



Network of Ethiopian Scholars (NES)

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Title: It should be ‘Good –Feel Time’ for Ethiopia: Not the time to threaten the death Penalty!

“I hope they will say that I did a good job of leading America into a new century, a new millennium, and a whole new way working and living and relating to the rest of the world, that I lifted the American people up, and brought them together.” Bill Clinton, Former US President during the Western Millennium

*‘But I don’t want to go among mad people,’ Alice remarked.
“oh, you ca’n’t help that,” said the Cat: “we’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.”
How do you know I’m mad?” said Alice.
“You must be”, said the Cat, or you wouldn’t have come here.”*

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll

Introduction: The millennium is a time to bring the people, nation and country into one!

Bill Clinton captures the moment of the millennium on January 1, 2000 to start the 3rd Millennium with optimism and hope for America and its relations with the rest of humanity. He hoped and believed that he lifted the spirit of the American people and brought them together, and not the opposite. Whether what he claimed happened or not his own hope and wish has been to spread inspiration and not depression, healing and not division, to mend society and not break it.

In Ethiopia the millennium should be a time to bring the nation, the people and the country together by lifting their spirit and creating good-feel, and bringing wisdom, celebration, joy, excellence and quality in the communication amongst the people to increase and consolidate their solidarity and lessen their divisions and quarrels. The millennium is for lifting up and not to bring down the Ethiopian spirit. It is a time to strengthen deeply the unity of the people; it is a time to heal the wounds and sores that have been festering in the country creating the static society and the brutal state. This millennium should be a time to make a canon and vow to lift and bring together citizen

and state in order that they together create a more beautiful civilisation and world for all Ethiopians irrespective of colour, belief, language, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, age and sex the citizens share both as individuals or communities.

But on the eve of the millennium what we hear leaves us hurt and anguished. We hear the threat of death penalty hanging on those the people elected. Any person who respects the people who voted for these prisoners of conscience can only feel like the conversation of the Adventures of the Wonderland by Alice and the Cat. What else can the threat to kill these democrats mouthed with such wild exaggeration by the state persecutor conjure up except sheer madness emanating from an arrogance of power?

2. The wonderland of extreme injustice

An adventure in the wonderland of extreme injustice, where the death penalty is casually threatened to citizens who have not committed any crime, who stand for putting the rule of power under the rule of law, and who stand against the madness of audacity, arrogance and hubris in favour of humility, must be felt indeed as an experience that is not to be taken as sane and safe. It must be this type of inexplicable behaviour displayed by the state persecutor with such cruel vindictiveness and wicked malice against the prisoners of conscience that makes one to understand why Alice and the Cat declared both the place and themselves to be mad. What kind of good feel comes out of a state persecutor on the eve of the millennium where he declares he demands the death penalty for the innocent prisoners of conscience not on the grounds of proving any case against them but because they refused to defend themselves against crimes they do not recognise ever committing? Under what law and book of justice can such a stance by them elicit a death penalty unless the persecutor lives in a mad world and is also mad himself, if not also the government he so slavishly serves?

3. So it looks all along all talk of prisoners release was a gimmick!

Instead of an inspiring momentum to a millennium, the nation is treated to an emotional blackmail and cynical manipulation by the careless and cruel misuse and abuse of the prisoners of conscience whom the Ethiopian people voted for. There is no doubt that the ruling party in power lost the argument during the election. As to the votes, it should have been able to count it properly. We do not know the true result because it took nearly a year to count it by an election board that was favouring the ruling party.

The Government is acting in such a way that today those who voted for the prisoners are driven to curse their vote or deed. They can only feel sad and angry for electing them only to see them suffer in prison for so long. Lo and behold the time when these frustrations, sadness and anger turn into the courage for resistance, that is when this regime would get its comeuppance. The people can rise and say enough is enough. The time is getting closer when the sheer arrogance of power would compel the people to say they would use any means necessary to restore the dignity of justice and the people, the electorate and the country. This millennium is a test case whether the country moves into broad era of reconciliation or confrontation. The odds are stacked against reconciliation, but the people must patiently exhaust all avenues for the larger good of the country and the future generations.

