

*In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

**Professor Zinabu Gebre Mariam**

President of Debu University

PO Box 05

Awasa, Ethiopia

May 09, 2006

Dear President Zinabu,

This letter of protest and concern is addressed to you in a unanimous and joint voice by various organizations of Ethiopian Muslims in Europe, the Middle East, and North America concerning the grave discrimination and injustice carried out by your esteemed university in dealing with the recent flagrant aggression and violation of the constitutional religious rights of all Muslims in general and the Debu University Muslim community in particular.

This illegal attack and evil behavior was a deliberate work of bigotry and intolerance that has no place in any seat of higher learning. It is a sinister copy-cat crime, replicating the desecration of the Holy Quraan at Guantanamo and Abu Ghuraib prisons. We believe it was a deliberate and systematic cowardly rampage carried out by hate-mongers in a span of three weeks in the grounds of your university. Its motive, no doubt, is to offend and anger Muslims with the hope of stirring clashes between Muslims and Christians.

It doesn't take a genius to conclude that this was not only meant to anger and intimidate the DU Muslim students, teachers and employees but was further intended to hurt all Ethiopian Muslims as well as Muslims the world over. In the same token it was also meant to offend and insult any peaceful and tolerant Christian or peace-loving people of any other faith.

Even though circumstantial evidences surrounding this provocative transgression unmistakably indicate that it was being carried out by several conspirators, the university did not make any effort to investigate and bring the offenders to justice. It was only after the DU Muslim students launched their own investigation that it culminated by apprehending a single perpetrator caught red-handed in the act of desecration of the Holy Quraan. The Muslim students, to their credit, acted peacefully and honorably handing over the delinquent to the appropriate authorities along with the evidence. Yet in dealing with this outrageous aggression, the university administration utterly failed to execute justice.

- With all due respect for the institution of higher learning that you are the leader of, your administration have fallen far short in adequately and publicly addressing the matter with the weight and seriousness it deserves as terrible violation of the constitutional rights of Muslims.

- Your administration also failed far short of condemning the act and taking a firm stand against any similar violations in the future by laying out grave consequences against any such behavior.
- Indeed your administration also failed far short of applying the proportionate measure of punishment for this grave crime to make it an example with deterrence effect.

**Our investigation of the matter indicates that in your initial reaction right after the apprehension of the perpetrator you expressed outrage in which you rightly pointed out that the gravity and the heart-breaking nature of this serious contravention impacts not only Muslims but indeed the whole university community and all Ethiopians at large.**

In the aftermath, however, your administration treated both the crime and the perpetrator less seriously and lacked sensitivity and proper respect towards the victims.

- Instead of punishing the criminal student (after finding him guilty) with unconditional permanent dismissal, he was given a slap on the wrist and assured to return to the university after two years.
- Instead of insisting and vigorously pursuing the criminal action, your administration has taken its hands off the criminal pursuit and in bringing the matter to justice. This is as if the university has nothing to do with the crime while it was done in the very compound of the university and by the very student(s) the university is in charge of.
- Instead of appreciating and commending the Muslim students for their apprehension of the perpetrator and giving them protection, you are ignoring a rising tide of open intimidation and harassment being inflicted on them by hate-mongers who clearly have an agenda of vengeance.
- Instead of ensuring full and peaceful enjoyment of their freedom of worship, the authorities in Awasa has let the Muslims down by actively entertaining the demolition of their small mosque just outside of the university campus, thereby encouraging ill-intended and ill-mannered individuals who are bent on creating a religious divide in the name of peace and order.
- The Muslim students who acted peacefully and with exemplary maturity and respect to the rule of law should have been acknowledged and rewarded. However your office and administration had even not the desire to issue a statement to that effect and encourage all the students of the university, regardless of their faith, to uphold such exemplary deed of the Muslims Students.

In conclusion, we desire to express our serious concern that the university has erred gravely in handling this violation of the fundamental and inalienable constitutional rights of all Muslims in general and the university's Muslims in particular. As patriotic Ethiopians who love our country dearly and care for her peace, stability and progress, we sincerely advise you that it is not too late to correct the mistakes and missteps your administration has done/taken. Doing any less or ignoring this volatile situation will only result in further hate crimes and uncalled for tension and hostility within our customarily tolerant inter-religious society. Because of the gravity of this incident and its sensitivity, we would like to point out to you that the reputation and interest of our beloved country Ethiopia is at stake. Be also reminded that the incident had been reported by international media like the Aljazeera network and had become internationalized and it is no more a local issue.

Therefore, we urge you and all your colleagues as well as the State Government of Southern Peoples Region and the Federal Government to uphold the constitution and execute justice in accordance with fairness and equal protection under the law.

Thanks.

*“O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for **Justice**, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it is (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (**Justice**) or decline to do **Justice**, verily Allah is well- acquainted with all that ye do.” (Quraan 4:135)*

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