

# National Agenda: Unity of Purpose & Sustaining Democratization in Ethiopia.

## Part I of two Parts

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*“To accomplish great things, we must not only act but also dream; not only dream, but also believe.” - Antatole France*

### The Importance of Pursuing a National Agenda:

The dream France is fostering is one of vision...a powerful concept that moves countries, leaders and people to accomplish great things, especially in transforming their lives and those who live in their societies. To be **meaningful, a vision** (foresight) must be designed to respond to the real needs of real people at a given time in history. A vision must be shared, clearly understood, owned and, must be able to mobilize spirits, energies, talents, resources and capabilities of people. As critical, a vision must be translated into action.

Translating vision into action requires mindsets and behaviors that are directly related to values and principles. These would include:

- **Shared Purpose**
- **Art of Leadership, including organizational acumen**
- **Team Work/Collaboration**
- **Mutual Trust**
- **Mutual Respect**
- **Integrity and Honesty**
- **Transparency and Openness**

**These values and principles will be discussed in greater detail in Part II of this paper. In Part I, we will diagnose the context and the arguments of why the democratization process in Ethiopia must be pursued with wisdom, patience, perseverance, strategic thinking---always using the National Agenda and Unity of Purpose as guide posts.**

#### Context:

When the **Chinese** popularized the vision that the “**people can move mountains**”, they believed and **trusted** the capacity of the Chinese people to achieve great things by harnessing the creativity and wisdom of the people. Look at where China is today. When President **Kennedy** vowed that Americans will put a “man on the moon,” he believed in the scientific capacity and determination of the United States to do just that. History proved him right. When Nelson **Mandela** vowed that South African blacks

will achieve majority rule and democracy, he believed in the capacity, **determination and commitment** of the people to free South Africa from Apartheid. He lived to witness a multi-racial democracy that has won the **admiration** of the global community. **When Gandhi** challenged the British with his wise strategy of “peaceful resistance,” he believed in the resolve of the people of India to break the chain of colonialism and racism. Today, India is on the way to becoming an economic colossus. It is not too long ago that **Martin Luther King** made his “**I Have a Dream**” speech and mobilized the hearts and minds of millions of people around the globe and changed the course of history.

Whatever example we may cite, it is clear that charting and pursuing **visions and goals** that respond to the real political, economic, social, diplomatic and cultural needs of a society are absolutely critical to any country or people. There are no short cuts to achieve them. **They cannot be achieved without mutual trust and respect. They cannot occur without leadership & organization. They cannot be accomplished without participation and inclusion of those that can and should be included. They cannot be achieved without persistence, sacrifice, collaboration and team work.**

### **What does sustaining the National Agenda of Democratization Mean to us?**

Under the political leadership (s) of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUD/P) and the United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF), the Ethiopian people witnessed sharp differences in vision and goals between the ethnic-based political and social architecture of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and these Opposition parties. The Opposition Parties offered the Ethiopian people a contrasting vision of an all inclusive, peaceful, pluralist, progressive, democratic, free-market oriented and unified Ethiopian society in which the rule of law and the settling of disputes peacefully will be the norm. The Opposition Parties challenged the leadership of the EPRDF to demonstrate the legitimacy of its **Governance** in political, economic, social, diplomatic, cultural and development policies and practices. The Ethiopian people were given contrasting and sharply differing choices. We now know the choices they made and the **adverse consequences** that followed.

