

Awakening Giant!

Can Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans living in America make a difference in their homeland?

(Full text of address given on July 2, 2006, at the Ethiopian American Council of the United States Forum, the LAX Hilton, Los Angeles, CA.)



Amesegnalehu. Enquan dehna metachehu.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

First, I would like to thank all of you for taking the time to come to this event. We appreciate very much your presence here today.

I would like to offer my special thanks to the Ethiopian Americans Council of the United States (EAC US) for organizing and sponsoring this event and for facilitating dialogue on issues that are critical to us in America, and our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia.

The very existence of the Ethiopian Americans Council and other similar organizations is proof positive that we have come of age in America.

I would like to congratulate the Ethiopian Sports Federation of North America as it opens its 23rd annual Ethiopian Soccer and Culture Festival in Los Angeles.

Ms. Ana Gomes is here with us today.

As you all know, Ms. Gomes is a great friend and a staunch defender of democracy and human rights in Ethiopia.

Who can forget?

Ana is the one who called the international cops when she witnessed the wholesale theft of an election, and the hijacking of democracy in Ethiopia in 2005.

Ms. Gomes, thank you for being here with us, and for standing up for us.

Although our great champion, Representative Christopher Smith of New Jersey, is not here with us today, we have our brother in the cause of justice and human

rights, Mr. Greg Simpkins of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations.

Greg, we are indebted to you and Chairman Smith for your dedicated and tireless service in the cause of freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia.

When others chose to become mouthpieces for the doers of inequity and apologists for ballot thieves, cold-blooded murderers and jail keepers, Chairman Smith and yourself stood up and upheld the principles of human rights and insisted that democratic verdict of the people must be respected.

We thank you!

Last but not least, I want to extend a warm welcome to any government representatives who may have traveled far and wide from the homeland or the nation's capital to attend this event.

When you return and file your reports on these proceedings today, I hope you will dare tell the truth -- nothing extenuate -- that you came upon a peaceful gathering of Ethiopians in Los Angeles.

That you heard them talk. And that they talked of nothing but freedom, human rights and democracy in their homeland.

Report to your superiors that these Ethiopians bear malice towards none, but stretch out their hands in friendship, peace and good will to all.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am an academic and a lawyer by profession.

I have spent a good part of my adult life teaching young Americans in the art and science of politics and the law.

The balance of my professional life has been largely dedicated to defending the rights of the accused, and safeguarding American civil liberties to the best of my ability.

I believe this has been and continues to be a worthwhile commitment for me.

I will confess to you today that I have not had the good fortune of rendering much service to the land of our fathers and mothers.

I assure you, this is not for lack of interest or desire on my part.

The fulfillment of my boyish hopes and dreams was to return to the motherland one day and make a contribution, however small.

But as you know, things fall apart, and so did my hopes and dreams.

Perhaps, some of you may sympathize with me if I tell you that I carry with me a sense of guilt about the way things turned out.

I should also let you know that I have been away from the motherland for many years now, perhaps too many to count.

But I assure you that I may have left Ethiopia, but Ethiopia has never left me.

My case is a simple one. To adapt an old saying: "You can take the kid out of Ethiopia, but you can not take Ethiopia out of the kid!"

That is exactly how I feel.

Let me also set the record clear at the outset.

I am a follower of Mahatama Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr., two great leaders who were deeply inspired by the teachings of Christ.

I believe in the ways of nonviolence, truth and love.

I also believe that mere declaration of faith in these principles is not enough.

Ghandi and King have taught that the highest expression of love for mankind is to love justice, the highest virtue to stand for truth, and the highest value, compassion for our fellow man and woman.

There is no place for violence where justice stands tall.

No place for oppression where law reigns supreme.

I believe we prove the righteousness of our cause not in battlefields soaked in blood and filled with corpses, but in the living hearts and thinking minds of men and women of goodwill.

And so today I come before you to share a few words about a question of great interest to all of us:

Can we -- Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans-- make a difference in our homeland while living, working and struggling in America?

I shall argue that we can, and in fact, are making a world of difference today.

As I labor to answer this weighty question, I wish to speak with you, my friends, not as an Ethiopian, not as an American, but as an Ethiopian American.

I want to speak with you as one who was blessed to have been born in a country unrivalled for its beauty and the compassion of its people, and also as one who had the great fortune of living in a country that strives to be a beacon of democracy in the world.

