



Mr. Obang, Metho, Speech to the Ethiopian National Congress on the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia in Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois.

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Thank you for inviting me to speak about the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia. I am grateful to be here with my fellow Ethiopians. I thank Ato Erku Yimer, Dr. Imru Assefa, Ambassador Imru Zeleke and the Ethiopian National Congress for organizing this conference and for their commitment and passion to help in the struggle for our country to become a land that is free and where Ethiopians can live and flourish together.

I first entered this struggle when I started working for the protection of the Anuak following the massacre and human rights crimes perpetrated by our current government in December of 2003, but the seeds of a larger, more inclusive movement began over three years ago when I began hearing more and more reports of the suffering, misery and abuses to our people all over Ethiopia—from the east to the west and from the north to the south—at the hands of this same government.

Since that time, I could not only focus on my own group because I knew that until all were free, none of us would be free. I also knew that a New Ethiopia would never be accomplished without valuing all human beings as precious and all created in the image of God. I knew that **until our humanity came before our ethnicity or any other differences, that we would sabotage each other's efforts to improve our lives and the lives of our descendants.**

I knew that coming together in solidarity would require that we improved our relationships and our respect for each other. I knew that such relationships could transform our society into a new, more welcoming Ethiopia. This is the kind of Ethiopia for which I hope and dream. This is the basic reason behind the formation of the SMNE.

Today I have been asked to more specifically describe what the SMNE is all about, why it was formed and what we hope to accomplish as a result of it. Sometimes it is easier to start by explaining something **by what it is not**, before explaining **what it is**.

1. The SMNE is not a political movement to run for office.

It is a social justice movement to bring about a climate conducive to genuine political expression so that different political parties and their candidates can openly compete for elected office in free and fair elections where the people decide who they want to represent them.

2. The SMNE is not a movement of groups or organizations where these individual groups or organizations are expected to each abandon their own identity and goals so as to merge into one.

It is a movement of individuals, groups and organizations who are independent, unique and who should continue to carry out their own objectives, but who desire to come together as a stronger, more collective force for good, around the shared goals and principles of the SMNE in order to bring about a more open, just and harmonious society where Ethiopians are free to pursue their goals.

3. The SMNE is not a movement to fight for dominance or to overthrow the government.

It is a non-violent movement where Ethiopians can join together, more powerful and effective as a unified force of diverse people, to exert pressure on the ruling government for positive change through wide varieties of tactics of non-violent actions and/or resistance, through legal measures, through actions taken by the international community resulting from advocacy work and through other peaceful actions within and outside of Ethiopia to bring about change, possibly including a genuine dialogue with international mediators.

4. The SMNE is not a movement of one tribe, one political group, one region, one culture, one class, one religion, one gender, etc.

It is a movement of people to people, family to family, friend to friend, community to community, ethnicity to ethnicity and so on, to bring reconciliation between previously alienated people and groups and to set an atmosphere in Ethiopia where all are included regardless of ethnicity, regional background, political view, religion, culture, language, educational level, class, gender and age, so that all who live within the boundaries of Ethiopia are valued members of society and are considered 100% Ethiopian.

5. The SMNE is not a movement based on a certain leader or group.

It is a movement of ideas, principles and values intended to hold all leaders and members of our society—present and future—accountable. Where men and women fail, make mistakes and change their minds, we must have high standards of transparency and accountability that challenge all to perseveringly uphold the basic rights and value of every human being as of highest importance and as key to the sustainability of any free, open and harmonious society.

6. The SMNE is not a movement that ends once Meles leaves office

It is a movement that must continue to protect, shape and undergird our society, government, institutions, civic organizations, economy and natural resources against future tyranny, oppression, injustice, devaluation, exploitation and abuse by those inside or outside of Ethiopia.

The Goals of the SMNE:

- To encourage Ethiopians to become a healthier, more inclusive society where all people are valued and where the rights of all are respected and advanced.
- To bring about national reconciliation between previously alienated groups.

- To bring an end to human rights abuses, the imprisonment of all political prisoners, corruption, cronyism, injustice, government domination of all sectors of society, unjustifiable military aggressions against Ethiopian citizens and neighboring countries, the territorial disintegration of Ethiopia, the suppression of the press and media, the suppression of free speech and other such basic rights.
- To better document human rights crimes perpetrated, instigated or tolerated by the current government to different people in different locations within the country, raising awareness, calling for urgent action and compiling a legal case showing a pattern of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other human rights violations in violation of international human rights laws and the Ethiopian Constitution.
- To raise awareness and advocate in the international community for the respect of human rights, freedom, justice, free and fair elections and good governance.
- To identify key experts, who might join together to form think tanks to begin to examine and make plans to address potentially critical areas of Ethiopian society—such as security issues, national reconciliation, ethnic issues, the food crisis, political prisoners, the economy, corruption and good governance—where preparedness would prevent violence and chaos and help ease the transition from an authoritarian society to one that was free, diverse and open.
- To establish an institution that would continue to act as a watchdog to guard and advance the principles set up within the Solidarity Movement for the long-term.

In summary, the SMNE is a movement to teach Ethiopians to accept, value and respect one another, giving people their God-given rights so we can live in a healthier society, also making those running our government more accountable in becoming a healthy government of the people.

