
Invitation to Organizations Concerned About Ethiopia to Participate in a Symposium On: “Where Do We Go From Here?”

Saturday, August 30, 2008

4:00 PM to 8:00 PM

Unification Church, 1610 Columbia Rd, NW, Washington D.C.

Press Release: August 13, 2008

On Saturday, August 30, 2008, I, Obang Metho, and other peace loving Ethiopians, will be hosting a **Symposium on: “Where Do We Go From Here?”** This is the next step towards the formation of a **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia**. All who are concerned about the future of Ethiopia should plan on coming to the event which will be held from 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM at the Unification Church at 1610 Columbia Rd NW, in Washington D.C. This will be an important opportunity for you to be part of this urgent discussion that you should not miss.

We are inviting civic organizations, individuals and the public to come together to offer solutions to the question, **“Where do we, as Ethiopians, go from here?”** Those guests invited to speak include representatives of human rights groups, academia, religious organizations, civic groups—including those for women and youth, humanitarian organizations and governmental entities, both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian. Each participant will be given ten minutes to share their vision about where we can go as a collective society under the premise that no one is truly free unless all are free. Opportunity will also be given to the public for questions and comments.

No one person or organization will have all of the answers, but ideas generated by diverse people and groups can bring about greater answers than otherwise possible. However, this will not be the usual kind of meeting when people come in and talk with no follow up action required. Instead, this will be a continuation of the effort to bring all civic organizations under one umbrella. That umbrella is a **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia**.

This kind of meeting is all the more critical because you and I cannot ignore the pain of suffering back home and not do anything about it. Therefore, I am calling this meeting as the next step in bringing together new groups and organizations to create a more powerful force to confront the destruction of Ethiopia, something that is now in full force under the hands of the dictator, Meles Zenawi. Enough is enough and we can no longer wait for any leader to free us. We have to free ourselves to survive as a people and as a nation.

A recent press release, posted on August 11, 2008 from ActionAid entitled, **“Horn of Africa at Tipping Point,”** warns that the country, as part of the increasingly unstable Horn of Africa, is in danger of collapsing into something catastrophic if nothing is done. They state, *“With millions facing hunger and destitution, ActionAid is warning that the region is now reaching a tipping point with increasing numbers of people unable to cope. Altogether five countries – Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti – are affected. If nothing is done, the situation could easily become catastrophic.”*

Even though the crisis in Ethiopia is worse than in 2005 or in 2006, Ethiopians are less active than before. We understand the problem and the extreme hardship being faced by our people back home; but despite knowing this, many are failing to act. Our words, sympathy and anxiety mean nothing if they are not given life through meaningful action.

For example, in addition to hunger and inflation, there is severe repression of the press where people cannot speak up without the threat of serious punitive actions—like the arrest of not only Teddy Afro, but also of his attorney and a newspaper editor who reported on the story.

At the same time, many Ethiopians passively sit by listening to his music, but fail to speak out for him and others like him. Newspapers editors, journalists and political activists continue to be intimidated or locked up in prisons and jails throughout the country.

Websites are blocked. Radio stations are jammed. The work of Western human rights and humanitarian groups is restricted due to a new “charities law” recently passed, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to do their work. Some have even left the country as a result, despite the ongoing critical need.

Human rights atrocities continue in the Ogaden and in the Afar region at the hands of the TPLF or Woyane as well as in other areas in the country. In Oromia, reports of disappearances, torture and the suppression of Oromo activists persist. The conflict between the Oromo and Gumuz festers along with new reports of conflict between the Guji and the Burji in the Southern Nations.

In both cases, some significant evidence points to the government as being the ones “stoking the fires” of the conflict. Instead of the government acting as peacemakers, they fail to take protective action on behalf of the victims or to investigate the case in order to hold the perpetrators accountable. Moreover, some reports allege that the government has disarmed one group while supplying arms to the other—not a new complaint in Ethiopia!