I am going to speak with you bluntly today, and so I ask for your forgiveness in advance if the truth as I see it makes you uncomfortable, makes you question yourselves and your values.

I believe we must step out of our comfort zones if we are to do anything that will make a difference in our homeland.

It is no secret that our homeland today is gripped with terror and tyranny. And our people are floating precariously on a sea of melancholy and despair.

Over the past year, an irreversible course of tyranny has been charted in our country. And the light of freedom has been extinguished.

Everyday, our people look towards the westward sky for signs of hope.

But the star on the westward sky shines dimly.

Their despair deepens, and they are overwhelmed by a sense of abandonment.

And so today I have come here to gaze with you towards the heavens and face the question: "Can we make a difference in our homeland while living, working and struggling in America?"

My friends, this innocent question is pregnant with a serious accusation.

Today, we stand accused of the crime of moral indifference to the suffering of our people, moral indifference to evil!

You may ask: Who dares make such an outrageous accusation!!

Allow me to tell you a little story.

A few weeks ago, I had a chance meeting with a bright young man who had recently arrived in this country from Ethiopia.

In the course of our conversation, this young man asked me to explain to him why it is that Ethiopians in America seem not to care or be able to do much to help the suffering of their brothers and sisters in the motherland.

He said to me words to the following effect:

“There are many of you in America who are well educated, prosperous, politically and socially aware, but you do not seem to do much for the country that gave you birth.”

I must admit, I was caught a bit off guard by this matter-of-fact observation.

For a moment, I thought I was being asked not so much to offer an explanation, but to present an instant defense to a state of facts.

But the young man’s inquiry was innocent enough.

Surely, he asked not out of malice but with the same innocence of a child who notices something out of place and is puzzled.

I don’t know if it was a reflexive reaction of a guilty mind on my part, but suddenly I felt I was standing accused:

Is this young man asking a question or condemning us all for living in America in relative luxury, apparently unconcerned and disengaged from the life of our homeland?

Is he asking me and the rest of us to make sacrifices?

In that fleeting moment, I thought I should object strenuously:

“What right do you have to expect sympathy from us or even assume we are patriotic enough to care?

Who are you to question our morality?”

I was uncomfortable. I was being held accountable. I did not like it.

I wanted to feign righteous indignation. Chastise him for his audacity to ask such an impertinent question.

But I thought it safer for me to steer the conversation away from this unrelenting question, and casually brush him off with an off-the-cuff response about not really being able to do much from thousands of miles away.

May be, I thought, he will buy it and will not insist on an answer. I will be off the hook.

But he did not have to ask again. I was deeply stung by his question.

I could not walk away by giving him a flippant answer. It would be disrespectful. And if I did not answer his question forthrightly, I thought I'd be at serious risk of compromising my own intellectual integrity.

I did not have to think much.

It dawned on me that the young man was not merely asking a question, but in fact indicting us all for the crime of moral indifference in the first degree, for failure to assist in the plight and suffering of our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia.

It was distressing to me.

You know, moral indifference to evil is the greatest crime of all.

It comes bundled with the lesser included offense of moral cowardice.

If the philosophers are right in teaching that suffering is what makes a human being human, then indifference to the suffering of our brothers and sisters is a demonstration of our inhumanity.

If the philosophers are right in teaching that compassion is what makes a human being human, then indifference to their plight is an act of cruelty.

If justice is what makes a human being human, then indifference to injustice is an injustice itself.

I submit to you today that when one is indifferent to the suffering of others, one has indeed taken a moral stand.

A moral stand which says, the life or pain of one's countrymen and women is of no consequences. That their lives have no real value or meaning.

Now, I know, it is convenient to be indifferent. We do not have to get involved in another person's despair or pain.

But if the accusation of indifference in the young man's question is true, we are at perilous risk of losing not only our moral standing, but our essential humanity as well.

I felt I had to say something to convince this young man that everything is OK! Stop him from pursuing this uncomfortable line of questioning.

I desperately wanted to present a credible defense.

I wanted to tell this young man that life in America is really difficult.

He must understand that everyday we are fighting for survival.

We work long hours and we get weary.

We do not have time to tend to our own affairs, let alone to get involved in politics and save others. We need to be saved ourselves.

I wanted to tell him that he was new and naïve.

It will take time for him to understand the trials and tribulations of the black immigrant experience in America.

