



SMNE Calls TPLF/EPRDF to Halt Plans for Massive Arrests and Crackdown on Muslim Leaders Following AU Meeting

SMNE Condemns Killings, Arrests and TPLF/EPRDF Inference in Religious Freedom; Calling Ethiopian Leaders and Public to Stand Together

Religious leaders, political leaders, international donors, the African Union and others, including the Ethiopian public—whether Muslim or not—should condemn the recent TPLF/EPRDF attack on Muslims, who have been peacefully rallying for freedom from government interference in their internal religious affairs for over eight months. *Now, word has leaked out from sources within the country, that the TPLF/ERPDF is planning massive arrests of Muslim activists and leaders, including members of the Independent Islamic Arbitration Committee, an elected group which has been leading the cry for religious independence. Allegedly, none of this will take place until African Union meetings end, later this week.*

In the last month the numbers of protestors have risen to include hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians in various locations in Addis Ababa as well as outside the capital city of Ethiopia. Six civilian protestors, one only six years of age, were killed a month ago and this past weekend, security forces killed four more after entering the Awalia Mosque in Addis, in an attempt to interfere with plans being made for a protest the following day. In addition to those shot and killed by security forces, a number of others were wounded and over 160 persons were arrested and remain in detention.

Forty additional arrests were made of women who had gone to the prison, only to take food and water to their family members. *Reports from the ground indicate that the TPLF/EPRDF has been trying to force the women to confess to criminal activity they never committed in order to be freed. Among those arrested were women as old as 80 and as young as 12, as well as pregnant women. Thirty-three of these women have now been released, according to the latest figures from our sources.*

As the regime cracks down on the Muslims, these fellow Ethiopians are only more determined to continue to rally for freedoms guaranteed in the Ethiopian Constitution, but as they do, tensions are dramatically increasing between Muslims and the TPLF/EPRDF and we call on all Ethiopians, of any background or religion, to stand side by side with our fellow Ethiopians as they demand religious freedom.

We, in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), condemn this unjust treatment of our Ethiopian Muslim brothers and sisters and offer our deep condolences to the families of the victims. *We cannot afford to be indifferent to the pain of any of our fellow Ethiopians, ignoring their need at such a time as this; for “no one will be free until all are free!” We also pledge our support in their struggle for truth, justice and freedom for it is our shared struggle. Are they not fighting the same fight for justice, liberty and freedom of worship, thought and belief as are we and other Ethiopians?*

A short time ago, our Ethiopian Muslims and Ethiopian Evangelical Christians stood with leaders and members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Toronto in condemning the planned destruction of the fourth century Waldeba Monastery and the eighteen churches in the surrounding area by the TPLF/EPRDF in order to make way for a government-controlled sugar plantation. This should be a proud moment in our recent history.

Shortly after that, *Ethiopian Orthodox leaders came out with a strong statement of support towards Ethiopian Muslims, agreeing with their demand for freedom from religious interference by the TPLF/EPRDF, which they and others have also experienced as a church body. This was an excellent demonstration of what religious leaders can do for a nation! Now, there is another critical opportunity for those in positions of leadership to take in continuing to support this call.*

Some from the grassroots are hoping those in leadership will say it for them, fearing their own voices will not be heard above the clamor and fearing that without it, others will assume a lack of support from people of different ethnic, political and faith backgrounds. One Ethiopian woman from Los Angeles, who was highly concerned about the need to publically condemn the recent attacks on Muslims, summed it up very well. She asked:

“Why are our [political and religious] leaders not saying or doing more to support the Muslims right now? I’m an Ethiopian Orthodox believer [and an Amhara], but who will hear me? If our leaders do not speak out, Muslims will put us all in a box and will think we Christians do not care, but we do!”

