
Ethiopians Hunger for Compassion in the Ethiopian New Year

September 13, 2008

We in the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** want to extend our warmest greetings to our fellow Ethiopians for a Happy New Year.

Only one year ago we Ethiopians celebrated the New Ethiopian Millennium with many hope-filled celebrations that the “turn of the millennium” would bring a “turn around” for Ethiopians. Unfortunately, as most every Ethiopian knows, we have instead experienced worsening conditions in Ethiopia in almost every arena, with little promise that our situation will not continue to decline.

In light of this, do we have reason to expect that the New Year will be different? Yes and no! Yes, if we learn from our past mistakes and no, if do not! That is, our hope for a better year is to a large extent, *conditional*, that is, it is based on what we Ethiopians do in the next months and throughout the year and our compassion towards others in greater need than ourselves, will make the key difference.

The emphasis must be on our own *personal responsibility* and *personal accountability* responding with humanity towards others, as this is where the change must start! This is change that is driven by a change of thinking that comes from leaving behind those attitudes, beliefs, prejudices and ideas that have contributed to the *virus that dehumanizes our society* that has *infected* Ethiopia—*ethnic hatred, tribal favoritism, selfish ambition, lack of compassion, numbed consciences, the devaluation and abuse of other human beings, violence, pride, deceit, corruption, stirring up division, unhealthy competition, apathy, the expectation of a “hand-out” to take care of one’s own problem or the problems of others rather than taking the initiative and the worship of leaders and demonization of those with whom we disagree.*

We have developed a culture of victims and perpetrators that continues to be recycled into new victims and perpetrators, regardless of who is in power—on the small scale—in our homes, communities, businesses and on the streets of our cities, and also on the national scale between those in power and those who suffer the consequences from the actions of those in power.

If we stubbornly refuse to admit the truth and to make the necessary changes, we will only add to our misery; however, if we use our individual and collective failure(s) to push us to become more compassionate and healthy individuals and thereby, a more compassionate and healthy society that can work together, we have much reason to have hope for our future and for the future of our children. The more of us that do this, the greater the impact we will collectively have on our society.

This cannot happen unless Ethiopians work together in *solidarity based on shared principles of freedom, justice, equality, human rights and civility* as its foundation and *compassion* as the thread that connects all of these principles together within our society.

Before we talk about what we want for the next year, let us openly address the serious problems that have developed over the last year. We are reminding people that this “better year” for which we are hoping, will not be possible without our commitment to making such changes. In fact, without such changes, Ethiopia faces the possibility of implosion and disintegration.

We must face the fact that right now, Ethiopia is dying—literally, as a people, and figuratively, as a nation. If we do not face the desperate urgency of our crisis, we will be so disconnected from reality that we will be unwilling or unmotivated to take action to save the life of this people and nation!

What is the evidence of our dying people?

Let us first look at our people. The conditions under which the vast majority live are so difficult that many Ethiopians must concentrate all their energy on merely surviving. Pervasive hunger, malnutrition and death—of not only children, but also adults in the rural areas as well as the cities—from starvation is worsened by rising prices, drought, floods and the overall mismanagement by the government in genuinely dealing with this crisis. Why should the cost of one chicken have doubled in the last months to now cost 100 birr (\$10)? Why should a middle class working Ethiopian man be picked up on the streets because he collapsed into unconsciousness because he had not eaten for days due to giving all the food to his children.

These are only two examples of a widespread problem affecting countless millions some who say Ethiopians are even too weak to get angry, to protest, to rally or even to think. Without food, not only does the body stop working, the brain will not function properly either. As a result, there is no way of counting how many are dying such silence.

Our hope in our TPLF government in taking remedial action is less than ever. For instance, how can we hope that Meles will take steps to resolve this food crisis when he and his government deny the magnitude of the problem or while they actively contribute to the problem by displacing Ethiopians and destroying their homes, livestock and crops in such places as the Ogaden?

How can we hope that Meles will help enhance the productivity of farmers, while refusing to move from feudalistic or socialistic models of government owned land where the land cannot be used as capital, but can only be leased by subsistence farmers? Reports indicate that these small farmers are so hungry that they are eating their seed and selling their farm tools just to survive.

Those Ethiopians who are being “given” opportunities to manage more efficient and large-scale farms are almost entirely those within the small group of “favored” Woyane supporters whose food may be destined for other countries like Saudi Arabia rather than Ethiopia or who are using thousands of hectares of land to raise flowers for export to Europe at this time of crisis where there is not enough food to cover the needs of Ethiopians. If the profits from the flowers would not be destined for the pockets of only a few, there might be some rationale in this economic endeavor.

The list of additional negative things that plague our people and threaten their lives are countless; to name a few—the lack of clean water, lack of education, lack of employment for even the educated where they are forced to beg in the streets, lack of health care for pregnant mothers, children and those with HIV/AIDS.

What is the evidence of a “dying nation?”