He will soon find out. It's a jungle out there. Yes, live in America for a year and ask me the same question, I wanted to challenge the young man.

I wanted to tell him it takes generations to mature politically and integrate into the American political system and influence policy outcomes. He must understand, it's not that easy.

I desperately wanted to convince him there really wasn't much that we could do. That is just the way things are!

But I knew this litany of lame excuses was disingenuous at best, perhaps bordering on the dishonest.

I knew better.

There is really no defense against a charge of moral indifference to the suffering of others.

There is no argument in support of silence in the face of injustice.

There is no defense against a charge of inaction, apathy and political paralysis when our people suffer under the yoke of a brutal and merciless dictatorship.

There is no excuse for not taking a stand when our motherland teeters on the precipice of disaster.

I thought I should be honest with this young man, and answer his question without evasion.

“It is not lack of interest or compassion or inability to identify with the suffering of our brothers and sisters,” I confessed to the young man.

The real reasons, I said, are simple.

“You see, some of us do not know how to get involved, organize politically, or use resources available to us. We lack knowledge and experience.”

Some of us, I said, remain estranged from our homeland.

The wounds that have been inflicted upon us in the past are too deep and too painful, and have yet to heal.

Our thoughts can not be homeward bound. It hurts too much to look back. To think back.

Some of us live in America, I told the young man, resigned to a life of quiet desperation.

We feel lost. We do not feel at ease and at home in America. America is a wilderness to us.

We feel permanently cut off from our roots.

Some of us, I said, have given up hope and faith in the future of our motherland.

We are overwhelmed by the unending misfortunes that have befallen our beloved country.

We know all too well, our brothers and sisters die everyday not only from the bullets of ballot thieves and oppression, but also from the scourge of AIDS and debilitating poverty.

It is all too much to bear.

Some of us are afraid, I told the young man, afraid to speak, afraid to take a stand, afraid to be seen doing the right thing.

We lack courage. We fear our own shadows.

We are paralyzed by distrust and mistrust of each other, unable to unite or cooperate in any meaningful collective action.

Some of us, I said, are drowning in a sea of consumerism and suffocating ourselves in lifestyles well beyond our means. We struggle to keep our heads above water.

We don't have time to worry about anyone else.

I told the young man some of us have our own individual interests to protect.

We are building homes, operating businesses and helping in the economic development of our people. We want the best of both worlds.

Our credo is "Business and politics do not mix."

Our mantra: "Leave politics to the politicians." We can't get involved.

We stand on the sidelines hoping against hope that if things change, we will still be around and still get ahead.

And, I said, yes, some of us, some of us, just do not care. We couldn't care less!

I saw an expression of shock and dismay on this young man's face.

Perhaps he did not expect such disarming honesty.

But I was not about to let him down!

"But look at us now!" I said effusively. "We are the sleeping giant beginning to awaken!"

"Did you feel the tremor in the Ethiopian political landscape when Chris Smith introduced the Ethiopia freedom, human rights and democracy act in the United States Congress?" I asked the young man.

Did you feel the earth move when we stood together shoulder-to-shoulder and said to Pharaoh:

"Release the prisoners of conscience, now!"

"Keep your hands off the free press!"

"Let justice flow in our country like the mighty waters of the Blue Nile!"

Did you feel it?

“Look at us now,” I said.

We are organizing, building coalitions and action groups, not only to demonstrate in the streets of America but also to walk the halls of Congress and executive branch offices.

“Look at us now!” I said. We are mobilizing at the grassroots level, groups with different agendas are coming together, uniting in a common purpose.

A new generation of Ethiopian Americans is taking upon the cause, and their thirst for justice in their ancestral homeland is no less than our own.

Our sons and daughters, born and raised in America, have claimed their identity, and their pride in their heritage is only exceeded by their enthusiasm to help their people.

Look at us now!

We are forging ahead-- without discouragement or reserve of action.

I could see the young man's eyes lit up with anticipation and joy.

I wanted to reassure him.

“We can not turn our backs on the history of the past year.

We can not sit silent when freedom is rooted out, democracy hijacked in broad daylight, our brothers and sisters butchered in the streets, human rights trampled and the innocent languish away in overcrowded and unsanitary jails.”

We can't. We won't!!

We insist on a forward course, the only course. We have no avenue of retreat from our present struggle for human rights, democracy and freedom in our homeland.

And so, I told the young man what I believed to be the truth.

