

## **Joint Public Statement**

### **President Donald Trump's Administration Should Side with the Ethiopian People**

This public statement signed by Diaspora based Ethiopian civic and political organizations addressed to the newly elected President of the United States of America, President Donald Trump and his administration, is intended to:

- a) Generate American public interest concerning the dire and suffocating environment under which 102 million Ethiopians live; and the potential adverse consequences for the Horn of Africa and beyond; and
- b) Call on President Trump's administration to review America's policy toward one of the most brutal and repressive governments in the world today. The Tigray People's Liberation (TPLF) dominated government of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has been in power for more than a quarter of a century; and it intends to perpetuate its political and economic hegemony for decades to come.

We feel strongly that, if the regime is not pressured to open-up political and civic space soon, Ethiopia might Balkanize further; and civil conflict is likely to ensue. There is a plethora of evidence that opposition groups and civil society, especially youth, are being radicalized. The suffocating environment imposed by the governing party leaves little hope for a peaceful transition toward inclusive governance.

The TPLF-dominated ethnic coalition of the EPRDF has captured the Ethiopian government, state and institutions. This political preponderance has led to the capture of the national economy and all natural resources, including lands on which the vast majority of Ethiopians depend for their survival. The governing clique of self-selected and self-appointed ethnic elites, primarily, the TPLF, have become shamelessly wealthy while millions of Ethiopians suffer from malnutrition, hunger and abject poverty. Each year, hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian youth flee their homeland because of fear; and in search of job opportunities abroad. The current model of development is therefore unjust, unfair and unsustainable.

Despite continuous protests, pleas and appeals to the global community, bilateral and multilateral donors and Ethiopia's foreign friends such as the United States have failed to appreciate the depth and breadth of the problem facing 102 million Ethiopians. If left unaddressed and unresolved soonest, the adverse consequences of repression and oppression in Ethiopia are far reaching; and will affect America's long-term interests in the Horn of Africa.

In this connection, signatories of this public statement wish to acknowledge the extraordinary, bold and proactive role of members of Congress who continue to champion a new human rights legislation on Ethiopia that will guide American policy in the second most populous country in Africa; and one of the top recipients of U.S. bilateral assistance in the world.

**H.R. 128, “Supporting Respect for Human Rights and Encouraging Inclusive Governance in Ethiopia”** has been introduced by Congressman Christopher Smith and co-sponsored by Representatives Karen Bass, Mike Coffman, Keith Ellison, Robin Kelly and Mark Veasy. The vast majority of Ethiopians at home and abroad welcome and support this legislation and urge Congress to pass it. At a hearing he chaired March 9, 2017, Congressman Smith underscored the dire and deteriorating human rights situation in Ethiopia saying that Ethiopian “security forces killed ‘hundreds’ of peaceful protestors in 2016....In addition, there are at least thousands more people held in jail who are considered political prisoners, and the government continues to arrest and imprison critics of its actions. Dr. Merera was arrested upon his return to Ethiopia after testifying in November at a European parliament hearing about the crisis in his country.” He is accused of “terrorism” and is no doubt being abused.

There is no sign that the Ethiopian regime that depends heavily on American aid is willing to negotiate a peaceful transition toward inclusive democratic governance in Ethiopia. As Congressman Smith noted rightly, "Unfortunately, the Ethiopian regime shows deteriorating signs of human rights practices. Rather than spend hundreds of thousands on consultants to try to mislead Members of Congress on the facts and inciting e-mail form letter campaigns by supporters, the Government of Ethiopia can acknowledge their challenges and work with the U.S. government and others in the international community to seek reasonable solutions. We are prepared to help once they are ready to face the ugly truth of what has happened and what continues to happen in Ethiopia today."

Sadly, the regime’s strategy is to crush the opposition by accusing members and by imprisoning and or forcing into exile potential Ethiopian leaders as “terrorists.” This strategy diminishes alternative national leadership from emerging to replace the TPLF/EPRDF; and reinforces the misleading notion that the country will fall apart without the current ruling clique. Signatories assure Congress, the American people and the Trump administration that Ethiopia possesses the requisite competent and dedicated human capital to make a successful transition.

