



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

Buyer Beware: Recovering Our Stolen Identity

April 1, 2007

Don't think! Ignore your conscience! Invest with quick approval- purchase land or property in Ethiopia with one simple condition – refrain from speaking against EPDRF! Help us suppress the restless poor! Forget about their rights! It's easy- just invest your money and get rich! We will even displace the poor to help you find the perfect location for you to build your new home. Feel free to invest in your homeland at your own risk. Join EPDRF'S staunch supporters at the Millennium as they help us celebrate our 17 years of dictatorship! We'll even buy your air ticket to Addis. But hurry—this is a limited time offer! The cost to you? Just your soul! And as for those who may call you “Hodam”, pay no mind for they know not what they're missing! Your safe return, not guaranteed; We reserve the right to revoke any and all offers at our discretion; currently, no warrantees available. Don't think about it—just do it! You're well on your way to becoming one of us!

Does this give you an idea of how clever and calculating opportunists, with evil intent, might seduce civilized and decent people to join together with them in bringing death to a nation—one soul at a time? Take warning—this is now happening and we are the people and Ethiopia is the nation!

This ploy is not new and has been used by the conniving against the vulnerable “for a millennium.” Perhaps it might remind some of the famous play by Goethe, “Faust,”¹ where the devil convinces a man, Dr. Faustus, to sell his soul to him in exchange for power, riches and fame. The man eventually realizes the cost he paid was too great in exchange for the loss of his soul and wants it back, but it's too late! The man's pride, vanity and greed set him up to become a willing victim, bringing about his own eternal doom. In another historically similar tale with a more hopeful outcome,² a woman makes a similar pact with the devil, but when she later regrets what she has done, she fully repents and changes her ways. God forgives and restores her.

Consider the following verses of scripture from the Bible on this very topic when Jesus was addressing his disciples in Matthew 16:26-27: **“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”**

¹ From Wikipedia: “**Faust** or **Faustus** is the protagonist of a popular [German legend](#) in which a mediæval scholar makes a [pact with the Devil](#). The tale is the basis for many literary works by, for instance, [Christopher Marlowe](#), [Goethe](#), [Klaus Mann](#), [Thomas Mann](#), [Charles Gounod](#), [Hector Berlioz](#) and [Oscar Wilde](#). The name “Faust” has come to stand for a charlatan [alchemist](#) (some claim “[astrologer](#) and [necromancer](#)”) whose pride and vanity lead to his doom. Similarly, the adjective “[faustian](#)” has come to denote acts or constellations involving human [hubris](#) which lead eventually to [doom](#).”

² From Wikipedia: “There are other theories for the origin of Faust. In the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century a Dutch play attributed to [Anna Bijns](#), *Mary of Nijmegen*, appeared that may offer a template for the Faust legend. It dramatizes the story of a young woman convinced by a demon, One-Eyed Moenen, to sell her soul to learn the seven liberal arts. She lives a dissolute life for some time until, moved by a morality play, she regrets her bargain and seeks forgiveness. Unlike Faustus, Mary repents and, after a long penitence, receives her reward in [heaven](#).”

To those who have not yet succumbed to the new loaded incentives being offered by Meles & company, take heed, be strong and resist! To those who have already bitten off a chunk of the poisonous apple, spit it out before you are “owned and controlled” by your own investment in a crooked scheme meant to prolong the life of the EPRDF and the suffering of the people!

Buyer beware! More is at stake than you know! Before we lose our nation through the seduction of our souls, let us consider the very real consequences that are likely to result. Then let us consider who we are and who we want to become. If we become a nation of opportunists, people who take advantage of our Ethiopian sisters and brothers for our own selfish benefit, we may be also killing the movement for justice and freedom! When we “sleep with the enemy” are we not selling out, making our own pact with the devil, causing others—and eventually ourselves—to pay a heavy price? After all, your participation in these “government opportunities” has some strings attached. To be eligible, you must be willing to shut your mouth and align with a brutal regime—all for the sake of protecting your investments!

For instance, an Ethiopian, who had come to a previous event where I had spoken, told me he could not come to the upcoming one because he had recently leased land from the EPRDF and he did not want anyone to videotape him at another meeting! This man has been virtually silenced! Yet, the people of Ethiopia keep waiting for those in free countries to save them. We will only have ourselves to blame if we become scavengers and prey on our own people.