I am not sure if he believed me, but I tried.

As I left the young man, the question he planted in my mind kept gnawing at me.

I felt he had served us all in America with a summons issued by our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia.

It is a summons that calls upon us to testify in the cause of freedom and justice.

It is a summons that calls us to be drum majors for human rights, and advocates and defenders of democracy.

And this is what the summons says:

“We are your brothers and sisters in Ethiopia. We have no voice, could you speak for us?

We can not tell the story of our suffering because we have no free press. Could you tell the story of our suffering to the world?

Our eyes have been blinded. Could you help us find our way?

And our ears have been rendered deaf? Could you sign for us?

Our faith is wilting under tyranny and oppression. Could you pray for us?

We are in despair, could you be our hopes?

My friends: If we fail to answer the summons of our people today, we will surely be indicted by posterity, by generations to come who will point an accusatory finger and say:

“They remained silent when they could have spoken.

They stood by idly, when they could have acted.

They turned their backs, when they could have extended a helping hand.

They saw our sacrifices, and walked away.”

Then, my friends, we will have no defense.

And so, generations yet unborn will look back at us and pay tribute for what we have done or condemn us for sitting by idly.

We will face the judgment of history, that there once lived Ethiopians away from their homeland.

Much was given to them, but they returned little.

Much was expected from them, but they turned up empty.

But I am optimistic that when a jury of posterity sits in judgment and renders its verdict, we will be praised for our courage, for our unflagging pursuit of justice and human rights, and indefatigable defense of democratic principles.

My friends, in the tradition of folklore, there was once a mighty man who fell asleep.

Seeing this mighty man in deep sleep, a crowd of small men began to tie him up from stake to stake, across hand and foot, leg and arm, neck and body.

These little men bragged to each other that they have finally caged the great giant into submission.

From time to time, the giant would take a deep breath, and some of the stakes and ropes would snap.

The little men, terrified by the thought of the giant waking up, would scramble furiously and retie the ropes.

But in time something happened that was beyond the imagination of the little men.

The giant began to awaken and flex his muscles.

The ropes which seemed to be permanent shackles to the little men broke like strands of cobwebs as the giant began to stretch.

I submit to you that Ethiopians in America today find ourselves in a position similar to that of the giant.

We had fallen into a mighty sleep, and in our sleep little men had bound our minds with ethnic hatred and division, shackled our wills with fear, riveted our mouths with savage threats, and blinded our vision with gifts of shimmering gold and silver.

But, we are awake now!

We awakened when we heard the cries and wails of the innocent who languish away in Zenawi's jails.

We awakened when we heard the call for help in the dying voices of the courageous young men and women who were massacred chasing ballot thieves.

We awakened when we heard the voice of Ana Gomes saying, “The Ethiopian people have been betrayed by those who continue to govern in their name without a proper mandate.”

We awakened when we heard the voice of Christopher Smith ringing in the halls of the United States Congress pleading for freedom, human rights and democracy in Ethiopia!

We awakened because the silence of the Ethiopian free press was deafening.

We awakened when our children tugged on our hands and said, “Wake up mother and father. It is a new day. It’s time to act!”

We began to flex our muscles when we heard the savage threats and boastful arrogance of the adversary.

We began to stretch our muscles when the adversary thumbed his nose at international law.

We stood up and proclaimed to the adversary: “The people have spoken. You must accept their verdict!”

My friends, I began my conversation with you with a question:

“Can we – Ethiopian and Ethiopian Americans -- make a difference in our homeland while living, working and struggling in America?”

I suppose I do not have to give a definitive answer to that question now.

The giant is awake! The giant is sitting in this room.

The giant is at this soccer tournament, and in every state, city and town in America.

Look around you and ask him.

Look around you and ask her.

The giant can give you the answer.

But I will be glad to share with you my humble personal views on this important question.

The tragedy for us in America today is that we have great power, but do not know how to use it.

We have great energy of purpose, but we do not know how to harness it.

And we have great knowledge, but we do not know how to put it in the service of justice.

My view is that whether we can answer the question put to us by history depends on our answers to a number of other vital questions.

And so I will advance them to you today.

Can we purge the poison of ethnic hatred from our hearts and minds?

I believe we must undertake an internal struggle in our minds and hearts and cleanse ourselves of the poison of ethnic hatred.

