

Worldwide March Events, May 15-18: Telling the Truth about Ethiopia

Press Release: May 12, 2008

The third anniversary of the failed Ethiopian National Election is almost here. As the time approaches, the Worldwide March Committee members are working hard to plan events in cities across North America, Europe, Australia, Africa and Israel.

These events will publicly demonstrate that the Ethiopian peoples' thirst for freedom, human rights, justice and democracy will not die despite the hijacking of the last election and the increasing repression within the country. This has been a huge organizational task and will not be perfect, but it is the beginning. Let the sleeping giant—the freedom loving people of Ethiopia—awaken and rise up for truth and right!

EPRDF or Woyane reportedly are asking, “Why do these people want to embarrass their government and their country by coming out for this rally?”

The real question is, who is embarrassing Ethiopia—those who repress their fellow Ethiopians or those who tell the truth about it? In other words, stop the human rights abuses, injustices and electoral manipulations and we will not have anything to rally about.

Just look at two recent examples, Ethiopian children have the lowest access (83%) to health care in the world!ⁱ Secondly, Ethiopia received another world distinction—the dishonor of being the most backslidden country in the world in regards to freedom of the press!ⁱⁱ

Should we admit this? Why not? Are these correctable problems? Of course! Denial of real problems will not do anything to solve them. In all fairness, health care is an enormous problem throughout the world, but Ethiopia is the worst—why? The repression of the press is directly linked to a repressive government. Why should we not rally against this?

We would be happy and proud of our government that was doing its best for the people despite limitations. This is the kind of government for which we are rallying—not a perfect government, but a government that serves the people, not themselves! Anyone who agrees with us should come out this week and not stop working until justice comes to Ethiopia!

This is not about political choices. It is about the basic right to make “a political choice”—whichever choice that might be! If you want a choice, you need to come out from May 15 to 18th and stand up for that right!

One of the greatest joys over these last three to four weeks of planning has been to see so many previous “fighters for liberty” re-emerge to work alongside new Ethiopians at the grass roots level after the deep discouragement among Ethiopians over the last months. There has been a tremendous amount of work accomplished in a very short time—with much more to do—but the highlight has been in seeing new groups and new people joining together to accomplish a shared goal—a free Ethiopia where the rights of all of the people will be respected.

As Ethiopians remember those who have died, let us come together in unity for we have all suffered losses either during this regime or at the hands of earlier ones in our history. These events are meant to remind us that one of the chief roles of government is to protect and uphold the lives of its citizens. How can we do a better job of this as a people and as a nation? These

events over these four days are ways to raise the expectations for what we expect as people of Ethiopia, the Horn, Africa and as members of human kind.

Groups will differ in how they accomplish this. The format of these events will take on the creativity, diversity and ownership of the local organizers. In some cities, events will be combined into one or two events. Others will change the dates to accommodate the needs and preferences of various groups.

For instance, Muslims will be having a Day of Marching on Thursday, a Day of Prayer on Friday and a Day of Reaching Out will remain the same, Saturday. For some, celebrating a Day of Reaching Out will mean small gatherings in homes for dinner, tea or coffee while others are organizing community gatherings in town halls or in their places of faith. Prayer gatherings Friday or Sunday might include five earnest people or fifty.

Remember, this is only the beginning. It is an opportunity to reject the worst parts of tribalistic thinking that leave so many out. We can be proud of our own ethnicity while at the same time; we can still embrace others from other backgrounds.

We are hopeful that all these events and suggestions will begin to connect us together in new ways so that the human rights of all Ethiopians will be upheld and valued and so that people will reach out in unity, tolerance, respect, love and care for one another to create a better future for our children.

We still expect more and more people to join by the end of the week, contributing in their own ways to this effort. Some of these efforts will be very simple, but meaningful. Here is one inspiring example of two families from Denmark. We hope many of you will follow this example.

It began with a Tigrayan woman who read about the upcoming events, particularly the suggestion about reaching out on Day Three to your neighbors and those from different groups around you. She immediately thought of an Ethiopian family she regularly met at the grocery store. She said that early on, she had asked the woman, Abasha Neach? the woman replied in English, "I'm an Oromo."

After that, both of them had merely passed each other in the community for five years. She admitted that she was friendlier with the Danes in the country than with one of her own fellow Ethiopians. She said that after reading about reaching out to others, she had started to feel guilty and knew she had been wrong. She decided she was going to do change.

The next time she saw the woman in the store, she asked her if she could come with her family to her home so she could cook for them and have supper together. The woman asked her why. She explained that it was because those organizing the Worldwide March events had asked people to do simple things such as reaching out to invite someone to your home for supper, not to talk about politics, but to learn about each other. She said she had been passing her in the community for five years and that she wanted to know her better.

At first, the woman told her that she would get back to her, but by the time she had gotten through the store, she went up to the other woman who had invited her and said, "We will come to your home."

We will not know the end of this story until after next Saturday, but what if more people did this all over the Diaspora and throughout Ethiopia? What would Ethiopia be like if this became common? Changes like this are up to many average Ethiopians, not politicians who sometimes use their hidden agendas or ethnicity to divide average Ethiopians. If many average Ethiopians would extend love and caring actions to others, imagine what could happen!

This is what it means to be human. This is what our complaint is about our government--- they have forgotten how to be human. Let us start this week to show each other what it will mean to Ethiopia if each of us is simply “human”, one person at a time! Let us persist in our struggle for such a society. Come out of your homes and join this week in any way you can to bring about a new Ethiopia! It is up to Ethiopians like you and like me!

For information on events or if you want to participate in some of the planned groups, you should email us at ethiopiansmarchforfreedom@yahoo.ca for details. Events are planned in many different cities in 23 cities and in 17 countries throughout the world.

If you want to join, it is still not too late! If you are already organizing something, email the details to us of the date, the time and the location so we can put it all together with other information. Also, for ideas of possible slogans that are being used throughout the world, contact us.

For more information please contact
The Worldwide March for Ethiopian Freedom, Human Rights and Justice Organizing
Committee

By E-mail at: ethiopiansmarchforfreedom@yahoo.ca

ⁱ See recent report from Save the Children’s 9th annual State of the World’s Mothers report where it ranks Basic Health Care for children. <http://www.marketwire.com/mw/release.do?id=852438>

ⁱⁱ See recent report from Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) May 2007 five-year report ranks Ethiopia as the world’s most backslidden country. <http://www.cpj.org/attacks07/pages07/almanac07.html>