



SMNE Calls on Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn To Lead Ethiopia towards Change by Answering the Demands of the People

June 3, 2013

His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegn,
Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. BOX – 1031
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dear Prime Minister Hailemariam,

On behalf of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), I, as the SMNE's executive director, am writing to you regarding the peaceful rally that took place in Addis Ababa yesterday, June 2, 2013. **We highly commend you and the TPLF/EPRDF for allowing the rally to proceed without interference. Even though freedom of assembly is allowed under the Ethiopian Constitution; since 2005, Ethiopians have been denied this right. For the first time in eight years, after some negotiation with the Semayawi (Blue) party's leadership to change the date, the TPLF/EPRDF government agreed to provide the permit that allowed the Ethiopian people the right to express their beliefs without arrests, brutality or death.**

In response to this opportunity, an astounding number of Ethiopians came out—estimated at hundred of thousands—all to show their support for change. No one expected such a response, even the leaders of the rally; but **it serves as an important revelation to all of us as to the deep thirst for freedom, justice, peace and opportunity that is within the hearts and minds of Ethiopians. That same thirst has united Ethiopians of different ethnicities, religions, genders, regions, socio-economic levels and political alliances in their call for change.**



Peaceful demonstration in Addis Ababa organized by Semayawi or Blue Party | June 2, 2013

First of all we truly commend you, Mr. Prime Minister for allowing this rally to go forward. It shows a different kind of leadership—even though it is under the same TPLF/EPRDF government—because it takes strength, principle and wisdom to hear the discontent of the people. You may also better understand the risks of ignoring the very real rumblings of the people on the ground, which will not go away until they are genuinely addressed. It is even more important in this changing world where support from the people makes a difference in a government's ability to function and be secure.

Like your predecessor, Meles, you could have ordered TPLF/EPRDF security forces to gun down our young people, arrest the leaders of the protest or to detain large numbers of demonstrators; however, you did not. We believe you, and other members of the TPLF/EPRDF, only allowed this rally to proceed because you may be more ready to listen to the people than ever before.

This should not only be applauded by us, but should also be recognized by others such as national and international human rights groups, civic organizations, donor countries, religious leaders and defenders of the law and freedom who have been wanting good governance, democracy and respect for human rights to come to Ethiopia.

Secondly, the rally itself was historic in nature by being very peaceful and we want to give credit to the police and security forces for not interfering in the peaceful demonstration. Though they were present, they treated people with respect. No one was arrested or detained and no one was harmed, harassed or threatened to our knowledge. This is exemplary.

Thirdly, we give enormous credit to the hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians who came out from their homes to show their support for change. Regardless of what political viewpoint one might hold, we should all be proud of how well they presented themselves and in doing so, represented all Ethiopians as they shouted during the rally the following: “We cannot be divided by our ethnicity! We cannot be divided by our religion.”



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The rally was carried out with great discipline, respect, civility and basic good manners towards others. There was no bloodshed or destruction. From start to finish it was peaceful. It makes Ethiopians a shining example to the world and is evidence once again that we are not people of violence, but people who seek a better future for the country we all share and love. Congratulations to the people!

Fourthly, we believe the Semayawi (Blue) party leadership, who called for this rally, should be commended for their extraordinary leadership in organizing and carrying out a peaceful protest where the diverse people of Ethiopia could demand the God-given rights of all Ethiopians.

First of all, their name, *Semayawi*, which means “blue”, denotes the calm and peace one sees on the colour of the clear sky and gentle flowing of the deep sea waters. The name reflects the nature of the movement as one that seeks to move an inclusive Ethiopia forward, but not by turbulence or violence but peacefully and with determination and persistence. Their expectations of participation were for several thousand participants. They were obviously greatly surprised with the huge numbers of people who came out.



Ethiopia's quest for freedom is irrepensible. The blues have done a marvelous job. The long march to freedom has begun in earnest. We salute the Blues for their leadership.

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Another excellent outcome was the diverse makeup of those participating in the rally. It demonstrated how dissatisfaction with the status quo was not merely a position held by a few but that it was widespread at the grassroots level. The people who came were not only from the Blue party, but were from different political parties, ethnicities, religions and regions.

Those rallying certainly included opposition members, but we believe it also could have included some who were pro-TPLF/EPRDF who saw the need for reforms. Among the participants were Muslims, Christians, non-believers, women, men, young, old, public servants, unemployed, students, teachers, business owners, religious leaders, the healthy, the disabled and in general, people from all walks of life.