I realize that maintaining perpetual ethnic antagonism is the lifeline of those who misgovern our homeland today, and it is an issue that causes me the deepest anxiety and anguish.

We must stand united, shoulder-to-shoulder and stamp out this malignant cancer from the body politics of our country.

Some of us, long denied our rightful place in society and politics, speak of secession and separation from the motherland.

Such talk, I believe, springs from deep feelings of dispossession and deprivation and frustration, and testifies to the success of our adversary's ability to sever the everlasting bonds of marriage and blood, and sisterhood and brotherhood and nationhood we have shared for millennia.

I can not accept the core principle of those misgovern us today that Ethiopia is merely a nation of ethnic reservations. Ethnic federalism is the tool used by the adversary to keep us alienated from each other and in perpetual antagonism.

No! No! No. We are first and foremost Ethiopians, one people, woven by the hand of the Almighty into the most beautiful ethnic mosaic in the world.

Look in the Holy Bible. Look in the Holy Q'uran.

The learned scholars tell us that Ethiopia and Ethiopians are mentioned in the Holy Bible no less than thirty-three times, and as many times in the Holy Q'uran.

And so, whatever language or dialect we speak in our country, we have shared the same name for millennia: Ethiopia and Ethiopians. No one can change that! We should not allow anyone to change that!

And so, I reject those who proclaim that we live in our country merely as ethnic partners in a marriage of convenience.

I take great pride not only in our unique regional and geographical communities, but also rejoice in our tradition of diversity and tolerance.

But we must take a clear and unambiguous stand against the politics of ethnic hatred.

If we allow ethnic hatred to fester and smolder, one day we will find ourselves consumed by it.

Let us also not forget that the world is shrinking every day through advanced technology.

More and more people are thinking and acting globally.

The politics of narrow nationalism and ethnic division have appeal only to those leaders who seek to feed their own insatiable appetite for power.

I have no doubts that we will ultimately overcome the destructive passions of ethnic hatred, but we can do so only if we value our brotherhood and sisterhood and nationhood more than the vestigial bonds of ethnicity.

Do we have a vision?

We must be clear about what it is that we want for our homeland. We want change, but what kind of change do we want?

If we are not clear about what change we want, any change will do. We will be back to square one soon enough.

We will need substantial intellectual force to help us define a vision of what we want to become as a society and as a nation.

We have that force, we are that force, but we need to deploy it.

Without a vision, my friends, we will only have sight, and only a blurred view of the future.

Can we cultivate leaders who are able to subordinate their personal ambitions to the common good?

Leadership is the flip side of vision.

We need to cultivate leaders who want to lead not out of personal ambition or selfish interest, but out of a desire to serve the common good.

We have many such leaders amongst us today, but they need to come forward and join the march, lead the march, follow the march!

Can we build welcoming and nurturing organizations?

It is true, we can do a few things individually, but if we participate and collectively act within the framework of organizations, there is no limit to what we can do.

During the American civil rights movement, there was a popular catchphrase that went something like this:

“If I push you with a single finger, you may not move, but if I push with all ten, you will surely lose your footing.”

I realize that some of us may have had disappointing experiences in the past with organizations of one type or another.

Some of us may have been turned off by the lack of vision, transparency and accountability in our prior experiences with organizations.

But if we insist on bringing this baggage of discontent and disillusionment from the past to our future collective efforts, we would be giving the adversary the greatest gift he can hope for -- self-defeat, disunity and discord. We would have done his job for him!

But if we unite in a common purpose, in the words of the old song: “There ain’t no stopping us now!”

Can we change the way we look at ourselves?

Far too many of us look at the world as victims.

We are quick to sound the trumpet of defeat and say, “men yaregal, yalekelet neger new. Esun te-wew.”

Some of us counsel defeatism: “Don’t waste your time. It is impossible to organize and unite Ethiopians in action.”

Some of us explain the die was cast by the Almighty: “We have been cursed to a fate of discord, disunity and division. There is no hope!”

We tell each other things have been bad for a long time in Ethiopia. Nothing can change. Nothing will ever change.

Some of us even doubt divine mercy and declare: “God has abandoned Ethiopia!”

Some of us in our bootless cries ask where Ethiopia’s educated children have gone when their people are being massacred and jailed by the thousands, their country’s wealth mismanaged and plundered by the practitioners of corruption.

“Why are they silent?” we ask. “Where have the Ethiopian men gone?”

