



# Free and Fair Election Requires Substantive Negotiation!

## Press Statement

**For Immediate Release, 21 October 2009**

The Ethiopian National Priorities Consultative Process (ENPCP), a network of rights based civil society organizations, is convinced that free and fair election is an important instrument for the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and the installation of a government that is accountable to the electorate. A democratically elected government opens political space for the opposition and civil society organizations, and has a better chance of resolving conflicts, building political stability and economic prosperity that helps stem the recurring scourge of hunger. It is from this firm belief that ENPCP enunciated the minimum conditions that are necessary for holding free and fair election in Ethiopia, in 2010. These conditions are available at the following link [http://www.enpcp.org/ENPCP\\_Declaration\\_on\\_Free\\_and\\_Fair\\_Election.pdf](http://www.enpcp.org/ENPCP_Declaration_on_Free_and_Fair_Election.pdf) (also visit the ENPCP web page for additional information on our network, <http://www.enpcp.org/> ) and were reaffirmed at a public gathering in Chicago, on 2 July 2009. Furthermore, ENPCP has also pleaded with the new administration in the United States to take all the necessary steps to help ensure that there is an unfettered free and fair election in Ethiopia in 2010 - see also the link below.

[http://www.enpcp.org/ENPCPs\\_Letter\\_To\\_President\\_Obama\\_July-24-09\\_Media.pdf](http://www.enpcp.org/ENPCPs_Letter_To_President_Obama_July-24-09_Media.pdf)

ENPCP members also note the recent positive intervention of the diplomatic community in Addis Ababa whose past posture, in the view of the general public, did not put enough pressure to temper the bellicose stand of the ruling regime. Our hope was and still is that the negotiations between the ruling regime and the opposition will be broader in scope so that the process paves the way for a comprehensive settlement of the country's governance problems. We keep observing that the present negotiations between EPRDF and most opposition parties do not bode well, in some cases even abruptly interrupted, simply because the government is irresponsibly posturing to escape from substantive and an all inclusive negotiation.

As indicated by the International Crisis Group's (ICG) September 4, 2009 statement, Ethiopia is in great danger of plunging into a new crisis. The ICG's report is yet another addition to the mountain of damaging evidence against the EPRDF regime. The intransigence on the part of the ruling party cannot continue long without exacerbating the crisis identified by ICG. Despite the widespread international concerns, the government is using its propagandist machine to hide and misrepresent the crisis in the country and in the Horn of Africa. We deplore Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's recent diatribe against the ICG, an organization whose governing board is graced by the presence of former respected political leaders and international civil servants. The international community must therefore realize that the government is once again obstructing Ethiopians the opportunity to live in peace, and install a democratically elected government that is accountable to the electorate. The intransigence of the regime that is spearheaded by Meles Zenawi and Bereket Simon, must therefore be challenged, and should not be allowed to plunge the country into yet another crisis. We in the ENPCP therefore share ICG's concerns, and appeal to both the political parties, and the diplomatic community to resume the negotiations by quickly moving into the substantive issues that make the forthcoming election free, fair and transparent. The negotiations also must be transparent. Furthermore, adequate consultation with the key stakeholders of the country, that is, the 80 million Ethiopians to make this an all inclusive negotiation is absolutely necessary.

The present negotiation on election code of conduct is insufficient in itself. It is opaque to ensure a free and fair election. It can neither resolve current confrontations, nor does it prevent the type of conflicts identified by the ICG. It does not create the roadmap for the installation of a government that is accountable to the electorate. It does not repeal TPLF/EPRDF's draconian laws. It does not bring the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and human rights abuses to justice. It does not lead to restorative justice to the victims of crimes against humanity and gross human rights violations. It does not lead to the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience including the release of Judge (Miss) Birtukan Mideksa, the President of the Unity and Justice Party to lead her party into the next election. Thus, the positive efforts of the diplomatic community in Addis Ababa would only be posturing if it is unable to secure the immediate release of all political prisoners, without any precondition. It is preposterous to assume that negotiations on code of conduct will succeed while at the same time elected and key political leaders are languishing in prison, or are in exile or are excluded and forced into clandestine and armed struggle. It would be unfair if the diplomatic community does not restrain EPRDF from putting undue pressure on the opposition parties to participate in an election, the outcome of which is predetermined. After witnessing the abysmal governance in Ethiopia by dictatorial misrule for nearly two decades, is it not high time for donor nations to start reexamining their double standard policies of democracy and focus on the well being of the majority of the Ethiopian population instead of buttressing one of the most ruthless and sectarian leaders in Africa?