Signatories welcome and support the draft legislation because it:

- Condemns the killings of peaceful protestors and the use of excessive force, the arrest and detention of journalists, activists, students, political leaders and abuse of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation to stifle political and civil dissent and freedom of expression;
- Calls on the government of Ethiopia to lift the state of emergency; and end the use of excessive force by Security Forces;
- Calls on the government of Ethiopia to conduct a full, transparent and credible investigation into the killings in Oromia and Amhara regions and hold security forces accountable for wrongdoing;
- Demands that the government of Ethiopia respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and guarantee the freedom of the press and media;

- Demands that the government of Ethiopia allow a Rapporteur appointed by the United Nations to conduct an independent examination of the state of human rights in Ethiopia;
- Asks the government of Ethiopia to repeal proclamations that can be used as a political tool to harass or prohibit funding for civil society organizations and to investigate the circumstances surrounding the September 3, 2016 shootings and fire at Qilinto prison, the deaths of persons in attendance at the Annual Irreecha festivities at Lake Hora near Bishoftu on October 2, 2016, and the ongoing killings of civilians over several years in the Somali Regional State, and publically release a report on such investigations in an expedient manner;
- Calls on the Secretary of State to conduct a review of U.S. security assistance to Ethiopia in light of recent developments and improve transparency with respect to the purposes of such assistance to the people of Ethiopia;
- Calls on the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to immediately lead efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy to support improved democracy and governance in Ethiopia;
- Calls on the Secretary of State in conjunction with the Administrator of USAID to improve oversight and accountability of U.S. assistance to Ethiopia, pursuant to the expectations established in the U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa; and
- Calls on the Secretary of State in cooperation with the Secretary of the Treasury, to apply appropriate sanctions on foreign persons or entities responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against any nationals in Ethiopia as provided for in the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.”

Passed by the U.S. Senate on 12/17/2015, the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act is consequential for Ethiopia. Section 3 of the bill authorizes the President to impose U.S. entry and property sanctions against any foreign person (or entity) who is:

- a) Responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against individuals in any foreign country seeking to expose illegal activity carried out by government officials, or to obtain, exercise, or promote human rights and freedoms; and acted as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign person in such activities; and
- b) A government official or senior associate of such official responsible for, or complicit in, ordering or otherwise directing acts of significant corruption, including the expropriation of private or public assets for personal gain, corruption related to government contracts or the extraction of natural resources, bribery, or the facilitation or transfer of the proceeds of corruption to foreign jurisdictions; or has materially assisted or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services in support of, such activities.

President Donald Trump has an opportunity to do the right thing by implementing the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act with regard to Ethiopian officials who have committed crimes against humanity and who have used political power to amass wealth for themselves and their families. The Department of the Treasury can identify specific Ethiopian officials or private persons who have stolen and hidden monies and made physical investments through illicit mechanisms.

Signatories are delighted to note that the U.S. Congress “stands by the people of Ethiopia and supports their peaceful efforts to increase democratic space and to exercise the rights guaranteed by the Ethiopian constitution,” the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN and the Principles and Guidelines on Human and Peoples’ Rights while Countering Terrorism in Africa adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights during its 56th Ordinary Session in Banjul, Gambia (21 April to 7 May 2015). We hope that H.R. 128 will be passed by the U.S. Congress.

The past quarter century of one party rule in Ethiopia informs that the governing party has an obligation to observe and practice not only its own Constitution; but also human rights laws adopted by the civilized world community to which Ethiopia is purportedly a member. So far, the government of Ethiopia has failed miserably and does not show any willingness to learn from its own mistakes. The regime is tolerated by donors and the diplomatic community for a fundamental foreign policy reason. The TPLF-dominated government acts as a police state in the Horn of Africa. Some call the “ruling clique a con artist” that manipulates international public opinion by availing Ethiopian military personnel for peacekeeping operations in Africa. Its recurrent and systematic assault on any form of dissent within Ethiopia is either ignored or neglected because of the regime’s cunning stance in the regional and international arena. This policy is counterproductive and undermines America’s long-term strategic interests.