The regime may see it perhaps as a joke or to taste public attitudes to put on the possibility of the release of the prisoners and to put it off willy-nilly. One moment the nation was treated to a gigantic rumour mill that spilled all over the world that the prisoners would be released. Expectations were whipped high; in fact far too high nearly everyone talked that it is a matter of days before they would be released. We even heard that the prisoners' families had begun to transport the prisoners'

meagre belongings from prison. How can one make sense of this up and down, on and off, emotional zigzags deliberately leaked and spread by the politicians involved in it?

Then came the tragic disappointment. Meles flatly denied he has been engaged in any mediation efforts despite so many reports such mediations have taken place with Government officials, though the actual persons involved were not revealed except for some of the outside mediators that included a Diaspora professor and a lawyer, and foreign powers backing such efforts either discreetly.

Then Bereket with the usual disdainful arrogance said everything with the prisoners of conscience is going through the courts. He claimed that there cannot be any other route to get the prisoners released except for what they can expect from the constitution, the courts and the law. Then came the final act in this saga. The state persecutor declared that the prisoners be punished with a death penalty, not because they have been found guilty but because they did not show remorse or respect to him, the judges and so on.

By such mad act of the not so clearly thinking men that play Byzantine political games on the future of this nation, like this hapless persecutor, this regime also broadcast to the world that it neither understands justice nor law, nor also respect the evidence that must be proved beyond reasonable doubt for people to be sent to the gallows. They showed the world that the country that has perhaps one of the oldest legal systems and justice systems in the world is still run by people who do not understand elementary norms of legality, legal discourse and justice, not to mention morality, wisdom and humanity.

4. Is it with threats to kill that we wish to enter the millennium?

The threat of death penalty against the prisoners of conscience is not easy to fathom for any sane person who has both elementary humanity, sense of justice, and moral and intellectual sense. This is time for Ethiopians where ever they are to spread a 'good feel spirit' across Ethiopia. The millennium will take place in less than two months! What would be interesting about the millennium celebration is not the expected costly razzmatazz or the party jamboree by the Government in a country that can hardly afford such a spectacle. No, the party jamboree is the least interesting aspect of the millennium episode. What would make the millennium monumental is indeed when state and society, leader and citizen and everyone come to gather and rally behind leading up to the millennium, the millennium day itself, and well beyond it, all as united and purposeful Ethiopians learning and willing to sharing a vision irrespective of what politics, religion, ethnic origin and language difference we have or share at the moment. **The most precious outcome would be to be able to come together with a lifted up spirit without any fear and with full national confidence to confront many of the country's internal and external challenges, threats and problems and create the opportunities for sustainable peace, rule of law, human rights, democracy, justice and democratic governance, stability, prosperity and legitimacy in the rules of the game for orderly and lawful transition for Government for all the people from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.** The spirit of the millennium should be to hope to undo what pulls as apart; and foster and grow and prepare to unite all as one nation, to emerge also as one people, one country, with one destiny and one vision to be free, independent, democratic, just, with a law-governed system of rule, developing a rule of the game for democratic transition and governance without any need to resort to violent methods, being always self-reliant, non dependent on donors, prosperous and renascent. It means that the millennium spirit is fulfilled when the Government and those who should be having the responsibility to serve, not as they do now to rule by injustice the country, the people and the nation, are able to take wise steps to give leadership to bring the nation together, heal society from its many sores and wounds. The call for extreme

application of death penalty suffers not only from its lack of substance but its sheer lack of timing. It leads to disunity rather than help to heal the many fractures and wounds of society. It fosters the breaking up and the spread of anomie amongst society, people, and nation even deeper and elongates further the distance between state and citizen for years to come. Extreme penalty is extreme injustice. It is power gone mad and crazy. It must be condemned by all people of good will who wish well Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people to have a peaceful, gentle, kind and harmonious Millennium.

