with the exception of some within the TPLF/EPRDF, wants to end their repressive domination; however, how to do it so we end well, is a desperately needed topic of civil discussion and debate; right now, not later!

WHAT ENDING DO WE WANT?

Have we Ethiopians considered how we want this crisis among Ethiopians to end? Do we simply want to end the one-ethnic, one-party rule of the TPLF/EPRDF, regardless of what it costs to human life, property, infrastructure, and future grievances against new offenders, us? Are we willing to let anger and unrestrained rage destroy our goals for future generations?

Will we enter into a cycle of ethnic violence and conflict, worse than what we have ever experienced; or, is it important to know our final goals and then figure out how to reach them in a more controlled, cooperative and directed manner? What will we be left with if the internal fires of pent-up bitterness and ethnic hatred towards some other group, explode into conflict beyond our capacity to contain it? Are there any winners? Probably not, but if there are, who will they be— one group where many are not beneficiaries? How is this different from what we have now? Who do we want to win— those who care only about their own ethnic group or those who care only about themselves and power? If we are willing to use any means, are all limits gone and at what price to our future? Is there a higher road to take where all Ethiopians can move forward together?

We know the TPLF/EPRDF has fueled ethnic divisions among us, but why has it worked so well? Have we been manipulated or duped or has it only worked because we hold to the same TPLF worldview of “my tribe first?” In dividing with each other in this way, have we become TPLF mercenaries against ourselves and our fellow Ethiopians? Is this tribal-based hegemony the only system possible in Ethiopia? How about a society based on the value and rights of every human being, each created in the image of God? What does an Ethiopia based on this core value look like? How do we get there?

CAN USE OF CONSCIENCE AND WISDOM RESTRAIN EMOTION-DRIVEN DECISIONS BASED ON FEAR, ANGER, HATE, VENGEANCE, HUMILIATION AND PREJUDICE?

Decisions are made for many reasons—good, bad and in the middle. Some of our most regrettable decisions are emotionally driven, over-reactions based on fear, anger, revenge, feelings of humiliation, and prejudices. The outcome is usually not much better than what we had before; and oftentimes, it’s worse. Had we considered what results we were after, we may have made better choices from the beginning.

Even serious crises could have been more easily resolved had we better understood what “the other side— or sides” wanted or justifiably needed. This question is not only for us, but for the TPLF/EPRDF as well. **What are the consequences of one’s actions on all parties? Will the outcome we want be more possible or more sustainable if we think about these questions now rather than act impulsively? What happens when bitterness and the desire for retaliation take the forefront? Do we not lose the opportunity to listen to conscience, to listen to all sides, and to pursue the best possible resolution for all through meaningful dialogue and resulting action? This is what is meant by focusing on the best desired “end product” for all parties. It is exactly this approach that makes any peace agreement more sustainably effective for all of us.**

SHORT-TERM VERSUS LONG-TERM GOALS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Those decisions that are made out of fear, duplicity or a sense of expediency, sometimes achieve short-term goals, but in the long-run, most do not deliver. Instead, they become obstacles to the best outcomes because people settle for less than they should because it looks like the easy way out, but it is not. For example, concessions may be offered that are not genuine or meant to endure. They are only meant to pacify the “other side” with superficial changes. Some might work in the midst of crisis, but the effect of such concessions must last to be effective.

In other cases, instead of upholding fair justice, or even sometimes, merciful justice when it accomplishes a bigger goal, one or both sides might seek to humiliate or harshly punish the other, creating grievances and emotional bitterness that later erupts into another conflict, to be repeated again and again as it never really was resolved. An example of this were the harsh and humiliating terms placed on Germany after World War I that laid the groundwork for World War II. Fortunately, that same mistake was not made after WWII. How does this all apply to Ethiopia?

COULD ETHIOPIA BECOME A FAILED STATE?

The future for Ethiopia looks grim. International observers and Ethiopian insiders are fearful of the worst happening, the implosion of the TPLF/EPRDF and the explosion of Ethiopia, leading to destruction, violence, death, suffering and chaos. Once ignited, it could spread like a wildfire, having far-reaching and inescapable long-term consequences for our nation, its people, and its future.

The TPLF/EPRDF, and its layers of compatriots, are being pushed further and further into a corner as they, themselves, see strong indications of an imminent TPLF collapse. Experts seem to believe its only a matter of when it will happen as the signs of the TPLF's demise have already been set into motion.

The same signs have preceded many other nations who have now descended into failed states, like in the case of Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, South Sudan and others. **The recent findings of the Fragile States Index 2017, indicate that Ethiopia, in the last years, has moved four positions closer to becoming a failed state— from 19 to 15— more than any other country in the world.** If it descended this fast, who knows how much time it could take to go further. All Ethiopians should be alarmed at this. We hope it is a catalyst to finding a common vision to come out of this crisis.

RECOVERY IN THE AFTERMATH OF A COLLAPSE COULD TAKE DECADES

If Ethiopia descends into violence, killing and chaos, our ability to end it may not mean days or months; but instead, years. Recovery and restoration from Ethiopian self-led destruction may easily take far longer, even reaching decades before real progress might begin again. Just look at how long it is taking Somalis to come back to “normal,” let alone, to a real movement forward. Keep in mind, Somalia has many advantages over Ethiopia because it is homogeneous, ethnically and religiously. This is not the case in our own country where we have more than 86 ethnic groups, many languages, different religions, and different cultures depending on where one geographically lives.

