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**SMNE urges Minister Tedros Adhanom to take swift and comprehensive action in addressing the shameful treatment and humiliation of Ethiopian migrant workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and other countries in the Middle East.**

**[An open letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs](#)**

November 22, 2013

**Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Dear Minister Tedros Adhanom:**

I am writing this letter to you as your Ethiopian brother who shares the same beautiful country despite the fact we hold to significantly different political views. As the executive director of the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE)**, a social justice organization that stands for the well being of all our diverse Ethiopians, *I am not here to please you or anyone else, but instead I am here to urge you, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to take swift and comprehensive action in addressing the shameful treatment and humiliation of Ethiopian migrant workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and other countries in the Middle East.*

Whether or not Ethiopians agree with you or whether or not they believe that the TPLF/EPRDF is representative of the people does not make a difference in this because you are the ones now in charge. *You may not agree with what I will be saying, but I feel the moral obligation to speak forthrightly about what I believe to be true; if you consider me to be in error at any point, I am accountable for whatever I say. The humiliation and shameful mistreatment of the Ethiopians that is going on now is not only felt by those Ethiopians experiencing it physically, but it is also felt by all Ethiopians wherever they are, whether or not they are TPLF/EPRDF supporters, members of an opposition group or completely non-political.*

This has been proven in the last weeks as tens of thousands of Ethiopians from more than 30 countries and 80 cities throughout the world have come out and continue to come out with one unified message: **“Stop the mistreatment of Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia.”** *The suffering of our people in Saudi Arabia carries our name with it, putting all of us, including you and the TPLF/EPRDF, in the same box even if we do not agree on many other things.*

*This is not a problem to be solved or funded by the World Bank, United Nations, other countries, international organizations, the Ethiopian Diaspora or the Ethiopian opposition. Only the TPLF/EPRDF has the capacity and clear responsibility to deal with the magnitude and scope of this massive human tragedy of our people. Current efforts are not enough! Ethiopians all over the world are outraged by what is ensuing at the hands of a country supposed to be a friend of Ethiopia. It is intolerable.*

*My first question: where is Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Hailemariam Desalegn? The man who is supposed to be the leader of Ethiopia has failed to say anything about this? Why? In any other country where leaders are elected by the people, such silence in the face of such immense suffering would be considered dereliction of the prime minister's primary duty to protect the citizens of the country and would be reason to resign.*

***Some are saying it is an indication of the EPRDF's plan to replace him with yourself. If true, why such political maneuvering when it comes to such a critical issue? We strongly hope the reported sympathy you show for these Ethiopians in harm's way is genuine and not simply a part of damage control for the benefit of the EPRDF or about enhancing one's own personal image for future political aspirations.***

In the speech you gave before the Third International Family Planning Conference in Addis Ababa on November 16, 2013, you focused almost exclusively on the plight of Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia; but in fact, the problem of Ethiopians is worldwide, especially in the Middle East where so many are suffering.

***Why is there not a reaction from the EPRDF to the plight of Ethiopians in many other places? Why have we not seen this kind of caring coming from you or others in the EPRDF over the last few years as these stories of abuse came out? What has the EPRDF done to stop it?***

Those Ethiopians in the Diaspora and within the country with access to the international media have heard heartbreaking stories about the mistreatment of Ethiopian domestic maids and other migrant workers in many parts of the Middle East. Like most other Arab countries, Saudi Arabia uses the *kafala* system where those Ethiopians entering the country with a one-way ticket must give up their passports and other identification papers at the airport. These are the very documents needed to obtain exit visas, required by law before one can leave the country; yet, many never see their passports and papers again.

Saudi authorities claimed to provide a 7-month amnesty period to undocumented workers before being deported, but it is impossible to obtain such a visa without proving their legal status. That requires a passport. In cases where Ethiopians did have such documents in their possession, it often has not made any difference as they still have been rounded up and mistreated. (See our previous press release for more details <http://www.solidaritymovement.org/downloads/131111-SMNE-Calls-on-ERPFD-to-Protect-Ethiopians-in-Saudi-Arabia.pdf>) Ethiopians on the ground predict difficulty in rapidly returning Ethiopians to their home country; believing it will prove to be an administrative nightmare, taking many months, unless there is a relaxation of regulations in Saudi Arabia and the utmost of cooperation between them, employment agencies, the Ethiopian Embassy, the Ethiopian government and other institutions involved.

