

SOLIDARITY FORUM OF ETHIOPIA

The *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia* emerged as a result of Ethiopians realizing the desperate need for dialogue regarding the interests of their country and people as a nation. The compounding economic, political and social difficulties, and the lack of respect for human rights, are screaming for solutions. The negative use of our diversities has made us incapable of building on the valuable linguistic, religious and other differences and commonalities – the valuable assets we have inherited from the past. At this juncture, it requires more than the formation of newer and larger political parties to resolve the problems which have resulted from decades of bad governance. The lack of an independent and free press necessitates the involvement of each and every individual Ethiopian in deliberating on how to reverse these processes of failure. For these reasons, concerned Ethiopians will engage in a constant, dynamic and democratic conversation on solutions in the *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia*.

Rationale: Over the last few decades, leaders have been unable or unwilling to ensure Ethiopian development in real terms. They have allowed the loss of the country's territorial integrity, its political instability and the downward trend of its economy. Total poverty and poverty-induced illnesses are increasing the numbers of street children, unemployed youth and destitute adults. There are no efficient ways and means of reducing AIDS, malaria, and other afflictions in place. While education, health and other basic facilities for human resource development are insufficient, oppression that targets the civilian population is forcing intellectuals and others to flee the country. The continuing political crises, the brutalities meted out against innocent civilians, and the brain-drain are undermining our social well-being and may lead to the collapse of Ethiopia and the entire region. The individuals in the *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia* are confident that their deliberations will lead to solutions for reversing these symptoms of the downwardly spiraling developments of the country.

Oppression of the mass media, along with abuse of individual rights, has left us a nation lacking in confidence. Aside from depriving us of our ability to creatively combat the many problems, bad governance has turned us into a brow-bitten society that is suspicious of officialdom and of each other. The level of such inculcation has degenerated individuals to happily exchange their national interests for personal benefits from the whimsical and paternalistic power holders. Even more significantly, it has reduced us to relying on ethnic, religious or other identities when relating to each other in our daily lives. We are losing the capacity to hear and comprehend our fellow Ethiopians with the spirit of tolerance of difference of opinion. Our ability to improve our diplomatic and social skills on the basis of human values is crippled. Both at home and abroad, we are failing to understand the workings of compromise and reconciliation. In brief, oppressive laws and lack of alternative media and creative outlets have deprived us Ethiopians of our capacity to appreciate and capitalize on our differences and similarities.

With the intention of reversing the political, social, economic, moral and physical failures, we, the individuals who have taken the initiative to form the *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia*, feel we cannot expect anybody else but Ethiopians to solve our Ethiopian problems. We feel we have to reach out to our population in rural and urban Ethiopia and prepare for a possible scenario of

worse political crises. We shall commit our own resources, intellect and continuous engagement towards this goal, as reiterated in the following points:

1. Given the magnitude of Ethiopia's natural and man-made problems that have been used to the detriment of Ethiopians, compromising the sovereignty of our country and people;
2. Given that our coexistence across ethnic, religious, class and gender divides has been politically manipulated to create hostilities amongst Ethiopians;
3. Given that our poverty has become the obsession of philanthropy, businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs (INGOs), multilateral and bilateral agencies, and political activism – all of which have actually failed either to alleviate the economic difficulties or to liberate our own resources for the benefit of our people;
4. Given that the context, purpose and process of Ethiopian politics has become an emblem of African corruption;
5. Given that external influences to which the government has aligned itself are severely affecting the social well-being, economy and socio-political processes of Ethiopia and of Ethiopians within the north-east African region.
6. Given that Ethiopians need to appropriate the process of prioritizing our social, economic, political and other problems by articulating them first;

Therefore, we, the citizens have decided to start a movement for rethinking and articulating our problems and finding solutions for forging new and creative directions of policy implementation. For this purposes, we launch this movement as a permanent ***Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia***.

Mission of the *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia*: Through a permanent series of constant dialogue, aimed at appropriating the orientation of the social, economic and political processes of our country, Ethiopia, and redirecting them to serve the purpose of (a) celebrating our diversity and interrelatedness by bridging our differences, (b) promoting our unity and (c) serving the interests of our country and people as a nation, we strongly believe, and hope, that we will regain our self-assured status as Ethiopians. Our constant dialogue will specify the ways and means of reasserting in practice the entitlement of Ethiopians to all forms of basic human rights, including positive and socially responsible self-expression.

The founding members of the ***Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia*** cannot overemphasize that, as of now, the inflamed man-made problems of Ethiopia are those of difference, underdevelopment, corruption, disloyalty to the nation, non-transparent foreign relations, lack of freedom of speech and abuse of human rights. Periodically we will take up themes as the problems occur, articulate their solutions and address the root causes that need to be reversed for the benefit of Ethiopia.

Our proposal is to carry out our responsibilities by recognizing and promoting the following principles:

SHORT TERM:

1. Grass-root mobilization of Ethiopians in the country and in the Diaspora to join the FORUM;
2. Form ad hoc committees to discuss the current political, social and economic crises in Ethiopia;
3. Reconciliation of the various opposition parties with the view to form a united front under the auspices of the FORUM to demand change of direction in Ethiopia;
4. Discussion of possible formation of Administration of National Unity with the participation of the FORUM as deemed appropriate by all stakeholders.

