



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

A New Ethiopia: Calling All Youth to Join the Struggle for Freedom, Morality and the Fear of God in Ethiopia—You are Needed!

April 20, 2007

A new Ethiopia is needed! We call on our youth to join us in our struggle for freedom, morality and the fear of God in Ethiopia! We have come a long ways towards achieving our goals in Ethiopia, but the last part of that struggle may be the hardest and things may get worse before they get better! Despite this, we must push through to the next level and it may be our youth who bring it about! When so many of our young people were killed during the student protests of 2005, the Prime Minister referred to those who died as **“unemployed youth”** as if they were unimportant to the future of Ethiopia. We need a new Ethiopia where youth are recognized and accepted as precious human beings and potential leaders of the country! They are someone else’s children, our students and the fathers and mothers of everyone’s future.

It is time they claimed their position along side the rest of us. As they join us, they will learn that freedom is not free, but it is an effort that will cost us time, labor and money. To some, it might even require greater sacrifices for the sake of many others, in that a struggle like this is not about “me”, but is about “us.” We all must do what we are able, while acknowledging that not everyone is called to do the same. The question for each of us is—what is my part? Therefore, this call is not only for the youth, but also for all of us to increase our effort and commitment.

Let’s first think about the progress we have made! Only a few years ago, most outside of Ethiopia considered Meles Zenawi a “new breed of leader” in Africa. Now, he is known to be an autocratic dictator who polices the people as if they were the criminals rather than he and his brutal regime. He and others in the EPRDF are now named in a case accepted by the African Union and another referred to the International Criminal Court for their parts in the crimes against humanity directed against the Anuak in the massacre of December 13, 2003 in Gambella, Ethiopia. Meles and the EPRDF are responsible for the repression of most every freedom and right characteristic of a **real democracy**—freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to a fair judicial process (habeas corpus), freedom of peaceful assembly and so forth. Instead, he and the ruling government are believed to have stolen an election, imprisoned innocent opposition leaders, journalists, human rights defenders and anyone else who is seen as “anti-government.” They have put political controls on the Internet and killed peaceful protestors following the May 2005 Ethiopian National Election.

As the illusion of democracy has been revealed to the world as false, the EPRDF government, characteristic of a cornered wolf, is attacking. As history has documented, the bite is always worse when the threat of capture is the greatest! If the bite does not work, offer your sweetest honey to bribe your opponents into distraction and silence! Wolf bites or honey are both signs of a weakening position. Only those who are very threatened would try to use force or bribes to such an extent! The increase of force while at the same time offering unbelievable incentive programs are not hopeful signs for this regime; that is, unless we become so fearful or opportunistic that we defeat ourselves just short of our victory!

Dear Ethiopians, it is a critical time when we need to earnestly seek divine help and guidance as never before. I urge the people to seek God for our help, defense and protection. Consider a prayer movement that starts with you and then those around you. Can prayer be criminalized like dissent? We can only wait and see! Can silent prayer vigils with others across factional boundaries bring bullets? We can only wait and see! Let us start coming together in ways that will bring reconciliation between ourselves and God and then reconciliation between each other. God can do the impossible!

For those safe in the Diaspora, we also need to be praying and struggling with our sisters and brothers of Ethiopia. No longer do many of us Ethiopians only see our own groups as worthy, but instead, we are hearing many call for unity and inclusiveness—something that was unheard of several years ago. Our thinking is beginning to change and will be a threat to this regime! Can that transformation of the minds, souls and hearts of Ethiopians be criminalized in Ethiopia? Who knows how the EPRDF might try, but we must not give up. We must not compromise the truth and values, set not by men and women, but by God Almighty!

Lots of Ethiopians now understand that our struggle for freedom requires unity of purpose, putting aside factional ambitions, finding strong visionary leadership that is trusted and the developing of an organization (s) that can manage to implement it all. However, what may not yet be clear to some is that freedom does not come for free—there is a cost. The question remains—are Ethiopians willing to pay the price? I am not talking about those in Ethiopia who have lost their lives or their freedom, but I am talking about those in the Diaspora who have been **“waiting anxiously”** for freedom for their beloved country, but who have not yet contributed what it takes to **“tip the scale”** from dictatorship to democracy!

