



From the SMNE:

May All Ethiopians Have a Blessed New Year and to all our Muslim Brothers and Sisters, Eid Mubarak!

May This Be the Year of Truth, Tolerance, Reconciliation and Cooperative Action to Build a New Ethiopia!

September 10, 2010

The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) wishes Ethiopians of every ethnicity, religion, region, economic status, gender, age and viewpoint *a wonderful and blessed Ethiopian New Year; hoping this will be a meaningful time to reflect on how each of us might become part of building a more loving, caring, just and free society in Ethiopia and in the Horn of Africa for all people during the coming new year.*

We in the SMNE also warmly greet our Ethiopian Muslim brothers and sisters—"Eid-Mubarak"—hoping that after this past month of fasting, prayer and commitment to God, that these next days of celebration of Eid ul-Adha *might be filled with thankfulness and joy that can be shared not only with your own families, friends and fellow Muslims, but also be extended to the greater family of Ethiopians and fellow humanity throughout the world.*

As these two significant events occur only one day apart, *let us think about how our past history of religious harmony might inspire us to re-create such an atmosphere of social cohesion in Ethiopia today. Despite all the negative things about Ethiopia, the religious tolerance and social harmony we Ethiopians have displayed in the past is truly unique in the world.*

People of faith respected the humanity of others of different beliefs *as evidenced when Muhammad told his followers to seek safe haven in Ethiopia; believing that "good" leaders of Christian faith would surely welcome them. That is exactly what happened when Ethiopia became a place where Christians and Muslims lived side by side, developing friendships and building their mosques and churches next door to each other, only divided by a fence.*

This is a model of respectful co-existence that could bring healing beyond our borders! However, unfortunately, such *a beautiful part of us is being torn apart by negative ideologies of hate and division, advanced by the TPLF and those who believe in domination and exploitation of everyone else; regardless of what it is based on—ethnicity, religion, political party, skin-color, elitism or language. We Ethiopians should never allow ourselves to become such people! This is NOT what God intends for us and is contrary to all His teaching!*

As many of you already know, the SMNE was established for the solidarity of all Ethiopians based on the belief that ***Ethiopia would only become strong, healthy, united and prosperous if together we built a society based on putting humanity before ethnicity or any other differences and caring about each other as none of us will be free as long as some among us are oppressed.***

Over 80 million Ethiopians; plus a million or more in the Diaspora—***each one of us having an individual name and identity—live, or were born, within the boundaries of Ethiopia. Together, we are part of the greater family of Ethiopians. We have breathed the same air, drunk from the same rivers and lived underneath the beautiful skies over Ethiopia. Most are hoping for the free exercise of our God-given rights and for the opportunity to build a better, happier and more prosperous life for ourselves, our families and our loved ones.***

Unfortunately, ***the hopes of many Ethiopians are dimmer than even last year because of the failure of the electoral process to give the people a real choice, the growing hardship among the vast majority and the increasing greed resulting in a frantic race for Ethiopian land, resources and opportunity—all carried out in secret “behind-closed doors” deals.***

Additionally, ***many Ethiopians have been disheartened as they see other Ethiopians, previously engaged in the struggle for freedom and justice, newly silenced as they have abandoned the struggle by choosing to do business in Ethiopia; something that is a much riskier venture for those willing to speak out.*** Perhaps ***the most painful disappointment of all is the continued failure among Ethiopian leaders to collaborate for the overall well being of the people.***

The last year has been a year where the clouds of darkness surrounding the soul of Ethiopia—the suppression of truth—became much thicker. ***Ethiopia has become the land of the “LIE, DISHONESTY and DECEPTION.” Any who dare to speak the truth are punished and those who lie are rewarded.*** Birtukan Mideksa is a shining example of how those with the most integrity and courage are the ones this regime sees as the biggest threat. ***No wonder why so many journalists are either in prison or have fled from the country. No wonder why Ethiopian prisons are filled with some of the best of Ethiopian society from every ethnic group.***

Just this past week, four Anuak men from Gambella region, who refused to cover up for the Anuak genocide, received harsh sentences; two of them received death sentences and others, a number of years in prison.

Education, civil society and modern technologies promoting communication are now all threats to be suppressed. A system of spies and government enforcers at the neighborhood level have caused people to not trust each other; even being afraid to talk within their own families about politics or the future.

We have one of the worst regimes Ethiopians have ever had; one known for avidly spreading hatred and division in order to maintain an apartheid system that lines their own pockets with money. Yet, increasing numbers of Ethiopians tell us in the SMNE that they are giving up the struggle; saying there is no viable alternative so we must find a way to live with what we now have.

