
Voting for Africa: Exercising our Influence in the Upcoming Elections in Canada and in the United States



Press Release: September 10, 2008

This is a golden moment of opportunity for Ethiopians and Africans! Both Canada and the United States will have national elections within the next two months. Canada will hold theirs on Tuesday, October 14 and the United States will do the same on Tuesday, November 4.

If Ethiopians mobilize and work together, we can press candidates running for elections both in Canada and in the United States to better represent our interests both here and in Ethiopia and Africa. This time leading up to the elections is critical. It is the time when candidates are most likely to listen to voters, especially if we come in solidarity with a shared agenda.

In the past, we Ethiopians have undeniably confused policymakers in our international capitals, such as in Ottawa and Washington D.C., with our opposing political factions' proposals of opposing political agendas representing opposing ethnic groups. This must now all be put aside for the greater cause of freedom, justice, peace and opportunity in Ethiopia, something that cannot be achieved without solidarity among Ethiopians that is based on higher values—the kind of solidarity that can create a political environment conducive to good governance, to respecting human rights, to upholding the equal and fair application of the rule of law, to transparency and to a “no tolerance” policy towards corruption and “tribal politics.”

We Ethiopians should not let this opportunity slide by without exerting pressure on candidates to address issues affecting Ethiopians back home where changes in Canadian or US national policy could help relieve the suffering, oppression and difficulties of everyday life they are now facing.

There is no doubt that the direction of international foreign policy taken by both Canada and the United States in the next years could be catalysts for positive change or for the status quo—or even worsening the situation. It is a critical and urgent time for us to become involved.

The **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** is now organizing a campaign with two main goals: 1) a “get out and vote” campaign and 2) a campaign to bring the concerns of the Ethiopian people to the candidates and into the public debate. Let us ask our candidates to define their plans for Ethiopia and for Africa should they be elected!

We on the committee for **Solidarity** are attempting to reach the hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians in these two countries to form a strong voting block who can get behind the candidate(s) who best reflect(s) our interests. This is what it means to live in a free, democratic society!

The committee for the **Solidarity Movement** has identified individuals in **Canada**, in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba where most Ethiopians live, to mobilize them to organize regional and city-based efforts. We are making plans to call meetings in the following cities: Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor, Waterloo, Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Edmonton. The Canadian election is coming up within three weeks so we must move ahead quickly!

In the **United States**, the **Solidarity** committee has identified people willing to organize this effort within the following states or cities: Minnesota, Boston, Washington DC, Virginia, Atlanta, Dallas, Mississippi, California, New York and New Jersey. We have only fifty days left before the election and to make this effective, you, the reader has to offer what you can do to contribute, if you agree with the idea, by contacting the **Solidarity** committee or by starting to organize in your area.

The committee for the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** will be organizing teleconferences, like what was done during the Worldwide March in May, to assist groups with strategies and resources.

Every eligible Ethiopian should be registered to vote!

For our voice to be heard, we must have some “voting clout!” To have voting clout, we must be registered to vote. It is so simple. Ethiopians within communities, faith organizations and civic organizations should make sure that their people are registered to vote, reminding groups that are prohibited from endorsing one particular candidate (like faith organizations) to be careful not to do so.

In America, the group, **Ethiopians for Obama, has done a remarkable job** already to get people registered to vote and committed to their candidate. The Solidarity committee is working together with this group and **we can all learn from them**. Groups that are limited by law from endorsing one candidate over another, can discuss issues and educate the public regarding the candidate’s platforms so that the voter is able to decide which candidate best reflects their values, aims and goals.

However, remember, that as Ethiopians collectively become involved in working together regardless of ethnic, regional, political and religious differences, we are all the more effective in pressing all of the candidates to more closely consider our concerns. Additionally, these “collective efforts” should also be directed towards others running for office in the regional and local elections as well.

Our first major goal is to get people registered and to the polling booths on Election Day. Task groups can be organized to go from door to door, to call on people by phone or to send mailings or emails in order to encourage Ethiopian Canadian and Ethiopian American citizens to register. As Election Day draws closer, it will help to remind them again and to find out if they might need assistance, such as transportation, to get to the polling booths. Our motivation is to bring hope, life and change to Ethiopia and to the African continent.