Let’s look at the US presidential race as a lesson for what it takes. Think about what it takes for a successful campaign. Candidates and their followers are tirelessly working towards their goal. It will require millions of dollars, much organization and countless workers. In all these campaign organizations, you will find experts who are working fulltime on the effort. They are not working for free, but are paid for their work. They help to coordinate the contribution of many more volunteers who will be working many hours over the next year and a half before the election in November of 2008. It is a tremendous effort requiring the help and the contributions of many people if they are going to achieve their goal.

Now look at our effort, will it not require the same kind of support and commitment? Yet, we have much more at stake—it is a life and death race for our freedom, rights and prosperity, all of which are linked. However, many are afraid to be seen participating in our struggle. Others are committed to it, but have no real time to do so. Instead, they are working on it in the few hours left over at the end of the day or week, after working at other jobs they need in order to earn the money to support themselves and their families. It is not realistic to think that in such a great struggle as ours, that we could accomplish our goals by simply volunteering our leftover hours every week. Some will need to be financially supported to work fulltime in organizing and coordinating this work if we want this effort to succeed. It is a fact of life! The status quo in our struggle is not working! Without a substantial surge in assistance—particularly in labor and funding—our struggle will die as we sit by asking someone else to do the work without helping supply the tools necessary for the task! This awareness should send a shudder of fear through the spines of freedom loving Ethiopians.

For example the Anuak Justice Council used to get funding from churches and a foundation, but when that was greatly reduced we put out a plea for \$5,000 dollars, only a very small portion of our potential expenses. The response was disappointing. We received less than half of that, but want to thank those who did contribute, especially thanking a small group of Ethiopians in Seattle who worked at raising money and provided the majority of what was received. Others who contributed only \$10 or \$20 dollars, may have shared all that they could and we appreciated that, but there are many others who could have done much more and who still can do much more, especially knowing that even though the AJC is based mostly on volunteers, there are real expenses of operation that limit what can and can’t be done. For instance, if the AJC is going to do more, it will require substantially more in funding. Funding will support the development of projects that cannot be implemented otherwise. Experts, assistants and services can be utilized to accomplish different tasks only if we can afford to pay for them.

For example, the AJC is getting many emails and phone calls daily asking for help with this struggle. We can see much that could be done to advance the cause, but it cannot be done with the current infrastructure and will require substantially more funding. We can see that a reconciliation or democracy building movement could be organized where we could reach out and work with other civic organizations, but it cannot be done without the support and the funding that would make it possible.

Yet, it does not have to be the AJC that does the work. There are other good Ethiopian organizations or non-Ethiopian organizations that you might want to support. However, a surge in support from Ethiopians is imperative to the formation of a viable organization(s) that can provide leadership into the future. Evaluate yourselves which organizations, groups or movements are representative of what you want for the future of Ethiopia and contribute your support in whatever way you can to those. If you are not in a position to provide time, contribute behind the scenes financially. If you have no financial means, but can provide help, do that. Some will be able to do both. Some will not be able to do either, but could support the work with prayer and encouragement. All efforts are needed to make a whole. If you really want change to come, you must be willing to invest in the work by providing your time, your labor and your financial support. Some day when freedom is being enjoyed by many Ethiopian children of the future, you will have the satisfaction of knowing you have contributed your share.

At this time, we are especially calling on the youth of Ethiopia to be at the forefront of this movement! If you look at the impact of the young throughout the history of the world, you will discover that oftentimes it was the young who were at the front, leading the way. The young of today may be the ones who will be leading Ethiopia in the struggle to break free from the oppression of mind, body and spirit—to a place where many can enjoy the fruits of freedom in the future. The young are open to thinking in new and transformational ways. While saying this, you still must be cautioned to not discard the advice and wisdom of the elders since their life experiences, along with many age-old truths, have been passed on for generations to the next, remaining as relevant as before because they are truths coming from our Creator.

