



Instead of addressing the question of what I would do as a prime minister, I will focus on what I would suggest potential political leaders should do now and at such a time of crisis should this government collapse quickly and unexpectedly.

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Mr. Elias Kifle, the editor and chief of Ethiopian Review, has opened up a much needed discussion on the future of our country *by asking Ethiopians to offer their top ten ideas for what they would first do if they were to become the prime minister of Ethiopia*. I commend him for encouraging this important debate, one which could not take place in Ethiopia. Hopefully, it will result in a more structured and organized effort by those of us in the Diaspora that will positively impact what happens inside Ethiopia.

If we are not going to repeat the mistakes of the past, we must think about what we want for the future and how to actually accomplish that vision. This discussion cannot simply be about defeating a common enemy—Meles/TPLF—but about how to build an Ethiopia where *“humanity comes before ethnicity,”* or any other distinctions and where we seek a humane, just, fair and inclusive society for *“no one will be free until all are free.”*

What worries me most is that the Meles regime may collapse without any clear forewarning and then what? There may not be any opportunity to follow a legitimate process of selecting a prime minister and instead, *it might be wise to plan for a transitional government that would be time-limited, perhaps to three years or less, that could work to set up an atmosphere conducive to genuine multi-party democracy and free and fair elections*. Once that was in place, political parties could present their platforms and candidates. They could then compete with each other for the votes of the people.

Right now, there are many signs that this regime is fragile. It is very possible that some unexpected event or surge of effort may cause it to collapse. If that happens, will Ethiopians be prepared to step in with something better? The Meles of today is like someone trying to maintain his balance while standing on a table with loosened legs. Those legs, made up of his TPLF cronies, are rotting from the inside from their corrupt and abusive practices. If someone kicks a table leg or if the weight on the table keeps getting heavier from the 20 years of abuses against the Ethiopian people, the table and legs may not be able to withstand the increasing pressure and will collapse. Then, very suddenly, the whole thing will be over.

Meles and the TPLF are like a hollow tree which produces bitter fruit no one wants. Because what the tree has produced is inedible to others, it can end up becoming such a heavy burden to the tree itself that it collapses. There is no doubt that this regime will bear responsibility for bringing itself down, but our concern is about being prepared for the inevitable so that an emergency will not result in instability or crisis beyond what we are ready to effectively manage.

When this happens, Ethiopia will be in too much crisis to hold political debates over platforms of various candidates. Because of this, *we must be ready to jump in with a plan for a transitional government that will bring quick security, emergency help, reconciliation, reforms and the mobilization of civil society; all undergirded with the principles that advance the respect, worth and rights of all citizens, including the Tigreans*.

The SMNE, from its inception, has been about helping to create such an environment that will bring about the structure and accountability needed for a New Ethiopia. Therefore, instead of addressing the question of what I would do as a prime minister, which has not been the focus of my work from the beginning, I will focus on what I would suggest potential political leaders should do now and at such a time of crisis should this government collapse quickly and unexpectedly.

This is all based on the hope that this discussion will provide a needed warning to all of us—including liberation fronts, peaceful struggle advocates, armed struggle advocates and all religious, civic and political groups—that ***we must officially begin plans for an Ethiopian Transitional Government (ETG) that incorporates into that plan, strategies for dealing with a full-scale crisis.*** This would be followed by placing responsibility on the ETG for preparing for and holding the first genuinely democratic Ethiopian election within a prescribed amount of time. This would be accompanied by the establishment of check and balancing measures to assure accountability.

Proceeding on this task should be considered urgent, especially in light of the upcoming May 2010 election, which no one expects to be open, free and fair; however, much could happen over the next months and we who say we care should pursue the development of such a strategic plan. ***The truth is different political parties, religious groups and ethnic groups hardly speak to each other today even though the TPLF is killing, imprisoning and exploiting us. Imagine tomorrow if Meles and the TPLF are no longer there! What will bring us into unity?*** We have no reason to assume we will have greater unity once our “common enemy” is gone.

We best start reconciliation now as we come to the planning table and Tigreans and Woyane from other ethnic groups must come forward now to join us so that they are part of the solution. Meles has put his own people around a small table where they have over-indulged themselves, while others go hungry. ***If we are to create a new and better Ethiopia, those at the table who will be setting a new agenda for the country, must be those willing to serve rather than to exploit the others.***

If there are leaders that have a history of sabotaging, dividing or becoming obstacles in this Ethiopian struggle, the public should ask them to step aside to become advisors or supporters rather than key players. ***Fighting among ourselves over personal or group ambitions should be put aside for now and worked out through a just and open political process once we have saved our country from disintegration.***

If your hut was on fire, would you be fighting over which side of the hut you were going to put your bed on instead of putting out the fire that threatened to destroy the whole hut? This is a warning that our hut is on fire and that if we fail to take it seriously, we may become like Somalia—where warring factions have undermined the fight for a country. Now, it is considered a “failed state.” by western nations who have given up finding a solution for it. Is Eritrea in any better shape after breaking away, now also considered a failing state? Can we learn from these examples and overcome our grievances with each other?

