

## **TIME TO SAY NO IN UNISON IS NOW!**

*A patriotic appeal: by Ayal-Sew Dessye*

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Calls for cooperation and unity of action among and by opposition groups have been every so often heard since TPLF/EPRDF usurped state power. And patriotic and democratic Ethiopians have answered every call unfailingly. Equally true is the fact that those calls, to the dismay of the Ethiopian people and to the frustration of many who made those earnest and sincere efforts, were not heeded by everyone and have not yielded concrete and enduring results, mainly because they lack solid structure and continuity. Many have written about it, and there are ongoing calls for and relentless efforts to bring the democratic opposition, particularly unity forces, together in order to form a common platform that could and would give an effective and sober leadership to our people's struggle, or at least make sound and tangible contribution toward its fruition.

Be that as it may, and hoping that this time the call for unity based on democratic principles that is inclusive and unambiguously Ethiopian in every aspect, could be heeded, and Ethiopian political organizations along with civic and professional groups could come together before it is too late to do anything, there now is an urgent need for all of us to act in unison to abort the planned aggressive campaign by the Meles regime to further divide and weaken opposition to its ongoing anti-people and anti-Ethiopian predatory and destructive policies.

Given the popular revolts unfolding in North Africa and the Middle-East, the regime of Meles Zenawi is obviously unnerved by the very prospect of similar popular uprising in Ethiopia. In an effort to preempt any possible popular uprising, the regime has embarked on its renewed efforts that it is best at; on one hand creating an environment of fear and acrimony among our people by inciting religion and ethnic-based strife, and on the other, divert the attention of and divide and slice Ethiopians abroad (in the Diaspora) in order to render them powerless. The recent church burning in Jimma area is a clear manifestation of what these ruthless rulers are capable of doing and the extent to which they are ready to go in their effort to cling to power and delay their inevitable demise. Their callous disregard for human life and their willingness to do anything to stay in power are well established facts.

The pro-democracy Ethiopian community outside of the country has been staunchly anti-TPLF/EPRDF and remains to be a constant irritation and a thorn in the rulers' neck. Following their crushing defeat in the 2005 general elections, curbing opposition coming from this community was one of the rulers' top priorities. As we all know, soon after they brutally suppressed the aspirations of Ethiopians for a democratic system in 2005, the regime launched a systematic campaign designed to divide the Ethiopian community overseas (the "Diaspora"). Even churches were not immune to this sinister campaign. In the name of "investment opportunities for Ethiopians in the Diaspora" and a meaningless "dialogue and overture", they lured some and deceived many. To a greater extent, they succeeded in creating division among Ethiopians, which in turn, as designed, contributed to the overall weakening of the opposition.

While the regime is fully engaged in uprooting Ethiopian peasant farmers in the process of its massive land sale to foreigners, and when Ethiopians are experiencing economic deprivation and political suppression on a colossal and unprecedented scale, talk of "investment and transformation" in Ethiopia is ludicrous and very insulting. By first compelling Ethiopians living abroad who have property in the country to personally re-register, which required detailed personal information about each individual home/property owner including finger prints, the regime believes that it is now in a position to "expect" any cooperation it asks of them; simply put, it believes that it can blackmail them. It should be noted that, although the regime owns all land in Ethiopia, as it does everything else, it is every Ethiopian's birth right to own property or do business in his/her country of birth, and directly supporting the regime and its detrimental and injurious policies just because they own a house, a business or a piece of property is demented and unconscionable. It is an insult and Ethiopians should be aware of the implications of

allowing, let alone participating in this diabolical political maneuvering. Ethiopians everywhere should be outraged that a repressive regime that is uprooting peasant farmers and denying their basic rights of ownership at home is engaged in a charade campaign of "investment and transformation". This is a campaign of sheer treachery that is aimed at buying the support and cooperation of Ethiopians who live outside of their country, and a dubious effort to drive a wedge between them and Ethiopians at home.

As someone who is not eager or is not predisposed to oppose for the sake of opposing and who had not even shied away from openly supporting some selective measures of this regime in the past, I am convinced that Ethiopians in Europe and North America should foil this latest orchestrated campaign of deceit and disinformation. The stakes are high if we allow it to even partially succeed. Failing to do so would be a prelude to further weakening of the opposition abroad. As it would be easily interpreted for being a support to the regime and its derisive policies, it could send a deeply poignant message that is injurious to the morale of the Ethiopian people. Why is the regime eager to talk to Ethiopians abroad about "investment and transformation" at this time when it is denying even the courtesy of basic consultation with the peasant farmers whose land it is giving away to foreigners? Why does anybody in the Diaspora believe that this regime would allow the freedom to "invest" freely when it is denying Ethiopians their basic rights to ownership without necessarily associating themselves with the regime or becoming at its total mercy? Can there be any guarantee for free investment as we know it under a restrictive system that controls every aspect of political and economic life?

We know that what the regime is attempting to do is dividing Ethiopians to facilitate its efforts to fully control the Diaspora community. In these times of popular empowerment, Ethiopians in the Diaspora should not only expect their countrymen and women to rise up against the Meles Zenawi tyranny and for the respect of their democratic rights, but should show their concern about and solidarity with them by saying No to the regime's planned North America and Europe meaningless and poisonous "investment and transformation" devious political campaigns. Anyone wanting to participate in these farcical and sinister campaigns, whose only mission is to further divide Ethiopians and bolster support for the beleaguered regime, should know the implications. This political mission on "investment and transformation" is aimed at sending a clear and misleading message to the Ethiopian people that the regime's policies are accepted and supported by their compatriots in the Diaspora and that they should keep quiet. It is equally aimed at sending a misleading message to foreign governments that the regime has the support of Ethiopians both inside and outside of the country.

Needless to say that, because of our dismal failing to act together in a sober, principled and continuous manner, we have allowed this brutal regime to be confident enough and to have the nerve to come where we are, launch an aggressive campaign and ask us to "invest". Let us show our resolve and unity by standing together and saying NO! If we fail to say No and shame them, we should know that we are not only sending the wrong message to our people inside the country that we do not care about them and about what they are going through, but our inaction could be misinterpreted to mean that Ethiopians in the Diaspora agree with the murderous policies of the regime, we are in cahoots with their tormentors and they should be happy with the regime! If that is not what we want, I urge every political organization, civic and professional group and all patriotic Ethiopians to join the counter campaign and act in unison to say NO to treachery and tyranny! And NO to fake investment! (I am glad Ethiopian Democratic Hibre Hizb Unity Movement (EDHUM) has called for unity of action, and hope others will do the same, not only by issuing statements but more importantly by acting too). Ethiopians know how and where to invest once they are FREE. We cannot bargain away our freedoms for unrealizable and malicious talk of "investment" and empty promises of "transformation". The one urgent transformation Ethiopians want and need is democracy.

Long live Ethiopia! Long live our unity!!