However, they are resigning to the status quo just when ***Ethiopia is now documented to be the second poorest country in the world with 90% of our people living below the poverty level! No wonder our people are facing death, detention or hardship while trying to run away from our motherland.***

One of our friends recently asked, “*How come the negative forces are taking over our society and the positive forces are dying or disappearing?*” This is the question we pose to all Ethiopians as we face the New Year—***how can we revive the “soul” of Ethiopia so that people have the strength and depth of moral conviction to rise up?***

Abang, a woman from Gambella said, “*There are so many problems in Ethiopia that if people told the truth, everyone would have something to say. Hiding the truth is the problem and you don’t do anything because you’re afraid. You know something is wrong, but the one who comes up with truth is the one who is in trouble; so as a result, people are afraid to speak up.*”

We all know that to exist in Ethiopia most believe they must live a lie while begging for someone else to see through it and save us. These two qualities: lying by denying reality and begging for someone else to save us will only kill any hope for a better year ahead. Combine both of these with fear and we will be stuck in misery forever!

People of faith, in particular, cannot leave their God-given responsibilities at the door of their mosques or churches after praying inside, but not acting accordingly on the outside. Is it right to call on God while at the same time, neglecting His obligatory call to defend and help the oppressed, the poor, the vulnerable, the widows, those in prison, the hungry and the struggling? How about you or us?

An Ethiopian of faith shared the following: “**O LORD, I have shown only verbal concerns for those who suffer and in my heart I know you want me to do more. Give me the courage to do things I know I should do.”¹**

Some may have used their religion as an excuse to only follow the form of religion rather than the heart of it. Some religious people say they do not want to get involved with Ethiopian politics; however, ***our struggle is not about politics to take power, but it is about the treatment of our people and the building of a healthy society! If the people of faith in our society do not take a stand to promote morality, we are in trouble.***

Despite all of these negative factors; we, in the SMNE, know that ***the people of Ethiopia can rise up against these forces of evil that are destroying our people. We think of those who are struggling, trying to feed their families. We think of those grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren after their parent(s) have died or have been imprisoned.***

We think of the mothers waiting anxiously to hear from a son who tried to escape the country by crossing the Red Sea to Yemen or whose daughter took a job in the Middle East only to find out about her desperate circumstances.

¹ *Heart the Light; daily readings (September 8)* by Helen Lesman, 1984

We think of a single mother, struggling to care of her children after her husband was killed in Somalia; after being forced to fight Meles' War on Terror. We think of the young people forced to stop their long-distance education programs or plans to gain degrees in education or law simply because Meles has become anti-education. These people are the hope of Ethiopia who may finally say they have had enough.

At the right time, **we have hope that they will rise up to claim their freedom and to break this vicious cycle of domination by a few over the majority of people. Those who will bring the change will come from every walk of life—they are your sons, your daughters, your mothers, your fathers, your grandfathers, your grandmothers and they are you! They may come from across the table, from the next room, from a thousand miles away or from a dark cell. They are people arising from the same soil God has given to all Ethiopians.**

Let us reach out to each other in love for only then can we conquer the ethnic hatred, dirty politics and greed that make us fail to see the humanity of others. Let us speak the truth without fear, let us not give in to becoming opportunistic at the cost to our people and let us not wait for someone else to free us. It is we who can be changed from the inside and take action to stop this misery and suffering.

As those filled with hate, bitterness or ambitions to dominate over others have fueled the fires of division in our country; **we should never allow our religions, our ethnicities, our skin-colors, our viewpoints, our regions or our languages to defeat us by making us forget our shared humanity.**

As we celebrate this **Ethiopian New Year** and as Muslims also celebrate **Eid-Mubarak**, **let the peace-loving people of Ethiopia show love towards each other; extending especially to the poor, the suffering and the needy and valuing the humanity within each of us that is a gift from our Creator God. Caring about others is the only way to bring lasting freedom, justice and well-being to ourselves as we do the same to our neighbor for “no one will be free until all are free.”**

If we work hard during this festival and coming year, **we Ethiopians could bring about a government based on these life-affirming principles—a government that more genuinely represents the best interests of all of the people.** Only then will we thrive and become an example of religious and ethnic harmony in this troubled world.

May the Almighty God who created and loves all of us, help us take responsibility to mend our divisions and to build a healthy and caring society where the beauty of our people can be seen in our many colors, shapes and sizes that fill the garden of Ethiopia.

“Do all the good you can by all the means you can and in all the ways you can and in all the places you can.”²

Please do not hesitate to email your comments to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE. E-mail: Obang@solidaritymovement.org Please help us by clicking the following link and filling out the required fields to be add on the SMNE mailing lists: <http://www.solidaritymovement.net> You can also join us on the Face book page.

² *Hear the Light; daily readings (September 8) by Helen Lesman, 1984*