As we in the SMNE have said before, *the only way we can “live well” as a society is when we are willing to defend and to protect the God-given rights of others; especially when they cannot do it for themselves or when by joining together, we can better overcome injustice or wrongdoing. Ignoring it when we can do something will hurt us as a whole.*

For example, when a pain inflicts a part of our body—even our little finger—it affects the rest. This applies to a nation. Right now, pain is being inflicted on part of the body of Ethiopia. This part of our body is our Muslim brothers and sisters. They are not just one tribe, but they are made up of people of different ethnicities, different political views, different ages, different genders, different socio-economic groups and different regions. The whole body, which is the Ethiopian people, should react when something is done to one of the parts of their body—the Ethiopian Muslims. We cannot ignore it!

In the past, a small ethnic group could be massacred in one corner of Ethiopia and no one would even notice, let alone come out in its defense; however, when a few are killed in Addis, there is an outpouring of crying, grief and sympathy from people throughout the world. The same thing happens when a freedom fighter from a small group is arrested—no one says anything—but when someone else is arrested from Addis, the amount of outrage both inside and outside of the country is overflowing. *This kind of indifference towards some of us occurs most easily where groups of people have been devalued. This kind of devaluation of our people is what we in the SMNE are fighting against.*

Right now, our fellow Ethiopians of Muslim faith are being denied religious freedom. It is excellent that the Ethiopian Orthodox came out to stand with Ethiopians of Muslim faith and vice versa. Such solidarity was big step but it is not the end of what must be done, not only by them but by others. The voices of leaders and people of other faith backgrounds, supporting principles of justice, compassion and freedom for all Ethiopians, would bring great healing to our country.

This applies to the rest of Ethiopians who should not sit by, watching and doing nothing, thinking that the freedom these people are fighting for maybe is not the same freedom as what “I” or “we” non-Muslims are fighting for. However, like cattle, the butcher comes to take one of “them” away and the rest do not react because it is not yet “us.” We should know by now, this regime targets one group at a time, whether in places like Gambella, Afar, the Ogaden or in Southern Nations or whether it is a church in the Amhara region, a mosque in Oromia or a cemetery in Addis.

Ethiopians of faith, especially the leadership, should make it very clear that all of us—including TPLF/EPRDF members in churches and mosques throughout the country—should be fighting for the mutual religious freedom and defense of the God-given rights of all of us. Right now, we have victims, bystanders, beneficiaries and perpetrators, all standing alongside of each other in many of our houses of faith. The leadership has often been silent in the past or even, at times, aligned with the perpetrators rather than with the victims, perhaps out of fear or even opportunism. At such a time as this, Ethiopians need the religious leaders to visibly lead the way in confronting what is evil and immoral, while also bringing to its members—and to Ethiopian society—a path to reconciliation and the restoration of justice.

Some, or even many within the faith community, will want to go further, making public statements, even confessions, of its silence, its fear, its apathy, its ethnic prejudices and its neglect in standing up for the justice and rights of those within their communities as well as those in communities of different faiths and ethnicities. Can you imagine how such an example could lead the way for others to do the same and in doing so, bring about healthy change?

Some people may feel suspicious that “the Muslims are here—right now—to take over and they want Shari’ah law.” However, “the Muslims are not coming;” they have been here in Ethiopia for a thousand years and have repeatedly said that they are not for Shari’ah law but want religious tolerance for all Ethiopians! This should not surprise us because it reinforces our own past experience as Ethiopians of differing faiths who have been living together and getting along with each other for as long as any of us can remember.

What the TPLF/EPRDF wants is to isolate the Muslims from other Ethiopians; using fear-mongering not only in the West, but also among Ethiopians in order to isolate the Muslims from other Ethiopians. By demonizing and dehumanizing all Muslims or by putting them in a box called “Islamic radicals” has earned the TPLF/EPRDF significant revenue from the West. We must refuse to support this thinking or the violent actions now being carried out by the TPLF/EPRDF in response to it. If non-Muslim Ethiopians fall victim to this anti-Muslim campaign; not only will they be making a big mistake, creating division when unity is so needed, but they will also be prolonging the TPLF.