### **The sad and debilitating reality on the ground**

In November 2015 and in subsequent months and until the State of Emergency was declared by the regime in October 2016, large-scale and unprecedented protests swept throughout Oromia. This massive popular outrage against the state and government was soon followed by a similar uprising that engulfed the Amhara region in July 2016.

In Oromia, Ethiopian security forces took matters into their own hands against peaceful demonstrations, killing an estimated 1,000 people. Tens of thousands were arrested and jailed. Enforced disappearances became routine. The regime released thousands; but kept tens of thousands in prison.

In July 2016, the protests spread to the Amhara region. Human Rights Watch reported at the time that the protests were “triggered by the arrest of Wolkait Identity Committee members, a group seeking to resolve long-standing concerns over administrative boundaries. Protesters in Amhara region are primarily concerned with the unequal distribution of power and economic

benefits in favor of those aligned to the government.” The issue is far broader and deeper than “identity.”

### **A Common Agony**

Regardless of where they occur, Ethiopians face similar problems: the non-existence of political and civic space; criminalization of free press, media and civil society; a spy network that monitors each and every adult within and outside the country; suffocation and decimation of independent political parties and imprisonment of political leaders; constant harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrest and detention of any dissenter and democratic activist; gross human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, torture, nepotism, massive corruption etc.

Ethiopia is a one party state or dictatorship. In Parliament, the governing party controls 100 of the seats. Sadly, the Obama administration gave a misleading and dangerous signal that the governing party is in the process of building a democratic and inclusive state. This misleading and false signal emboldened the TPLF/EPRDF even further. It gave it legitimacy.

Similar to Oromia, security forces killed large numbers of protestors, maimed hundreds, arrested and jailed tens of thousands throughout the Amhara region. H.R. Watch reported that “On August 6 and 7, 2016 security forces killed over 100 people in Amhara, including over 30 people in Bahir Dar alone. The town witnessed one of the largest protests.” Similarly, Gondar witnessed the largest demonstration in its history. Children as young as 5 years old joined the protests. Numerous people were killed and thousands were arrested and jailed. The popular resistance in the Amhara region of Gondar has spread like wild fire and continues unabated. It is unlikely that peace and stability would occur in the Amhara, Oromo, Somali, Afar, Gambella or other region as long as the root causes of the revolt remain intact. In Gambella, an untold number of children, women and men are being abducted by unknown forces. The regime in Addis Ababa ignores these recurrent incidents that destabilize the country and spread fear and “terrorism” among peaceful citizens. Despite this, the ruling party continues its policy of crushing any form of dissent in Gambella and other regions with absolute impunity.

### **The Huge Social Cost of Graft, Corruption and Illicit Financial Outflow**

As the U.S. Congress’s draft Human Rights legislation indicates, the human cost emanating from extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, detentions and theft is unprecedented in Ethiopia’s long history. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’s Public Statement of June 2, 2016 entitled “Ethiopia: 25 Years of Human Rights Violations” offers a bleak picture. The Obama administration failed to recognize the dire situation with regard to human rights violations. Instead of promoting democracy and defending human rights, it continued to provide massive humanitarian, development and security assistance to the regime under the pretext that the ruling party is a champion of Anti-Terrorism in the Horn of Africa. The Obama administration also encouraged other donors such as the World Bank to provide massive aid without holding the Ethiopian government accountable for wrongdoing, for crimes against humanity, for theft and graft and for illicit outflow of funds from one of the poorest and aid dependent countries in the world.