The May 15, 2005 General Elections were **therefore contrasts in** vision and practice between the Governance of the EPRDF and the **aspirations and hopes** of the Ethiopian people as presented by the two major Opposition Parties in general and the CUD/P in particular. As in other countries, the May 15, 2005 General Elections---relatively free and fair up to that point---offered the Ethiopian people a historical opportunity to express their voices in shaping their future. A year ago, 26 million Ethiopians cast their ballots **rejecting the legitimacy of the EPRDF. The onslaught against the leaders of the Opposition, civic society, youth, party supporters and others by the regime begun when it became clear that the vast majority of the Ethiopian people rejected its political, economic and social hegemony and leadership.**

**Almost a year later**, the EPRDF leadership remains as intransigent as ever. It continues its **scorched-earth policy of repression** in order to perpetuate its political and economic dominance. It continues extra-judicial procedures and practices---fabricating false charges against the CUD/P leadership, journalists, civic leaders and youth. It continues to reject the call of the international community to release all political leaders and to begin **dialogue** with the **Opposition. It cleverly and systematically crafts alternative, dependent, submissive and nominal parties** loyal to EPRDF. In doing this, it has found and recruited short sighted and easily swayed allies. This is not, at all surprising. A regime that has lost legitimacy resorts to machinations to sustain itself. In many respects, the EPRDF has begun to resemble the **Dergue** during its fading phase.

**At the same time, the Ethiopian people have shown a remarkable determination** to sustain the democratization process at all costs. Many innocent Ethiopians have lost their lives for a noble cause. Equally important, Ethiopians in the Diaspora continue their allegiance to the people's cause and vision. This persistence and determination will ultimately result in achieving a new, democratic, pluralist and progressive Ethiopian in the years to come.

As we observe **the first anniversary of the May, 2005 Elections**, it is critical that we make note and reiterate **the eight (8) Point Preconditions** that the leadership of the CUD/P issued as part and parcel of the democratization process. These are highlighted below:

- 1. The Restructuring of the Election Board into an Independent body;**
- 2. Freedom of and access to All Media;**
- 3. Independent legal system (free of EPRDF party control);**
- 4. An Independent Commission to investigate the killings of innocent Ethiopians;**
- 5. Non-involvement of armed forces or police in political affairs;**
- 6. Reinstatement of Parliamentary procedures and Governance of Addis Ababa in accordance with the verdict of the people;**
- 7. Release of all political prisoners; and,**
- 8. Independent commission or body to adjudicate the above.**

**These points and principles remain as valid today as they were then. They are part of the democratization process that we should continue to defend.**

## **What are the Vital Reasons for Sustaining the Democratization Process?**

Pretensions aside, Ethiopia's economic, social and cultural development show persistent poverty. **Despite massive foreign assistance totaling more than US\$21 billion over the past 14 years, and the recent significant debt relief, the current Government has failed to better the lives of ordinary Ethiopians..** It is even unable to feed the poorest of the poor. There is ample evidence to show that its agriculture **based**

**development strategy** has not produced the promised outcomes. In a most recent and thorough study on Poverty in Ethiopia, the authors identified the following structural issues, and indicators of failure under the EPRDF:

1. The Gross Domestic Product per capita today is “still slightly above the levels in the early 1970s, underscoring the deep-rooted nature of poverty;”
2. “The micro and macro evidence paint a picture of limited to no decline in consumption poverty (food and other consumables) since 1992);”
3. “The agricultural sector (EPRDF’s economic policy foundation) barely kept up with rural population growth,” despite heavy donor contributions to the tune of US\$21 billion since the current regime took power;
4. “Poverty in urban areas increased despite substantial growth in the services sector---largely fueled by Government expansion.”...This expansion in Government expenditure did not benefit the urban poor. On the contrary, the beneficiaries remain to be EPRDF loyalists who invest in selected industries, services and locations, including housing, manufacturing, transport, banking and mining extraction. The current regime’s investment, financial and monetary policies have created a growing urban inequality that any visitor to Addis Ababa and other cities would witness. Party affiliated and supported enterprises continue to benefit from Government procurement policies and practices. There is hardly a level playing field for **non-EPRDF loyal** Ethiopians regardless of nationality, religion or gender. Sadly, donor contributions of billions of dollars have not benefited the poor, especially rural Ethiopia. In fact, the beneficiaries are largely EPRDF party affiliated and run enterprises, leaders and loyalists.
5. **The regime’s loss of Addis Ababa in the May 15, 2005 Elections is in part a manifestation of growing nepotism, corruption, lack of a level playing field for all Ethiopians, and therefore growing and sharp inequality. EPRDF lost legitimacy in Addis Ababa and else where in the country because it proved to be incapable and unwilling to respond to the economic, social and political needs and aspirations of the Ethiopian people. This was at the center of the debates during the elections that the Opposition parties surfaced and the public supported through its voice.**
6. Today, HIV/AIDS afflicts at **least 1.5 million Ethiopians**. A total of **539,000 Ethiopian youth are AIDS orphans**, one of the largest in Sub-Saharan Africa.
7. “There is a startling correlation between poverty in Ethiopia and the lack of **educational achievement**”, especially among girls and women;
8. “**At 55-60 percent, pre-school child** stunting remains among the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa...” This stunting of Ethiopian children will affect the potential