This rally was only held in the capital city, but if Ethiopians had been given the opportunity to rally throughout our beautiful country, the number would have been in the millions. This shows that the people of Ethiopia want change. What they are demanding are four actions, which should not be difficult for the government to move forward on remedying. These include: 1) **the release of all prisoners of conscience, such as politicians and journalists,** 2) **for measures to be taken to stop the forced eviction of Ethiopians from their homes and land,** 3) **to stop government interference in religious affairs, such as with Muslims and Ethiopian Orthodox,** and 4) **for the TPLF/EPRDF government to take action against injustice, the high cost of living and corruption.** The good thing is that the protestors are asking for these peacefully.

Mr. Prime Minister,

You and the TPLF/EPRDF should understand that this is an important opportunity to act for the good of Ethiopia that should not slip from your hands. It is not in the interest of anyone, including the TPLF/EPRDF, to doggedly cling to the status quo. No longer can anyone pretend that the government is a government of the people. Instead, as the people now demand change, it clearly shows that the TPLF/EPRDF is not with the people and does not represent their interests even though the TPLF/EPRDF speaks of doing exactly that.

Governments, like Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, found themselves in similar trouble when they did not answer to the inspiration of the people. We all know what happened to them when they ignored the people and we should learn from their history. **Now the response to the Ethiopian people's demands are in your hands. There is no turning back from this reality; ignoring it will only create a worse crisis. Instead, we should all look at it as a God-given opportunity to create a better Ethiopia, a New Ethiopia, for all of us. As the African proverb says, "If you want to go faster, go alone; but if you want to go further, go together."** This offer is here before you today but it may not be there indefinitely. What can you do as the leader of Ethiopia to help build the bridge to a new Ethiopia for all our people?

Mr. Prime Minister,

We urge you to meet these demands; however, we are deeply disturbed by the statements coming from the following EPRDF officials: Ato Shimelis Kemal, the State Minister of Government Communication Affairs, Ato Redwan Hussien, the Head of the Secretarial Council of the EPRDF and Ato Bereket Simon, the Ethiopian Minister of Communication. Their statements all fail to acknowledge the great divide between those clinging to the "one group rules all" system of domination of the past and the majority wanting an inclusive Ethiopia for all of us as our future.

Furthermore, it shows a continuation of the TPLF/EPRDF efforts to try to divide Ethiopians, often by ethnicity but this time along religious lines between Muslims and Christians. It will no longer work. The Ethiopian Muslims are our precious brothers and sisters. They are our people. We do not only share land; we share blood.

The statements from Shimelis Kemal and Redwan Hussien both attempt to label some of us as terrorists, without cause, in order to prolong EPRDF hegemony. This is not only wrong, it is in error and very dangerous. They hope to label the Muslims in order to isolate them from the mainstream of Ethiopians and in order to gain support from the west in the War on Terror. Western donors should be made aware of this unfair scapegoating.

The truth is that Ethiopian Muslims have been peacefully demanding their religious rights for over a year, as they gathered on the grounds of their own religious compound. Now TPLF/EPRDF officials are slandering them as they accuse them of being terrorists. What have they done? Nothing! In the last year, they have never vandalized anything, let alone ever harmed another human being. Yet, their leaders have been arrested and their mosque disrespected.

Their peaceful actions give evidence that they are different from what the government has portrayed them to be. They have consistently chosen a non-violent path to demand freedom from EPRDF government interference in the practice of their religion—a right guaranteed under the Ethiopian Constitution—and should not be accused of something they are not.

When they came out with the Blue party for this demonstration, they did not come out only as Muslims but they came out as human beings, asking for the same freedom, justice and peace that everyone else is demanding. There is no need to single them out from others like they were outsiders. If you saw the demonstration or viewed the pictures, you would see our beautiful people of differing backgrounds and beliefs, including Muslims, intermingled with each other in peaceful protest. There should be no boundary placed between them and others. They are us!

Mr. Prime Minister,

Let me be very clear, the SMNE is not for one group of people, but for all Ethiopians, including the TPLF/EPRDF and those who have different viewpoints, strategies or goals than we do. Will you and the government you represent do the same? There should be no “us” and “them” if we Ethiopians are to have a healthy, peaceful, prosperous society for ourselves and our descendents.

No government holds onto power forever and because of that we believe the TPLF/EPRDF only stands to gain from helping to build a society where the wellbeing and security of all people will be held in high regard—putting humanity before ethnicity. When such principles are embedded into the fabric of society we will all better flourish for no one is free until all are free. When one Ethiopian is harmed or hurt, we all are. When the pain is inflicted on one, it is inflicted on all of us. What the people are demanding is not as a separate voice but as one people—no matter what religion, what ethnicity or from what region they come from, for we will stand together.