We acknowledge that Western aid has boosted growth in physical and social infrastructure. It has saved lives. However, Ethiopia is still one of the poorest, hungriest and unhealthiest countries on the planet. No one knows the amount of money stolen by public and private officials and taken out of the country illicitly; but it is staggering. In his commentary on March 3, 2017 entitled “**Ethiopia’s Cruel Con Game**” David Steinman of Forbes reported that the U.N. Secretary General, Antonino Gutierrez “called on international community to give the Ethiopian government another \$948 million to assist a reported 5.6 million people facing starvation.” Last year, drought and hunger together affected 20 million people. There is no end in sight that the government of Ethiopia will cease to be “a beggar” government on behalf Ethiopia’s hungry. It makes no sense for American and other Western tax payers to bail out a regime that steals from the poor and represses them at the same time. Ethiopians need freedom more than aid.

### **Aid that enriches a ruling clique and impoverishes the majority**

Clearly, the \$44 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) over the past 25 years; and the tens of billions of dollars in humanitarian aid over a quarter of a century have done little to boost agricultural productivity, generate employment, strengthen the private sector and change the structure of the economy. The make-believe narrative in growth aside, Ethiopia cannot feed itself. “The amount of American aid received by Ethiopia’s government since it took power **is \$30 billion.**” According to a U.N. 2015 special report on “**Illicit Financial Outflows** by a Panel chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki and another by Global Financial Integrity, the amount stolen by Ethiopia’s leaders since it took power in **1991 is \$30 billion.**”

Other reports and findings suggest that the amount stolen from the Ethiopian people exceeds **\$40 billion.** American and other Western tax payers are therefore subsidizing theft rather than alleviating poverty. Steinman put it correctly. “Ethiopia’s far-left economy is centrally controlled by a **small ruling clique that has grown fantastically wealthy.** Only they could be responsible for this enormous crime. The same leadership that is begging the world yet another billion for its hungry people is stealing several times that amount each year.” A few years ago, Global Financial Integrity also opined that “Ethiopians are bleeding from massive illicit outflow” that continues unabated at a rate **of \$ 3 billion** per year.

In short, the Ethiopian poor are not benefitting from massive aid. Gains from aid and growth are captured by the “ruling clique.” It is this same ethnic clique that punishes ordinary citizens. Despite this hard reality, the narrative of the donor and diplomatic community, including the UN system, gives a false sense of peace, stability and shared prosperity. We wish to persuade President Trump to reject the trickery of dictators and so called development experts who thrive and prosper on the misery of the poor.

### **Crushing opponents to stay in power and to amass riches**

Amnesty International reported last year that “As Ethiopians celebrate 25 years of EPRDF rule, they have suffered persistent and pervasive violations.” Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) have all documented numerous cases of

“Journalists who have been arrested for criticizing government policies and actions since 1993... Some of them like **Eskinder Nega** have been arrested multiple times.” He is still in jail. “**Tesfaye Desersa and Bekele Mekonnen of Urji** were charged in December 1995 with "publishing false information and disseminating it internationally" in connection with their report of on the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) that casted a doubt on a government statement about the conflict...More than ten journalists are currently on trial, or serving jail terms in Ethiopia, and some of them are detained in inhumane conditions. An example would be the case of **Temesgen Desalegn.**”

### **Cruel and inhumane treatment**

Nothing depicts the cruelty of the regime than the inhumane treatment of political prisoners, especially journalists. According to CPJ “...prison authorities denied Temesgen prison visits from friends and family for more than a month, according to a public letter by Temesgen's mother, Fanaye Irdachew.” When asked, “Authorities did not provide an explanation, but local journalists told CPJ they suspected Temesgen had been denied prison visits after an article he wrote from prison was published on several Ethiopia news websites. The articles detailed the mistreatment of prisoners at Ziway Prison.”

No critic of government wrongdoing is left untouched. The draconian Anti-Terrorism and Charities and Societies Proclamations are used routinely and systematically to silence every journalist, blogger, democratic activist and political leader regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. The cases of journalists and bloggers is especially well documented and has received global attention because of human rights organizations such as those noted above. For example, “the silencing of journalists such as **Reeyot Alemu, Eskinder Nega and Zelalem Worq-Agenyehu** that places Ethiopia amongst the ten most censored countries in the world” and the second worst jailer of journalists in Africa. These and other capable and competent opinion and political leaders are in jail because they are a threat to the dictatorial one party state.

