

Mr. Obang Metho's Address to the University of Bahir Dar Graduation Class of 2021

Seeking the Source of Genuine Truth, National Reconciliation, Restorative Justice and Meaningful Reforms as the Answer to Our Present and Future Crises

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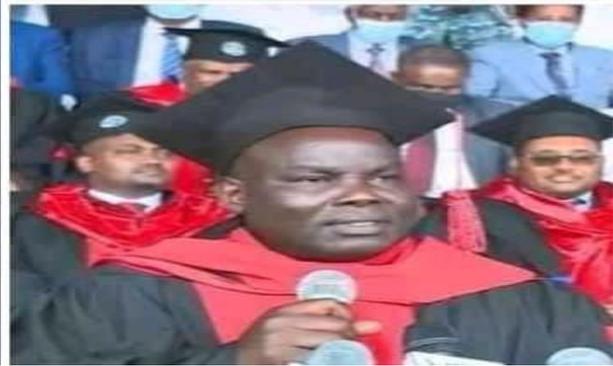
Good Morning! I am greatly honored to be with you today to address the 2021 graduating class from the University of Bahir Dar. I want to join with you in celebrating the great educational achievements of each student who is graduating today. This is a great accomplishment that has taken diligence, perseverance, sacrifice and basic hard work. Congratulations on your achievement!

I also want to thank Dr. Firew Tegegne Amogne, Bahir Dar University President, Dr. Seleshi Bekele Awulachew, Minister of Water, Irrigation and Energy of Ethiopia and the leadership of this major Ethiopian University of high distinction for an opportunity to speak to you at such a critical time as this in the history of our nation. *There is much at stake and I believe this university and today's graduating class can take a meaningful role in making a difference in the direction we, as Ethiopians, choose to take to bring about a healthier society.*



Today, I am also humbled to receive the unexpected award of an Honorary Doctorate Degree from this great university. At the same time, I must give much credit to the many others who have helped in the work of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), of which I am the Executive Director, in its advocacy for human rights, justice, peace and reconciliation for all Ethiopians. This includes my wife and my family, SMNE's board and members, work colleagues, supporters, friends and those many others who have upheld and spread these principles to others. Thank you!

Most of all, I thank God for his help, guidance and protection. Here, at the source of the Blue Nile, I am reminded that it is God, as Creator, who is the real source of these life-giving waters that provides the majority of water downstream. It can be symbolic of our search for the source of genuine wisdom, truth and knowledge, a great metaphor for a university as it strives to educate and equip its students for their future.



Bahir Dar is at the source of the Blue Nile, a river that starts out serenely and small; yet, since ancient times, its nourishing waters have flowed to many deep and unknown places, descending some 6,000 feet from the highlands of this place, forming mile-high gorges, widening to over 15 miles across as it meets other tributaries and rivers along the way before reaching the Mediterranean Sea, some 2,700 miles from this place. Perhaps, the Blue Nile can illustrate how important it is to “go to the Source”, our Creator, for his truth, wisdom and direction as to how we should live in relationship to each other and as people of this ancient nation, Ethiopia.

Will we genuinely listen? Will we only pretend to listen and care? Or, will we block our ears to what we do not want to hear? Think of the Blue Nile, if we pollute it, what will happen to its life-giving properties? If we try to stop the waters, can we succeed or will it flood and overflow?

How is it like God’s truth? What are the dangers or consequences of not listening or blocking our ears? Are we now seeing some of the signs and symptoms of a failing system today? *Ethiopia is in a fragile, confusing and unpredictable position because of ethnic federalism or institutionalized tribalism. We are fighting from within; yet, a body that fights itself, may not survive.*

Every generation faces testing; however, the class of 2021 may be facing one of the greatest challenges in recent history. The one possibly to be compared to it would be the time that led to the Battle of Adwa. Ethiopians, at the time, put their differences aside and stood together as citizens of one country, coming together to defend their God-given dignity. Are Ethiopians ready to do this?

Culture is difficult to change with all its traditions, loyalties, shared experiences, alliances, biases, grievances and favored responses. Embedded in each culture, and we have many diverse cultures within Ethiopia, is resistance to change; yet, *how can we go to the Source and actually listen and choose a better path for our lives and the lives of others, taking the best of our cultures with us and leaving the rest behind?*

Might we hear that our Creator God endowed every human being with value and inalienable rights, even those outside our families, communities and tribes? If we choose to listen, what does that mean in terms of finding a solution to this crisis or other underlying signs and symptoms like the lack of educational opportunity for the majority?

As you may know, education is the backbone of a civilized society, equipping and producing people to fulfill the many needed professions and roles of any society. We all can benefit. So why be surprised that one of the symptoms of a failing society is the lack of educational opportunity?