Secondly, unless we start thinking for ourselves, we will be like sheep, ready to follow imposter leaders, the “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” right over the cliffs of our lives. We must be inspired by our opposition leaders, journalists, human rights activists and many of our peace loving activists that are still languishing in prison across the country and take the baton and continue the good fight for peace, justice, equality, freedom and democracy. We must take ownership and responsibility of this historic movement; we must think for ourselves, carefully differentiating between the opportunities for good and the “opportunistic enticements” being presented to us that are meant to silence and entrap us.

In every ethnic group, for many years, the EPRDF has picked out those willing to become collaborators against their own people. We have looked down on them as betrayers, willing to sacrifice their own people to not just save themselves, but also to profit from the suppression of the rest of their own people. Many government puppets must justify this in their own minds, saying, I can help my ethnic group better while I’m in this position. Previously this offer was only made to those inside the country, now, the offer to share in the profits of collaboration extends all the way from Ethiopia to the US, Canada and Europe. The intent is the same—the EPRDF wants to suppress the voice of Ethiopians abroad who are calling for change by offering the equivalent of a bribe in order to ensure their survival. Before you are willing to jump on the profiteering bandwagon, excusing your participation with a myriad of justifications, consider this—it is blood money and the blood is that of our fellow Ethiopians!

The EPRDF has set up offices in most major cities with large concentration of Ethiopians in the Diaspora. Only a week ago, one of the Ethiopian ambassadors, promoting these programs in Europe, got an egg in the face, thrown by some angry Ethiopian, in response to his marketing of this scam. Now, we do not endorse the throwing of eggs, but we must reject being manipulated and also warn others to not fall for these schemes to buy our conscience and compliance!

Let us consider three of these “approaches” being handed by EPRDF’s foot soldiers as “gifts with strings attached” to Ethiopians in the Diaspora (1) leasing of land in Ethiopia, (2) government subsidized airline tickets to the Ethiopian Millennium, (3) government gifts of \$1000 per person for business investment in Ethiopia.

First of all, the land-leasing scheme is taking place in a country where most citizens cannot even own the land they and their families have lived and worked on for many years, keeping them in poverty and from investing more in something they can own. Instead, they operate as tenant farmers to the government, frequently paying exorbitant rates for its use. Now, despite this policy, the government is promising long-term land leases to people outside of Ethiopia for a mere pittance! How are they doing this?

Well, reportedly, if someone eyes some “good land” they just need to put in their bid for it and the government will evict whoever has been living on that land, no matter if they and their family have been there for generations. Many of those evicted are left without homes and displaced permanently. Look at the new high-rises going up in Addis? Who will live in them? It will probably not be those who have just become homeless through this plan.

Secondly, you may be hearing the call for Ethiopians to come home to celebrate the Ethiopian Millennium and to bring their families. It goes on to say that if you don’t have the money, the Ethiopian government will buy airline tickets for you! What a deal! Think about it, a family of four could receive \$4000 or more. Think about how hard it is to save up that kind of money for you and for your family. Think about how easy the use of this “simple shortcut” would make it easy for you see your mother, father, relatives and friends back home! It seems too good to be true, doesn’t it! Lest you forget, keep in mind that it really is not free—you must agree to become a pro-government agent to get it! While you and your family are celebrating the Millennium at the Sheraton, you will have to forget about the poor and suffering in the streets of Addis Ababa—the beggars, unemployed, disabled, mothers with children or young prostitutes—all who are struggling to just barely survive in one of the poorest countries in the world. After you have celebrated, you can come back to your jobs, homes, families and freedom.

Thirdly, think about starting a business in Ethiopia where you could receive \$1000 up front, with no need to reimburse the loan for who knows how long! If you and your friends can combine your new assets, you could do even more. One man I know of, was working at a fast-food restaurant in a major city before he “participated” in such an investment program. He is now enjoying being rich, living in an expensive home instead of working hard and sacrificing. Instead of working for the benefit of Ethiopians, he, and others like him, are living off the blood of others, forgetting the difficult lives of the invisible people on the streets and back roads of our country, one of whom, might have been able to start a small micro-business from such a loan! As some Ethiopians are starving, others are making deals that are obviously “too good” to be true!