A team of experts is needed to communicate “Ethiopian positions” to the candidates.

The committee for the **Solidarity Movement** is also organizing a team of spokespeople who can make sure these candidates understand the facts about Ethiopia and how Canadian or US foreign policy can positively enhance freedom, justice, peace and opportunity in Ethiopia—the same benefits we enjoy here. Such a team of spokespeople can press the candidates to better define and refine—based on new information—their positions regarding Ethiopia and Africa should they be elected.

That team will be made up of policy experts, both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian, who already know what is right and wrong with current Canadian and US policy towards Ethiopia, what changes in policy will better accomplish what is needed in Ethiopia and what could enhance our working relationships. The only way we can effectively influence these candidates is if we can present our case with solidarity.

We cannot ignore what is happening back home. It is our responsibility to get our information and our questions to the discussion table and to work together to do so. They need to become part of the public debate.

In Canada, let's hear from the three major political parties—the Conservatives, the Liberals and the National Democratic Party (NDP)!

In Canada, the two parties most likely to win and create the government is either the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party. In order to become a majority government, they will have to claim a number of seats in the Parliament, especially from the province of Ontario where most Ethiopian-Canadians live.

In other words, the Ethiopian-Canadian can play a significant role in this election if they can show these parties that they represent a strong voting bloc. Some say that between 60,000 to 80,000 Ethiopians live in Ontario. This is a lot of voters if they all exercised their right to vote and because of that, the candidates from the major parties will not ignore them if they speak out with one voice. It could lead to changing Canadian government policy towards Ethiopia. This is something Ethiopian Canadians should not take for granted.

In the US, let's hear from both Obama and McCain camps!

In the United States, some Ethiopians have already formed the group already mentioned, “**Ethiopians for Obama,**” but we should also have a group, “**Ethiopians for McCain**” or at least present our concerns to both candidates to see what their plans are for Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa and for Africa in general.

The debate between the two candidates will only enhance the importance of the discussion. If you are for Obama, he might increase his commitment towards Ethiopia if he learns more from us or if McCain's position is equally or even more significantly, shows more openness to listening to our concerns.

The reverse is true as well. If McCain believes it is an important issue, backed by citizens who care about this region of the world, he may become more responsive to our concerns regarding the issues affecting Ethiopia as well as Africa. If he ends up being elected, we are in a much better position to continue to influence policy in this arena if we engage him early on in this matter.

Many Ethiopians and Africans are unified over Obama, but few are capitalizing on it in a strategic way. Right now, he probably believes he has most of the African votes, but let us not sit back and assume he will take the actions we want without our taking responsibility to press him for commitment to those things most important to us. Also, there are Ethiopians and Africans who will recognize that McCain has taken a stand for human rights and African issues in the past and yet will want to know what he will do if he is elected.

In summary, the goal of the **Solidarity Committee** is to present the questions related to Canadian and US policies effecting Ethiopia, the Horn and Africa to the candidates to better understand and influence their positions. If one or the other of the candidates takes a stronger and better stand than the other, it will only put more pressure on the other to improve their position.

Ethiopian citizens in Canada and in the US should encourage African-Canadians and African-Americans to do the same!

Let's invite other Africans and see if together, we can even create a larger voting bloc to press the Canadian parties and American parties to improve their policies towards Ethiopia. To do so effectively, we should come, not as one country, one ethnic group, one religious group or any other sub-group, but as one who has interests in advancing the freedom, justice, equality, transparency and opportunity of Africans. Many new citizens from Africa do not understand the potential political power they possess as a group if only they organized.

Imagine if Ethiopians could take the initiative in bringing together other Africans who could vote in order to press for the protection of the rights of Africans, not by favoring dictators over the people or by suppressing democratic movements within the continent when it conflicts with their interests, but instead, to form genuine dialogue and honest partnerships where the people of both Canada, the US and in Africa, all benefit. If this could be done, it could greatly impact Africans. If Africans were mobilized, it could be a powerful force to address the chronic corruption, exploitation, conflicts, human rights abuses, poverty and misery faced by the people of Africa.