Some of us even comfort ourselves in despair saying: “Compared to the Derg, it’s really not that bad. This too shall pass.”

Some of us are quick to criticize and condemn each other, and sit in judgment of each other’s organizations and leaders for sins committed, and yet to be committed.

We malign and defame those individuals who strive to offer leadership and build organizations, and spread rumors about their individual and leadership integrity, often with little evidence.

We accuse each other of misconduct and improprieties, which if proven, could be felonious violations of the law.

I get weary listening to some of our brothers and sisters who, out of frustration and despair, have become unwitting prophets of defeatism, self-negation, self-doubt and doom.

I don’t blame them for their frustrations and disappointment.

When your spirit is broken by a long train of abuses, and you have no outlet for your frustrations, it is easy to cling to defeat.

When your hopes for democracy and freedom are dashed, and find yourself floating on a sea of despair, defeatism offers a comfortable safe harbor.

But I believe we must change our attitudes and perceptions about ourselves before we exert our labors to help others in changing their circumstances.

We must constantly remind ourselves that we are in charge of our destiny, but if we do not change the way we look at ourselves and act decisively, destiny will surely be in charge of us.

Are we prepared to take on the challenge?

Knowledge is power, but knowledge combined with action has the force of cosmic energy capable of moving individuals and nations.

We must educate ourselves on the American political process.

More importantly, we need to educate ourselves and our children on our rich history and heritage.

We need to learn from each other. We need to teach each other.

Can we learn from our experiences in America?

I believe there are two great lessons we can learn from our experiences in America.

One is that people of diverse national, ethnic and racial backgrounds can live in an imperfect harmony with each other and prosper together. Thrive together.

Another lesson is that we need to learn to do politics in the open. To debate our differences in the open. To challenge each other in the open.

And to do so, always, with civility and respect for each other.

We should abandon the politics of intrigue and suspicion.

It has proven destructive our homeland, and it will not serve us well here.

Can we take advantage of the resources available to us here?

We have enormous resources on our hands. We have the advantage of numbers. We count in the hundreds of thousands in America.

We have expertise. We have brothers and sisters who have excelled in the arts, sciences, law, medicine, the humanities and other fields of knowledge.

We have allies in the halls of the government and elsewhere -- members of Congress, executive branch officials at all levels, and international human rights organizations.

They want to hear from us. They want to help us.

But we must seek their help fully prepared to answer their questions and address their concerns.

There is nothing more irksome to our allies than to seek their help but be ignorant of our own cause.

We have the most powerful communications tool -- the internet -- at our fingertips. Let us use it to create and network virtual communities across cyberspace.

And we have the greatest resource of all: ourselves and our children.

We need to engage our youth in the great cause of freedom, human rights and democracy in Ethiopia.

Their yearning to learn about their ancestral homeland is deep and expansive.

We must teach our youth in America to be proud of their history and heritage.

They should know in their hearts and minds that our people are not the wretched of the earth. We are not merely news footage from the pages of the apocalypse that they see on television.

Let us also answer their questions honestly:

“Why is there so much suffering in Ethiopia? Why is the news about Ethiopia mostly about famine and starvation and political turmoil? Why do they allow so many kids of our age to die from AIDS? What are you doing about it mom? Dad?”

It causes me great pain to see our children, with downcast eyes, deny to their school mates that they are not really the same as those Ethiopian children you see on TV dying from famine, starvation and poverty.

It causes me great pain to see the sheer terror in the faces of our children who take upon a class project on our country, but are embarrassed and ashamed to talk about our people's poverty and suffering.

But I tell the young ones, “Do not feel ashamed. You come from a great and proud people who have maintained their independence for 3000 years. You come from a land of heroes. You come from good people. Compassionate people. Affectionate people. Respectful people.”

I believe our youth have the intensity of passion that most of us had not too long ago.

Let’s help them lead us. Let us prepare them for leadership.

Let us also strive always to be inclusive of all who agree with our principles and our cause, but disagree with us on strategy.

If we agree on the destination and we are all aboard the freedom train, we can sit at a table of brotherhood and sisterhood and chart the course of our destiny.

Let us join with each other in a common purpose.

Now, allow me to say a word or two about resource management.

Resources require careful husbandry. We should not overtax and make unreasonable demands of our allies and supporters.

Those of us who play leadership roles, and aspire to such roles should be careful in the way we administer the funds and resources we gather for our cause.

