



KINIJIT INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD ■ ቅንጅት ዓለም አቀፍ አማካሪ ቦረድ

## Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (Kinijit): The Struggle for Democracy Prevails - KIAB, June 12, 2008

The struggle for democratic unity, freedom, the rule of law, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ethiopian people prevails against formidable odds. Seeds of division, rancor, discord, character assassination, strategies and tactics placing blame on certain national leaders and groups as means to create and perpetuate animosity and mistrust among nationalities are, we believe, short lived. Ethiopia's mosaic of nationalities and religious groups has proven, time and again, that Ethiopians share a common political, social, cultural, economic and geographical space that is durable and lasting. Their destiny is intertwined; nothing will break this enduring legacy of democratic unity of the Ethiopian people.

The strategic design on the part of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) led and managed by the ethnic dominated Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to split Kinijit's leadership into different fighting factions and personalities was carried out successfully, especially in the Diaspora. The political parties that have emerged since are reflections of this strategic design on the part of EPRDF/TPLF. Dual partnerships, one focusing on internal political processes and, another on external tactics and alliances, are not beyond the grasp of ordinary Ethiopians. Time will tell which political alliance will ultimately prevail. In our view, only political forces that are rooted in the realities of the Ethiopian situation and that respond to the hopes and aspirations of all Ethiopians will endure and triumph over time.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Kinijit's General Assembly which was attended by more than 800 representatives from all regions of the country, including Tigray, Roomy, Southern Peoples, and Afar as well as youth and women groups, civil society, artists and others will be remembered in the annals of modern Ethiopian political history as **extraordinary** for a number of reasons.

First and foremost, the Congress was a genuine representation of popular democracy. Far from being a Congress of 'elites' and big name personalities, it was attended by ordinary Ethiopians from different nationalities, religious, gender, income and age groups who chose to attend because of their belief in and commitment to the **Kinijit spirit**. The Congress took place in a 'tent' because the ruling party refused to allow the event to take place in a conference hall or in a hotel.

The symbolic importance of a major opposition party holding its General Assembly in a tent will long be remembered as a mirror of sheer determination of the Ethiopian people that nothing will deter them from waging peaceful struggle for peace, free elections, national reconciliation, and rule of law, freedom and pluralist democracy. Lack of comfort, modern logistics, communication facilities and the like that are common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century did not dissuade the lively dialogue, discussions, reports and election processes that took place at this "tent of the people," as we will call it. The meeting could have easily taken place under a big tree if it were not for the fact it is winter in June in Ethiopia.

Equally compelling and important to remember is the national representation of the Congress. By all accounts and despite financial and logistics bottlenecks, all regions of the country were represented. Such representation was not forced by any one. It was based on free choice; and,

commitment to the vision, mission and goals of Kinijit that motivated them to attend. They were not forced or enticed by financial, personal glory or political gains.

Proceedings of the Conference were well reported by independent Ethiopian media. The denial of coverage by the state media and, the utter disregard of this important event by the Voice of America which has public responsibility to Ethiopian Americans and American tax payers are beyond comprehension.

The General Assembly took place despite formidable obstacles imposed by the ruling party. The political leadership showed wisdom and perseverance in steering the Assembly by managing and resolving political and logistics obstacles astutely. The leadership drew the attention of participants to focus on possibilities for the future; to windows of opportunity for peaceful transition for good and better governance; to the plight of youth and women who have been left out from political, social and economic opportunities and so on.

The ability of the leadership and representatives from all regions to focus positively on a **brighter and promising future** and, to **speak in unison** are among the most enduring outcomes of the Conference. They elected a new leadership through democratic participation. They discussed and reconfirmed Engineer Hailu Shawel as the leader of their party despite efforts on his part to let others lead in his place, taking into account his own health situation. The decision of participants to reconfirm Engineer Hailu as Chairman showed their full confidence and trust in his leadership. It showed maturity and wisdom of participants that the durability of Kinijit as a potential formidable opposition party (institution) was far more important than showmanship of change for its own sake. In saying this, we are also keenly aware that this durability and sustainability will need to be supported by a well designed and strategic succession plan in order to ensure that the organization will be buffeted by new and young leaders that have the full confidence and trust of the Ethiopian people. We have no doubt that this will occur in due course.

As far as we know, there was no staging of the election process. Representatives chose their leadership based on merit, competence and dedication to the causes of the Ethiopian people. The process showed that a new democratic and principles based political culture is taking root in Ethiopia. Kinijit General Assembly showed this commitment to open debate, dialogue, discourse and, the capacity to choose political leaders freely and democratically. Imagine the possibilities that lie ahead if this political culture could be solidified and ingrained in the hearts and minds of all Ethiopians, especially youth. On our part, we have no doubt that, with hard work and imaginative organization and political leadership at all levels, a new democratic culture of participation will emerge.

Last but not least, the General Assembly preserved and strengthened Kinijit's lasting legacy as a political institution. Participants did not dwell on the negatives chastising the government and its leadership; denigrating splinter groups and personalities; expressing bitterness and resentment towards those who jailed the entire political leadership for almost two years. The accent of the Assembly was on new possibilities; the new frontier of democratic transformation that requires patience, hard work, commitment to and ability to work with the Ethiopian people side by side; the willingness to go far beyond political power and prestige for the few; and, the statesmanship to place the interests of the Ethiopian people beyond party, individual and group interest.

We do not have any illusions that the struggle for peace, national reconciliation, freedom, the rule of law, free elections and, pluralist democracy will be long and hard. We are comforted by the fact that the extraordinary Kinijit General Assembly that concluded in the "people's tent" in Addis Ababa is a reaffirmation in the determination and capacity of the Ethiopian people to usher in a new era of transformation. We commend and congratulate the leadership that showed courage and deep and genuine commitment to the Ethiopian people. Nothing better can inform the Ethiopian people at home, the Diaspora abroad and the international community than the hopeful and bright signs that took place in Ethiopia's capital under the "people's tent."

We now have seen dramatic developments at home that compel us to join and support those who have sided with the Ethiopian people in deeds and not words. Action, our friends, says more than sheer and elegant rhetoric. The Ethiopian people have shown their full confidence and trust in rekindling the "spirit of Kinijit" that galvanized millions of Ethiopians during the general elections of 2005. The sacrifices made by Ethiopians are not forgotten. A new and energized Kinijit has renewed the hopes and aspirations of Ethiopians for a better and brighter future.

Long live Kinijit. The Democratic Spirit will Shine

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