The border issue is simmering with more threats of violence between Ethiopian stakeholders and Meles-empowered encroachers. Zenawi has now also given over Ethiopian land to Djibouti and there are rumors stirring that he intends to give or “lease” arable land in Gambella to Saudi Arabia instead of to Ethiopians who are in the middle of one of the worst food crises in history!

Where is our moral outrage or have we become numb to the pain of other human beings and to the evil being perpetrated on those created to represent the image of God? Will we not be judged for failing to stand up at such a time as this for the weak and vulnerable?

This is your opportunity to change the direction of our country. We must stand up and challenge these opportunistic policies and those individuals among us who are taking advantage of the open market on the exploitation of the weakest in our society. Those *Hodamoch* or opportunistic people are not only Tigrayan, they are found within most every ethnic group, organization and religious group. Without these *Hodamoch* or opportunistic people, the apartheid system of Meles would have never lasted this long. They have become the lifeblood of his evil system, but together we can confront them.

However, if we are to be successful, we must focus on how we can bring justice, freedom, opportunity, equality and hope to Ethiopia rather than being fixated on blaming, accusing, attacking and insulting other groups—something that diverts our attention from our main goal.

I do not care who these groups are—you can call them *Separatists, Liberation Fronts, Terrorists, Cessionists, supporters of the peaceful struggle, proponents of the armed-struggle or those in between*. You can call them *Muslims, Christians, radicals, Neftegna, Amhara Neftegna, or Oromo Neftegna, Shaebia, feudalists, barias, unemployed youth, anti-peace elements, freedom fighters or whatever you like*, I do not care because these people are all Ethiopian and we must try to work with them or we will end up spending all our energy blocking each other rather than the focusing on the destruction of Ethiopia by Meles and his cronies.

In the same way, we lose momentum if we spend so much time defending ourselves or tearing down the work of others while leaving Meles alone. Instead, our main goal should be for us come together in a dialogue in one room and that day, TPLF or Woyane will know their vulnerability.

Consider the lesson of the ant found in an Anuak proverb that assures us that *an army of tiny, little ants can kill an elephant*. The same analogy applies regarding the collective efficiency of ants to defeat the slithering snake that is preying on the newly born chicks in a bird's nest.

The snake quietly slithers into the bird's nest to devour the vulnerable little chicks, but sometime, there are also others who occupy the nest—the tiny ants who end up saving the chicks by biting and covering all over the snake until the much larger snake is driven out from the nest. Their strength is their collective work and the collective force of the hundreds or thousands of ants will easily defeat the larger foe, not their individual ability.

Meles is not a formidable foe when we utilize our collective strength. As we do, we do not need the permission of Meles or his supporters—inside or outside the country—in order for us to come together. We also can do it at the time of our own choosing! This is not the same old game. The rules of operation have changed.

The rules of change means tolerating some degree of division as part of a process of sorting out the best ways to get to a common goal. New leadership, where the leaders put humanity before ethnicity, will automatically produce some inner tensions between the goals, values and tactics of these new leaders and those who believe in “Melesism”—also known as ethnic divide and conquer politics.

Meles uses Article 39 for his own advancement at the cost of the destruction of the country. People are supposed to think they have autonomy, but they are under the control of the TPLF. Meles does not want all the varied groups with their different approaches to have a dialogue and to come up with common goals. Yet, dialogue and compromise is the best means to be used to restore peace and harmony to Ethiopia.

Because of this, I, and others, God-willing, are determined to work as hard as possible to accomplish such solidarity. I repeat, by God's will, we will try to make sure that all these political, civic and religious groups come together in the same room and have a dialogue for a lasting peace in Ethiopia. An atmosphere of peace is just the beginning of the road to building a future for a New Ethiopia.