Let us first consider this practically—is this all legal? In other words, does the EPRDF government really have the legal authority to make these deals for the long term? If not, your investment will be made without any security. Right now, Meles & company can get away with it, but for how long? What happens when this government is replaced with another? Future governments may not honor these type of politically charged commitments with out any grounds and in most cases prove infringements on rightful land owners— previous residents may later be able to exercise legal claims to recover their land ownership and property.

Another question to ask is how one of the poorest countries in the world is getting the money to finance such extravagant handout incentives? Could it be accruing debt or using funds from international donors that is supposed to be targeted for development or other specified purposes? If the latter is the case, who should have been benefiting from the funds? Is it the poor, marginalized and voiceless once again? Another question is, why should Ethiopians in the US, Canada, Europe and Australia, receive such incentives when those in the country are crowded out or are even leaving the country due to fear of political harassment?

A report came out recently that indicated that the cost of living has gone up so high since the May 2005 election that even people with some means, cannot afford to buy the basics such as dairy products and meat. The rate of unemployment has doubled, further limiting Ethiopians from affording their basic needs. When journalists questioned Meles regarding the immense food shortages the recent drastic hike in food prices, he reportedly explained that it was due to most of the agricultural products now produced in Ethiopia were being exported to other nations.

Another problem is that our educated intellectuals, the most likely ones to speak out against our repression, are leaving the country due to fear of being harassed and threatened, especially since the election of 2005. Others have left for better opportunities overseas. With this “brain-drain”, we have seen reports that our hospitals, even four major ones in Addis Ababa, are unable to perform hardly any surgeries due to the lack of surgeons.

Yet, several weeks ago, at a World Health Organization (WHO) conference in Addis Ababa regarding health issues in Africa, Meles was asked about the exodus of doctors out of Ethiopia due to their fear of political harassment. He shocked the listeners by telling them that if these doctors are so afraid of political harassment, that they should leave the country—that Ethiopia doesn’t need doctors!

The worsening of food and health crisis is only part of the deteriorating conditions in the country for the average person. There is fear that if the situation continues to deteriorate, many will increasingly suffer, yet, they have little hope for the next election as any potential political opponents are being suppressed. If no leaders emerge by that time, there may be five more years of worsening conditions. Yet, the EPRDF is reaching out to those in the Diaspora in an effort to undermine the movement towards freedom, justice and democracy and are doing so with large amounts of money. Will you participate in bringing down the struggle? Are you so worried about your investments that you are afraid or unwilling to speak out now? Are you so concerned about losing this “opportunity” that you have dropped off the political landscape so you aren’t filmed at a political meeting, rally or incriminated by signing a petition?

As we turn our backs away from the men and women of Ethiopia, the collapse of our group morality will sink to a deeper low! One Ethiopian man of great integrity recently told me that he was determined to do all he could for justice, freedom and democracy to come to Ethiopia. He went to see Canadian government officials, but as he is working on this cause, whenever he looked behind him and ahead of him, he was all alone! He asked, ‘Where are you my Ethiopian brothers—my Ethiopian sisters? Are you forgetting about who you are? How can we revive our national identity in this time of trauma? Are we self-interested opportunists or are we a people of a great nation who value each other and minority ethnic groups, who are willing to work for the common good of our nation?’

Right now, the struggle for freedom and justice is dying down and becoming silenced by a newly emerging manufactured force — unsuspecting victims turn investors by Woyanne overnight! As shortsighted former activists are converted into exploiters, hopes for the release of those imprisoned as well as for our future are further compromised. At the same time, we blame the US and others for not doing more, while excusing ourselves from our own failure to actively prepare for democracy. In other words, we should not complain while not doing our **“Dirsha”!** However, there has been more than mere inactivity that is behind our problems. It is essential that we ask ourselves if we Ethiopians are really up for the task of creating an Ethiopia where our country is more important than our own ethnic groups, political factions or self-interests? Another important question is, are we waiting for our Opposition leaders to create a free Ethiopia for us while we continue with our daily lives?