***We both know that one of the reasons this crisis is so mammoth is because it did not start two weeks, two months, or two years ago. The influx of Ethiopians to the Middle East started nearly six years ago, but the flood of Ethiopian refugees and migrant workers was birthed out of the oppressive policies of the TPLF/EPRDF and the exclusion of most Ethiopians from equal opportunities reserved for party supporters. Under other circumstances, these workers would have remained to live and work in their home country; however, so many of our people are so desperate with the lack of food, opportunity, hope and life in Ethiopia that even if they were warned about inhumane working conditions and abusive treatment in the Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, they ignored them.***

***Large billboards paid for by employment agencies throughout Addis Ababa, other cities and even in the countryside advertised to attract more innocent and unwitting recruits. Yet, many quickly became entrapped in situations where they were regularly beaten, raped or overworked but could not escape because of those papers and laws that prohibited them from changing employers. What has the EPRDF done in response to the daily or weekly accounts of Ethiopians committing suicide or losing their minds—even after recently hearing that 90% of those in hospitals for mental breakdowns were Ethiopian women?***

***Why did you, (the Minister of Foreign Affairs) not stop these employment agencies from continuing to recruit these young people when you heard these accounts? Instead, tens of thousands of workers were sent off to this plight on a monthly basis. Last year, according to your own government website, 160,000 domestic workers sought employment in the Middle East, most through employment agencies within our own country. Who is making a profit from the hardship, blood and humiliation of our people? Why was there not a crackdown months or years ago?***

If this were taking place in a country where people keep their elected officials accountable and where the rule of law is enforced, individuals in positions like your own, would have been fired or would have resigned because of the moral shame of it.

*In your talk you said you could not even sleep because of the mistreatment of Ethiopians while the EPRDF's security forces cracked down on innocent Ethiopians rallying in front of the Saudi Embassy in Addis Ababa who were only protesting the same mistreatment of their people as were you. Why are you sleepless for those being beaten, arrested and tortured in Saudi Arabia and not for those beaten, arrested and tortured in Addis Ababa? Is the pain our people feel different when it is committed by Saudi police rather than by the EPRDF police? Does it really matter who is doing it? It is the people of Ethiopia you are to represent; but instead, the EPRDF is brutally violent with Ethiopians who were rallying for the same cause you claimed to care about. Should you not have rather joined together with them in their protest instead?*

On the other hand, when it comes to the horrible abuse, rape and mistreatment of our people, we Ethiopians have forgotten our differences. *We are Ethiopians and above all, we are human beings created in the image of God. He knows who we are and hates injustice, oppression and the exploitation of the vulnerable. Yet, one Saudi Arabian posed a very good question. He asked, "Before you curse us and dehumanize us, tell your own government to treat you decently?"*

*Regardless of how Ethiopians are treated either by Saudis or by the EPRDF, we know who we are. We are a people created, gifted and loved by God. It is our Creator who gave us this land of Ethiopia to call our own. Why is our land drying up to our own people? What has happened to the heart and soul of Ethiopia? The situation in Saudi Arabia is alarming but the real crisis is in our own country? Is the ruling regime of TPLF/EPRDF ready to do something about it? We recognize that you and your ethnic group are in power for now, but for what gain if it is at the expense of others? How hard must one get before the impetus for change comes sincerely from softened hearts towards the pain and suffering of others?*

*We are not interested in words and pretenses but in a transformational change that will embrace a New Ethiopia for all our children—yours, mine and our peoples'—the present and coming generations. Suppressing the truth or simply putting small bandages on a critically wounded nation will only galvanize increasing numbers of Ethiopians to demand sustainable remedies to this systemic illness we face in our country.*

*In light of this, on behalf of these voiceless and oppressed Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia, I call on you to take immediate and comprehensive action by bringing back all Ethiopians wanting to return to their motherland, whether documented or undocumented and whether they are in Saudi Arabia by choice, through deception, as a result of human or sexual trafficking or by any other means. It should not matter now. It is your responsibility and that of the regime you serve to bring our people back like any nation would do that cares about its nationals. Any who want to come home should be brought, even if there are no jobs for them in Ethiopia. It is better to become a beggar with dignity than to live in a place where they are unwanted, mistreated and dehumanized.*

Never have Ethiopians been more united. Groups of all kinds and sorts, including pro-TPLF/ERPFD groups, are standing up for the victims—knowing they are “us.” *Who cares about what kind of flag is being waved? This is about other human beings. This is about our people. These Ethiopians are not checking out the ethnicity, religion, political view or background of those being mistreated to see if they match their own before being outraged about the Ethiopian man beaten to death on the streets of Jeddah or the Ethiopian woman gang-raped by a mob of civilian thugs. Instead they are seen simply as Ethiopians. No human being, including other migrant workers from other countries, should be treated in that way and Ethiopians know this. Their hearts are breaking in response to the cries of our people.*

***This is an opportunity for the EPRDF to act for the good of all of us. It is a second-chance to show who you are. It is an opening that is fragile and fleeting. It can be used rightly or wrongly; in a timely and earnest fashion or missed entirely through failing to act or acting in pretense.***

