



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Letter to the Ethiopian Canadians

July 25, 2007

Dear Ethiopian Canadians,

We are thrilled with the release of the 38 political leaders, human rights defenders, journalists and political activists this past week, yet the crisis in Ethiopia remains serious despite this good news. Instead, it is time for increased action—rather than relaxing, thinking that others will do it all for us. We now must take advantage of this encouraging development by not losing a step in our march for freedom, peace and the rule of law in Ethiopia. To do this, we must call other Canadians to march with us, calling them to intervene wherever it is possible. Ethiopian Canadians have an important role to play as they live, work and raise their families in a great and free country, but one that continues to generously support the current ruling government of Ethiopia with huge amounts of foreign aid.

To be effective, we must collaborate in the work, not to advance our own political party, but as a front of united Ethiopian people, invested in first making Ethiopia open and free to a diversity of voices. Political parties and their platforms must be secondary or we will lose our common voice as it is reduced into political factions, in competition with each other for future control, power and opportunity. Instead, our primary task at hand is opening up the country to the Ethiopian people so that they later can equally, freely and honestly choose who and what they want at the ballot box.

We are at a critical juncture where a common voice is needed to create a sustainable foundation for a free, healthy and strong democracy where future independent political groups are later, free to offer their best platforms to the public for their choices. Right now, let political groups continue to promote their independent agendas, but let those agendas be secondary to the greater Ethiopian Movement for freedom and democracy. Such a movement will be far more broad-based and inclusive of all Ethiopians from every region, ethnic group, gender, religion, educational level and economic level.

In the last weeks, I have received many calls, emails and requests to follow up on our previous article where we called on Ethiopian Canadians “to organize a coalition movement for the advancement of human rights for those in Ethiopia” a movement that is truly Pan-Ethiopian. People have asked me for help in determining where we should go from here and I contend it must be such a Pan-Ethiopian front of freedom-loving Ethiopian Canadians who want the same for Ethiopia as what they enjoy as members of Canadian society.

We already have indications that we are ready for such a movement. Consider the support for the release of the CUDP leaders in the past weeks and months. It has not only come from the Kinijit, but it has come from the ONLF, the UEDF, the OLF, the ENUF, the EPPF, the EPRP, the Afar, the Tigrayan Solidarity or Gasha organization and many others who were calling for the release of “their leaders.” The great example of that is the recent press release from the Ogaden people.

It is a phenomenal indication of how these newly released leaders have come to represent not a party, but instead, have become symbols for a national movement for justice and freedom in Ethiopia—something that would never have happened even two years ago. We have come a long way, but we must be extremely careful right now that our movement for freedom and justice does not quickly disintegrate into political parties, vying for leadership at the cost of the bigger struggle.

Such an effort will require leadership not just from Addis Ababa, but also from every region of Ethiopia. It must include the countless heroic leaders, many whose names we still do not know, who remain locked up in prisons throughout the country. Let us unite to assure them that they are not forgotten—that our battle is not over until their voices are also heard.

In fact, a new Ethiopia is emerging that may give new voice to such leaders from Afar, Ogaden, Hamar, Mazenger, Hawadle, Welayta, Konso, Shekicho and Shanqella. However, if we are not careful to include these leaders and instead, make the mistake of only focusing on one or a few major groups, we may lose so many of our guides along the road to freedom that we lose our way as a nation.

Right now, despite our rallying and protesting, we Ethiopian Canadians have not accomplished what we could have in Canada. We have not passed our own test. Unlike those in the United States or in Europe, we have never advanced any action that could have resulted in the Canadian government taking concrete action. If we are willing to accept our failure in this arena, we may be better able to respond with deeper commitment to score more highly on the next round of testing. We must work together so we do not limit ourselves by doing our own thing, separate from each other.

For example, in September of last year, I met with some of the top Canadian government officials in Ottawa, who told me that it is difficult to respond to the crisis in Ethiopia because Ethiopians do not have one common front and instead are separated into factions with some differences in their agendas. We know this is true, but we also know it may be convenient justification for not doing anything with what they may see as “a sensitive political situation.” However, we Ethiopian Canadians can remove any obstacle caused by our disunity by recognizing three unifying principles upon which most of us can agree.