Some are fearful that your administration will quietly arrest, harass or intimidate leaders of the Semayawi (Blue) Party or other leaders and activists. I must warn you, Mr. Prime Minister and your government that such actions would only incite the people, especially following this government-permitted peaceful protest. What Ethiopia needs is not more arrests but for all our people to be released. We all know that the law has been repeatedly subverted for political purposes and that some of our best heroes and heroines are locked up. We call on you to release them so they might be part of building a better society. Repeal this anti-terrorism law that has been used to silence truth and the Charities and Societies Proclamation that has been used to suppress civil society. Now is the time for Ethiopians to be more united rather than divided if we are to build a shared future of hope rather than of doom.

If change does not follow these demands, the government should know that there is a limit on how much repression that people will endure. As the people of Ethiopia unite together, the likelihood of more pressure for change will only increase. There are simply not enough prisons to hold all the Ethiopians who demand change. Arresting the leaders will not make the people's struggle die for the desire for change is here. Those who commit unjust acts against the people will ultimately be held accountable. In 2005, the government tried to stop the push for change, but here we are in 2013 and the people are still demanding it. Neither have the people forgotten those who committed the crimes of 2005. They are holding on to the belief that justice will eventually be done.

God created human beings to seek freedom. Where human beings are oppressed, there will be a struggle for liberation. Ethiopians, like others, will surely pursue freedom, especially as they embrace the shared struggle with other Ethiopians. If you, Mr. Prime Minister, as a different kind of leader than your predecessor, can lead the current government of Ethiopia to embrace a different vision from the status quo, you could be instrumental in ushering in an Ethiopia that would be a “win-win” for everybody. If not, the resistance to authoritarian rule will predictably arise and eventually, the people will bring change, but such change must be based on the right foundation so it does not simply replace one flawed system for another of the same ilk.

Mr. Prime Minister,

This is an opportunity for all of us. In light of this, **we ask you, to demonstrate your leadership, even though most people believe that the TPLF leadership is using you to advance their own interests, limiting you from acting as you otherwise might do. If this is the case, this is where you should stand up for your principles and do whatever is morally right; even if you are isolated for it or must resign in protest over their wrongful control.**

You will find that not only will Ethiopians stand with you, but even the people of moral fiber beyond the borders of Ethiopia will stand with you for doing the right thing. For the well being of our country, our descendants and our shared future, it is critical to give up something to get something better for all of us.

This is especially important at this critical time when external forces are talking about bombing the Grand Renaissance Dam. According to The Associated Press articles news, entitled: *“Egyptian politicians suggest attacking Ethiopia over Nile dam”* published today June 03 2013. Please click at the following link to read the news report

http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/06/03/egyptian_politicians_suggest_attacking_ethiopia_over_nile_dam.html.

The AP reported that: *“Politicians meeting with Egypt’s president on Monday proposed hostile acts against Ethiopia, including backing rebels and carrying out sabotage, to stop it from building a massive dam on the Nile River upstream”* If this kind of thing happened, which we hope it will not, Ethiopia will be vulnerable. This is even more the case when the TPLF/ERPFD government fails to have the support of the people. If it happened, the powerful players of the world may side with others, not with Ethiopia.

Mr. Prime Minister,

Please take time to reflect on the gravity of the times. **The decision you make at this hour is not about only saving your power or the TPLF/ERPFD government but about saving our country and the future of our people and children.**

May God give you and others within the government the wisdom and insight to realize what is at risk and then the strength and courage to act accordingly. **As for the SMNE, we will always work with those who are genuinely seeking a more unified, free and just Ethiopia. We will stand with the people of Ethiopia, as they demand change. If you or others in the TPLF/ERPFD are part of bringing that change, we will also stand by you.**

As we look at our ancient land, we are reminded that the blood that flows through our veins and nourishes our bodies also connects us to each other as one people through our ancestors, even those beyond our regions and borders. We must care about each other if we are to thrive for no one is free until all are free.

With faith in God, He is able to multiply our efforts and our resources to build our nation to be more righteous, just and livable. No blessings should be kept to oneself or one’s own ethnic group, but also should be used to bless all Ethiopians and others, including our neighbors in the world, just like the mighty Nile River that originates with us but nourishes millions of lives with its flow.

We are urgently awaiting your response.

Your brother Ethiopian,



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This letter has been CC to:

U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Mr. Donald Boothe
Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary of African Affairs Mr. Donald Yamamoto
U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Sen. Bob Corker, Ranking Member of Committee on Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Sen. Christopher Coons, Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs
House of Representatives, Mr. Christopher Smith, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa
UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
European Union Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

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