The TPLF dominated regime uses its competencies to identify and punish its political “enemies” without mercy regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation. It can be called an equal opportunity punisher. According to Amnesty International “Members of Oromo political opposition parties were arrested by security forces in August and September 2011, as well as a number of students in August 2011. More than 75 students from Wollega and Adama universities and Gimbi town were arrested the following December. In 2012-2013, Muslims in Ethiopia staged a protest against alleged government interference- the government sponsored teaching of ‘al habash’ interpretations of Quran- in Islamic affairs.” Many were arrested and jailed for protesting. The situation has worsened since then.

On November 9, 2016, Professor Merera Gudina, the Chairman of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and a major Ethiopian opposition leader who believed in peaceful change, met with members of the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels, Belgium. Two other Ethiopians had also been invited to the meeting: Berhanu Nega, leader of the opposition group, Ginbot 7,

designated as a terrorist group by the government, and Ethiopian Olympic Silver Medal winner, Feyisa Lelisa. Their pictures were taken together at the meeting and circulated on the social media. Although Berhanu Nega has openly pledged to use “any means” to bring regime change, Professor Merera has been a long-time advocate of seeking remedies for rampant injustice through a peaceful, non-violent movement for change. He was not spared either.

On December 1, 2016, Professor Merera returned to Ethiopia from Europe and was met by security officials at the airport. They arrested him. He was detained at the infamous Maekelawi Prison in Addis Ababa. On December 14, 2016, European Parliament President, Martin Schultz, sent a letter to Ethiopian government officials seeking an explanation for the arrest of Professor Merera. President Schultz cited information he had received from the Ethiopian ambassador in Brussels that the arrest was linked to contacts Professor Merera had had with individuals “deemed as terrorists” by the government, probably referring to Ginbot 7’s leader, Berhanu Nega. Subsequently, Professor Merera was formally charged with terrorism. He joins others in a similar predicament. His arrest and trial mirrors the dilemma all Ethiopians face. The intent of his arrest is to crush and eliminate all forms of opposition and to deprive Ethiopia an alternative government to the ruling party. In his case, he has a large following is considered a threat to the TPLF/EPRDF.

Given the current state of emergency, the TPLF has the license not only to imprison political and civic leaders; but also to arrest, maim, evict and forcefully cause disappearances of tens of thousands of innocent Ethiopians, especially in the two most populous regions of Oromia and Amhara. Arrests and harsh treatments are permissible under the state of emergency. Communication is monitored and enforced. The Anti-Terrorist Ethiopian “government is now a full-fledged terrorist state and government.” It justifies its terrorist actions in the name of anti-terrorism. This tactic has become a singular tool in appeasing and cunning the global community, especially the U. S., and in prolonging TPLF political and economic hegemony.

The arrest, jailing and trial of Professor Merera is not an isolated incident. Politically motivated arrests and jailings are all too common in Ethiopia. Professor Merera joins numerous other Ethiopians, including members of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), for which he is the chairman. One of Ethiopia’s regime critics, Bekele Gerba, OFC’s First Secretary, and Dejene Fita, OFC’s Secretary General, as well as many promising Ethiopian voices are in jail.

These jailings and accusations are intended to perpetuate a political and organization vacuum such that the TPLF/EPRDF continues to rule. The regime’s argument that, without the TPLF/EPRDF, Ethiopia will fall apart is buttressed by these types of deliberate imprisonments of alternative potential voices, leaders and alternative parties. Given freedom, Ethiopia won’t fall apart. In fact, it will emerge stronger, unified and more prosperous under a democratic system.