contributions of a future generation of our youth, and therefore the productivity of the national economy;

9. **Ethiopian women** are among the most disempowered in the world. “With over 75% of women having received no education at all-- compared to men at 50%--, the lack of access to **educational opportunities for Ethiopian women is one of the major limiting factors in tackling endemic poverty.** **A Government that cares about its people will devote resources in tackling this limiting factor, instead of investing heavily in national defense, security, intelligence and in its members. The EPRDF does not have the interest, the commitment or the motivation to introduce and implement social policies that address the needs of the vast majority, including women.**
10. Despite the demonstrated impact of **education** in reducing poverty and creating the conditions for sustained growth, Ethiopian society continues to suffer from an **educational policy** that is ethnic based, narrow in scope and depth, **nepotistic** and not responsive to **the economic and social needs of the country.** **The study concludes that “education attainment in Ethiopia remains limited “**
11. **Ethiopians actually suffer from a double phenomenon under the EPRDF. Highly educated and trained Ethiopians leave the country for better and more secure lives abroad.** Because of unfavorable political, economic and social policies, Ethiopia is unable to benefit from its **investment in human capital.** **The brain drain is one of the most important results of the current policies of the EPRDF.** Second, universal education at the primary level remains to be a pipe dream. On average, male adults **complete 1.8 grades; and females complete .88 grade-- less than first grade.**
12. Numerous examples from the East Asian and other experiences suggest that **education is** the most critical variable in attaining sustained development. “The empirical study suggests that **bringing all female** adults to at least a 4<sup>th</sup> grade education could reduce poverty by 12 percent. Education will help households adopt new technologies and thus enhance productivity in agriculture, etc.” In addition, **educated women** are most likely to encourage their children to go to school and stay in school. The benefit is therefore not limited to women’s productivity; it is also a sure way of enabling the young to be educated and productive. **Educating Ethiopians and creating a good political and governance environment within our country to retain and enable them to participate in all sectors of the economy are sure ways to fight poverty.** No amount of foreign aid will be a substitute to this reality.
13. **Ethiopia’s single most important capital asset is its people.** The attainment of education, the retention and reentry of the thousands of Ethiopians in the Diaspora are vital for Ethiopia’s economic, social and cultural development. **Sad, but true, internal objectives in social capital formation and institution building will be virtually impossible as long as the current political architecture of exclusion,**

**disempowerment, and lack of pluralism, democratization and participation remain illusive.**

14. The above and numerous other examples suggest **that it will be impossible for Ethiopia to reach the United Nations mandated Millennium Development Goals (MDGS)** of halving poverty (reducing poverty by half), by 2015. This said, a real **break through in the political regime impasse** ---namely, freeing political prisoners, allowing the democratization process to take roots, and creating the conditions for peace and reconciliation....will mobilize and empower all Ethiopians in shaping their country's future, and in meeting the MDGS. Without peace, national reconciliation, an all inclusive and democratic political system, Ethiopia's future will remain bleak. The donor community should be aware that pouring good money after bad money does not support the poor in Ethiopia. In fact, there are ample indications that the largesse from the donor community is routinely siphoned to enrich **what we call the EPRDF inner club.** The donor community needs to recognize that without good governance----the establishment of genuine democracy in our country---foreign assistance will have little impact in tackling poverty in Ethiopia. Meantime, the EPRDF needs to assume total responsibility for our country's dependency and poverty.
15. It is therefore clear that the EPRDF has failed in meeting the hopes and aspirations of the Ethiopian people. For this reason, sustaining the democratization process of May 15, 2005 is not a choice. It is a necessity. That is why the National Agenda has to be our guiding post.