As you may already know, the SMNE (<http://www.solidaritymovement.org>) is based on the principles of putting **humanity before ethnicity** or any other differences and that **no one is free until all are free** because ***when a society values and cares for its people, it builds the foundation for healthier, more harmonious and more prosperous communities, villages and nations. What Ethiopians have experienced on-the-ground under the TPLF/EPRDF regime you represent is a system which has exercised political and ethnic-based favoritism to the exclusion of the majority.***

***Despite the EPRDF's many laws, institutions, pretenses and public assertions to the contrary, the disillusioned and desperate lives of Ethiopians attest to the facts. The acclaimed double-digit economy still leaves the majority in such poverty that they are leaving the country and becoming the victims of modern slavery in wealthy Arab countries. Addressing these issues would be part of a long-term solution to the flood of Ethiopians refugees to not only the Middle East, but to all sides of the globe where their suffering is not new.***

Many report that the Ethiopian Embassy in Saudi Arabia has been unresponsive to their pleas for help and have even turned away young women who have bruises on their bodies and faces from mistreatment. The Ethiopian Embassy in Saudi Arabia was closed for three days this past week and finally reopened. Why in the midst of this crisis? Stories from the ground in Saudi Arabia have emerged substantiating the alleged illegal connections between employment agencies in Ethiopia, Ethiopian Embassies and traffickers, not only in the Middle East but in other countries, like South Africa, as well. ***How can this mounting crisis be solved without pursuing a thorough investigation of these practices? The EPRDF must hold accountable any of those Ethiopians who are making money out of the suffering of these people through illegal actions. Now the Saudis have reportedly dumped off thousands of Ethiopians at the border of Yemen with no supplies or means of survival. What will you do for them? Will you be sleepless for those in Yemen, Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon and beyond?***

You have spoken of your commitment to bringing these people home and have claimed that 10,000 people were repatriated by November 20, 2013 and that 19,428 were repatriated to Ethiopia by 10:00 PM, Ethiopian time, on November 22, 2013. This appeared on your Twitter account. People at the airport in Addis Ababa say they have not seen many people coming in let alone these huge numbers.

***How could they come in these numbers without being noticed? Which airline are you using for transport and which kind(s) of plane? How many passengers per plane and why have Ethiopians not seen a flood of arrivals from Saudi Arabia? How will you deal with the high level of skepticism among Ethiopians who would like to challenge you on these enormous figures even while hoping you are speaking the truth?***

However, the credibility of the EPRDF is in question. To bring that many people (19,000) in the last few days will have required more than 22 flights on an Airbus, the largest of all planes, with the maximum passengers allowed—853. However, most airbuses are set up to only accommodate an average of 480-490 according to [Wikipedia's website on Boeing's Airbus](#)<sup>1</sup>. Most other planes will only take 400 or fewer passengers. The video coverage of you at the airport with the incoming migrant workers shows no more than 100 people with you at the airport. ***If this is a scam it is only another humiliation to the world that these numbers have been so grossly inflated. Why is the media not covering this?***

The task of repatriation is not an easy one and if your office and the TEPRDF are genuine in carrying this out, Ethiopians will exercise patience and you will earn of the respect of many; however, even then, ***the EPRDF must look at root causes and long-term solutions if this situation is going to improve and not blow up again sometime and somewhere else. This will entail a much longer discussion in the future; however, for today's problem, I, on behalf of the SMNE and the Ethiopian people who have asked for help, will offer the following recommendations:***