Some complain that adequate accounting is not given for the administration of resources. Some even hold back in their contributions because they feel unsure about the ultimate use of their funds.

We should strive to inspire confidence that resources we collect for our cause are administered not only with the highest ethical standards, but also professional standards of accounting.

Do we understand the adversary? Can we learn from him?

We should not be naïve. We have a formidable adversary. We should not underestimate him.

He is wily. He is treacherous. He is resourceful.

He has unlimited financial resources. And he is resilient.

And, my friends, he has a Master Plan.

It is a stealthy and Machiavellian Master Plan.

It relies on the use of mercenaries to defeat, buy or destroy the opposition in the Diaspora.

You will find this Master Plan in a 52-page Amharic booklet with the title roughly translated as “Constituency Building Strategy for the Ethiopian Year 1998.” You will find it on the web. http://www.ethioforum.org/pdf/tplf_secret.pdf

When you read the Master Plan, you will see that the adversary will use every device of political partisanship to subdue the giants in the Diaspora, to give them the opiate of money and privilege just to lull them back into slumber.

Skip reading this Master Plan at your own risk.

Now, we should be mindful that our boastful and arrogant adversary has great contempt for us.

I suppose he is probably sitting somewhere now and laughing at us with contempt, saying:

“Let them talk. What are they going to do? We got ourselves in power with the force of arms, let them come and remove us with the force of arms, if they can!”

Yes, we have a clever adversary. He knows of our difficulties to act in unity, to follow through.

In fact, he uses our apparent weaknesses to discredit us before the international community, and use every avenue of propaganda to scandalize our name.

He tells the international community, “The opposition is disunited. They have no plan or program. Those in America are just bankrollers. They are former Derg supporters, outdated royalists, Amharas who lost their privileges, and so on.

If they ever took power, the sky will fall. The country will go to hell in a hand basket.”

The adversary has been successful in painting a false picture of us before the international community, and some like Tony Blair have been duped into surrendering to him the crown jewels.

But the adversary has succeeded in his international propaganda because we have been busy with the small picture, pointing fingers at each others and calling each other names.

We have done little to expose his deceits, chicanery and hypocrisy. That is our loss and his gain.

The adversary tells our people at home and abroad: “These mischief makers from America are only interested in meddling in our affairs from the comfort of their luxury. They are not interested in us.”

He seeks to denigrate us in his usual boastful and dismissive way saying: “If they are so dedicated to their country, why don’t they come here and help! After all, it is a free country!”

And in our fractious politics, in our inability to unite in a common purpose to wage a united struggle for democracy and human rights, we have played right into his hands.

Shame on us!

So, my friends, have no doubts.

The adversary will be hard at work scheming and crafting divisive strategies to weaken our influence and our ability to act collectively.

He will do anything, spare no expense to keep us divided and at each other’s throats.

After all, he has used this strategy successfully for a decade and a half to keep himself entrenched in our country.

Yes, he is a grand master at divide and rule. He will try to use every trick in the book. Offer gifts of gold and silver. Threaten and intimidate.

I assure you when the giant is awake, the little men will not sleep. They can’t afford to sleep!

Like the little men of folklore, the adversary now has a big problem on his hands. He is terrified of the awakening giant. He is confused.

He is asking himself, “What went wrong? It’s not supposed to be this way! The giant should be asleep!”

And so now, he has organized a mighty army of the most powerful lobbyists in Washington to subdue the giant.

This mighty army will be marching on the Hill -- the United States Congress -- everyday!

He will feed this mighty and voracious army with thousands of dollars every month -- money that could go to care for AIDS victims, build schools, clinics and many other worthy causes.

And so, my friends, the giant, We, stand alone against the mighty armies of Nebuchadnezzar.

But we will not be subdued. No! No! No! We will not give in!

In the end, we are assured of victory because we have something that Nebuchadnezzar does not have.

We have truth on our side.

We have the cause of justice on our side.

We have the power of democratic ideals and ideas on our side.

But above all, we have the Almighty God on our side!!!

And so, in the end Nebuchadnezzar's mighty army will be vanquished by freedom advocates and defenders of human rights and democracy in the Diaspora.

And in the end, Nebuchadnezzar will meet his fate!

But I caution you, we must maintain perpetual vigilance against this cunning adversary.

We must be prepared, and yes, his malicious campaigns will lay a heavy toll upon our reserve of power and will.