Why is it in 2021 that the best education many can get is still found under a tree, with a blackboard with a hole in it, with no chairs for the children, who may have no food in their bellies, no shoes, no decent clothing, no clean water, no toilets, no playgrounds, no transportation making them have to walk for miles, no library, no computers, no books, no exercise manuals, and no pens and paper, let alone teachers. Public schools, if they exist, have almost no resources, with the majority being in this category. The educational standard is extremely low, making it nearly impossible to contribute as they would like to do. Who suffers? All of us, not only the individual people involved.

There are other signs and symptoms of a failing system in Ethiopia of 'Nations and Nationalities'. Look at our economy. For 30 years, it has been blighted by corruption, a lack of accountability and unmerited ethnic favoritism, often resulting in incompetency or a lack of commitment to the work.

Countries with high levels of these practices are known for their poverty and backwardness. Efforts to create businesses and other enterprises are repeatedly hijacked or thwarted by those wanting bribes or favors, creating national crises resulting in hunger, displacement and dependence on foreign assistance, where even hefty amounts of those funds end up in the hands of the gatekeepers. It is part of larger scale systemic failure where every part of society can be affected.

The source of truth is near, but instead of seeking it and listening for the betterment of all, the opposite is too often true.

Despite warnings, **those in charge**, often with support from others, especially based on tribal/ethnic or political loyalties, **will**:

- 1) **fail to listen**, while at the same time, pursuing their own agenda, sometimes based on tribe or cycles of revenge, until it is impossible to ignore the truth as the system begins to collapse;
- 2) **listen only to certain others, sometimes blindly or in loyalty to a tribe or other allegiances**; sometimes accepting a false narrative due to pressure or penalties
- 3) **promote deception, confusion or a distraction, despite knowing the truth** for self-protection, advancement of hidden agendas and to purposely disempower others by dividing them
- 4) **pretend to genuinely listen in order to gain popular support** until the effort collapses due to lack of consistency between the talk, reality and action, often then requiring more force against the “perceived” or identified enemy,
- 5) **actively silence others as the truth becomes a threat** to the existing or desired power system, often followed with the use of greater force
- 6) **blame others, often gaining support by utilizing false or partly false narratives about** others based on tribal and other identities for as long as it works, which may include the use of violence
- 7) **Fall victim to emotions and actions resulting from anger, fear, bitterness and rage** directed at others, sometimes as a survival instinct, rather than other alternatives of action; causing cycles of revenge

All of these are an overview of what is happening now in Ethiopia of ‘*Nations, Nationalities and People groups*’. We must take caution before acting on these potentially crisis inciting events.

After the massacre of the Anuak in December 2003, which was followed by ongoing crimes against humanity, I was faced with such a choice of how to go forward. As I advocated for the Anuak, I realized that justice would never come to the Anuak until it came to all Ethiopians—that **no one would be free until all were free** and that God had created all human beings equal meaning that every human being is of value. This principle, **putting humanity before ethnicity, or any other differences**, became foundational to our principles.

It was God and his principles that repeatedly renewed my spirit, made clearer the path to be taken and gave me the determination to keep up the struggle, regardless of obstacles, opposition and a frequent lack of resources. It was a conviction I felt as I traveled from my home in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to Washington D.C. that I added something to my prepared talk on March 29, 2006.

I had been asked to speak at a hearing on Ethiopia before the US Congressional Sub-Committee on Africa. Many Ethiopians were present when I said, with conviction, the following:

“I cannot pick or choose who is my fellow Ethiopian or not because by being born in that land, the Creator had already made us one.”

Click at the link to read the speech

http://www.anuakjustice.org/doc_metho_advocacy_ethiopia.htm

God already had chosen that I would be born in Ethiopia, where my name, my color, my tribe or other identity factors did not alter my citizenship. The same is true for every Ethiopian where our rights and privileges should be given to all. ***This also meant that each of us should be held accountable for our actions; yet, our institutions need meaningful reform in order to support such things as a fair and just legal system, without favoritism or impunity. For the last four decades, we have not seen this and is one of the reasons for the cycles of revenge we are seeing.***

For example, as the civil war was breaking out in early November 2020, I warned that the violent armed conflict should not be pursued without genuine efforts to examine and pursue alternatives of dialogue, legal action or other interventions, especially following all the killing and displacement throughout the country, believing it could lead to a failed state.

At the time, many did not want to hear it; instead, they sought revenge against the former oppressive government and the people of that region. Without getting into all the details, it is painfully obvious that the anger of those on different sides has led to great numbers of deaths, widespread human rights crimes, displacement, hunger, destruction and great suffering in many places.

