



Thanks to Ethiopians Who Refuse to be Bystanders! Where in the World are the Rest of You Ethiopians?

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The last several months have been extraordinarily busy for those who have been involved with the March to Stop Genocide and Dictatorship in Ethiopia/Africa. Immediately following the march, I traveled to Europe, where I saw other dedicated Ethiopians working very hard in their region for our struggle for freedom and justice in Ethiopia. I have much to say about this for none of these events would have taken place without the commitment of a few great Ethiopians who were willing to do something tangible to make real their dream for a better Ethiopia. Without such people, we would be at a standstill in our struggle, but thanks to them, we have made some truly significant strides forward. My hope is that many more Ethiopians will be inspired by their example.

Some may not know that I had been invited to Sweden and Norway by Ethiopians in these two countries who both had planned a series of events and meetings with key government officials and others from their respective countries while I was there. On my way, I stopped in the Hague, the Netherlands, where I was able to meet with some of the officials from the International Criminal Court; also providing them with some documentary evidence in reference to the referral of the case of Ethiopia by Genocide Watch president, Dr. Gregory Stanton earlier this year.

In a future report, I will cover the meeting with the ICC officials and the encouraging meetings in Sweden and Norway that I had with both Ethiopians and government officials for I want to only focus now on thanking some of the key Ethiopians who made the March for Freedom successful. Through the work of these individuals they have laid the groundwork upon which we must now build.

We saw proof that a unified group of people can accomplish far more together than apart

This is not only very encouraging, it is very positive. Despite the daily diet of upsetting information we hear about the deepening crisis in Ethiopia, something truly extraordinary has just happened. Many Ethiopians, in a new openness to working together, have crossed over from previously broken bridges dividing them from others, and have pulled off an event where participation came from diverse groups. It may only be a first step, but it is definitely a move forward.

We saw proof that a unified group of people can accomplish far more together than apart, like the way a body functions in synchrony with its many parts. This is something to be proud about. It was also demonstrated on stage at the march as Amhara, Tigrayan, Oromo, African American, Anuak and other people of diverse ethnicities, genders, religions and backgrounds took part in the program.

Another new bridge which is now being built is to African Americans. Gerald Lemelle, the executive director of Washington DC based Africa Action, was a distinguished speaker at the march. He spoke with great understanding about the crisis in Ethiopia and their organization's interest in working together in partnership with Africans in advancing goals related to politics, economics and social justice.

They are the oldest African American organization in the US dedicated to working on issues in Africa dating back to before 1956 when members met in Accra, Ghana with Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumba at a conference held there. Mr. Lemelle honored us by presenting a plaque to Birtukan Mideksa, in recognition to the sacrifice she has made for freedom and justice in Ethiopia. Discussions are underway for some strategic joint ventures with Africa Action in the future.

Ethiopians came from many cities across North America—Minneapolis, Vancouver, Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, Boston, Denver, Toronto, Seattle and Detroit. People also flew here from the UK, Denmark, South Africa, Norway, Kenya and Israel. Even though the numbers of people we wanted were not as many as we expected, the heart of the mission was accomplished as this message has now been transmitted to millions of people in Ethiopia thanks to Voice of America and Deutsche Welle Radio.

Some of the march organizers went on to demonstrate in Pittsburgh as Prime Minister Meles Zenawi joined others for the G-20 meetings. Good job! These people are our heroes! They were few in number, but their message reached millions. This is a great way to build on what has been accomplished and I hope it will continue! Meles was greeted with the same banners and posters that were used in Washington, DC. Two thousand members of the press reportedly were present so it was a significant opportunity to raise public awareness of the crisis in Ethiopia. By now, many of you have probably seen the pictures and the videos. I also brought some of the same banners and signs to Sweden for a public rally. We want to make these available to varied groups wherever there is a plan for a public demonstration.

I wholeheartedly want to thank the many Ethiopian groups that supported the march through endorsements of both the March and the principles of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia: **“humanity before ethnicity”** and **“no one will be free until all are free.”** These endorsements came from ethnic human rights and community organizations who have never come together before. These groups included the Benishangul, the Oromo Citizens' Council, Sidamo, Ogaden and others. This is the groundwork needed towards bringing about greater reconciliation within our society; something desperately needed right now and something we want to continue to expand upon wherever possible.