Join this **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia**—where all are respected, valued, equally appreciated and have opportunity. There is already solidarity building among civic organizations like the Ethiopian Solidarity Forum, Ethiopia-Sudan Border Affairs Committee; Oromo American Citizen Council, EHRCO, Ogaden Human Rights Committee, Coalition for H.R. 2003; Afar Human Rights Organization, Benishangul-Gumuz Human Rights Foundation, Anuak Justice Council, Gasha for Ethiopia, Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners; Save Ethiopian Refugee International; Ethiopian Student Association International; Ethiopian Women for Peace and Development, Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association; Ethiopian Common Forum in Norway; Ethiopian community in Kampala, Ethiopian National Congress, Holy Synod of Ethiopia Orthodox Tewahdo Church; Ethiopian Canadian Muslim Community Association, Ethiopian American Evangelicals for HR2003; Ethiopian Council of Elders, where leaders are emerging who are more than capable of seeing the purpose of solidarity and dialogue in bringing about lasting peace. The same is true in religious groups such as within the Ethiopian Muslims, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Catholics, the Ethiopian Evangelicals, Ethiopian Pentecostals and others.

We already have discovered the common ground of human rights which can provide a foundation in the formation of a **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** that could become a pressure group—a watchdog organization—that would hold other groups and institutions—political, governmental, economic, social, religious—accountable for respecting the God-given human rights of Ethiopians and of others in the Horn of Africa and in greater Africa.

This is the third event in the formation of a **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** in a series, starting with the previous two events, the first one being the meeting of diverse groups, “**Human Rights for Ethiopians in the Next Millennium**,” held in Washington D.C. on November 17, 2007 when representatives from most of the regions within Ethiopia came together in unity. For more information, visit: <http://www.anuakjustice.org/071120PressRelease.htm>

The second event carried out was the **Worldwide March for Freedom, Human Rights and Justice of May 15-18** which had four goals: 1) the commemoration of the lost lives of Ethiopians and the failed 2005 election, 2) a day of reconciliation and reaching out to others in informal ways, 3) a rally for a greater movement to achieve freedom, justice and equality in Ethiopia, and 4) a day of prayer for God’s help. For more info visit <http://www.anuakjustice.org/080525WorldwideMarchCommitteeFollowUp.htm>

Now, the goal of this third event is to pull together the civic organizations, many of which already have leaders who demonstrate the vision, integrity, humanity and abilities we need in Ethiopia leaders of the future. It will be people such as these who will lay the groundwork for genuine freedom, justice, human rights, equality and civility in the country. As these civic leaders solidify their vision for the country, they will be in a position to impact a future event when political groups will be invited to join in a similar dialogue and strategy session.

This current event is not a political discussion, but it will be important for political leaders to be present if they want to learn from the people and the new emerging leaders within Ethiopian civil society about their vision and expectations for Ethiopia in the future. Politicians should not be left out of these important discussions and are warmly welcomed. This includes all types of political groups—liberation fronts, peaceful struggle groups, armed-struggle groups, separatists and others.

The **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** is like the spider web that is being woven in beauty and complexity and can be an image of the beauty and complexity of Ethiopian society like the garden of Ethiopia of which I have been talking for the last two years. In the center of that web is *its strength—the solidarity of the people, for the people and by the people. It is a pan-ethnic and pan-Ethiopian movement where diversity is celebrated like the individual fibers of the net that hold the web together as one.*

We can consider each individual fiber of the web to be like a tribe of Ethiopia. We can then see that each is an important part in what makes it beautiful and complete. We can also see that if one of those fibers is broken, it compromises the strength of the entire web. Its strength is collective and based on its completeness. The only way the web can capture the fly is if it holds together.

Like the web, the only way we Ethiopians can stop the enemy that threatens to destroy us as a people and as a society is if we are together in collective solidarity. An Ethiopian proverb states, “*When the spider’s web is together, it is strong enough to tie down a lion!*”

On August 30th, we will be strengthening the foundation for the transformation of Ethiopia and at its center must be our solidarity as Ethiopians and even more so as human beings. Do not be left out of this important discussion and please encourage new people you know to become involved.

The names of the speakers will soon be announced. Those who would like to be on the program should also contact us at the earliest opportunity.

Please note: Volunteers are needed to help. We encourage you to contact us for more information. We also appreciate any financial contributions you may be able to make to this event and the overall movement.

May God guide and help us to honor Him in all we do.

For more information please contact me by email at: Obang@anuakjustice.org