Right now our survivals as a people and as a country are in doubt. Meles is using ethnicity or other differences to destroy, but **we must use humanity to unify us** and by doing so, **to overpower his destructive influence**. Meles has told us we only have our own group, but **we say all human beings are our group**. These are the principles we are building. **To make it practical, it requires reconciliation through listening to others' pain, acknowledging what we have done, forgiving each other and coming together in new relationship.**

What we need is not the solidarity of a political party, a tribe, a class, a religion or class, but **human-to-human solidarity**. Because of this, we in the SMNE are willing to work with any other group, as long as we have something in common, like the Ethiopian National Congress. We have to collaborate on the things we have in common. For instance, during a disaster, the International Red Cross works side by side with other organizations who are all present to help in their different, but complementary ways.

The destination that many of us are wanting is to free Ethiopia to bring freedom for everyone. All of us may take different roads or means of transportation to get there, but never the less, if that is our destination, we can work together because **our destination is the same**. Our job is not to compete with each other, but to help empower and encourage others to do their best to accomplish our shared goals.

Division will destroy us. That is why in the SMNE, reconciliation between Ethiopians is the bedrock of the foundation for a New Ethiopia. Labeling of people in categories is only deepening our divisions so much that we often see each other as an enemy instead of as part of our family. Everyone knows what I am talking about. An example is our tendency to not talk to or socialize with others outside our ethnic groups.

Another example is in the sad truth of how so many of our people want to break away from Ethiopia because it has become a country that has no place for them. We must change all of this by creating an environment where when we face another Ethiopian, **we see their humanity rather than their tribe.**

My statement recently about racism is an example of how important it is to start sitting down with each other to talk so that we can bring people together. When you care enough about someone, you do not ignore something standing in the way of a stronger friendship, but instead, you tell them so together, you might solve it.

We must to try to solve these conflicts by starting to listen to others rather than avoiding those with whom we have a problem or with whom we disagree. This culture, where if you disagree with someone, you cut them off, shows what a problem we have in resolving settling our differences with the spirit of honest reconciliation, with humility, with grace and with civility.

We need to practice the art of apology, as the best way across the bridge that can link a divided Ethiopia to a new Ethiopia. In the rebuilding of our country, feeling healthy shame for our past behavior, combined with honest repentance, will heal many wounds and help the memories of past offenses soften enough so we can forgive each other and move on.

This work of reconciling cannot be done by politicians. It has to be done by all the people and that is why we call the solidarity of this movement, the solidarity of the people. It must start and be carried out at the grassroots level—people to people, one by one. For instance, you may know of an Ethiopian who avoids you. Instead of also avoiding them, approach them with friendliness and say, “I am from the same country as you.” Start having a real talk, asking what we all can do to better our society.

This is the caution: if we do not do this, we will be judged as people who sat by doing nothing and allowed hatred to boil up until it exploded into more hate, violence, destruction or even into ethnic killing. On the other hand, **if we start reaching out, becoming more inclusive, just and compassionate, we could be known as a people who have changed the downward direction of their country and instead brought about renewal.**

In conclusion, we have no time to compete, manipulate others or to waste. The clock is ticking and it is time for each of us to do our share, reaching out in a genuine and truthful way, rather than with deception and dishonesty. We do not need a superficial chameleon unity of saying we are family when we cannot even talk to each other.

Anything we do to deceive, God knows and our people cannot afford this. This false unity is the reason that the whole country is in prison, but even more so, like my friend Birtukan, and many others, who are being held under terrible conditions. We, including me, are not doing enough for her and for others in prison. I am hoping that we can all do more in the next coming weeks to make people aware of our prisoners as well as those in harm’s way—like the Ogadeni.

I would like to end this talk by thanking certain individuals who have made this event possible and also thanking the Ethiopian National Congress, for the work they have been trying to do to bring Ethiopians together. As I said from the very beginning when I first came to this struggle, we must work together for the benefit of Ethiopia. I am not pro-one group, but I am pro-Ethiopian and am for any group contributing to our struggle for the betterment of Ethiopia. You can count on me doing my share because I believe unless all Ethiopians are free, I myself will not be free. I came to this struggle not for political reasons, but seeking justice. The justice I have been seeking has still not been accomplished so I will carry on and I hope you will too. Let us work together until justice is served.

To the Ethiopian National Congress and to all the peace loving people here with us in this room or to those outside, my call is to remind you that we are all one people and one family so let us stand together for our humanity.

Let us see each ethnic group or any individuals or groups as one unique part of our larger body—such as our finger, our arm, our leg or our head—because if we view them as part of our body, when that part is inflicted with pain, that pain goes throughout the entire body and effects all its functioning. Let this be what we strive for. **We must protect this one body we have from being hurt.**

From now on, when you think of different ethnic groups, think of their beauty. Think of the beautiful songs of the Amhara, or the dancing of the Gurage, the Oromo or of others. Think of our reaction to each others’ music that stimulates all of us to move or feel something emotionally when any of our groups perform.

I leave you with a quote from a human rights lawyer from Mexico, Digna Ochoa, who challenged others to productively use their anger about injustice. He said, *“Anger is energy. It is a force. It is injustice that motivates us to do something—to take risks, knowing that if we don’t, things will remain the same.”*

Dear Ethiopians, that injustice is everywhere. We have the energy. We have the force. The death of our people, the depth of their misery and the endless threats to their life and livelihood, all point to the danger looming over us. This should motivate us to stand together, to fight together and to take risks together, knowing that only then, will we be able to survive as a people, as a nation and as human kind.

The rich and powerful countries on earth may abandon Ethiopia and its people but the Almighty God will never abandon Ethiopia and her precious people.

Thank you. May God bless you. May God bless Ethiopia.

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Please do not hesitate to email me if you have comments to: Obang@solidaritymovement.org,
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