### Recommendations:

1. The EPRDF should find a way to send multiple planes or ships to bring people back home as soon as possible, even if it means subsidizing Ethiopian Airlines and others to accomplish this large task. ***The EPRDF should also find the means to utilize large ships that could have the capacity to transport four to five thousand passengers at a time as a means to ship the people across the Red Sea, at least to Djibouti where buses could bring them to Addis Ababa or other destinations.***
2. The EPRDF should negotiate with Saudi Arabian officials to cut down on red tape linked to the *kafala* system and other administrative challenges that obstruct the swift repatriation of our people due to their current suffering. ***The problems inherent to a system that immediately confiscates passports and other identification documents belonging to migrant workers upon entry into the country should be quickly overcome due to the massive task on hand and the unfair predicament of Ethiopians whose paperwork is not accessible through no fault of their own.***
3. The EPRDF should ask the Ethiopian-Saudi Arabian billionaire, Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Al Amoudi, to help finance the transportation of these people; not only because it is the right thing to do, but because this man is half Ethiopian—his mother is an Ethiopian and his father is Saudi. ***He could use not only his money but also his influence as a Saudi to tell the Saudi kingdom to treat Ethiopians with respect and dignity. Why has he not come out in outrage regarding the beating, torture and rape of these people? The young Ethiopian woman, suffering in the hands of Saudi men, could have been his Ethiopian mother.*** He has made a good amount of his billions in Ethiopia and so now it is his turn to give back. This is his chance to show if he wants to continue his business in the New Ethiopia.
4. Due to the lack of trust in the TPLF/EPRDF, ***an independent group, which is not connected to the TPLF/EPRDF, like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or human rights groups, should observe the process and the results. Let them document what is going for accuracy. It will increase your credibility if it is not a whitewashed report.*** We all agree that the EPRDF should repatriate Ethiopians, but are highly suspect of the numbers. You say the government is working on this 24 hours a day, but in this atmosphere of mistrust, verification of the facts on the ground is necessary to be believed. Why does the camera not go to those shelters?
5. If the EPRDF is genuine in carrying out its mandate, ***these efforts should not stop with Saudi Arabia but should include other Ethiopians experiencing similar difficulties in Yemen, Lebanon, Dubai, Libya, UAE, or other places,*** especially those using the *kafala* system.
6. ***Numerous reports of corrupt practices on the part of Ethiopian employment agencies and staff at Ethiopian Embassies in Saudi Arabia and other places point to the complicity of some in the trafficking and what has become the modern slavery of our people. Allegations that the TPLF/EPRDF has turned a blind eye to what may be endemic organized crime should be thoroughly investigated and any found guilty should be held accountable. Reports that are numerous and credible alleging that criminal enterprises are being conducted behind the scene in Ethiopian embassies throughout the world, including in Europe, should not be overlooked but investigated.***
7. Remove all billboards and other forms of recruitment and assignment of migrant workers to the Middle East until further investigation ascertains that it is safe for our people.

8. *If the Saudis continue to do this to our people in their country, you have the power to evict Saudi investors who are capitalizing on our resources, particularly where the peoples' rights have been violated and where the land or resources of Ethiopians have been illegally confiscated with little or no benefit to the people of Ethiopia.*

**To the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its people, our Saudi Arabian neighbors:**

*We ask you to desist from any mistreatment of Ethiopian migrant workers in your country and to facilitate the process of their return, particularly in regards to the provision of exit visas. If they are unwanted in the KSA, their own country should receive them swiftly.*

We also recognize these actions by the KSA to be in direct violation to the directions given by the Prophet Muhammad, revered and honored by many of our fellow Ethiopians, which explicitly prohibited any of his disciples from ever committing such acts against those who gave not only refuge to his followers, but hospitality.

**To the people of Saudi Arabia:**

*We recognize that these draconian policies being carried out in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by its officials and some civilians do not reflect the attitudes, behavior and spirit of many wonderful Saudi Arabians who may be as outraged as are we. We continue to seek good relations with all who uphold the dignity and respect of all people, regardless of whether we share the same ethnicity, religion, culture or viewpoint for we believe humanity should come before ethnicity. Our Creator endowed all of us with worth.*

**Minister Tedros Adhanom:**

*The failure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the TPLF/EPRDF to care for our own people is why we are dealing with this tragedy now. There are many other countries in Africa that are as poor or even poorer than Ethiopia, but you do not hear the horror that their people are facing like what we hear from Ethiopians.*

*To revive the soul of our beautiful country of Ethiopia again will only come as God helps us to soften our hearts towards others, resulting in the restoration of justice, forgiveness, and the embracing of each other. We seek a country where the value of human life is not judged by whether one is a child of the elite, the wealthy or the favored ethnic group running the country but because one is human and Ethiopian.*

I await your response and hope you will swiftly act on this.

Sincerely yours,

**Obang Metho**, Executive Director of the SMNE

On behalf of the SMNE and Ethiopians suffering in Saudi Arabia and throughout the world

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**This letter has been CC to:**

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**Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf Al Saud** Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United Kingdom and Ireland

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to United States

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Canada

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to German

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Norway

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Sweden

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Switzerland

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Netherlands

Ambassador of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Australia

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**International Labor Organization (ILO)**

**International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

**African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)**

**Mr. Donald Yamamoto**, Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary of African Affairs

**Patricia M. Haslach**, U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Mr. Christopher Smith**, House of Representatives, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa

**Human Rights Watch**

**Amnesty International**

**This letter has also been CC to major news media outlets such as BBC, the Guardian, New York Times,**

**A24MEDIA**

**All Africa**

**Bloomberg News**

**NCNB Africa**

**CNN**

**REUTERS AFRICA**

**The East Africa**

**African Review**

**VOA Ameharic**

**VOA-English**

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<sup>i</sup> The maximum certified carrying capacity is 853 passengers in an all-economy-class layout,<sup>[42]</sup> Airbus lists the "typical" three-class layout as accommodating 525 passengers, with 10 first, 76 business, and 439 economy class seats.<sup>[105]</sup> Airline configurations range from [Korean Air](#)'s 407 passengers to [Air Austral](#)'s 840 passengers.<sup>[167][168]</sup> and average around 480-490 seats.