### **How are the Above Conditions Maintained by the EPRDF?**

- The EPRDF's political architecture of a single ethnic-based political, economic and social monopoly is the primary institutional and state vehicle that sustains the current system.
- "Public safety, stability, law and order and security" are used as the primary reasons for arresting the democratization process and for massive human rights violations and for the disenfranchisement of the Ethiopian people. That is why CUDP's point on an independent military or police apparatus is on the mark.
- **Under the EPRDF, Ethiopia ranks in the 16 percentile of countries (globally) in terms of "indicators of voice and accountability," one of the lowest in the world. In other words, the EPRDF does not and will not permit the Ethiopian people to air their political views freely and openly. That is why CUDP's call for an independent legal system is on the mark.**
- **In a scathing study done recently, Ethiopia scored an index of 0---the lowest possible score---for press freedom. A free press that offers alternative and objective information to the Ethiopian people is a challenge to the leadership**

**of the EPRDF. That is why CUDP's call for a free media is absolutely on the mark.**

- **The same study showed that Government decision making is among the most bureaucratic and most ineffective in the world, a reputation that does not seem to bother the leadership of the EPRDF.**
- The donor community on which the EPRDF depends heavily finds that there is no **accountability** in the use of public funds (borrowed or taxes); that there is massive and structural bias in favor of party loyalists, party affiliated firms, segmented regions and loyal individuals and groups in the areas of investment, property rights and the administration of the rule of law. Today, some studies show that Ethiopia has “structural corruption and nepotism” that the donor community can no longer ignore. Doors have therefore begun to insist on **Governance provisions**---procurement, financial management, voice of the poor, oversight by civic organizations, participation by the Opposition in decision-making.....in providing loans. Some have stopped budgetary support to the EPRDF...Canada is an excellent example. More remains to be done.
- The same donor community no longer has confidence in the capacity and commitment of the EPRDF to channel borrowed resources directly to the poor. At the same time and due to “national interest”, this community has not shown a clear, firm and determined position to challenge the legitimacy of the EPRDF.
- The EPRDF's decentralization policy has proved to be a well **crafted mechanism** for control of the rural population rather than for **enabling the poor to voice their** opinions and to participate in the **democratization process**. Decentralization in Ethiopia has become a means of control rather than a means of empowerment and freedom. Local populations have no say in decision-making; and that suits EPRDF best.
- Under this system, good governance, the rule of law, a level playing field in the areas of private investment, the empowerment and participation of the rural and urban poor, the functioning of a **vibrant civil society**, and the participation of a free press in airing differing views are not tolerated, because they threaten the political and economic monopoly of the EPRDF.
- **Opposition party leaders with principled and contrasting vision** and goals for the country have been jailed.....with false accusations including treason. Their continued incarceration has nothing to do with “crimes” they committed or “plots” they designed. It has a lot to do with their challenge of the ethnic-based monopoly of the EPRDF. It has a lot to do with a contrasting vision for the Ethiopian people. It has a lot to do with the question of sustaining the democratization process in our country.

Accordingly, economic and social conditions under the EPRDF against which the Opposition parties campaigned and for which the Ethiopian people gave their voices, remain as formidable as ever. These are perpetuated by a political, defense and intelligence machinery on which EPRDF relies heavily and routinely to perpetuate itself. These conditions will not change until and unless the regime accepts the verdict of the Ethiopian people for peace, national reconciliation, dialogue the rule of law and democracy.

