



An Open Letter to my fellow Tigrayan brothers and sisters who are supporting the TPLF

June 11, 2009

Dear Fellow Ethiopian,

I want to address those Ethiopians who are Tigrayans, especially focusing on those who are benefiting from this regime at the expense of the majority of other Ethiopians.

I am accountable for the following words that I will be saying to you. With that in mind, I am not speaking as an expert or as someone who is perfect because I am neither, but I am doing this because I care about you and you need to hear the truth, at least, as I see it. Take what you agree with from this message and discard the rest. I am hoping you will find something of benefit to you.

I am opening this delicate subject up for discussion and I hope more people will join me in looking for ways to strengthen our broken relation and Ethiopia. I will be frank and straight-forward, speaking to you in love and in hope that all of us can benefit from speaking honestly and directly with each other. Let me start with **“the elephant in the room!”**

Anyone who says that Tigrayans, not all, but many, have not benefited under Meles, are lying to themselves. We all know that the key positions in the government, in the military, in the economy, in the judicial system, on the national election board, in banking and finance, in education and in any other sector of society are mostly held by Tigrayans who are loyal to Meles. For the most part, those from other ethnic groups are given certain positions by the TPLF only to fool the outsiders so they can look better.

We also know that there has been more development, services and opportunity of every kind in the Tigrayan region and available to persons of Tigrayan ethnicity than in any other region or to any other group of Ethiopians. There is no debate about this being true. Even when I was attempting to start the Gambella Development Agency in 2002, Ethiopian government officials at the Minster of Justice office tried hard to convince me to go to the Tigray region instead of Gambella. This kind of preference has been going on at a large-scale level over the last 18 years of TPLF rule.

In reality, there are only two branches of government in Ethiopia, one that runs everything—the TPLF—which is mainly dominated by Tigrayans, and the other—the EPRDF—which has more diversity, but only pretends to run everything. The public knows this very well, but people avoid talking about it. This preferential treatment is not only unacceptable and wrong, it is immoral. It is a model of government that is built on greed, self-interest, pride, corruption, oppression and lack of empathy for others. It has been doomed to failure from the beginning as were other preceding regimes who were built on the same shaky foundation. We have created a cycle of destruction and deception for ourselves that should be discarded if we do not want to keep repeating our mistakes and perpetuating our suffering.

The purpose of this letter is to ask Tigrayans, the TPLF and also Woyane to join with your fellow Ethiopians in ending this system that perpetuates the destruction of one another. ***Our society greatly needs reconciliation in order to accomplish this great task.*** Our Tigrayan brothers and sisters have an opportunity to come together at a strategic moment in our history that could dramatically change our shared future. “Tyranny” and “Injustice” are always thirsty for new victims and perpetrators.

If we are to break out of this cycle, we need Tigrayans to rise up out of their silence, something that will make a bridge of reconciliation between yourselves and other Ethiopians in this very divided nation. This is also for your own protection because somehow, we must heal the animosities that have built up over these past years so when this regime collapses, our future together in Ethiopia is secure and harmonious. In doing so, you are preparing the way for a better future for your children and grandchildren.

Together, we can make this crucial transition from a government built on tyranny and ethnic domination of one group to a government built on God-given principles of **“humanity before ethnicity”** and the promotion of truth, freedom, justice, the respect of human rights, civility and equal opportunity for all Ethiopians for **“no one will be free until all are free.”** In such an Ethiopia, you will be at home; but do not wait until this TPLF government collapses to claim these principles for yourselves or it may be too late. Instead, I am hoping that you will be part of the solution in bringing about a New Ethiopia right now. Let us start by looking at our history of consecutive “one village rule” regimes and where it has gotten us.