**Suffice to say, signatories believe that it is in America’s self-interest to side with the Ethiopian people.**

**We therefore recommend the following for consideration by the government of the United States.**

1. Most Ethiopians subscribe to America's war against terrorism in the Horn of Africa and understand the motive behind according the TPLF government the status of an "ally". However, this policy is short-sighted. It can no longer be justified because the TPLF-led government does not represent the vast majority of the Ethiopian people. It punishes its own people through extrajudicial instruments under the pretext of fighting "terrorism" using American weapons. The Trump administration, the U.S. Congress and the public ought to appreciate that America's good will, values, image and long-term interests are being damaged by the TPLF and its allies.
2. The Trump administration and Congress must appreciate the notion that Ethiopia's famed double digit growth is a make-believe narrative that masks abject poverty. Aid monies and growth benefits are captured by a small clique of profiteers and con artists. Famine-driven hunger occurs too frequently and puts into doubt the regime's commitment to make Ethiopia food secure. The root causes of the popular resistance remain unaddressed. The government's preoccupation of crushing the resistance has been strengthened through the state of emergency. This approach is not a viable solution. It makes Ethiopia more susceptible to terrorism and extremism.
3. The Trump administration and Congress must appreciate the unintended consequence of TPLF arrogance and intransigence that peaceful resistance in response to a legitimate grievance can be crushed. It can't. The U.S. and others must be concerned that the lack of political space is a recipe for violent struggle and civil war. We are deeply concerned of the potential for deepening and broadening terrorism and extremism not only in Ethiopia; but also in the entire Horn of Africa and beyond.
4. Signatories appreciate the hearings on March 9, 2017 sponsored by Congressman Christopher Smith at the U.S. Congress. The number and diversity of Ethiopians who came to the hearing inform the level of interest among Ethiopian Americans that it is time for the government of the U. S. to stand with Ethiopia's 102 million people who desire substantive change in governance. We urge Congress to pass H.R. 128 at the earliest opportunity. We assure the Trump administration that Ethiopia possesses capable, competent and dedicated individuals who can lead the country and its 102 million people; and defend the country from terrorism while establishing a firm institutional foundation for sustainable and equitable development led by the private sector.
5. The Trump administration and Congress, donors, investors and other foreign stakeholders must come to grips with the reality on the ground that there is no stability in the country; and that the current resistance is unlikely to stop unless its root causes are addressed. The majority of Ethiopians feel strongly that the harsher the regime, the more the resistance is likely to be! Those who support TPLF's harsh treatment of protestors by demeaning the Oromo and Amhara population are adding petroleum to the fire.
6. As the largest bilateral donor to Ethiopia, the Trump administration should leverage its considerable influence and demand that the government of Ethiopia stop killings and enforced

disappearances now; releases all political prisoners immediately and allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to send independent experts to investigate extrajudicial killings and other crimes; and report on political and social conditions in Ethiopia.

7. The Trump administration can and should urge the government of Ethiopia to negotiate a transitional government of national unity with the participation of all stakeholders at the earliest opportunity; and initiate a process of peace and reconciliation with the Ethiopian people and with opposition groups. Signatories are ready and willing to participate in the transition process.

### **List of Signatories**

1. Dagmawi Arbegnoch movement
2. Ethiopiachin ("አንድ ሀገር! አንድ ሕዝብ ኢትዮጵያችን ሕዝባዊ ንቃናቄ")
3. Ethiopian Border Affairs Committee (EBAC)
4. Ethiopian Democratic Hibre-hizb Unity Movement
5. Ethiopian Dialogue Forum (EDF)
6. Ethiopian National Transitional Council (ENTC)
7. Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Legitimate Holy Synod (EOTC)
8. Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle (Shengo)
9. Ethiopian Youth National Movement (EYNM)
10. Ethiopiawinnet: Council for the Protection of Citizen Rights
11. Global Alliance for the Rights of Ethiopians (GARE)
12. Gondar Hibret for Ethiopian Unity (GOH)
13. Moresh Wegene Amhara Organization
14. Solidarity Movement for New Ethiopia (Solidarity)
15. Tussa Ethiopian Salvation Democratic Organization

16. Vision Ethiopia

March 15, 2017