



April 25, 2015

## A LETTER FROM OBANG METHO TO ETHIOPIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS: AN URGENT CALL FOR PRAYER FOR OUR NATION

Dear Ethiopian religious leaders and members of the Ethiopian faith community,

I am coming to you as a human being and also as a believer in Jesus Christ. My appeal is not only for fellow Christians, even though it is a call for Christians to pray, but I also want it to apply to others for when we truly seek God, he will reward us.

*Some religious leaders and people of faith will come as Christian believers, others as Muslims, still others as Jews. We may differ in our beliefs, but we share the truth that there is one God who created all human beings in His image. He gave each of us value and the free will to choose to love him with all our hearts, souls and strength.* God told the people of Israel through Moses the following before entering the Promised Land. It gave the people a choice and we are faced with a similar choice today. He said: “... I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.” (Deuteronomy 30:19b-20a)

Can life exist in our beloved country of Ethiopia? There are many Ethiopian migrants and refugees all over the world who will answer “no” to this question as well as many Ethiopians within the country. *The devastating events of the past week have shaken Ethiopians to more closely examine why so many of our people take the risk to leave their homes only to find themselves in harm’s way. These questions fill our minds as grief and sadness surrounding the horrible deaths of our young Ethiopians continues to overwhelm us. Because of this, I am also coming to you in my personal grief to share my pain with yours.*

Ethiopia is a poor country in the world despite the fact we have abundant resources. Billions of dollars of aid money have flowed into the country; but yet, the outpouring of our people continues unabated. *The image of our country is now closely intertwined with that of seeing our young men burned alive in South Africa, the 48 Ethiopians who died after being caught in the civil conflict in Yemen, those who died in containers in Tanzania, those found dead in Lake Malawi, our young girls hanging themselves in the Middle East, the dead and rotting body of a young Ethiopian, lying in the streets of Saudi Arabia for lack of someone to bury her, Ethiopian bodies floating on the Red Sea or the Mediterranean Sea after the boats carrying them capsized, the skeletons of Ethiopians in the Sinai Desert after their organs had been removed, our young boys and girls selling their bodies on the streets of Addis with no one to protect them; our elders within Ethiopia searching for food in the heaps of trash, Ethiopian men and women of courage, fleeing the country under threat of arrests because they spoke the truth and demanded change, and now our 30 young men beheaded or shot in the head in Libya because they were Christians.*

Our emotions are stirred to new depths; realizing that so many of our people put themselves at risk only because they feared or despised of life inside Ethiopia more than they feared the hardships and dangers awaiting them on their journeys abroad. *We have to honestly acknowledge what is happening and why, if we are to stop it. Unless all of us Ethiopians declare ourselves to be part of the problem as well as part of the solution, it will continue.*

## **I CALL ON RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND PEOPLE OF FAITH TO CALL FOR PRAYER IN THE WEEKS AHEAD**

Let us dedicate the next weeks ahead to prayer, starting Sunday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. In our prayers, let us seek God's deliverance from whatever it is that is wrong or evil with our country—both individually and as a society. *I also call for prayer for those Ethiopians who remain at risk of harm, death, suffering, injustice or hunger whether they are abroad or remain in the country. I am also concerned because rumors have surfaced regarding other Ethiopians who may be captured by the Islamic State (ISIS). I call on our Ethiopian religious leaders and people of faith to pray for the protection of these people, for our nation, and for a lasting solution to the problems we face.*

### **TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS:**

**“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)**

You are in a position to guide, inspire and direct the people, especially because we the people, along with the system under which we live, are part of the problem. *Pretending otherwise, will not solve our dilemma and it will certainly not be solved by itself. It will require proclaiming what is genuinely wrong or evil, calling people to repent and to correct the wrongs being done.* We are to meditate on God's word and its instructions for life. We should also pray for TPLF leaders and those in the EPRDF that they might repent of their ways and please God, not self. You are spokespeople for God, not for a political party. That means not compromising God's truth and principles so as to please an immoral regime, regardless of the consequences.

*For example, at some recent candlelight vigils, religious leaders told the people to avoid any talk about politics, but instead, to leave it all to God. Does that mean that religious leaders cannot speak out against the killing, corruption, robbing of the poor, ethnic-based favoritism, the repression of human rights, the rape or abuse of women and children, the lies, deception or torture of our people—all because it is connected to a political group in power?* In the New Testament parable on the Good Samaritan where Jesus explained who one's neighbor was and how to love one's neighbor as oneself; did Jesus not hold the religious leaders accountable for failing to help the wounded man on the side of the road?

