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## **An Open Letter to the Prof. Ephrem Isaac and Ethiopian Elders**

**June 3, 2010**

**Dear Prof. Ephrem Isaac and Ethiopian Elders:**

We, in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), want to address the urgent crisis in Ethiopia following the illegitimate results of the recent Ethiopian National election. What you do right now will either bring our country down to greater destruction or could instead, revive the dead bones of Freedom, Justice, Truth and Democracy already lying in their graves among the millions of other dead Ethiopians, victims of the EPRDF regime of Meles Zenawi!

Can these bones be raised up to stand?<sup>1</sup> What you do will make a difference! Will your actions help raise them up from the ground or will your actions only cover them more deeply with the bodies and souls of the Ethiopian people?

***Meles has appointed you to act as elders (shimagles) on behalf of him and his self-interests; not on behalf of the Ethiopian people who are thirsty for freedom, but now face five more years of tyranny unless men and women of courage, honesty and truth follow their consciences. This means all of you! Genuinely fulfill your role of a traditional elder (Shemglina) in our society that is not falsely “used” by one side to rob the other side of its legitimate rights or property.***

In this case, ***our country is in the hands of the killers of democracy and for you to say nothing, makes you an accomplice! We plead with you to speak the truth, to take the side of right and uphold justice. However, if you, as Meles’-appointed “elders of the people,” fail to do this, we have faith that the mighty arm of the God of Ethiopia can still work justice on behalf of the oppressed and suffering Ethiopian people.***<sup>2</sup>

Meles wants to use you to suppress the great outrage of the people who know very well that this election is a total scam, from the beginning to the end. ***He wants you to be his “henchman in elder’s clothing;” threatening harsh punishment for all who refuse to accept the illegitimate results of a rigged election.*** Not only are opposition leaders being threatened with prison if they do not concede defeat; but, they are also being told that Birtukan Mideksa, leader of the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) will never be released without such concessions from them! What blackmail!

Reports from Oromia allege that 1000 opposition leaders, members and /or activists have been arrested, with some being released; perhaps with the expectation that they will not contest the results. Such intimidation is not limited to only Oromia, but is going on throughout the country as the ***Meles regime attempts to force Ethiopians to their knees in submissive agreement with a “collective lie.”***

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<sup>1</sup> See Ezekiel 37: 11b-13a, “They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land... Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD.’”

<sup>2</sup> See Isaiah 59:4, 14-16, “No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil....So justice is driven back and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice.... he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him.”

*Accepting these results means that freedom-lovers must participate in killing their own fervent hope for freedom and justice and then act as if nothing of importance was lost! Concession is about opening the door to five more years of terror, authoritarian rule, persecution and suffering. It is about seeing our young and educated people flee the country for safety, freedom, jobs, education or other opportunity only to die or struggle along the way or to face hardship elsewhere, far away from their homes and families.*

*It is about submitting to the selling off of Ethiopian land, natural resources and the interests of the Ethiopian people within their own country. It is about remaining silent in the face of injustice, human rights abuses and the criminalization of the exercise of our God-given rights – like freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of the press. It is about passively helping to lock ourselves up in the chains of oppression for five more years!*

*This is a moral crisis and you are being called to make a choice that either way, will affect millions of Ethiopians into the next generation.* We in the SMNE ask you to be strong for such a time as this. This is why we are writing this letter at this critical time!

As you may already know, the SMNE is a social justice movement whose mission is to speak up for the well being and rights of Ethiopians; based on the principles that **humanity comes before ethnicity** or any other distinctions and that all Ethiopians are included since **“no one group will be free until all are free.”** When something goes wrong in Ethiopia, it leaves us with no choice but to respond.

The urgency of the time requires that we be completely honest and straightforward with you; however, if we misjudge your position or get any of the facts wrong, please accept our apology, but know that our intent is to protect those at grave risk in the country.

Since ancient times, elders (*Shemglna*) in Ethiopia and Africa have been used to mediate conflicts between individuals, families, leaders and communities in order to restore peace, order and harmony to societies. Wherever there are people, problems will arise, but when elders are present, they can change the outcome of conflicts from disaster and destruction to resolution and cooperation. However, *if your role is only in name alone, we are collectively in trouble and must look to other solutions to what could become a much greater and more damaging crisis.*

Five years ago, the negotiations with the opposition, of which you, Prof. Ephrem Isaac were part, sadly led to the imprisonment of opposition leaders and subsequently to the government's manipulation of the entire process in order to justify the imprisonment of Birtukan Mideksa on absurd charges. *Of course, it was only one of many tactics used to dominate the entire political space of this illegitimate election of what is now an unelected leadership. We hold you accountable for your part in legitimizing this process by appearing to act as mediators when in the past and in what is continuing now, your role has been to force the Ethiopian people to pretend that democracy has not been put to death in Ethiopia!*

In the name of justice, do the right thing for the people, not for Meles. He appointed you for his interests, not for the interests of the people who were never consulted regarding your appointment.

We need wise elders for it always has been the elders who have intervened in stopping violence and conflict and brought peace to relationships. Their effectiveness was based on their high regard for fairness, truth, transparency and honesty. They earned their role as elders based on reputations for upholding such values. This meant they would not take sides unfairly, remaining objective. It also meant they were willing to tell each side; not only what they “wanted” to hear, but instead, also what they “needed” hear if the conflict were to be thoroughly resolved.

Oftentimes this takes courage; particularly when one or both sides do not want to hear the truth; wanting instead to hold on to their own agendas and self-interest. Unfortunately, *from what we see, the mediation you are now following lacks this genuineness as it does not appear to be following these guidelines. Instead, it looks as if you are assisting in making the victims into the guilty and protecting the guilty from their shame—as was also done in 2005.*

*Our country needs true mediators, peace-makers and reconcilers; not people who ingratiate themselves to a bully of the people and a manipulator of the democratic process. Our country is bleeding and our people are screaming in silence. They are dying in the streets of our homeland and trying to escape. The land that could be used to produce food for the hungry is being given away to foreign groups for their own needs rather than ours.*

*Our land has become a place where our songs of peace, joy and happiness are replaced with tears of sorrow and grief. The voices of our playing children have been replaced with their cries or worse yet, the absolute silence that accompanies impending death. Our family of Ethiopians has been divided; with much violence among ourselves. We have become like a community of orphans, lacking elders.*

*Truth has been lost and there are few seeking to find it. The people who are supposed to uphold the rule of law and protect us are instead misruling, deceiving and oppressing the people. Ethiopia desperately needs true elders who will confront the lies that hold this sham government together; for the well being of the greater family of Ethiopians.*

In conclusion, we are only writing to you because we are not giving up on you and your capacity to become the elder that bring hope of a future to our nation. Be the elder who prevents the shedding of blood rather than the elder who prolongs the violence and the suffering. Free Birtukan Mideksa and all political prisoners. Speak to Meles, warning him to change his ways.

May God help each of you be that **TRUE** elder, who takes his direction from God, rather than from men. If you cannot do this, do not pretend to fulfill that role; even resigning if it is impossible to work under such conditions. Meles is afraid of the people rising up against him, but do not be part of subduing them so that evil is prolonged.

May God give you freedom from fear and intense passion for truth and right. May He remind you that there is no greater loss than losing one's soul in such times as these. May the people of Ethiopia pray for your strength and courage.

Long live Ethiopia! We look forward to hearing from you and expect the very best from all of you!

In hopeful anticipation,  
***The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia***

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