Can we all contribute?

This is a very important question for each one of us.

I have heard so many of us express doubt about ourselves and stand on the sidelines saying: "I am not a politician. There is not much I can do. I lack this art or that profession, or this skill or that aptitude."

I believe this self-induced self-disempowerment is perhaps the most important obstacle to any collective action we may be able to undertake in the Diaspora in the future.

One need not be a professor or a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, a scientist or whatever else to make a contribution.

In the larger scheme of things, I believe the contributions and sacrifices of the average citizen have proven more decisive in changing the course of history.

If truth be told, the thousands of heroes who died defending our country against fascist aggression were average men and women whose unique distinction was patriotism and love of country, and not necessarily learning or education.

The American civil rights movement was sparked by a seamstress, a woman who sewed clothes for a living. One day she sat down and said “Enough is enough!”

The leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement were barely out of their teenage years when they laid their bodies in segregated buses and restaurants.

Martin Luther King Jr. was 24, and Harry Belafonte, who did not even finish high school, was 26 when the Montgomery Boycott was launched.

The millions of Indians that populated the British colonial jails in Ghandi’s movement were ordinary citizens.

So, yes, I believe every Ethiopian living, working and struggling in America can contribute, indeed has a moral duty to contribute to improve the lives of our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia!

We can, and must, contribute according to our abilities. Those with learning, with ideas. Those with means, with financial support.

But no one, no one, can be exempt from offering at least moral support and encouragement to those on the frontlines.

And so when you doubt your capacity to make a contribution, think of the contributions of the young men and women who were massacred chasing ballot thieves.

Think of the contributions of thousands of our brothers and sisters who are suffering and dying in Zenawi’s jails every day.

When you doubt ability to make an impact, or feel you are just too small to make a difference, consider the thought of going to bed with a mosquito in the room.

That tiny mosquito can keep you awake all night. And so, you can keep the little frightened men awake all night!!

I have no doubts we will rise to the occasion. We will not merely survive, but surely prevail in the end.

I have confidence in the future, because I have pride in our past.

Sometimes when I think upon the fate of our country and the suffering of our people, I get weary and dispirited.

But I quickly pick myself up. I reinvigorate and inspire myself with thoughts of the deeds of our ancestors, their immortal courage and honor and dignity, and their immeasurable sacrifices, which remain the glory of our history.

I pick myself up with visions of our young people in America and Ethiopia carrying the torch of freedom, human rights and democracy in every city, town and hamlet, in every village and neighborhood in Ethiopia.

Oh! "My cup runneth over!"

And so, as I come to the end of my remarks today, perhaps some of you might think that I do not fit the usual mold.

I admit I have a different approach and style.

Indeed, some of you may listen to my message and call me utopian.

I don't mind that. I don't mind being called a utopian Ethiopian.

And one day soon, I hope to meet the young man I spoke about earlier.

I am sure each and everyone of you will meet him too.

Let's tell him it is a new day for us in America!

Tell him that we have accepted the summons of our people, and we will stand in their defense!

Tell him to reassure our brothers and sisters in the streets and jails, and in every city and hamlet to hold on, hold steady, and to keep hope alive!

Friends, before I close my remarks, I want to tell you that I have come to this place, as I hope you have, not only to have a conversation about what is possible, but also to remember the untold thousands of our brothers and sisters who languish away in jail in Ethiopia today accused of bogus crimes or no crimes at all.

I stand here at this podium and offer my deepest sympathies for their suffering.

I stand here and express my appreciation for their sacrifices and declare my eternal indebtedness for their contributions.

I stand here to praise their courage and express my admiration for their incorruptible character and unimpeachable virtues.

And so, I stand here to proclaim my affirmation of those principles of civil and human rights for which they continue to be persecuted.

They sit in jail today because they stood up for democracy and human rights yesterday.

They suffer and die in the darkness of Kaliti jail and Kebele jails and other jails throughout the land, because they wanted to bring the light of freedom, democracy and human rights to their people.

And so I would like to respectfully ask you all to stand up and join me in thanking our brothers and sisters in Ethiopian jails:

Thank you, brothers! Thank you sisters!

Thank you for your sacrifices!

Hold on! Hold on! The Almighty willing, redemption is near!!

God bless you and protect you wherever you are!!!

Thank you my friends, thank you all for being here.

God bless Ethiopia! God bless you all, and your children! And God bless America!

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