Our shared past as Ethiopians has left you, our youth, with an unpaid debt, a bankruptcy of values, a legacy of hatred, grievances and hostility, only worsened with the recent war between Ethiopian brothers and sisters. How can you, the class of 2021, help break through this cycle of defeat and change the outcome?

I believe it starts with knowing who you are as a human being and that you are created equal. Knowing this carries responsibility beyond yourself. By being given life by God, you are being called to higher purposes, including caring for the wellbeing of not only yourselves, or your preferred groups, but also the wellbeing of others.

You have now received an education of great value; how will you now use it to break the cycle of institutionalized tribalism, corruption, violence, extremism, hatred and destruction?

Will you go back to the Source to gain wisdom and direction as you graduate and enter into the next phase of your lives? This is the real source of lasting peace.

You have had the great privilege of an education and have gained much wisdom from this school at the source of the Blue Nile. Will you now use it to help bring about a better Ethiopia for all?

You will have to break through the history of deception in order to do it. For example, when Haile Selassie was in power, he did not establish a health and sustainable system for the people to ensure them of a better future; but instead, he created a way to maintain his power that led to the student uprising that resulted in his downfall.

When Mengistu Hailemariam took over, he was the hope of the students and they made great sacrifices in the effort to bring about greater freedom; however, he failed to bring the government for which they had fought and died. His goal was to stay in power by any means, namely Red Terror and civil war, which again, led to his downfall.

Then, when TPLF came to power, it was even worse because the TPLF purposely divided the people in the country, based on ethnicity, so the few of them in the TPLF could dominate over the majority. Again, it did not last and collapsed after 27 years.

What we, the people are now looking for is an overhaul of our present flawed and weak system, which is empowered through deception, manipulation and ethnic domination. *Instead, we seek an inclusive government, a harmonious society and a united country where humanity comes before ethnicity, or any other differences, and where no one is free until all of us are free.*

The road ahead may not be easy, but let us choose to peacefully pursue God's highest purposes for this country and our people through genuine dialogue, reconciliation, restorative justice and meaningful reforms. I have tried many times in the past to pursue such a process to genuine change, but no one has listened.

On February 20, 2007, I sent a letter to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, urging him to change directions, but he did not respond or listen. Click at the link to read the letter
<http://www.anuakjustice.org/070220LetterToPrimeMinisterMelesZenawi.htm>

On June 11, 2009, I then sent a letter to our Tigrayan brothers and sisters, trying to convince them to come out and separate themselves from the TPLF leaders, rejecting what was being done “in their names.” Again, there was no response.

Click at the link to read the letter

<http://www.solidaritymovement.org/090611OpenLetterToMyFellowTigrayans.php>

On September 26, 2012, I then wrote a letter to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, urging him to take the country in a different direction, one for which the people had been waiting for the last 100 years. He did not respond. Click at the link to read the letter in English.

<http://www.solidaritymovement.org/downloads/120926-Letter-to-Prime-Minister-Hailemariam-Desalegn.pdf> or Click at the link to read the letter in Amharic

<http://www.solidaritymovement.org/amharic/120926-Letter-to-Prime-Minister-Hailemariam-Desalegn.pdf>

On August 2, 2014, I then sent a letter to the TPLF Central Committee, warning them that the way they were heading would bring their own destruction along with many innocent victims. Again, the warning was ignored; yet, this is exactly what we are witnessing today. Click at the link to read the letter in English <http://www.solidaritymovement.org/downloads/140802-Open-Letter-to-the-Chairman-of-the-TPLFBR.pdf> . Click at the link to read the letter in Amharic <http://www.solidaritymovement.org/amharic/140904-Open-Letter-to-the-TPLF.pdf>

On February 13 2018, I wrote a letter to the Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO) asking whether there was any open door to reconciliation with the people of Ethiopia? I received no response. Click at the link to read the letter. <http://www.solidaritymovement.org/180213-response-to-the-statement-by-opdo.php>

When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power I encouraging him to finally bring about the meaningful reforms, yearned for by the people of Ethiopia. I met with him and we discussed it further, but it has been three years now and we all know the depth of the crisis we face today as a people and nation. It cannot be denied.

Yet, there is still time to finally get it right, but we all need to “go to the Source” for truth, wisdom and guidance if it is to be achieved in the right way. Is anyone listening? If so, are we, the people, willing to do something about it? It is time! I am ready! May God help us!

For the University of Bahir Dar Graduation Class of 2021:

May God use the hard work and the outstanding educational achievement of every one of you, for his highest purposes, as you step into your future. Congratulations! Thank You!