The “One Village Rule All” System:

We Ethiopians are caught up in a cycle of replacing one ineffective and abusive government of a “village group”, (meaning our ethnically-based political groups like the TPLF) with another that duplicates the actions of the last, with the same predictable results. Each new group rises up out of oppression, but fails to learn the lessons of its own past. Instead the new group greedily seizes the new found power, becoming the next “village” opportunist and oppressor, brutally lashing out in pent-up anger and repression against their “previous oppressors” and “new opponents.” Suppression begins against any competing groups vying for power, including those wanting “a legitimate voice in their own regional affairs.” Eventually, the cycle will be repeated with new victims and perpetrators. Let’s look at the stages we have been going through as a country:

Stage One: “Village groups” suffer at the hands of the government, giving rise to rebellions and insurgency groups. Individual groups—“villages”—experience repression, marginalization, exploitation and human rights abuses. Because legitimate ways to voice grievances are denied and because complainants are punished, “village groups” form separatist groups or liberation groups to protect the lives, the rights and the livelihoods of threatened families, communities, ethnicities and regions.

Stage Two: “Village” insurgency groups work alone or join temporarily with other “villages” to overthrow the government, but still pursue their own “village” goals, causing power struggles from within until one emerges as the new “village ruler” of Ethiopia and excludes all the others from the perks of the struggle, such as happened with the TPLF becoming the EPRDF. As soon as the EPRDF gained power, the old “village group” of the TPLF re-emerged to take charge and the EPRDF became its cover name.

Stage Three: “One Village” group rules over everyone else, making the rules, always in their own favor, while pretending to be inclusive of all groups outwardly. Two layers work in synchrony: 1) the public face of the EPRDF in the international community, and 2) the private face of TPLF as controlling everything as the reality lived out by the Ethiopian people. A layer of inclusion on the exterior hides the non-spoken truth, which is that one small elitist group controls and monopolizes every sector of society. Competitors are left out of important government positions.

They fail to get the jobs, bids or opportunities within the “system,” all of which is carefully controlled to reward and punish. More outspoken critics are threatened, harassed, beaten, imprisoned or killed. The justice system and election process cannot be separated from the control of the “one-village rule.”

Stage Four: Anger, resentment, bitterness and rebellion increase and begin to give rise to challenges by others, leading to government crack-downs and counter-insurgency attacks against rebel groups. Those benefiting from the government become increasingly fearful of retribution should the government fall so even if they disapprove of government actions, they continue to do their best to maintain the status quo.

Stage Five: The regime is finally overthrown; vengeance is taken and another “village” government sets itself up to do the same. Now we are back to stage one which starts all over again. It is a given, that there will never be a turn for any minority group, who continue to be oppressed, exploited and marginalized, regardless of who is in charge.

We Ethiopians have to transition to a different system—one where “many villages” exercise representative rule over a “country of many hundreds of villages” rather than one where a single “village” takes complete ownership of a nation and then uses its power to crush opposition and exploit everyone else.

Some False Justifications Used to Perpetuate TPLF Ethnic-Based Domination

Justification for TPLF ethnic domination can be traced to flawed excuses and fear-mongering tactics. Some are:

- 1) *We suffered past grievances from others and now it is “our ‘ethnic’ turn to eat.” Those who oppressed us deserve to “finally get what they deserve.”*
- 2) *Other Ethiopians are: a) “less golden than are we,” b) “they are not ‘true’ Ethiopians” and; therefore, c) they are not “as worthy” as are we.*
- 3) *Other Ethiopians would have done the same to us if they “had won” over the Derg; therefore, we deserve what we have gotten since we are “more clever,” “better fighters” and have worked harder for it.*
- 4) *If we do not hold on tightly to our control, someone else will simply come in and do the same, punishing us as an ethnic group; therefore, it is disloyal and damaging to our shared ethnic future to speak out against what some of us are doing—no matter what! If you do not agree, maintain your silence or you will be punished.*
- 5) *As long as we stay in control, you need not fear accountability for what we or what you have done. If you have not done anything, you still will be punished by others for your ethnicity so remain silent.*
- 6) *Do not worry about accountability before God because we are in control of the religious leaders who will not confront your conscience with the truth. You can still “practice your religion” anyway, as long as you stay away from acting on moral convictions.*
- 7) *If you do not support the TPLF, you will be a victim of genocide—there is no other outcome for us all if we lose our hold on this country. Hold on to us for your survival.*

I want to tell you, particularly addressing the last point, that violence is a real possibility, but that possibility is greater reduced if we join together and if you do your part (**Dersha**) in bringing about a more just, reconciled and harmonious society. I am very worried about violence, chaos and killing and am trying to find a way to avoid such a disaster in Ethiopia that would bring shame and sustained injury to all of us. This does not mean that some perpetrators will not face justice, but the truth is, we Ethiopians must find ways to restore a sense of humanity to this country if we are to have any future for ourselves and for our children.