Canadians and Americans are giving millions to Ethiopia and to other countries on the continent. Yet, Africans are not achieving even close to the same kind of freedom, stability, democracy, rule of law, development, property rights, protective economic laws directed against corruption as we have in North America.

We Ethiopian and African citizens in North America desire that what we treasure here, be brought back to Africa to be enjoyed by our families and by future generations—something that would dramatically stop the “drain brain” of those wanting to leave their countries for the freedom and opportunity of the west. Instead, as citizens here, some of our tax money is being used by dictators to kill and oppress our people, to block the media and to exploit the people and their natural resources. These are the questions we want to ask these candidates: how will they fundamentally alter foreign policy in Africa in a way that it would enhance the freedom and democracy on the continent—not merely band-aid solutions?

Once the election is over, a unified effort to address international policies in Africa should continue being driven and energized by those who have a stake—citizens of free countries who still have family, interests and compassion for these countries. This collective effort should not disintegrate once the election is over, but instead should be carried on through a foundation, based on these principles, that can build a more powerful voice that is not only under one African nation's name. It cannot only have the name of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Zambia, Senegal, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Eritrea, Algeria, Togo, Nigeria or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It must represent African interests more than the African Union, a union of dictators for life, an organization that should be replaced with those who uphold one people and the respect of human rights for all.

Change in Africa cannot be achieved without our involvement and commitment!

Change cannot come without us Ethiopians and the rest of us Africans. In the next weeks, we call on community leaders to set up a committee in your areas that can take immediate action. Anyone who reads this and agrees with it, you are a leader and there is a job for you to do. If you are outraged by what is going on in Ethiopia, we are calling on you. If you are heartbroken because of stories coming out of Ethiopia, we are calling on you.

The **Solidarity Committee** will help, but the local people must take the action. We will organize a teleconference on this very soon, but before that, we are attempting to contact individuals known to us who might initiate action. We welcome calls from interested persons as well so that you can be included if we do not know you or call you ourselves. Please reach out to us so we can reach back to you.

Do not let us be held back by differences or lack of previous communication with each other. Let us be focused on our goals and keep in mind those attitudes and values that will free us as a nation and as a continent: **“Humanity before Ethnicity”** and **“No One can be Free Until We All are Free!”** This can apply to all of Africa.

The African people have been exploited by our dictators as well as by their collusion with outsiders who end up both trampling on the rights of the people. From country to country and from region to region in Africa, we have much in common. It is time for us to come together. Think of what it would mean if Africans combined forces and together would say, “Africans deserve much better than what they have been getting. It is time for Africans to rediscover their God-given destiny and to call to halt these corrupt, exploitive and oppressive practices in Africa!”

This opportunity is for all Canadian and American citizens of African background or those non-Africans who are sympathetic to the African, to develop policies that hold African leaders accountable and which do not align with dictators at the expense of the people. This is the way to eradicate tribal thinking and to send a loud message to African leaders belonging to the gang of dictators for life in the African Union that “enough is enough!”

At the end of the day, it comes back to us individual Africans and Ethiopians. It is our God-given moral responsibility to organize and act for justice, freedom, equality, peace and prosperity so deeply yearned for on the continent of Africa. No one else will do it for us.

Remember, there is much to be done and many are needed to complete the tasks. A leader is someone who sees the job to be done and does it. Be that person. If the **Solidarity Movement** can empower you to do what needs to be done, please contact us. We believe that in solidarity we can thrive and exponentially multiply the results of our joint efforts.

Let us work together for a New Ethiopia and for a New Africa where **humanity comes before ethnicity** and where we all work to free our brother and sister Africans since **“No one is free until we all are free!”**

May God open up opportunities and guide us as we seek to organize this election campaign and to influence candidates to accomplish God’s purposes through this election in North America for His purposes in Ethiopia and in Africa.

May you, Almighty God, hear the cries of your people and free us from whatever hinders us from within ourselves or from what hinders us from outside of ourselves so that we might become your instruments of peace, justice and righteousness in the world both far and near.

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**For more information contact the committee for the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia
by E-mail at: ethiopiansmarchforfreedom@yahoo.ca**