In the last few days, the TPLF/EPRDF may have targeted “Muslims,” but they killed our fellow human beings, given intrinsic value by our Creator, the same God who gave life to each of us. Those who died could be a mother, a brother, a sister or a son. They each have a name and have someone who loves and cares about them. They may be from Ethiopia and come from a certain tribe or region, but they are “us.” They are members of our Ethiopian family so the pain of their loss should not only be left to the mother who brought them into this world, but should be felt by every one of us as we put humanity before ethnicity. Their pain is our pain. When they are not free, we are not free. When they have a loss, we have a loss.



July 18, 2012

Our conscience should be our invitation to be part of the struggle. Today it is the Muslim in need of defense, but tomorrow it could be the Orthodox, the Evangelical, the Catholic or the non-believer from any of the countless tribes of Ethiopia. We should look at the bigger picture and call on Ethiopians to condemn these actions by the TPLF/EPRDF against our brothers and sisters and their plans to arrest their leaders for peaceful protest, guaranteed under the Ethiopian Constitution that has become meaningless.

For outsiders, including donors who are listening to Meles' claims that the "radical Muslims" are coming to Ethiopia, we can counter by saying, "we know them," for they did not arrive just yesterday or when the War on Terror started in 2001 or twenty years ago when the TPLF came into power, for we have lived together for long enough to know.

As the previously mentioned woman from LA, concluded, "The poor Muslims are expecting the leaders to say and do more to support them. I feel it [the outrage for what has happened] and now the leaders should say it!" ***This woman speaks the language of the New Ethiopia. Can we Ethiopians join together to build it? I think so but let us show it!***

Before concluding here is a special word to the African Union:

As the shooting, killing and arrests were being carried out in Addis Ababa, members of the African Union were meeting close by on the matter of human rights, security and stability in Africa—focusing on the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, the Republic of South Sudan and Somalia—with no mention of Ethiopia.

Now, as soon as you leave this impressive building, the new headquarters of the African Union, the TPLF/EPRDF will be cracking down on Muslim leaders and activists. If reports prove to be accurate, massive arrests will be made of those simply calling for freedom to practice their religion without government interference in their internal affairs. Will you speak out? Will you condemn the killing of innocent people that took place at the front door of your meeting? The need for improved security existed only a few kilometers from where you were discussing the subject.

For the AU to have significance on changing the suffering, poverty and conflict on this continent, its members must speak for the people! Yet, for Ethiopia to truly change it cannot come from the outside, we Ethiopians must say it ourselves!

So, on behalf of the SMNE, our Ethiopian Muslims and the justice-SEEKING people of Ethiopia, I want to speak directly to every member of the TPLF/ERPFD.

Do not kill, wound or arrest these Ethiopian Muslims or any people of faith who are only claiming their human rights under God's universal law, international human rights laws and the Ethiopian Constitution! Become part of a New Ethiopia where you will have a place! We cannot go on like this any longer! It will only get worse! How much blood will it take before enough has been shed? For how long will the blood of the slain cry out for justice? What you are doing is wrong and immoral. It will require its own penalty from those who refuse to change their ways. Know that opportunity for repentance, forgiveness and transformation can suddenly elude us without warning. Do now what is right!

Seek God's way and correct what you have done wrong so that "righteousness and peace kiss each other." (Isaiah 85:10b)

"The good action and the bad are not alike. Repel the evil one by one which is better! And behold! He between whom and you there was enmity, shall be as if he were a fervent friend. (Sura 41:34)

May God bless all our people and bring us peace, love and mutual respect as we repent of our ways and struggle together to create a New Ethiopia where there will be room for all of us.

Please do not hesitate to e-mail your comments to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE at: Obang@solidaritymovement.org. You can find more about us through our website at: www.solidaritymovement.org