It is true—those in prison are amongst the best and have contributed much, but that is also why they are locked up! Their numbers include many thousands of Ethiopians—not only the leaders of the Opposition party, but also many other talented and courageous community activists, civic leaders, student leaders, scholars, journalists, politicians and human rights defenders from many of our ethnic groups throughout the country.

Right now, they can only help us in this struggle through their examples and prayers. However, the majority of people seem to think we have to wait for these leaders to be released before our problems will be solved. Let me say, they are already doing their part! If we think we cannot move ahead without them in preparing and equipping our society for freedom and democracy, our system will never change enough to bring about their release! This is the irony of our present situation.

In fact, we need to exert much energy in changing a system from its roots otherwise, what motivation does Meles have to release them? Currently, the only way it appears he would release them would be with very stringent requirements, like forcing them to agree to leave politics or even Ethiopia—as their release is a threat to Meles & company's survival! Instead, it is up to us to walk the hard road towards freedom, not recklessly, but with determination, integrity and persistence. This should be our national identity as Ethiopians!

Consider this, these leaders have provided the foundation to the movement for freedom, but just like when you build a hut, there is more than the main poles that carry most of the weight. You still need smaller poles erected to the frame before the mud is applied. The roof will not protect you from the rain and sun unless you carefully place sticks across the top of it. These sticks must be tied together with ropes and secured with nails before the grass is placed on top. Even that grass must be tied on so that the winds don't blow it away. Without it all, the roof would leak and your hut would not be livable. Likewise, don't expect the leaders to build the whole hut for us! Even if they were released, it would still not be all up to them! It takes many hands, materials and steps to build a hut, just like it takes many hands to make a beautiful country. We need the hands of the police to enforce the law, the hands of the teachers to educate our children, the hands of the mothers to sustain the young, the hands of the farmers to make sure the crops are planted, the hands of the religious leaders to nurture and guide us and the hands of the musicians and artists to create beauty and to make us think!

I hear that those in Ethiopia are waiting for those in the Diaspora to fight the battle for them by engaging the help of the governments from the countries in which they live. However, this is not getting the results we want. Are we doing something wrong? Perhaps so, here is an example.

We are hearing from Western government officials that some of our political party leaders are repeatedly coming to them, presenting only their own factional concerns and ignoring the needs of others! Many groups are refusing to compromise at all and in doing so, will never find common ground. This is contrary to the thinking of most in free countries as compromise, sharing and negotiation is fundamentally part of maintaining diverse interests in a free society. Instead, in order to build and sustain any kind of relationship with differing interest groups, where guns and force are only used to protect its citizens, we must accommodate each other's needs. This may explain why we Ethiopians are struggling so much. It is very hard for us to understand this principle since we are so used to having guns and the uses of force — not to protect us—but to control, suppress and dominate the discussions. This is our history and we must “un-learn” it!

Instead, those with opposing interests must learn how to give up some things for the sake of their common objective- the sovereignty of Ethiopia. If political leaders and their supporters refuse to negotiate, communicate, consider opposing views and considering the needs of Ethiopia as a whole, we will find it very difficult succeed in bringing true democracy to Ethiopia.

In addition, if destructive and aggressive emotions, rather than rational thinking and self-discipline, take over during negotiations, you may never make the deal work, as people will simply become angry and resentful. For instance, the fifty states have learned how to get along and that is how the elephant became an elephant! It was by coming together and finding common grounds through compromise. If they started tearing each other apart as we have continually done, they would no longer be an elephant.

We must understand—those in free countries don't really care about our ethnicities, and many times, they don't even understand why we don't operate like "fifty states" and become our own elephant! Yet, even as we remain divided, we keep trying to move others to unite behind our particular interests and are discovering it is pretty hard to get the biggest elephant to budge! Let's examine this more closely.

In order to get the elephant to move, it takes more than one tiny push or tug! The Anuak are tugging on its tail. The Amhara are kicking its right foot and the Oromo are pulling on the trunk. The Somali are grabbing its ears and the Tigrayans are throwing sand in its eyes. The Sidamo are whipping it with sticks and the Afar are pelting it with rocks, yet the elephant has not moved one step.