Let us also look at the evidence that, without intervention, Ethiopia is “dying” as a nation. The repression of freedom has worsened in the last year. Political parties within the country are so controlled that they have little chance of representing the huge mass of Ethiopians who are profoundly dissatisfied with the current regime.

During the local elections in April, the government made it so difficult to run for office that they were almost exclusively, the only ones to run throughout the country, assuming different names of parties in different places, but no one is fooled and everybody knows it is the TPLF.

The repression of the media is almost complete. Our people are blocked from knowing what is going on in Ethiopia or in the outside world. On the other hand, no information can easily get out of the country either. As a result, Ethiopians are screaming in silence due to fear of reprisals if they are audibly heard.

The territorial integrity of Ethiopia is being violated as well. Meles is giving our land away to the Sudan or to Djibouti without our permission. Our economy benefits only the few “elite” in power and rumblings among numerous armed groups threaten violence while the Meles regime continues its divide and conquer ethnic politics as if hoping that the country will break into pieces so that the individual parts are “more manageable!” Some outsiders seem to have their own hidden agendas for a broken-up Ethiopia that would also make Ethiopia less of a threat to their interests.

For most of us, the millennium year has been one of the most difficult, despairing years we have faced, even worse than the previous few years. After the joy subsided from the Ethiopian Millennium celebrations of a year ago, today, we have sunk into a greater pit of despair, only made worse by the division of Kinijit and of most of the other political parties. Today, the future we were reaching for seems crushed. We are more fragmented than ever before. This includes not only the political parties, but also the armed groups like the OLF, the faith organizations and civic organizations. Right now, we have no one institution that is bringing hope to us.

A society that loses its compassion towards others loses its humanity.

Societies without compassion for others are societies that will be unstable, conflict ridden and devoid of the joy, peace and deeper happiness that bring meaning to life and nation.

What makes people human is emotion. When you don’t have emotion, you do not feel or respond to the pain or suffering of others. A society that loses its compassion towards others loses its humanity and everyone suffers as a result. It becomes the survival of the fittest where you trust no one and only care about those closest to you. You will play favorites with these few while at the same time, cover for them and not hold them accountable because you cannot trust “outsiders.”

This is what is going on with the TPLF right now. This is one important reason that we are not seeing most of our Tigrayan brothers and sisters speaking up or rallying with other Ethiopians right now despite the fact that we know the majority of Tigrayans are not really benefitting under the TPLF. It is also their moral obligation to speak out like the rest of Ethiopians. We also know that Woyane are not only Tigrayan, but there are also Anuak Woyane, Amhara Woyane, Oromo Woyane, Ogedeni Woyane, Woyane Christians and Woyane Muslims. Without all of these Woyane from other ethnic groups and religions, the TPLF would not survive.

It is a “dog-eat-dog” society and one where the rule of law becomes the “law of the most powerful dog!” In Ethiopia, Meles is “top dog”, but there are countless layers of underlings who must be catered to in such a system who become the “victims.” Any of these victims are threats or “unimportant” to their survival and are dehumanized so no one cares about their suffering and the injustice perpetrated against them. They become “forgotten and neglected people.” In the eyes of too many, most of our society comes under this category.

Human beings are “used” or “abused” to advance one’s own interests instead of being viewed as fellow human beings, created in the image of God. This devaluation of others becomes especially true if they are from a devalued or opposing ethnic group, political group, religious group, from a different region, gender, class or educational level or from a category of people like “separatists,” “unemployed youths,” street people (beggars, homeless or prostitutes) or orphans.

Have you lost your sense of compassion towards other Ethiopians who have been devalued and dehumanized in this society? We lose touch with our own humanity as we do this. The more this happens, the more it becomes a societal problem that affects every Ethiopian because if “I can devalue you, you can devalue me!” It is a vicious cycle of dehumanization.

So, the question is, how can we expect to have a better year ahead if we fail to treat each other with respect and care? The future of Ethiopia depends on how we will treat each other, especially the most weak and vulnerable in our society. If you agree that this is a problem, what can we do to change?

The strength of our Ethiopian backbone is being tested.

“Having backbone” is an expression commonly used to describe someone with strength of character, someone who does the “right” thing even when it is difficult or when it is at odds with others.

Right now, the strength of our “Ethiopian backbone” is being tested. Are we willing to make the New Year a better one for the Ethiopian people by stepping out with moral courage and conviction in order to bring compassion back into our society? We have been wounded by fear and abuse and have substituted survival for compassion. As more and more Ethiopians suffered, we looked away, not wanting to feel, but to escape. What small but practical steps can we now take to reverse this direction?

As each of you who were able, celebrated the New Year at home, eating with your family or going out for supper or as you bought gifts for someone special, remember those who do not have anything in Ethiopia.