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## **Part II: National Agenda: Unity of Purpose, Looking Ahead**

**“You must be the change that you wish to see in the World.” M. Ghandi**

### **Looking ahead:**

**It is against the above background that Ethiopians at home and those in the Diaspora throughout the globe stage public demonstrations in recognition/ support of the democratization process of May 15, 2005. However we observe it, this date is and will remain to be a turning point in our country’s history. The purpose of this paper is therefore to underscore the National Agenda identified above and to use this Agenda as the driving factor (guide post) for marshalling our resources, capabilities and creativity to sustain the democratization process for which many Ethiopians have sacrificed their lives; for which many have been forced to flee their homeland; and, for which many continue to suffer in jail. Their cause is our cause.**

**Sustaining the democratization process is a collective and moral responsibility.**

### **Our contribution:**

**The Ethiopian people expect those of us in the Diaspora to be constructive catalysts of change and support. In this regard, the recent debate concerning the recognition and the calls for demonstrations in support of the spirit of the May 15, 2005 General Elections has brought to the surface a number of behavioral issues on which we need to work harder and faster in order not to forget what the debate is all about.**

**The debate is about the National Agenda of sustaining the democratization process in support of those who are leading the change effort in our country. It is this national agenda that should govern our behaviors, relationships and actions.**

**While competition is very healthy in the pursuit of change, it is important to recognize the vital role of collaboration and cooperation on strategic issues. Recognition and celebration of May 15, 2005 and its aftermath are strategic issues. Accordingly, rallying in unison and speaking with one voice will have greater impact in lifting the spirits of the Ethiopian people and their leaders and, in encouraging Ethiopian youth that we are behind them. It is also important to show solidarity to the international community. This will ensure that the democratization is sustained no matter how long it takes.**

**The announcement by the local leadership of the United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF)-- that it will set aside petty and partisan politics and rally with the leadership of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUD/P)-- is a welcome and timely step. By taking the high moral ground, UEDF has shown that the bigger picture and the National Agenda in support of the democratization process is more vital than the competitive based step to hold two rallies on two separate dates for the same cause.**

**The democratization process will be a hard, long and difficult one to achieve. Critical to recognize are: never to forget the Purpose for which we need to persevere; the importance of reconciling competition and cooperation, with a bias in favor of cooperation and collaboration; the need to speak with one voice; the need to show unreserved commitment to the Ethiopian people and their political leaders (Opposition); and the need to craft strategies and tactics and use them effectively at each step of the process. These efforts require the art and practice of compromise.**

**In this regard, and looking ahead, it will be useful to recognize and practice some of the following behavioral and mind set changes. The reason for these suggestions has to do with the real issue facing us. The struggle for democracy and peace in our country will be a long and hard one. It will require the willingness to recognize that all Ethiopians have a stake in the political process, and must show readiness to collaborate and work as a team.**

**It is vital that we mobilize and energize all those forces that stand for the democratization process. No single individual, group or party can and should have a moral claim in pursuing the process. The more we are inclusive, the more we are collaborative and cooperative with one another, the more likely it is that we will shorten the political grip of those that are in power.**

**Accordingly, it will be helpful to the Ethiopian people as a whole if we could work harder and smarter in the following critical areas:**

- **A National Agenda or Unity of Purpose.**

- Leadership
- Teamwork and Collaboration
- Mutual Trust
- Mutual Respect
- Integrity and Honesty
- The art of dialogue

We will discuss the important value oriented and mind set (behavioral) attributes in greater detail below.