There is no country in existence that has not had some history of offenses within—like the US, Europe, Canada and Australia. Add to that history, offenses against other nations who now have good relationships, like between the UK, France and countries they colonized, or between the US and Japan, Germany and other European countries or Ethiopia and Italy. In Ethiopia, some will say they have been oppressed, another that they are still called Baria or slaves and another that they have been marginalized. ***We must be able to acknowledge and deal with our wrongs, but then we must refresh our society by putting “humanity before ethnicity” or failure is a certainty.***

The point to this prologue is that it is urgent that we get started now in making a transitional plan. Lack of having such a plan is a deterrent to gaining support for pushing ahead. The truth is that many will refuse to rise up in resistance because they will legitimately wonder what will be next—what assurance is there that what we get will be better from what we have now, as bad as it is? It is our shared responsibility to make sure the fight is worth it by laying a proper foundation.

The following points would be components of such a strategic plan for an Ethiopian Transitional Government (ETG). Each of them could be more fully addressed in and of itself, but space does not permit here. The following clarifications might be helpful before I start:

- A number of these actions will be taken simultaneously and will continue to overlap each other. The more critical the situation, the earlier on action will be taken.
- It is also to be assumed that advance planning should identify, train and equip key implementers, advisors and enforcers in key sectors so that teams can quickly focus on their area of expertise.
- All policies, actions and efforts should be undergirded with the values of *“putting humanity before ethnicity”* or any other differences and with the understanding that *“no one Ethiopian ethnic group will be free until all are free,”* including the TPLF!
- Some areas may need greater immediate attention due to being in a state of greater emergency (Ogaden, Southern Nations, Afar, Benin-shangul, Gambella, Amhara, Oromia and sections of other areas)
- To the best of everyone’s ability, this planning should utilize all Ethiopians, including those within the country wherever there is the opportunity; realizing this is more difficult for them to do under the watch of the TPLF

The following will be critical areas to immediately address:

1. Establishing the rule of law,

- a. Initiate a code of behavior for government officials/workers/military/security/police
- b. Revamp police, security forces and military; including ensuring that those in authority are not ethnically/politically motivated and biased; holding them accountable when not
- c. Identify areas/groups at greater security risk for potential retaliation, conflict and other danger; like Tigreans, Woyane supporters, etc; initiating measures to protect the security of all Ethiopian citizens and their property from violence, destruction and personal displacement
- d. Call on pre-selected implementers, prepared in advance and immediately empowered to respond to such threats
- e. Create reporting system for violations, threats and info-exchange
- f. Organize the immediate release of all political prisoners
- g. Assign key judicial experts of the law and the constitution to oversee and overhaul the system, dealing first with most urgent matters; creating an independent judiciary (work should begin now in anticipation of expediting the process).
- h. Develop a first-response transitional justice approach for offenders and victims determining which cases should have immediate attention and which can wait or be dealt with through a different approach; planning should start now rather than during the crisis and could include evaluating transitional justice options such as the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings in South Africa, Rwanda-tribunals, elder councils, criminal justice system, ICC, etc
- i. Establish a process for creating an independent election board

2. Assess emergency humanitarian situations requiring a more targeted and immediate crisis response:

- a. Assess need in at-risk regions like the Ogaden, which has been closed off to outsiders and may require intensive emergency assistance with food, medical/health services, etc.; pre-planning with humanitarian organizations to reduce time delay in first response.
- b. Identify and address other at-risk populations regarding humanitarian needs; especially those most threatened by starvation,