In addition, a host of non-Ethiopian sources also lent their support and endorsements, including such organizations as Genocide Watch, Africa Action, TransAfrica, the NAACP, Evangelicals for Human Rights, Free Africa Foundation and others. Now we are hoping to explore other ways to collaborate in the future and ways to broaden this base.

A very special thank you to those on the organizing team in Washington, DC! It is your hard work, including many, many meetings in advance, that made this possible. I want to give special appreciation to individuals like Dr. Kassa Ayalew, Mekdese Kassa and others who all played a strategic role in organizing the March for Freedom and who then took the lead to organize the demonstration in Pittsburgh. Additionally, there were many volunteers who played key roles. They were the foot soldiers of this event; without whom we could not have done it.

I also want to give credit to our wonderful Ethiopian websites, like Abbay Media, Abugida, Addis Voice, Ethioforum, EcadForum, EthioGuardian, EthioSun, EthioQuestNews, Quatero and among others who did a great job in publicizing the march. Equal credit must be given to those radio stations who did the same quality job in promoting and advertising the March for Freedom; radio stations like Mebit Radio, Addis Dimts, Asrat Radio; Mo-Anbesa and others. All of these media sources acted as a means for the voices of the silenced but suffering people of Ethiopian to be heard thousands of miles away.

Additionally, a number of great Ethiopians contributed money for the March for Freedom. One of those extraordinary Ethiopians is brother Gabe who called us to volunteer to help raise support for expenses related to the march, saying that he knew that nothing can be done without funding. He is one of the great Ethiopians I have met along this journey. I met him when I was at the Ethiopian millennium. He invited me to his brother-in-law's friend home where I met his whole wonderful family.

The flame of their passion may create the refining fire.

At every event, I have met other such new Ethiopians who have also enriched my life. This march was no exception. Some of these people have not been active before. I am convinced that for every activist, who has been doing a great amount of work, there are countless other wonderful, highly principled and caring Ethiopians who want to contribute positively to the struggle to free Ethiopia, but do not know how to get involved.

They are not attracted to politics; suffering from disillusionment and disappointment over past difficulties, but have not lost their love and concern about the people of Ethiopia. This is the group who holds the key to our success. They are the silent majority, but hold a great amount of power if it could be channeled appropriately. Again, many of these people are connected to their churches, mosques or synagogues and if someone could inspire them to see “justice,” “human rights” and “freedom from oppression” as issues close to the heart of God, *the flame of their passion may create the refining fire that would transform all of Ethiopia.*

Do not be fooled. The work ahead will be hard. The race we are running is not a short sprint, but a marathon. We Ethiopians are known for our ability to run long distances. Can we now apply the strength, immense concentration, endurance and perseverance to our current effort? Eventually, the Woyane will lose. It is inevitable. But when that day comes, will we Ethiopians be ready? Will we have put in place that healthy society we need to ensure a better future for all Ethiopians or will we once again simply recycle a new dictator to take the place of the last one?

The whole idea behind the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia is to not let this happen; otherwise, why should we carry on if we get nothing better than what we have now? *We call on Ethiopians to join together for we cannot afford to be lazy, ignorant, selfish or careless in the way we build our future.* Look, we would never build a hut for our family to live in with rotted wood because if the winds came, the rotted wood would never hold the grass in place and would collapse, leaving our family exposed and without shelter. Neither would we use weak, fraying ropes that could easily snap under such pressure for the same reasons. Instead, we would make sure that the hut we built was strong enough to stand up against the worst elements so that our loved ones would be protected. We would never use poor quality wood or ropes. Anyone who has ever built such a hut knows this very well.