The international community must not forget that the 2005 Ethiopian national election was blatantly rigged. As a result, at least 193 innocent civilians who peacefully protested were massacred in broad day light by the Special Forces of TPLF, called *Agazi*, which operated under the direct command of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi who was also seeking a new term of office. Close to 40,000 people were incarcerated immediately following the imposition of a Marshall Law which forbade any assemblies and/or protests. Elected political leaders were thrown to jail for over 20 months, and some of the leaders like Judge (Miss) Birtukan Mideksa are still in prison. Since the last election, not a single public demonstration or strike or any form of dissent has been allowed. Assemblies and demonstration permits were and are routinely denied, and the government continues to send vigilantes to disrupt public meetings that were called by the opposition. In short, normalcy has not returned to the country, and all indications are that Ethiopia is moving from one crisis to another. As shown in the recent Meles Zenawi's "resignation" drama, he is determined to continue his tyrannical rule in Ethiopia, and the international community must refrain from being a party to this gamesmanship.

As the next election is fast approaching, the Government of Meles Zenawi is in a desperate need of legitimacy. It is poised to conduct yet another sham election in which the major opponents of the regime are either excluded from the contest or are neutralized through overt and covert onslaughts. In addition, Meles has completely failed to separate his party's interest from that of the State. In contravention of international norms and standards, including the African conventions that it has ratified, TPLF/EPRDF is foolishly granting government jobs to its new recruits in return for their loyalty and votes at the next election. It has controlled the commanding heights of the economy. The National Election Board of Ethiopia is still infested by the TPLF/EPRDF cadres. The civil service is blotted with grossly incompetent TPLF/EPRDF ethnic based militia. The top brass of the army and key government positions remain mono-ethnic. Worse, a hyperinflationary economy that is accompanied by severe shortage of foreign exchange, power and water shortages in urban public facilities and in private residences, looming famine, and poor political leadership are additional problems that are exacerbating the misery of 80 million Ethiopians. It is irresponsible on the part of the government to ridicule aid agencies when they are trying to feed millions of Ethiopians that his government has been unable to support. After 18 years in government power and about a quarter of a century at the helm of the TPLF, Meles has dismally failed to reform Ethiopia's agriculture, and to establish a sound early warning system. The responsibility for hunger related deaths, misery, rural-urban migration, perpetual dependency on food aid, and starvation falls at the doorsteps of Zenawi and his TPLF regime. Meles is hiding this hunger and food shortage because he knows well the political consequences of the famines of 1975 and 1984.

Hence, all things considered, the planned date for the next election is increasingly becoming too close for opening the political space, to engage in meaningful agreements between the ruling regime and the opposition, and to put in place the logistical requirements for free and fair election. We, therefore, believe that it is necessary (i) that the international community, especially the donor representatives in Addis Ababa, take appropriate measures so that the ruling regime does not obstruct constructive initiatives proposed by opposition parties for free and faire electoral process, and (ii) that the parties must jointly agree to fast track the negotiation on substantive matters as the election date is fast approaching. Unless these are done without delay, we are deeply concerned that not only would the scheduled election of 2010 be a farce, but it will create more dissatisfaction, more rifts, and the escalation of conflicts which serve the interests of no one.

**May Civil Societies Join Hands to Speak and Act in Unison!**  
**May God Bless Ethiopia With a Free and Fair Election!**

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