3. **Foreign relations: Immediately contact and assess status of international allies; foreign governments,** UN, regional neighbors, AU, donors, humanitarian groups, etc to determine positions and involvement in transition, etc
4. **Assess economic situation: treasury, money reserves, other assets, financial status** of national and other banks and debts; taking immediate actions and proceeding with vigilance in regard to initiating protections so money laundering, pilfering and other forms of national robbery do not occur. As much work as possible should be done in advance.
5. **National Reconciliation effort, supported and including all diverse groups, drawing on strength** and expertise of the faith community, community elders, experts, civic organizations and other leaders, address reparations and the development of transitional justice approaches with other key sectors, develop plan for reintegration and support services to victims, offenders, military, etc.; provision of psychological services for victims and perpetrators of human rights
6. **Regional autonomy and empowerment of civil service:**
 - a. Shift services and regional authority back to regions when regional matters,
 - b. Require transparency and accountability at every level of government
 - c. Mobilize civil service technocrats/implementers of services at all levels; sometimes drawing on the expertise, help or support of Ethiopians in the Diaspora or non-Ethiopians,
7. **Open and free press,**
 - a. Launch intense media blitz-- using every means of communication possible; including enabling reporters, journalists, radio, TV, Newspapers, Internet, etc. to openly and thoroughly inform the public,
 - b. Use media to call the public to civil behavior, responsibility, reconciliation and appropriate action;
 - c. Define new levels of accountability and consequences for infractions for violence, corruption, destruction of property and other crimes.
8. **Economic assessment: Make an immediate inventory of assets and liabilities;**
 - a. Encourage review of status of new and present contracts/legislation/enforcement issues related to ensuring protective regulations to protect both Ethiopians and present/potential business partners from exploitive or illegal practices, including restrictions on bribery, kick-backs, money laundering and other forms of corruption; requiring greater transparency by all since no one is above the law.
 - b. Encourage private enterprise; including micro-loans, mid-level loans, improved telecom system, Internet,
 - c. Improved infrastructure (roads, ports, rail, air, etc) to open up markets,
 - d. Lift bureaucratic obstacles to business, etc,
9. **Jumpstart agriculture potential to reduce hunger and improve self-sufficiency**
 - a. Provide better access to agricultural supports: provision of seeds, fertilizer, etc. as funding allows
 - b. Take action to better enable average Ethiopians to be more self-sufficient as soon as possible so as to give access to food and reduce the need for outside help
 - c. Formation of study group on land ownership
 - d. Study group to restore Ethiopian territorial integrity and peoples' rights
10. **Address health, clean water, sanitation, electricity, education, women's rights; utilizing national and international resources to jumpstart assistance where critical situations prevail.** This should include environmental concerns related to health and destruction of the environment. Study groups should be formed, integrated and empowered with federal and regional members.

The tasks are overwhelming, but delaying planning for a **Ethiopian Transitional Government** during a possible crisis is not only foolish but dangerous. There is much that could be done now and we in the SMNE are willing to start working with others to help lay the groundwork.

We hope that many TPLF supporters and Tigreans will break the silence and join with other Ethiopians in bringing about a New Ethiopia where one- ethnic-group domination is discarded forever. This model of tribal apartheid domination by the TPLF or by anyone else in the future is what will eventually destroy our country. It is crucial that Tigreans and TPLF supporters support a non-ethnic system that does not give everything to one group on the basis of ethnicity. Some Tigreans just want to get rid of Meles but want to continue to dominate. This system of one-tribe domination must end if we are to bring this country back from the brink of disaster.

If you compare the development, business opportunity, educational system, medical and health services, agricultural resources and other opportunities available in the Tigre region and compare it to others, you will see it far exceeds other regions. Please see the link for more information.

<http://www.vcc.columbia.edu/documents/MekelleInvestmentOpportunities-Dec09.pdf>

This is wrong and is a threat to all of us. It creates resentment and anger due to the disparity of resources and opportunity. We know Meles has set you up for this to ensure your isolation and to create fear that he is the only one who can now protect the interests of the Tigreans and TPLF supporters; but know this, he will leave the country and most of you will remain. We want to bring all Ethiopians back together and that includes you, but it will be far easier to do if you step out now to join others in planning for our shared future rather than waiting for a time of national crisis. We have to start talking!

In conclusion, this plan that has been laid out is going to be difficult, but without financial resources and people stepping out to work with others, it is impossible. If many help regularly, even in small amounts, we can cover the costs of hiring people to work full time in this over the next months to help expedite this process.

A part-time volunteer staff, who try to do all of this after work, family and other obligations are met, will never have the time to get the job done. We Ethiopians need to start paying our own way now. Hiring people to do the work will not be the only costs; there will be expenses related to radio or media coverage to a country totally in repressive darkness. Right now, what happens on the other side of the country or city is not reported anywhere. People need to know not only what is going on, but also what we are planning on doing and how they can become part of it.

Nothing is for free and it is time for Ethiopians to take full responsibility for their freedom. Ethiopia must move as a people and nation from being overly dependent on outsiders for our basic needs, to a fully capable people, willing to work hard, to sacrifice and to join together to set in place a firm foundation for a New Ethiopia. Will you do your share? May God guide and empower us!

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