



Virginia Declaration of the Conference On Good Governance, Peace, Security and Sustainable Development in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa

A three day conference on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, which was organized by two civil society organizations- Advocacy for Ethiopia (AFE) and Ethiopian National Priorities Consultative Process (ENPCP), and sponsored by Trans Africa Forum and Africa Action, was successfully held in Crystal City, Virginia, from April 9 to 11, 2010. The participation of several hundreds of Ethiopians, experts, scholars from the United States and Europe, men and women of the Arts, former diplomats and leaders of civic organizations, with Honorable Ana Gomes of the European Parliament, speaking over the telephone from the Sudan, made the conference rich and unique. The conference addressed broad themes of good governance, conflict, civil society and development in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, and has adopted the following roadmap:

ALARMED by the escalation of ethnic and religious polarization, active and latent conflicts in Ethiopia and Somalia, further endangering the livelihood of millions of people and disturbing international peace, and the total absence of a freely elected and accountable governance system in the region;

DEEPLY CONCERNED by the political, economic and social policies implemented by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in the last 19 years, which has failed to make maximum use of the catalytic roles of the donor community's commitment for good governance, building national consensus, and boosting productivity and alleviating endemic poverty;

NOTING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT that, despite the unabated generous aid flows estimated at \$25 billion to \$30 billion since 1991, almost all of the credible international economic and governance indices rank Ethiopia at the tail end of world development, to the extent that the country, by the end of 2009, had an estimated 5 million orphans and 13-14 million or 16 percent of the country's population being identified as dependent on international food aid. Notwithstanding these, the government unashamedly claims double digit economic growth and success in the alleviation of poverty;

RECONGNIZING with dismay that Ethiopia will be entering the next election without adequate preparation, and more importantly, under a cloud of impunity, relentless human rights violations, vigilantism, and the incarceration of political leaders like Ms. Birtukan Mideksa and others, while at the same time the ruling party uses federal and foreign aid funds to recruit youth supporters, all these being done with the intent of building a single-party state.

NOW THEREFORE, We, the AFE and ENPCP, together with the broad cross-section of Ethiopian participants of the three days conference:



ENPCP

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Ethiopian National Priorities Consultative Process

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1.1 Have agreed that the quagmires that Ethiopia finds itself are by and large a result of the 19 years of poor political leadership of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his TPLF/EPRDF party. We strongly believe that neither peace nor development can be achieved and sustained while Ato Meles Zenawi is in power. Hence, he must immediately exit the Ethiopian political scene, preferably peacefully.

1.2 We call upon all political parties, including the TPLF/EPRDF, to convene an all inclusive National Conference for Peace and Reconciliation, with a view to establishing a Transitional Government of National Unity that prepares the country for an unfettered free and fair election.

1.3. Call on the Ethiopian people to continue their valiant struggle for peace, democracy and respect for the rule of law. We urge all Ethiopians to continue to resist the divide and rule policies of the regime; we also admire the resistance of the Ethiopian people against religious extremism.

1.4 Call upon the Ethiopian people inside the country and in the Diaspora to support and stand with forces that celebrate our diversity while trying to cement the foundations of a united country. We specifically call on all Ethiopians who are being forcefully recruited by the ruling party to side with the people and refuse to engage in any action that may be harmful to their brothers and sisters.

1.5 Commend and applaud opposition parties, civic organizations and their leaders for the work they do under difficult circumstances, and call upon them to create unity, coordinate their efforts, form unbreakable coalitions, and prepare for pre and post election scenarios.

1.6 Call upon the Ethiopian Diaspora to rise to the challenges and provide material, moral and intellectual support to forces that are committed to advancing good governance and democracy in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

1.7 Call for the convening of civil society organizations with a view to establishing strong rights advocacy networks that can better express the voice of the voiceless, and the causes of the people of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

1.8 Encourage all Ethiopians to vote for a party that stands for democracy, good governance, unity, and at the same time support democratic forces that stand to defend and protect their votes.

1.9 Call on Ethiopian Americans to use their voting rights to influence U.S. policies towards Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

1.10 Call upon the citizens of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa to respect and defend the rights of women and children.