LONG TERM:

1. Recognition of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ethiopia;
2. Promotion of our ancestral and historical spirit of independence and responsibility towards our society and country;
3. Identification, from time to time, of the problems in Ethiopia's human and material assets and seek the pertinent solutions;
4. Exploration of our systems of coexistence (with our ethnic, gender, class, and other differences) to rethink, rearticulate and institutionalize workable social reform implementation strategies;
5. Setting the priority areas that need public attention and stating the associated problems and solutions;
6. Addressing the current paradoxical business, political and philanthropic management of our human and material resources;
7. Exploration of the ways and means of carrying out political reform along the genuine paths of liberating Ethiopia from patrimonial rule, namely the destructive personalized social, political, economic processes that lack a sense of social responsibility;
8. Inculcation of the culture of transparency;
9. Creation of an open, peaceful, cooperative and transparent work environment for civil society associations, political parties, and other groupings.
10. Promotion of the rule of law applicable for all Ethiopians, irrespective of the levels of their crimes, their social, economic or political status or past records.
11. Promotion of separating the legislative, judiciary and executive branches of government;
12. Exploration of ways of bringing about administrative/governmental reforms, including sensitization of the public about major foreign policy matters that affect their socio-economic and socio-political lives;
13. Exploration of influencing Ethiopia's foreign relations for the purpose of commanding respect in Africa and the rest of the international community, irrespective of the government's drive to keep its power at any cost;
14. Finding ways of convincing the world that Ethiopians have our own very high standards, priorities, views and expectations about our ways of life, systems of coexistence and type of internal governance;
15. Creation of an environment for transforming Ethiopian society through dialogue, tolerance, transparency, social responsibility and honest engagement in the above and other similar matters of public concern.

We call upon concerned Ethiopian individuals, members and leaders of civil society associations and friends of Ethiopia to join us in recognizing the social, economic and political problems, articulating them properly and promoting the solutions as processes.

The Ethiopian National Congress (ENC), being a non-political civil society association, will be the **temporary** home to the *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia*. The members of the *Forum* movement will operate according to an appropriate structure.

Structure: To underline our roots in Ethiopia, the supreme body of the movement is **the Ethiopian public** as represented by the **General Assembly** of the world-wide membership of the *Ethiopian Solidarity Discussion Forum*.

Membership in the *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia* is individual based, and there are two categories: a) Full membership with the right to vote and be elected into official positions. This membership category is open to all who are not active members of political organizations; and b) Full membership with voting rights, but not the right to be elected to official positions. This membership category is open to members of political parties.

Officers: Officers elected from among those with Full membership and not affiliated with political parties will run the Forum. It will exclude individuals who are affiliated to political parties. The elected officers will administer the movement democratically and according to bylaws approved by the General Assembly of *Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia*. They will implement the ideals, aims and goals of the Solidarity Forum, performing their tasks with transparency, commitment, efficiency, and following the defined procedures and democratic processes.

The elected officers will be relating to one another in a three-tiered platform: in descending order this will be as follows:

- **The Board of Governors:** This is made up of elected individuals and accountable to the general assembly; The Board of Governors consists of elected leaders from the various chapters around the world.
- **The Executive Committee:** This is made up of 7 members, elected from the Board of Governors is accountable to the Board. The rationale is that this committee may perform the tasks of the Board on day to day basis, and report to the full Board on intervals per by-law.
- **The Advisory Council:** made up of task force coordinators and accountable to the Board of Governors; *(As advisors, they will, of course, be experts of the subjects of their individual task forces.)*
- **Branch Office coordinators (HQ only):** This body's function is running the day to day affairs of the Forum world-wide and accountable to the Board of Governors.

Election

Officers will be elected at the first meeting of the forum, and afterwards annually at the meetings of the general assembly. The length of time officers will serve will be decided at the first

assembly, and chairpersons of various task forces will serve on periodic rotation. To ensure continuity, a set number of the old officers will overlap with new for only one term of office.

The Board of Governors will have 15 members; and the **Advisory Council** will have as many as the tasks identified and approved by the General Assembly. **Branch Office coordinators** will be elected by the local members to work directly with the Board of Governors.

Duties:

The General Assembly

- The general assembly will convene annually;
- Will pass the Constitution, bylaws and elected officers;
- Will ensure that its Board of Governors and Advisory Council work closely with Ethiopian experts specializing on Ethiopian sociology, anthropology, economy and diplomats;
- Will accept reports, approve yearly plans, and assess and approve the annual budget

The Board of Governors

Made up of individuals, the Board will

- Ensure the continuity of public dialogue on the interests of Ethiopia;
- Oversee the smooth running of the Advisory Council;
- Ensure that the task forces engage the Ethiopian public, according to the policies, sense of direction and plans of the Discussion Forum;
- Ensure that assets are raised and put to use properly and strictly in the spirit of the policies and guiding principles of The Forum;
- Endeavor to increase the number of member chapters and concerned and interested individuals;
- Ensure the functioning and promotion of the movement, through four **Movement sub-committees** coordinated by members of the Governing Board:
 1. Discussion Theme Organizer **Movement sub-committee**;
 2. Public Relations (PR) **Movement sub-committees**;
 3. Fund Raising **Movement sub-committee**;
 4. Branch offices Liaison **Movement sub-committee**.