Yet, because a generation or more of Ethiopians were involved in the affairs of the country during the time of Haile Selassie, Mengistu and Meles, some may have a mindset of thinking that is not as conducive to freedom, democracy and equality for all. They may not be as open to leaving behind ethnic politics, revenge and Marxist-Leninist thinking that was the predominant philosophy of the times—particularly during the last thirty or forty years. These philosophies do not adapt well to freedom, respect for human rights and the encouragement of a free market economy.

Those of you who are young, do not wait for the older, more established groups to invite you to come forward. As one young Ethiopian woman recently said on PalTalk, “The young have a role to play. We don’t have to wait to act on our futures. I will do my **“Dirsha”** share

Think about those who came out in the streets of Addis—they were mostly the young. They were invited by their consciences, their souls and by their love of their country. For every Ethiopian, the young in particular, we invite you to say no to injustice, to the lack of caring about other human beings, to violence and killing, to living selfishly without seeking God’s purposes and living without fear of God and our ultimate accountability before Him on the day of judgment.

As a young Ethiopian man said during the same PalTalk discussion, “One of the reasons I think that Ethiopians are suffering so much is that they are running away from God and are not afraid of Him. Our leaders call God names, insult Him and don’t fear Him. They don’t realize that there is someone bigger than themselves and their own lives. They must understand that the life they have, was given to them by God and that their futures are not in their own hands.”

During the same discussion, another young Ethiopian said he had previously been ashamed of the public image of Ethiopia that is seen by the world as a poor, dying country, with skinny children with flies on their faces, full of beggars and thieves, and instead has now seen his own responsibility to make it different. He wants to do something to help produce real change.

Young Ethiopians, it is your time to come out to the public square—to get out of the underground, to see the light and to stand tall! Do not waver like trees without spines. Be like the mountains that continue to stand still over this ancient land of ours, gaining their strength from a strong foundation set in place by our Creator. Spread the word of God, His words of love towards humanity and let your words and your voices fill the air, creating new winds that will blow from the east to the west, from the south to the north, filling your lungs with the breath of new life. Ethiopia needs you; regardless of your ethnicity, your gender, your education, your age or any disability. Every other Ethiopian needs you and we need each other. I mean all of us, even our Tigrayan brothers and sisters—they are part of us! But what we need most of all is God and a view that is more “us” centered than “me-first” centered! Without being one and working together, respecting the rights of each other, we will never succeed. Otherwise, we will continue to be 77 million Ethiopian people who are living in a prison! We are in prison under a gun, but this gun can be put down without one shot and without one drop of blood by the power of the Almighty God and the unity that comes about by caring for others.

We Ethiopians must have had a more united front in order to maintain our independence when other African countries were being colonized. We need that unity today more than ever before, but that unity does not come without God. To succeed, we must not only declare war on injustice, but also on immorality, hatred, division, tribalism, HIV/AIDS, lack of education, malaria, unclean water and manmade famines.

All of these things will not be accomplished without everyone’s contribution. The death of those people who died on the streets of Addis Ababa, in Gambella, in the Oromo region, the Amhara region, the Ogaden region, the Sidamo region, the Afar region, the Southern Nations region and in the Tigrayan region, will only be a blessing if they bring spiritual reformation, peace, harmony, justice and prosperity to Ethiopia. Those who have died and those in prison have done their share. The important question now is—have you done your “**Dirsha**” share! If not, it is never too late! If yes, don’t stop. Instead—do more!

For how long are we Ethiopians going to be oppressed and killed by the same governments that are supposed to protect us? For how long are we going to continue to die on the road as we try to escape from the injustice, misery, pain, death, lack of education and health care as we try to run towards other countries for a better and safer life? Why must we seek life, happiness and opportunity in a foreign land rather than in our own ancestral land that should be our sanctuary? We must work together to bring the exodus of our people to an end! Let us put this to an end so our children and our grandchildren will not drown in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen or Somalia, in the refugee camps in Kenya, in the desert lands of Sudan or in some unknown country in the Middle East or Europe!

If we really believe in the principles of peace, equality, freedom, justice, prosperity and loving humanity, we can work towards the real transformation of our society. Let it begin with you! Do your “**Dirsha**”!

May God find us faithful to Him in all that we do and may He bring peace, justice, freedom, morality and most of all—the fear and love of God—to our beloved country of Ethiopia!

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