If we want to build a healthy and protective society, we must discard those beliefs, attitudes and actions that sabotage our current effort

The same is true for our future protection. If we want to build a healthy and protective society, we must discard those beliefs, attitudes and actions that sabotage our current effort or that will undermine our future security and success. These include *ethnic hatred or superiority, dishonesty in our relations, cheating other people of money or goods, personal competition based on self-interest, tearing down the work of others because it is not yours, not attending a meeting because of who organized it, not wanting to sacrifice or give time or money because you expect someone else to do it for you, or taking advantage of opportunities in the country; regardless of whether or not pursuing them might make you a complicit government supporter by silencing you.* Many Ethiopians have fallen for this manipulative technique advanced by the Woyane, some with full knowledge and others, without fully understanding what the pursuit of “some opportunity” might require of the participant. *A goal of the SMNE is to call Ethiopians to discard wrongful attitudes and practices in order to become active participants in building a better Ethiopia.* This is not about politics because it is much deeper than that, requiring moral change. Let me explain.

The goal of the SMNE is *to help “build a road” to a more democratic and well-functioning country where anyone who wants to run for office can benefit.* To build this road, one cannot be a political party whose primary goal is to compete with others in order to run for office. The reason is that the main work will be sidelined by political agendas leaving the road too bumpy, too full of obstructions and too ill-defined so that those trying to use it will never find their way to their destinations. Instead, *the goal of the SMNE is to be more like those doing the actual nitty-gritty road construction.* The ingredients being used to build it will not be concrete, water and sand, but instead will be truth, freedom, justice, human rights, reconciliation, civility and democratic choice.

The mission of the SMNE is *to concentrate on clearing away the obstacles, building a smooth surface on which to drive and designing a road that does not suddenly end in the wrong place.* The hope is that those who want to run for political office in the future will find enough political space so it is actually possible to campaign. A second goal would be *to help the people who will be making the choices to have a better understanding of what they want in a candidate and how to better hold them accountable if elected.* This road is not for just one driver, but is intended to be used by many diverse groups in a multi-party system. Once the road is in place, let the healthy competition of leaders, ideas and platforms begin!

We must individually change our ways; becoming more loving and caring

In anticipation of a regime change, in order to create such a “road,” we must individually change our ways; becoming more loving, caring and responsible in upholding the rights and worth of all Ethiopians. Lack of these qualities towards each other is what produced the TPLF and what created the ethnic diseases that have infected us. Like the Ebola virus, such diseases are eating Ethiopia alive.

If we are to be saved, we must have a grassroots revolution of moral change that starts with fearing God and valuing every human being. This must become a societal expectation because we can never pass enough laws to make something like “kindness” or “caring” mandatory under the law. It must come from within and be part of our hearts and souls. If someone does not believe in God, at least that person can believe in a natural moral law that requires certain basic standards of “respectful behavior” towards others.

Unless we start reaching out to people in reconciliation to build greater harmony and peace, we will never reach the finish line of our race successfully. The absence of these qualities is the core problem of Ethiopia! Too often we fail to talk to each other, but never fail to talk about “them” behind their backs. Why? This must change. How about starting by giving someone else a genuine compliment? Some think we “lose something” when we give, but in fact, “hoarding kind words” only makes us emptier and more isolated from each other. Be generous with kindness and let us look for new opportunities to become the sort of people needed to bring new life to a new Ethiopia!

This is not an easy transformation, but with God’s help, it is possible. *May each of us seek God’s help and guidance in becoming instruments of kindness, truth, integrity and action that will lead to the healing of our society and the preparation for a better Ethiopia—not a beggar Ethiopia!*

So many Ethiopians are worried or are complaining that we may not have a country in the future. The truth is, I agree. Things are that bad and it is also being acknowledged by outsiders like the International Crisis Group.

In fact, some are saying that *Ethiopia has become a lawless land where every immoral act is possible and where everything is for sale. Fertile land is being given away to foreign countries like Sudan, India and the Middle East while Ethiopians are starving to death. What is going on? Unfortunately, right now, the majority of Ethiopians are complaining, but not doing anything about it. Thank you to those few people who are doing their best, but where in the world are the rest of you? Do you not know that it is you who can bring freedom, peace and prosperity to your country, not outsiders?*

Please do not hesitate to email me if you have comments: obang@solidaritymovement.org