Remember the homeless, dirty child with no clothes, walking barefoot and sleeping with no blanket in the streets. Remember the young girls who are selling their bodies in Addis Ababa and towns in our country in order to buy food. Remember the other beggars on the streets, all with their own stories and emotions. Each one of them is precious in God’s sight. They are unemployed youths, elderly widows, disabled veterans of the military, disabled or sick with HIV or some other disease. Many came from the rural areas, seeking employment or a better life and found nothing.

Think of the victims of the flood in Gambella, some who died and many others who are displaced and their crops are ruined. Think of the Ethiopian women who are daily being trafficked to the Middle East to be prostitutes or forced servants. Remember those who died trying to make it by boat across the Red Sea to Yemen, who could have made it except their boat was stolen and they were forced to swim at gunpoint.

Remember the mothers who just buried their children in the last few months because they had no food. Remember those parents who are inwardly suffering as their children are too weakened by hunger to cry out any longer for food. Remember the young child who is taking care of his or her younger siblings because their mother and father have died of HIV/AIDS.

Remember the victims of terror such as the young girl or mother who has been raped in the Ogaden by the same soldiers who are supposed to protect them. Remember those whose fathers and brothers have been killed, beaten or tortured as they were trying to protect their mothers and sisters from such assaults. Think about the families displaced from homes simply because they live near natural resources that others want and those others are willing to take their land by force.

Remember the mother, whose activist children were killed during the protests after the 2005 election. Remember the family members of those activists who are still waiting for the release of their children so they might come home. Remember these activists and the thousands of freedom fighters like them who are still behind bars, in the dark cells of prisons throughout Ethiopia the country—including journalists, artists and musicians like Teddy Afro who did nothing but speak out for what was right.

Remember the children who are not getting the opportunity to go to school because their father was killed. Remember the homeless who were evicted from their homes—later to be bulldozed down—because another Ethiopian from the West, with money, went to Ethiopia and leased their land from the government.

Remember the orphans who have such a fragile future. Remember the disabled who cannot walk, see, hear or is mentally disabled, but in this society, no one is taking care of them. Remember the soldier who lost both legs and cannot take care of himself.

This is not only limited to Ethiopians in the country. Think of the refugees from Ethiopia in foreign countries, in the Sudan, in Eritrea, in Kenya, in Egypt and even those in the west who are having a difficult time surviving away from family and home simply because they are trying to seek safety or a better opportunity in a foreign country.

Please, as you celebrate with joy, put yourselves in the shoes of those fellow Ethiopians who have nothing in terms of worldly possessions—who have been viewed as discardable people by their own government and by many within our society. Refuse to promote the devaluation of these human beings. These are our people. May God restore our compassion and our humanity.

If we are to be a caring people and a healthy society, we should see these Ethiopians as part of our family. God wants us to see them as our people, but we are not living up to what God expects of us. As we celebrate this day, think of the Ethiopians in pain, in misery, in sorrow, in loneliness and in hopelessness for “we are our brother’s keeper.”

For those in America, Canada and Europe, when you return to Ethiopia, do not treat the other Ethiopians—like the homeless and the disabled—as if they were not your own people. Do not consider yourself to be a tourist for you are one of them. Eat with the maid who is cooking the food. Be a Good Samaritan to those who have nothing. We should feel their pain and attempt to relieve their suffering, giving them the boost, wherever and whenever possible, that might enable them to survive or to become independent.

May the Next Year Be Known as the Year Ethiopians Showed Such Great Compassion that they Changed the Direction of Ethiopia!

If we are wishing for a better life and year, we have to change. If we are to improve the future for Ethiopia, we ought to do our part by caring for each other. Our actions should not be only limited to those who are privileged and educated, but it should be extended to the people who have nothing at all—which is the case for the majority of Ethiopians. This will require those who have more, to share, especially those Ethiopians who live in the western countries. They should share not only with their families, but also with other Ethiopians who are part of their greater family.

This New Year celebration should not be a year of wishing for something better, but a year of action towards the betterment of our people. Let this to be a year when we put our *humanity before our ethnicity*, a year when we can act on the belief that *unless all Ethiopians are free, none of us will be free. Until we all have the basics to survive, we must share what we have.*

Let this year be the year to forgive and heal the bitter divisions between the people. Let this year be the year when the divided political parties can see that there is something bigger than their own political party and that is God first, then our humanity and then our country. Let this be the year when people will work together for the common good despite our differences.

We hope that next year will become known as the pivotal year when Ethiopians came together in solidarity of purpose, becoming a society known for its compassion towards others. We in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia hope you will join us in preparing the way for a better year and future.

We cannot avoid looking at the truth of what is at the heart of our failure—we have lost our compassion for others. A society that loses its compassion, loses its humanity. A society that loses its humanity loses its soul. A society that loses its soul, dies.

Listen and you will already hear the cries of a dying Ethiopia. Let us urgently call on God to help revive the soul of Ethiopia—that He might help us recover our soul, our humanity and our compassion before it is too late to save this nation and people!



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Revive Ethiopia!
It is Time to put Humanity before Ethnicity
because

No One is Free until We All are Free!
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