1.11 Agreed to establish a working group and broaden the breadth and scope of this declaration so that other stakeholders could join the process in taking the roadmap into action.



ENPCP

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2.0 To the TPLF/EPRDF

2.1 Condemn the relentless human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, persecutions and crimes against humanity committed by the TPLF/EPRDF security forces in Addis Ababa, Arba Gugu, Bedeno, Gambella, Hadiya, Hawasa, Ogden, Oromia, and other parts of Ethiopia, and demand that those responsible be held accountable and brought to justice without delay.

2.2 Call for the abandonment of the use of the anti-terrorist and civil society laws as smokescreens to suppress dissent and deny Ethiopians their fundamental economic, social and political freedoms.

2.3 Join human rights organizations, parliamentarians, governments and the Ethiopian people in demanding for the immediate and unconditional release of Ms. Birtukan Mideksa and all other political prisoners.

2.4 Demand that the top brass as well as the rank and file of the Ethiopian military properly reflect the ethnic and religious diversity of the Ethiopian people, and the army's size, shape, capability and doctrine be improved.

2.5. Demand that the TPLF/EPRDF ceases its manipulation of the electoral process by using federal and donor funds, political party controlled funds, sheltered employment, land and fertilizer.

2.6 Call upon the TPLF/EPRDF and the House of Peoples Representatives to initiate a constitutional reform in accordance to the will of the people, and define a term limit for the office of the Prime Minister.

2.7 Urge the TPLF/EPRDF to desist from blocking the Ethiopian people from having access to information. We condemn the government's blocking of the Internet, the jamming of the Voice of America, and the muzzling of the local media.

2.8. Call upon the TPLF/EPRDF to revisit its opaque long-term farmland leases to foreign investors, which we know is dispossessing citizens from the lands and waters on which they depend to survive. We demand the setting-up of an independent expert group, with the full participation of local communities, in order to assess the costs and benefits and ecological as well as social risks of farmland leases to foreign investors. We believe that some of the land leases have the potential to change the geopolitical equation of the region. We also demand that the TPLF/EPRDF discloses all the details of the contracts to the general public.

2.9 Demand that the government discloses the purpose and nature of the ongoing border negotiation with the Sudan, and that TPLF/EPRDF refrains from once again abrogating Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2.10 Demand the immediate repeal of the charities and societies, media, and the anti terrorism proclamations.

2.11 Demand that political party owned and "endowed" companies be urgently reformed.



3.0 To the people of the Horn of Africa:

3.1 We believe that our similarities and connectedness far outweigh our differences. Let peace and stability and democracy shine in our region. Let's try our level best so that our wounds heal.

3.2 We encourage the continuation of the relationship that has recently been started by scholars from Eritrea and Ethiopia, and hope that such conversations would lead to new beginning which will be mutually beneficial to the brotherly peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Everyone knows that Eritrea and Ethiopia are invariably linked by history, religion, culture, economy, and security. It is thus costly and wasteful for both to maintain the status quo.

3.3 We encourage free and fair elections in all of the countries of the Horn of Africa. We wish success to the people of the Sudan in the ongoing election, and in the implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

3.4 We encourage the international community and the people of Somalia to work together in finding solutions to the complex problems of the country.

4. To the Diplomatic and Donor Community:

4.1 We urge all donor countries, particularly the Government of the United States, especially President Barak Obama to live up to the statements that he has made about Africa. We urge the U.S. not to use double standards. We believe the blind eye afforded to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi by the United States has resulted in strengthening repression in Ethiopia. We, therefore, demand a thorough review of the United States' policy towards Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

4.2 We call on the Government of China to desist from assisting the Ethiopian Government's anti democratic practices, particularly in providing technical support to block the Internet and the jamming of radio broadcasts. We also call upon the Government of China to make trade mutually beneficial.

4.3 We call upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to attend to the call for the investigation of crimes against humanity in Ethiopia.

4.4 We call upon the United States, the United Kingdom and European Union to investigate whether tax payers' money collected during the 1984/85 in Ethiopia has indeed been used for strengthening the TPLF's Red Army.

4.5 Let it be known that we condemn and oppose, in the strongest possible terms, all forms of extremism and terrorism.

Crystal City Virginia, United States of America, April 11, 2010.

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