Facing the Truth: TPLF Domination Exists All Over Ethiopia

As you may already know, some research done by Ginbot 7 uncovered the fact that most every key position in the military is held by a person of Tigrayan ethnicity. As you can imagine, the extent of this cronyism has incensed many Ethiopians; something that other justice-loving people will also disdain. *Can you imagine if Obama, after being inaugurated, would have removed all non-black people from key government positions and replaced them with only African Americans? What would American citizens, those who elected him and others in the world think of this?*

This topic can no longer be avoided and must be confronted because if it is not, it might reach a boiling point and the consequences will be unbearable. Preventing such a catastrophe from happening is something that I and others in the Solidarity Movement are strongly pursuing because we are so fearful that if we do not deal with this now, it may be too late. However, those in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, cannot do it alone. *We must work together to change this now, especially re-emphasizing that when we talk about Tigrayans, we must be reminded that it is not all Tigrayans who are benefiting from this Tigrayan-controlled government.*

We also know there are countless numbers of Tigrayans who are extremely opposed to this regime and that they have suffered greatly for being lumped together with Meles; however, I strongly encourage those Tigrayans who have been silent on this issue, to come forward in large numbers and speak out about this wrong. We recognize that there is fear and risk in doing so, but if Tigrayans do not speak out, people will assume that things must be good for them and that they want Meles to stay in power. I know some Tigrayan brothers and sisters who are anti-Meles, but are not “anti” the TPLF system or “one-tribe domination.” Do not fool yourselves, for this entire system in Ethiopia is built on a model of exploiting others. This is why it is so important for our Tigrayan brothers and sisters to speak out.

For example, last week when I was speaking in Dallas at a meeting at a hotel in that city, another meeting was being held in the room next to us by the Tigrayan Development Association in celebration of the May 20, 1991 overthrow of the Derg. They showed a video of that victory and of the development that has been achieved since they came into power. In the next room where I was meeting with other Ethiopians, I was showing the video of the genocide of the Anuak and of the *destruction of the infrastructure in Gambella by the same Meles regime that had conversely, brought development to Mekelle and destruction to Gambella.*

As those in the Tigrayan Development Association were celebrating their “freedom” from the Derg, we were talking about the incarceration of Birtukan, Teddy Afro, Bashir Makhtal and thousands of other political prisoners, about the suppression of every basic right and about the massive human rights violations being committed by this regime against other Ethiopians. These are two totally different realities occurring in the same country, both true.

This is only one example. A few days prior to this meeting, I was in Ottawa and the same thing was happening. The TPLF group in Ottawa and other TPLF throughout the world were also celebrating their liberation from the brutal government of Mengistu while at the present time, other Ethiopians were protesting and grieving for the millions of their fellow Ethiopians who were suffering and dying at the hands of the brutal TPLF. What are they celebrating? How can they celebrate under these conditions?

Let me make it very clear. I am not suggesting that Tigrayans should be pushed aside, discriminated against or marginalized because that would be a violation of everything I believe in. Instead, I am calling on Tigrayans themselves to wake up and regain their sense of their own shared humanity with other Ethiopians. They can do this by helping to bring genuine justice to all of Ethiopia instead of selfishly celebrating when others are crying.

Together we must stop this cycle of oppression that constantly reshuffles victims into perpetrators and perpetrators into victims. The last thing I want is for someone else to experience a December 13, 2003. I am saying this out of truth and love for it cannot be ignored. Right now, Tigrayans are in a position to help remedy the mistakes made over the last 18 years, but if they fail to help, they could become the next victims.