- (1) Ethiopians from all over Ethiopia are experiencing human rights abuses and oppression—it is not just our own isolated experience, but is one that should unite our efforts in stopping our common perpetrator—the EPRDF—from continuing to terrorize us; recognizing that until freedom, justice and peace comes to all groups, we are not free ourselves.
- (2) Canadian Ethiopians living in Canada share a common new home country.
- (3) Canadian Ethiopians share a common heritage in Ethiopia, whether we are first or second generation Canadians—we have a common “Ethiopian-ness.”

Because of these three factors, we have a shared responsibility to work together to bring the travesty of our Ethiopian people—made up of our families, neighbors and fellow countrymen and women—to an end. From talking to so many of you, I believe we are ready to go forward in greater unity, but the question I keep hearing is—how do we do it—I say by organizing a meeting with this goal clearly in mind.

In my previous article calling Ethiopian Canadians to action, I proposed that we set a date for such a strategic planning meeting that would take place either in Ottawa or Toronto, hopefully by September 22, 2007. Those attending could be chosen as representatives from their organizations or political groups or could represent themselves as individuals. This would absolutely not be a political meeting for political parties, but instead a meeting to advance human rights, freedom, justice and democracy in Ethiopia—something we can agree is equally needed for all Ethiopians.

To facilitate the organization of such a meeting, those groups and individuals who are interested should email: Ethiopian_Canadians@hotmail.com and provide your full name, address and contact information. From those names and from those who have already formed an ad hoc group to advance these goals, a steering committee will be given the task of determining the date, place and general format of the meeting. Delegates and individuals can then attend the meeting.

What is envisioned for that meeting would be a day to strategize as to what we can do to put more pressure on Ethiopian Canadians to take more action within Canada. For instance, Canada is a key donor to Ethiopia, giving large amounts of financial aid to improve the Ethiopian parliamentary structure, the judicial process, humanitarian aid and good governance. Yet, the current EPRDF government is killing and suppressing the people of Ethiopia while moving backwards rather than forwards on the above-mentioned goals. Some have reason to believe that the aid money—part of which we have contributed to through our tax dollars—has instead gone to support the continued oppression and brutalization of our loved ones. Through our regular contact with those at back home in Ethiopia, we know what is going on and we should encourage our Canadian government to no longer be silent about the horrible state of affairs in Ethiopia.

We can plan how to better advocate for the rights of Ethiopians in Canada as well as how Canadians should relate to Ethiopia. We can come up with ideas as to how to increase awareness of this crisis with Canadian political leaders, with leaders and congregations of religious groups and organizations, with students and professors at universities, with teachers and students in schools and with the public and civic servants in Canadian communities so that they also can advocate for justice and wise use of Canadian tax dollars in the world. This is not an issue for a liberal or conservative nor New Democratic Party government—it is for all. It is a non-partisan issue.

Just like is the case in Ethiopia; a movement for political freedom takes precedence over a movement for a political party since a lack of freedom defeats all political parties as we have seen with the current opposition parties. Right now, Meles would love to even try to divide the newly released leaders, increasing competition between them if he could and therefore, they and we must all be very vigilant so that we do not fall into such a trap and lose freedom for the whole country because of it.

Meles will not give up the fight easily as he has now even hired Missouri Democrat Richard Gephardt to kill the bill #HR2003. Instead, we must keep fighting also for our future. This is about a better future for all Ethiopians where no one is left out, including the Woyanne and Woyanne sympathizers. We have no choice but to reconcile and work together in finding a peaceful Ethiopia where we do not live in fear of being eliminated by others.

What we do in Canada may be a model for all Ethiopians in the Diaspora as they have modeled excellent achievements to us. May God help us to move quickly towards organizing such a strategic planning conference and may those who choose to become involved, be used to accomplish more than we could imagine!

Remember, please email your information to: Ethiopian_Canadians@hotmail.com

Respectfully yours,

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