



The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia invites all media to:

A Press Briefing on Peace and Security in Ethiopia

Thursday, October 31, 2019 from 12 noon until 3PM

*National Press Club
529 14th St. NW
Washington DC 20045*

The briefing will take place on the 13th floor in the Murrow Room.

This briefing is for the media only and registration is required.

The National Press Club is a secure facility all attendees must have a valid QR code to pass through security gates at the entrance of the Club to attend the event.

ALL GUESTS MUST HAVE A VALID CODE TO ENTER THE FACILITY.

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Press Release for Immediate Release

October 30, 2019.

Washington, DC-- Ethiopia is a strategic country in Africa; yet, what happens in Ethiopia can have a far-reaching effect beyond the continent.

An expert on East Africa stated:

A civil war, and possibly genocide, is in the making in the Horn of Africa, in Ethiopia...If civil war begins in Ethiopia it will be an unprecedented catastrophe the likes of which has not been seen in Africa...Because of the Nile River, the lifeline of both Sudan and Egypt, instability in Ethiopia will be a major concern and it is likely that these countries will intervene either directly or indirectly. Together with the failed states of South Sudan, Somalia, Central Africa Republic, Yemen across the Red Sea, and with Sudan and Eritrea tittering as a result of US sanctions, the Horn can turn out to be the most complicated security zone the world has yet to see. We pray for peace...

Ethiopia has been a country under authoritarian rule for 27 years, until 2018, when an uprising of the people led to the peaceful emergence of a new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed. He had been part of the EPRDF, the same party in control; yet, early on he led the way to significant reforms—releasing political prisoners, making peace with neighboring countries, opening up political space, giving voice to the media and with it all, creating a sense of new hope among most Ethiopians. Only weeks ago he was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for establishing peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea and for other initiatives promising further democratic reforms.

Despite all of this, challenges to his leadership and “change” agenda, called Medemer, have arisen, now threatening the peace and security of the country. Some of this opposition comes from the old guard within the EPRDF, especially the previously dominant group, the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), who do not want democratic reforms.

Another strong source of resistance has come from the ethno-nationalists within the prime minister’s own ethnic group, the Oromo, who are strong adherents to the current ethnic-based structure of the government. This structure, ethnic federalism, formerly empowered the TPLF to advance their own group, carrying out the African proverb that it is “our turn to eat” to justify extreme ethnic-based favoritism towards their own group. They believed they sacrificed more than others to overthrow the previous regime. Now, it is being advanced by new ethno-nationalists. Unfortunately, the present Ethiopian Constitution supports this model of ethnic-based politics.

In fact, the preamble of the Ethiopian Constitution speaks to “nations and nationalities” rather than to WE the people of Ethiopia. Most regional states are named after the dominant ethnic group, as are political parties. Even security forces within most regions represent the dominant ethnic group and can play favorites. This has become a threat to national security.

In the last few months it has been put to a test on June 23, 2019, especially following the assassinations of Gen Seare Mekonnen, Ethiopia’s army chief of staff, from Tigrayan ethnic group, as well as Dr, Ambachew Mekonnen, the president of the Amhara region, his attorney general and others officials. The Amhara make up the second largest ethnic group in the country and the Oromo, the largest. Long standing conflict has never been resolved; but instead, is being used now to incite violence, with impunity.

In the last weeks, individuals have been targeted based on having different ethnicity from the mainstream, especially those living in the Oromia and Amhara regions. Some of different ethnicity have been told to return to their own regions. Preliminary reports, not yet confirmed, estimate that over seventy people have been killed in Oromia region, many in barbaric ways and four hundreds more, injured.

It should be understood that many ethnic Oromo living in the region certainly object to this violence, but fear repercussions should they speak out. In fact, the extremist-nationalists have become competitors with the present administration. Responsibility for the recent killing and rising violence has been attributed to the Qeerroo youth, an Oromo group, under the leadership of Jawar Mohammed, a US citizen, who publicly accused government security forces of plotting an attack against him, a claim denied by the federal police. In response, called for his supporters on his face book and his own media, Oromia Media Network (OMN) to come out in his defense. It resulted in the explosion of violence which continues to threaten the country. He also claims he was instrumental in bringing the new administration to power following widespread protests in 2017. More documentation and investigation by international independent organization is needed on this atrocity; however, people are alarmed with the lack of strong intervention by the prime minister and his government. It has left people vulnerable as businesses are closed, roads are blocked, houses are confiscated and some thirty or more churches burned down. The rise of ethnic tensions has led to the spiraling of anxiety and fear throughout the whole country. Many people are asking, “Is Ethiopia a Rwandan genocide in the making? The Country is slowly sleepwalking into ethnic war. Can it be averted”?

With this in mind, we cannot be remain silent while the nation is in such jeopardy. In response, the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) will hold a press briefing regarding this unfolding crisis. The SMNE is a diverse, non-partisan, social justice organization, formed in 2008 to confront human rights violations and to bring freedom, justice, reconciliation and peace to all the people of Ethiopia. The present structure of ethnic federalism has caused great suffering to the majority of people and is a recipe for the disintegration of the country, like what happened in Yugoslavia. Constitutional,

institutional and meaningful reforms are critically needed to save lives, prevent tragedy and revive a nation from becoming a failed state.

The SMNE is a movement based on fundamental principles— **to put humanity before ethnicity or any other differences** *because every human being is created equal; and secondly, to care about the wellbeing of all Ethiopians; for not only is it right, but also because no one will be free until all are free.* We also believe we must talk to each other, not about each other, as the best way to resolve conflicts.

When Prime Minister Abiy came to power, the SMNE supported his vision of an inclusive and democratic Ethiopia, leading the SMNE to send a team of sixteen diverse Ethiopians to Ethiopia to meet with him and his Deputy Prime Minister, the President and members of his administration.

The SMNE team members also traveled to seven regions of the country, talking to elders, religious leaders, community leaders, government leaders, other stakeholders and thousands of students at twelve universities throughout the country. The SMNE continues now to work within Ethiopia, particularly focusing on bringing stakeholders together, with a focus on youth, to advance conflict prevention, justice for all, reconciliation and to bring meaningful reforms.

The Executive Director, Mr. Obang Metho, has just come from Ethiopia and will be returning shortly; however, we have decided to hold this briefing, along with four other diverse Ethiopian leaders, to give an update to interested media regarding the current peace and security crisis in Ethiopia.

The panelists are as follow Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE; Mr. Negesso O. Wakeyo, Human Rights and Social Justice activist; Mr. Negasi T. Byeyene, Human Rights defender, Mr. Tamagne Beyenen, Human Rights activist and political commentator and Sheik Khalid, Ethiopian religious leader who works on peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

We believe support from the international community for the Prime Minister Abiy's democratic initiatives and meaningful reforms are important to increase the likelihood that these objectives cannot be hijacked by ethno-nationalists and ethnic extremists. Some relevant outcomes from this press briefing include, but are not limited, to the following:

- US policy makers and other donor countries to play a role to support the Prime Minister's democratic initiatives; including, constitutional and institutional reforms and democratic reforms, increased security, greater stability, increased justice, peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.
- The Western media to raise awareness of the rise of ethno-nationalism and ethnic-extremism in Ethiopia and the call for meaningful reforms.
- Human rights organizations to document and warn those who incite ethnic violence that they will be held accountable and will be brought to justice.
- Ethiopians people to stand together against violence and work together to engage in a genuine national dialogue to bring inclusive peace, justice and meaningful democratic reforms to the country.

We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming event at The National Press Club!

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For media enquiries, more information including interview requests contact:

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