1. Being guided by the single Purpose of serving the interests of the Ethiopian people in a consistent and principled manner. The struggle for the democratization process is not about us. It is about a National Cause. Placing this national cause---the democratization of our society—on the radar screen, and subordinating partisan interests, individual egos and aspirations aside will go a long way in being in contributing to the Ethiopian people and their aspirations.
2. Redefining the concept and art of leadership has become vital in a changing world. The tendency of giving great recognition and importance to individual leaders and heroes/heroines has permeated our political culture for generations. Of course, individuals matter a great deal as long as they espouse and devote their lives and energy for a collective and common good. However, individuals do not survive or operate in a cage. They become successful if and when they are able to mobilize others; when they listen and collaborate with others, including those who differ from them. Leaders leave lasting legacies when they are able and willing to establish enduring institutions ; when they help develop other leaders; when they empower and encourage others to be part and parcel of the change process.
3. One of the most difficult obstacles in leadership among political and civic organizations today is the inability to appreciate and accept those outside “the circle of friendship, knowledge and familiarity” from contributing to the greater and common good. This narrow and almost “village” mentality in leadership prevents the Ethiopian people from benefiting from the diversity of talent that exists both within and outside the country.
4. Leadership is, increasingly, about men and women doing the right thing for the right reasons quietly and inconspicuously. It is about responsibility to society. It is about creating political space for others. It is no longer about self interest; about commanding and

exercising authority. Rather, it is about humility, modesty and tenacity to contribute to social justice. It is about listening. One leading authority tells us that those incapable of being led cannot lead. It is therefore about the willingness to learn from others; to collaborate and work with others.

5. Today's political, economic and social challenges require team work and collaboration. Broadening and including the talent pool of leaders at all levels--- women, youth, talents from the mosaic of nationalities of our country---is vital in sustaining the democratization process. The era of solo leadership is over; and we need to recognize and accept it.
6. Building and nurturing trust among the leaderships of Opposition parties, civic leaders, academics, broadcasters and others who have a stake in the democratization process is among the acid tests of new and inclusive political leaders. Trust requires a change in mind sets. Trust requires transparency, predictability, consistency and adherence to basic and fundamental principles. Trust requires integrity and honesty.
7. Mutual respect is necessary in the pursuit of a common goal. It means acknowledging the rights and contributions of others; the willingness to listen to one another; and the readiness to change. The art of listening is vital in reinforcing a political culture of mutual respect and compromise. Debates are a healthy way of airing differing views. For debates and discussions to be constructive and healthy, we need to move from personalizing them. It is the concept that matters the most. Focusing on individuals, and characterizing them this way or that way will not reinforce trust and mutual respect. We need to move away from the politics of revenge to the politics of dialogue and compromise to serve a common good. As the saying goes, "The way you treat the person with whom you disagree most vehemently is the measure of your ability to shape the future."
8. The Ethiopian people have fought and hard against a regime that has no integrity or honesty in serving the common interest. Today, political and business leadership requires a high level of integrity and honesty. Our society has paid a huge price in part due to corrupt, nepotistic and arrogant political leadership. Nepotism, favoritism, ethnic-bias, chauvinism are all manifestations of this political culture. These manifestations arrest or prevent the full development of mutual trust, cooperation, transparency, democratic governance, peace and national reconciliation. We have a responsibility to practice integrity honesty in order to

**achieve the common goal of sustaining the democratization process, and creating the foundation for a democratic transition.**

We cannot serve the common purpose if our preoccupation is personal glory and the thirst for power and influence. The pursuit of these objectives makes honest folks fabricators of falsehoods. **The end justifies the means is a mantra that compromises honesty and integrity in politics.**

9. The recognition of the **constructive role** of **dialogue** in political discourse is another sign of good leadership at all levels. Dialogue is not debate for its own sake---to hear self or to prove the egocentric point of being right or wrong---but rather to gain from the collective wisdom that such practice generates in solving political and social problems. A major challenge for all of us is to resolve conflicts in a constructive and non-personalized way through dialogue.
10. Our country is a **mosaic of nationalities** and religions. This diversity is a source of creativity, innovation, and richness that offers the Ethiopian people a big comparative advantage in harnessing culture, social values and knowledge for the **common good. EPRDF has used the national question---the division of our country into modern Bantustans---**as a vehicle for mistrust, division, fear, rivalry and suspicion. Political and other leaders in the Diaspora have a special responsibility to promote mutual respect, trust, cooperation, reconciliation, compromise among all nationalities and religious groups.

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