If you are someone blindfolded by ego, power, money or pressure, open your eyes to the truth. Put yourselves in the shoes of your suffering fellow Ethiopians and take the initiative to stop this holocaust of the people by standing up for justice, freedom and moral right. Speak out against the “village thinking” that has incensed and alienated the public from you. Stop supporting a government system that can only survive off the pain, oppression and suppression of the majority of its people.

If you are only maintaining your silence for fear of what might happen to you should this regime fall, you need to be reminded that a partnership with a criminal regime that commits genocide and robs the majority of people from life, property and liberty, is one that is morally wrong and you should come out and separate yourselves from it. The evil they are perpetrating every minute of the day, all over Ethiopia, to millions of people, will continue unless good people stand up against it. Resentment is only building as Meles cracks down on anyone outside of his own “village,” “tribe,” or “region.”

A Call to Action: Stopping the Cycle of Destruction and Deception

You should no longer be part of this dying regime, which is in its final days. You can see the evidence that Meles and his clique feel vulnerable and weakened as they strike out in every direction in an increasingly frequent display of paranoia and desperation. I say this, hoping to protect our Tigrayan brothers and sisters from some of the worst consequences following years of oppressive “village rule,” once “Meles’ village” loses power. Remember how you felt after the oppression you experienced at the hands of Mengistu and his clique?

If we are not going to fall into mass vengeance, stemming from the anger and bitterness built up over the years, ***Tigrayans must initiate strong action to prevent it by becoming part of the solution.*** Please consider this! ***It will take facing the truth, facing one’s conscience and the finding the moral courage to clearly stop any suggestion of complicity, including support of this brutally exploitive system given through your silence. I am asking you to start challenging this system that was put into place in your ethnic name, but is devastating your fellow Ethiopian brothers and sisters. You will not escape easily unless we all work together for what is right and good.***

Right now most of the Tigrayans are grabbing the tail of the tiger, not wanting to let go; fearing that the tiger will bite you; but the hand of most Tigrayans who are supporting the TPLF must be getting tired. There will be a day when you will become so exhausted, that you will lose your grip. Then what? You need a new strategy and to come back to your family. I know there are many Tigrayans who value the principles of the Solidarity Movement. Many of you have told me this yourselves.

I want these Tigrayans to know my hand, the hand of those in the Solidarity Movement and the hands of countless other Ethiopians are reaching out to you. ***Please start reaching back because the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia was created for all Ethiopians, including you.*** There will be a day when the TPLF will finally collapse. Before that happens, we want you to become free of the threat of this wild tiger’s anger by reconciling with your brothers and sisters in your family of Ethiopia.

Stop your secret meetings, sponsored by the TPLF, that have been taking place throughout the world. Instead, start private discussions among other Tigrayans and non-Tigrayans about how to help cage the tiger by working together with others. This is the way to start—from behind the scenes, eventually joining us in the open places throughout the world, including Meskel Square in Addis Ababa! What a day of genuine celebration that will be!

I also call on other Ethiopians to reach out to embrace your fellow Ethiopians of Tigrayan ethnicity, so they might be further encouraged by your acceptance and partnership. Taking such a stand for them is not easy and each of us should help them feel safe enough to make such a break. Ethiopians of other backgrounds have been guilty of pushing them away.

I have spoken with many Tigrayans who have told sad accounts of trying to join with other Ethiopians in opposition to Meles, but have been given the cold shoulder, finally returning to their own ethnic groups as a result. Reaching back to those who are reaching out will make the table of tyranny on which Meles and the TPLF are standing, collapse. This will prepare the way for a peaceful transition to a New Ethiopia where no one is fearful of others.

In summary, why should a 3000-year old country of 80 million people, who stood up against colonialism, now disintegrate? It is not too late to fix this broken society and broken country so that it can re-emerge stronger.

Society is supposed to be like a human body, where the body functions well when all the parts are working. We need every part, for without each part, how do we come back to health? God will help us if we trust in Him fully. Come back to God's principles—fearing Him and loving one another. Let us put our humanity before our ethnicity and we may find a real homeland where all are free.

I hope the following verses from **II Corinthians 7: 8-11** written by the Apostle Paul will be true of your response to my letter:

“Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.”

May it be the same for each of you!

Your brother,



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