5. The death penalty threat cannot be seen lightly

After so much talk the prisoners would be released comes the death penalty threat. Even now commentator after commentator from the Western media says that what the regime intends is to 'make a point' with the death penalty against the prisoners of conscience, and after that provide them amnesty. Action speaks louder, not words, not secret negotiations, not rumours. No one can be sure what the action of characters in the state of the Cat and Alice who live in an imaginary mad world of power and privilege, opulence and wealth in a sea of popular misery would be. It could be anything. Lest we are not surprised if the worst outcome ensues, we must prepare for the worst. **We must try to begin the biggest, deepest and most resolute mobilisation this ancient nation ever had in its history to get the prisoners released. Not just the prisoners of conscience, but also all political prisoners before the millennium must be immediately released. We must enter into citizens covenanting to act like a sea of people who will not stop until justice prevails and sanity overcomes this officially orchestrated madness.** If the regime carries out its threats and disabuses the Ethiopian nation by promising blood, chains, imprisonment and death rather than hope, togetherness, unity, wisdom, light and possibility, **we must have the courage to say no, defy and prepare for the most resolute united resistance this nation ever have seen and will ever see.**

6. State persecutor is not acting alone

This death threat is not simply the work of the state persecutor. He did not pull the trick out of his hat. No one can believe that in a country where the judicial system has always been interfered by those who are in the executive that the state persecutor did bring these grave indictments against the prisoners of conscience without a green light from the central Government. Those in Government cannot wash their hands from such wicked mischief. What good does this Government get by unleashing such threats whilst at the same time getting its friends in the donor community to spread the rumour of imminent release of the prisoners of conscience? Why unleash such huge expectation that they democrats in jail would be released in the population and clamp back and send equally the de-inspiring talk that the executive has no role, and that all is up to the courts. Why make the expectation to rise high and equally bring down people to disappointment and depression. Why all that talk of mediators when the regime denies that it has not engaged in such mediations, that it knew all along this is a 'criminal affair' only fit for its courts?

7. Concluding Remark: the options are only to release the prisoners now or face deeper and sustained resistance!

This is time for all sections of Ethiopians to spread good feel amongst themselves first and then across Africa and the world. We are heading towards the millennium and beyond. This is such a precious and special time we must vow to leave behind us any residual feelings and deeds of injustice. **This is indeed a time when enemies can turn into friends. The millennium is a special moment. It must be captured with all its possibilities and hope.** The millennium is the time to enter the era of justice, democracy, human rights, rule of law and mount a democratic governance revolution and civilisation. This is no time to engage in wicked mischief and play cat and mouse

with the feelings and social psychology of the Ethiopian people by an unwarranted and cruel misuse and abuse of the prisoners of conscience!!!

It is simply wicked to threaten prisoners of conscience who have committed no crime for standing firm in their position of having either never intended or done nothing to warrant even putting them one second in prison or another second in court with a death penalty. The threat to execute them is made not because they have committed crime or the state persecutor has proved anything against them in law, rather it is related to his anger that they have towered morally and intellectually over his team's shabby failure to prove anything to incriminate these worthy citizens of Ethiopia.

This is no time for the rule of power to undermine the rule of law. It is not the time for arrogance and public deceit to be unleashed with the hubris of officials abusing the jailed and misusing them to manipulate the public sentiment at the wrong time for the wrong reasons of spreading injustice, cruelty public abuse and enmity.

It is either following Bill Clinton's notion of lifting up the people to bring them together so that they can also relate and communicate better with the rest of humanity or follow the route of madness of the Adventures of Alice's and the Cat's Wonderland. The regime must choose either creating good-feel everywhere in Ethiopia from the family to the country, lifting up spirit and helping responsibly to bring the people together **RIGHT NOW** or follow the mad threats of death penalties on the eve of the millennium. It is up to the regime to choose. NES hopes commonsense would prevail over cruelty and injustice.

If the Meles regime chooses to join the camp of lifting the spirit of the people, then it must immediately and unconditionally release the prisoners of conscience and all the political prisoners it put into jail since it came to power by violent armed struggle on May 28, 1991.

If it continues to choose the Adventures of Alice in the Wonderland, NES asks for a global Ethiopian resistance observatory to be formed where we all together enter the Millennium with courage, spirit of resistance and defiance until justice and the dignity of our people are fully restored. No time calls for the united opposition to ignore all the petty differences and come together and show robust united strength now. Time to prepare to come together for all the people and their organic intellectuals from the red Sea to the Indian Ocean! Time to mobilise, organise and confront those who show no concern for justice or engage in depleting the spirit of national moments that must be seized to spread good-feel, unity, togetherness and lifting-up all the people the country and the nation.

NES says free all political prisoners now!!!

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