We can continue to work with little progress, or we can "collectively" offer something to the elephant that it really wants—like lush grasses and cool water! Only then, will this giant animal of such strength and power, move on its own free will and in doing so, move the leaves in the trees around it at the same time. We must become the grass and the water by offering something better than what we have offered so far. It should not be that hard, yet as long as we are so consumed with "my own self-interests or the interests of only my family, my tribe or my region, at the expense of others, be ready to wait a long time for the elephant to move! There won't be enough grass or water in one place to entice it!

In the meantime, we should not waste time blaming the elephant, but instead to start thinking about what we must do to become a strong and united nation where freedom, justice, equality and the rule of law flourishes and where Ethiopia can become a contributing member to the global community! If Ethiopians refuse to tolerate another tyrannical government, our elephant may start waving its trunk, lifting its huge feet and stepping forward. As he does, the leaves of the nearby trees may start to wave in the movement of the surrounding air and we would have done it together!

We Ethiopians have much to contribute to future partnerships, that is, if we don't get in our own way. We must earn the respect and trust of the international community by not fighting so constantly in public or in private. We must demonstrate even now, the inclusion and respect for all Ethiopians. According to some, our demeaning attitudes towards each other and other's groups are so apparent to outsiders that many don't even want to help us, complaining that they find us arrogant, unwilling to listen and astonishingly unconcerned about others outside our ethnic groups and factions. Even our churches are divided. We have an image problem and we must seriously try to fix it if we are going to engage outsiders in our struggle! However, if we don't want to change, if we refuse to "agree to disagree", then assume that it will be a long uphill battle to get outsiders to help since these attitudes are sabotaging our own efforts.

Most everyone now knows about our division and they are pessimistic about our recovering the degree of emotional, psychological, social and moral well-being that will free us on the inside before we are able to be freed on the outside. Let us take on the challenge to show it is possible, but let us not do it alone—we need each other and we need help from our Creator. We can be totally assured that God loves Ethiopians and seeks to restore any who are willing—even **those who have sold out to the EPRDF** with their new deals! Let us seek help from a God who wants to teach us how to love each other and how to recover from a toxic culture that has infected us with division, hate, suspicion, jealousy, pride, grief, greed and revenge. May He give us a new beginning, a new identity and a new wholeness as Ethiopians! May God save our wounded souls!

Proposal for a National Conference of Reconciliation

In response to all of this, significant and specific steps must be taken to bring about the unity and reconciliation about which we are talking. The AJC suggests, as others have also indicated, that a National Reconciliation Conference be called to bring together neutral experts in the areas of conflict resolution and reconciliation who can provide the guidance, structure, training and a safe atmosphere where reconciliation can begin between our many groups. We need outside help as we have been using hammers on a dry rock to find water. This could take place in one or more locations, but for now, it would take place outside of Ethiopia.

Right now, the momentum of our fight for freedom has slowed down. In order to breathe needed life back into the movement, we must begin with ourselves. A National Reconciliation Conference could give us a new framework for approaching our differences—something that will be necessary if we are going to contribute to a freer, healthier Ethiopia.

If we could come together and admit how we have hurt or wronged others, sincerely seeking their forgiveness, we may start the process of reconciliation. None of us is without fault as we are imperfect people. However, as imperfect people, we still can start such a healing process, but we must be willing to actively pursue it. With this stand, please know that neither will it be a perfect process, but it will be a starting point towards restoration of relationships that could give us Ethiopians hope for a different Ethiopia. It will not be easy. Yet, with God’s help, if we put in a sustained effort, we may find reconciliation beyond what we thought was ever possible. As we do, we will be much better prepared for negotiations with anyone, even the EPRDF government.

During this process, we hope to identify those people among us who are especially gifted leaders in the area of reconciliation. These people might include religious leaders from different religious backgrounds, elders in the community, civic leaders, women, the young or even those with less education. Those who stand out could receive additional training that would further equip them to resolve conflicts in our communities, churches and groups both here and in Ethiopia. These reconcilers could train other reconcilers to pass on the principles of conflict resolution and conflict prevention to others.

However, this kind of conference requires not only a vision, but also the resources needed to support it and the willingness of people to organize it. Let those who support this concept consider how they might help. We encourage you to start talking about it within your groups and communities, considering whether it is a worthy goal or whether you might be able to offer a better solution. It is time to explore possibilities! The AJC welcomes your feedback.

May God help us to rediscover the preciousness of our brothers and sisters of Ethiopia!

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