How can Ethiopians cope with this “Ethiopian” problem? Worse yet, what if the sacrifices and widespread suffering of the people are not replaced with something far better, giving them a better future? What if Ethiopians instead find themselves in the hands of others similar to the TPLF/EPRDF, or even worse? It is possible, if we become reckless, hardened and blinded by our anger, our ethnic-hatred towards others and the desire for vengeance. The answer is not the status-quo for that is not acceptable or sustainable. It will simply feed the fire at a later time when it may be more difficult to respond. The failure of Ethiopians will then be the failure of coming up with a common vision to prevent self-destruction. Can Ethiopia be different? If we focus only on ending the TPLF/EPRDF without considering how it is done and what we want to see replace it, we will be on dangerous ground. We in the SMNE believe there is a way out, but wonder if any, including the TPLF/EPRDF, will take this alternate path. Will it be ignored, once again?

CAN ETHIOPIANS AVOID ETHNIC-BASED REVENGE?

In a letter to former, now deceased, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, we warned him that his policies of favoritism, division and hatred would backfire and set-up his own ethnic group to bear the consequences in the future. In a letter to Tigrayans, we challenged them to refuse to support actions by the TPLF made in their name. We Ethiopians must remember this for there is visceral anger now by many towards the Tigrayan people in general. This is wrong.

We are isolated in our own groups and forget about the numbers of Tigrayans who were suppressed, intimidated, imprisoned, killed, used and bribed for the political advancement and security of the present TPLF regime. Many Tigrayans endured some of the worst persecution in the past for their acts of conscience and courage. Tigrayans are our people and we Ethiopians must embrace all our people.

Even those who were in charge and complicit must have opportunity to be restored and to make things right. **Our problems are not owned only by this regime; but on the other hand, this regime can help bring about something that is respectful of the rights, freedoms and value of all our people. What would that do for the needed reconciliation between us?**

WILL THE TPLF/EPRDF INVEST IN AN ALTERNATE SOLUTION?

To avoid the worst outcome, it will require an investment in the process of change by the people of Ethiopia as well as by the TPLF/EPRDF. **That plan must include reconciliation, meaningful reforms and restorative justice. The current intense levels of hatred, vengeance and ethnic-based power struggles must be replaced with real changes if Ethiopians are to avoid the destruction of their own country and the very possible recycling of one-ethnic and one-party domination by some new group.**

In a meaningful gesture on this Ethiopian New Year, reports indicate that 3,099 prisoners were released by Ethiopia's Southern regional state; as well as 1,981 in the Amhara region and 957 from the Tigray region. While strongly commending those who made the decision to free these Ethiopians; we also ask about the release of countless others— from Oromia, the Somali region, Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Harare and Gambella— what will be done for them?

Whether this was only a superficial gesture to calm things down; or, was in fact a meaningful step forward by the TPLF/EPRDF, it came as a surprise; yet, these Ethiopians will be able to celebrate this Ethiopian New Year holiday with their families. **We also must state that most all of those released should not have been in prison in the first place; however, if genuine, we still see this as a significant move by the TPLF/EPRDF towards the people of Ethiopia and truly hope it will continue.**

If the TPLF/EPRDF are interested in a dialogue with the opposition, another strong indication of their desire to correct and reform would be to prohibit the use of torture among those still in prisons and detention centers in the country. **This should be followed by the release of many more, especially the leaders from all regions. Were these steps taken, the credibility of the TPLF/EPRDF would be greatly enhanced and the future success of a dialogue more possible. Moving from dictatorship to freedom is no easy job.**

Everyone expects the TPLF/EPRDF to resist, even if it means a harsh crackdown on the people, leading to the unimaginable. Yet, perhaps, God will show a way for what no one expects to happen; and if so, Ethiopia would never be the same! It would be an ending for Ethiopians enabling the greatest flourishing as a society.

In conclusion, we strongly believe Ethiopians have decisions to make. We see the SMNE's Ethiopia Council for Reconciliation and Restorative Justice (ECRRJ) playing a significant role in this effort. Please see the link <http://www.solidaritymovement.org/160221-retreat-ECRRJ.php> for more information on the ECRRJ.

We believe many Ethiopians are ready to take a course of action that will result in the best ending for Ethiopia, which includes reconciliation, meaningful reforms, democratic freedoms, strengthening of institutions and restorative justice. It is very important to spread this message, urging people to think through what ending they seek before emotions take all of us a place we do not want to go. Destruction does not have to be the only chosen means to bring an end to the TPLF, especially because it may surely backfire on all of us.

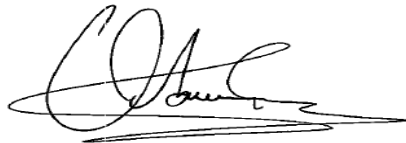
For the worst to be done, we must become inhuman so as to carry out such an evil plan; at what cost to our souls? Unresolved anger and bitterness gives evil a stronghold for our own destruction. We must beware of it in ourselves and help others to avoid it.

Now the concluding question is: will the TPLF/EPRDF become part of the solution? The TPLF/EPRDF may think their only option is a crackdown, harsher than before, hoping to gain time. On the other hand, the opposition may be attracted to a violent struggle in their frustration; however, who will succeed under either scenario— none of us! We must find a different way out of this impasse. Who will be the grown-up or elder in the room, taking the moral high ground? We hope you are one of them! Who is our brothers' or sisters' keeper, if not us?

Practical steps to begin joining together in this effort means living it out wherever you are, talking to each other, not about each other, learning to debate and disagree with civility, gathering in informal groups to work towards grassroots people-to-people reconciliation and being an influence for unity based action for the common good of your community and beyond.

As for us, we are already working towards an ending that gives all of us the best chance of sustainable freedom, justice and reconciliation with each other. If you agree, let us work together, to accomplish the unexpected!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Obang Metho', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Obang Metho,
Executive Director of the SMNE
And the Rest of SMNE Leadership

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This letter has been cc to: Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia and major news media outlets.