In the Biblical book of Ezekiel, [Ez. 33], **God made the prophet Ezekiel a watchman, who was told by God to warn the people when they were doing wrong.** In fact, God told him that if he did not speak out to dissuade a person from doing wrong; not only would that person suffer the consequences of his or her wrongdoing, but so would the one who failed to warn him. God's prophets, teachers, disciples and followers were to stand in the gap for people, warning them of wrong, but seeking to encourage them to do right so the person might truly live. These men and women of God and disciples of Jesus stood before judges, kings, rulers, mobs and people. Some did not want to listen, but others responded when their hearts were pierced by what was right, true, just and good.

***If we are to bring life-giving change to Ethiopia, our religious leaders have an extremely important role to play in calling a nation to repentance, including leaders of the TPLF/EPRDF. Many consider them our enemies, but Jesus told us to pray for our enemies and to speak the truth in love.***

Muslim leaders called for national prayers in all Ethiopian mosques this past Friday for the families of Ethiopian Christians harmed by ISIS. Now, we call on Christian leaders to call their people to do the same on Sunday and for Jewish leaders to do the same this coming Friday.

***In the future, I call on all Ethiopian religious leaders to begin organizing a national reconciliation effort to help bring healing, forgiveness, justice and reconciliation to our wounded country. On behalf of the SMNE, we will be ready to stand with you, making a similar effort to call on civil society to do the same. This effort is for all our diverse people for we are one family, the family of Ethiopia—the beautiful garden of our nation.***

*The blood of those Ethiopians who were killed included not one ethnic group, but many—Amhara, Oromo, Gurage, Tigrayan, and others. Although IS targeted Ethiopian Christians, a young Muslim man who was among them, refused to leave his Christian brothers, saying he was one with them and gave his life along with the others. The death of these people signifies the death of all of us. This is who we are as Ethiopians and we should not forget it. As I always say, we do not only share land, we also share blood which is inseparable.*

These Ethiopian Christian believers were barbarically executed in the name of Jesus. So let us pray and work to find a solution to the root causes of the problem, being willing to look at ourselves as well. *The TPLF/EPRDF regime must admit that its ethnic-apartheid policies, brutality, corruption, violation of human rights, repression of freedoms, and the denial of opportunity to the majority are all closely linked to the mass exodus of Ethiopians out of the country; making these deaths and the suffering of our people a direct result of the failure of the government to care for its citizens. Ethiopia is no place to live or flourish.*

Those with power and say must come to their senses for otherwise our future looks grim, but not impossible. One of the slogans during the 100,000 person mourning protest in Addis Ababa was a verse from which we should take heart: “**Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.**” (**Proverbs 20:7**)

May we humble ourselves, repent of our own wrongdoing, forgive others, and follow God-given principles of right and wrong. The future looks grim unless we seek God’s help, but when we do, He may call us to be his watchmen and watchwomen to stand up for what is right.

*No one expects Ethiopians to rise to the challenge of such change; it is unthinkable and seems impossible in this day of age, but we may surprise them if we turn our hearts to God so as to find a meaningful way to resolve our crises without destroying ourselves. Let us call on God to deliver us and our fellow brothers and sisters.*

*When each of us declares ourselves responsible for the change we seek; willing to contribute and to sacrifice for the well being of our nation and for those coming next; this shame and embarrassment of our image in the world can be ended. God has gifted Ethiopia with abundant resources, but we have not managed them well.*

*Ethiopia could be the fountain of Africa in terms of the water, the fertile land, resources, and nearly 100 million people. Many Ethiopians have been educated abroad, but because we do not have a system that values humanity before ethnicity; or fails to see how the freedom of others enhances our own, we live impoverished lives, both figuratively and literally.* Let us pray for the TPLF/EPRDF that those who cling to power by committing wrong towards God and others will begin to see the bigger picture; seeking cleansing from the intoxicating thinking of self over God, release from greed and deception over morality, and a renewed focus that turns us from temporary goals to more eternal goals as our faith traditions teach. **We have a choice; let us choose God’s way. Let us choose life.**

“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land...[he has given us.]”

In hope and trust,

Your brother,

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