Duties of Movement sub-committees:

1. Discussion theme organizer Movement sub-committee will

- Identify issues of public concern periodically
- Articulate the problems and the solutions
- Consult with members of the public, specifically with concerned citizens and knowledgeable intellectuals of problems and solutions;
- Work closely with the PR task force, especially on promoting transparency, trust and peaceful coexistence.
- Strategize to recruit into the movement Ethiopians, irrespective of their gender, race, class, age, ethnicity or other divisive and exclusive criteria.

2. **Public relations (PR) Movement sub-committee** will work closely with Discussion theme organizer sub-committee to

- Prepare and issue public announcements and statements, also in consultation with the Board of Governors;
- Organize websites, publications, flyers and other media for popularizing the movement, its activities, its mission and its spirit;
- Ensure that the concept of transparency is clearly understood and functional for the benefit of Ethiopia and her interests, while avoiding transgressions of the rights of individuals and groups.

3. **Fundraising Movement sub-committee** will

- Be responsible for the assets of the movement;
- Seek to increase the financial and other material capacity of the movement;
- Find ways of relating to potential donors and contributors, in the spirit of the movement

4. **Branch Office Liaison Movement sub-committee** will

- Ensure the increasing rise of the movement in Ethiopia and in various countries around the world
- Ensure that the branch offices of the movement function in the spirit outlined in the basic document of its foundation
- Create linkages between the Advisory Council and the branch offices

The Advisory Council:

1. Composition of the Advisory Council will be the chairpersons of the task forces working directly on matters concerning Ethiopia, and whose numbers will be increased or decreased as necessary. These chairpersons will

- Coordinate their efforts one with the other, and work in consultation with the Board of Governors;
- Ensure that the specific activities of the task force they chair will reflect the overall spirit of the movement, and
- Relate to the Board of Governors to whom it is accountable.

2. The Advisory Council, will consist of the chairpersons of the following task forces:

2.1. **Peace and Reconciliation Task Force:**

2.2. **Foreign Relations Task Force**

2.3. **Home Affairs Task Force;**

2.4. **Internal Security, Economic, Health, Education**

3. Duties and responsibilities of the Advisory Council:

3.1. **Peace and reconciliation task force:**

- Identify issues of differences among groups, including political and civil society associations;
- Lead public dialogue over ethnicity within Ethiopian national interests

- Engage in dialogue over inter-party conflicts from the perspective of national interests
- Identify and liaise with Ethiopian individuals, institutions and groups that can engage in peace and conflict resolution over various issues
- Articulate and promote systems and ideas of conflict resolution;

3.2. *Foreign Relations Task Force,*

- Identify any exploitive and/or supportive systems in the global economy and politics, as Ethiopia relates with individual countries worldwide;
- Pay special attention to the geo-politics of the Red Sea and the Blue Nile; in order to sustain Ethiopia's historical and political rights, and its regional interests;
- Promote good neighborliness within Africa, while strictly seeking ways of maintaining the country's territorial integrity and respecting the pre-1991 status quo in that regard;
- Develop positive relations with the AU, the UN, the EU, the ASEAN and similar other regional bodies, while guarding the interests of Ethiopia;
- Popularize the notion of involving the Ethiopian public openly in knowing and discussing its interests concerning Ethiopia's foreign relations.

3.3. *Internal Security Task force*

- Explore systems of inculcating the importance of the safety and security of the persons of all Ethiopians;
- Identify ways of combating political or 'tradition' motivated human rights abuses;
- Prioritize the safety and security of Ethiopians without discrimination of their gender, age, religion, language, region or other distinguishing criteria;
- Engage in defining and reducing political 'crime', and the prison population
- Engage in combating drug, commercial sex work, and human trafficking and other abuses of the Ethiopian population

3. 4. *Home Affairs Task Force,* will have two departments.

Socio-Economic:

- Explore viable alternatives for the availability of economic, health, education and similar [public] other services in all, rather than only in regions within administrative reach;
- Explore poverty alleviation programs that will utilize the local human and material resources, and explore and promote institutions and processes of combating exclusion and powerlessness arising from differing views and opinion;
- Explore ways of recovering the wealth that has been [is being] fraudulently exploited from the country;
- Explore and promote inclusion of people from the drought prone regions of the country in schemes of human, environmental and material development;
- Explore and promote alternative and rewarding ways of youth human resource development, employment, creativity and productivity;

Political:

- Explore and promote systems, media and other means of popular participation in political discussions of national, regional or local affairs, publicly and with impunity;

- Explore and engage distinguishing various forms of governance, structure of government, and parliamentary democracy;
- Ensure that the whole public is sufficiently engaged in self-assured processes of citizens of the nation.