

A Message from Mr. Obang Metho to the Ethiopian people:  
**I'm Human and I'm Ready to Serve, Help and Protect lives; Will You Join Me?**

March 24, 2020

**Dear Fellow Ethiopian,**

Like other people throughout the world, *I am deeply concerned about the rapid spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19), which has drastically altered life outside of Ethiopia and now poses an increasing threat to the people of our nation, the Horn of Africa, Africa and beyond.*



My heartfelt sympathy goes to those who have lost family members, as well as to those whose way of life has been made so difficult. Right now, *I am ready to join together with those attempting to serve, protect lives and help to find solutions and ways to treat Covid-19 and to prevent as many as possible from being exposed to it. These attempts have called for life-altering changes now affecting the lives, social and business networks, education, movement, employment, and the access to goods and services of people all over the world. So far, Ethiopia has been spared some of the effects; yet, we must be vigilant and prepare as best we can to deal with this possible crisis, not only for ourselves, but also for others.*

The concern for the wellbeing of all people, regardless of our differences, has been a core principle of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) since its formation. ***We believe that the value and dignity of every human being comes from God, our Creator, and that we will be held accountable, under God, for how we treat or care for others.***

The SMNE is grounded on the responsibility of human beings to uphold the rights and dignity of others above ethnicity, nationality, religion, race, gender, age, disability or any other differences, because we are all created equal. From this principle, we are to likewise, care about others, not only because it is right, but also because **no one is free until all are free**. When we knowingly withhold freedom, justice and rights to others, we undermine the sustainability of our own.

***As a nation, we have experienced the fallout from over-emphasizing ethnicity above our shared humanity for the last three decades of ethnic federalism government, creating a more difficult transition to an inclusive society. In fact, we have focused on our points of difference to the degree it has destabilized our society, causing divisions and conflict in many places.*** It led to our recent launch of the **“I’m Human” movement** in an effort to better appreciate the common bond of our mutual humanity—despite our differences and even when we disagree.

This has been made especially more clear with the emergence of this deadly virus. ***Covid-19 targets humans, without regard to ethnicity, language or other differences we allow to divide us. As people scramble to find ways to confront this threat, we may discover that our ethnic differences become less important and that our shared efforts among our diverse people, become more important and more effective.***

As we all witness the impact of Covid-19 around the world, it calls for an effort to prepare in advance as best we can. We do not yet know the degree of threat we face here in Ethiopia, but ***we should do our best to prepare in order to protect the lives of our people.***

We also must focus on how our efforts to protect the health of Ethiopians may create problems in other sectors of society like impeding our economy, overwhelming an already inadequate healthcare and sanitation system, closing our educational facilities leaving students without an education and many other areas of life where the life-saving actions negatively affect other valued services and systems; although, in the long-run, it might speed up areas where development is sorely needed.

***Currently, our weak or non-existent health care system should be immediately evaluated and upgraded, as best we are able, to deal with such a crisis should it develop here. This is why we all must be thinking of ways to help on many levels.***

***The federal government has already taken some strong steps such as closing the schools, closing the borders, cancelling flights, cancelling larger events, providing information on best hygiene and sanitation practices, and encouraging people to avoid large crowds. These efforts are good; however, as we see what is happening in other countries, we realize there is much more to do to provide better protection and to look for effective medical treatment or prevention. It cannot only be the work of the federal government, but should also involve the regional and local governments as well as many different people, organizations, groups and neighbors in different sectors of our society, all working at the same time, sometimes alongside of each other, for the common good. Some groups will be required to do more, such as our medical providers, health care workers and researchers. Other sectors of society could be highly impacted as well.***

Knowing the impact on the economy, other public and private institutions and on individuals, families and communities could be so severe, we should all be coming up with creative ideas of how to help each

other. *This is a critical time to reach out to our neighbors. Human relationships will be extremely important.*

This is also a time when many will call out to God for His help and protection, confessing our individual or collective wrongs, admitting our animosity, ego or lack of love towards others and asking Him to heal our people and our land, starting with each of us.

The “I’m Human” movement leadership *will be ready to play a role to contribute to the wellbeing of all Ethiopians, encouraging a new added commitment. As such, we are willing to contribute our share and encourage others to do the same. We intend to develop and define what this means in practice in the coming days. Until then, we ask all others to do the same. We cannot wait until it is too late, but must prepare for difficulties ahead.*

*Covid-19 makes ethnic differences fade into the background, especially as we are awakened to the humanity of each other. When we see the grief of those who have lost a loved one, do our hearts have compassion based on understanding their grief, because we are also human?*

On March 7, 2020, as I traveled from Debre Berhan to Addis Ababa, I witnessed a terrible tragedy of a minibus, carrying fourteen young passengers and a driver in his twenties. The minibus collided with a large truck and the driver of the minibus plus twelve passengers were killed.

As we stopped, along with many others, I witnessed the intense weeping and crying out of the people who did not know the victims, but could easily identify with the tragic loss of these young lives, also knowing the impact it would have on their families, friends and communities. No one knew the ethnicities, religions, backgrounds, talents, gifts or struggles of these young people. It did not matter. The sadness they felt was for these lives that were taken so quickly from them.

People surrounded the bodies of four of the dead, still lying on the ground. I was among them. An older man was holding his head with both hands, crying out in Amharic as he wept, “*My children, my children, why did this happen to you?*” A few feet from him was a young girl, about ten years old, overwhelmed by what she was witnessing. She cried out as she held both her arms close to her chest, saying, “*My brothers, I don’t know what to do.*” Across from her was a middle-aged lady, holding her chin as she stared at the bodies with great tears rolling down her cheeks as she was crying out in Afaan-Oromo. *The grief unified all of these people who were standing there, including me, as I also was choking up, trying to control my emotions as tears also filled my eyes.*

As other bodies were being taken from the vehicle and their identities determined, we learned this was a minibus carrying Tigrayan passengers to their homes. *Each of us felt a connection to those who died. The man called these his children, the young girl, her brothers, and the woman, spoke to them from her heart although I don’t know what she said as I don’t understand the language. The emotions came from first seeing these bodies, now without life, as fellow human beings or like their own relatives, before seeing them as anything else. At the end of the day, this is who we are.*

*All our hearts were torn apart by the loss of these precious fellow Ethiopians as well as the sadness we feel for their families. What lessons can we learn from this now as we face this looming threat of Covid-19? Let us come together at such a time as this as human beings, not as people divided by ethnicity or other differences.*

Can we now, take action to live out the “I’m Human” idea with an addition, which would be a commitment to help our neighbors near and far, those who are like us and those who are unlike us, especially during this crisis?

This is one more question for all of us to think about:

Is God shaking us up so we might become a people, restored to God and his greater purposes for our lives, the lives of others and this land? *Can this crisis be a call to find higher ground as a united people and as a united nation as we seek to live out these principles? I am ready; are you?*

May God protect and guide us and may we listen and follow!

Sincerely yours,

Obang Metho,  
Executive Director of SMNE  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia