

Statement on the Initiation of the "Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia"

United Ethiopian Democratic Forces **(UEDF)**

Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement **(OFDM)**

Somali Democratic Alliance Forces **(SDAF)** and

Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty **(Arena)**

Together with the Honorable Dr. Negaso Gidada and His Excellency Ato Seye Abraha have been engaged in an in-depth analysis of the multifarious outstanding problems of the country. Pursuant to this, we have reached at an agreement to work together under the appellation "Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia". The issues hereunder are the subjects of consensus on the basis of which the "Forum" was initiated.

(1). Aware of the reality that in the current epoch democracy is rapidly gaining ground globally; whereas on the other hand, in Ethiopia, although the feudal imperial rule and then after, the military dictatorship of the Derg regime were eliminated by the relentless struggle of the people and the democratic forces; we are seriously concerned that EPRDF, which seized power in the wake of the downfall of the Derg has not been able to address the basic questions of the Ethiopian people's - namely, democracy, justice, equality, development and peace;

(2). Cognizant of the chronic problems, i.e., violation of human and democratic rights of citizens, violation of the rule of law by the present state apparatus, lack of independence of the justice system, prevailing social injustice, stifling of the freedom of expression of expression, and the intimidation and harassment

associated with organizing political parties - that prevail in Ethiopia now as ever before, and the need for an immediate solution to the problems;

(3). Given that the legal framework that defines federalism in Ethiopia is respected, the violation of the rights of all Ethiopians to engage in developmental activities and also work and earn their living in areas of their choice, compounded with the lack of job security; and the fact that this is militating against the creation of a vital sense of unity that should prevail among the peoples, and this violation is undermining the peoples' spirit of ownership of their country and the regions they belong to, is a serious cause for

(4). Strongly believing that the question of nations and nationalities that had remained unresolved for generations in Ethiopia, is still hanging in the balance due to the undemocratic nature, mistaken policy and practices of the EPRDF; and concerned that lack of correct handling of the problem might lead to a far more complicated dire consequences for the country;

(5). Concerned about the ever increasing complication of outstanding problems of Ethiopia, which is gaining prominence as a result of EPRDF government's persistent resistance to the various demands for seeking solutions by involving all stakeholders (i.e., political, civic, professional organizations, etc);

(6). Deeply concerned by the unprecedented clashes that have been taking place between neighboring peoples of adjacent Regions of the country that have been causing heavy losses in human life and property;-and outraged by the inaction of EPRDF government to provide solution to the deplorable recurrent carnage;

(7). Concerned by the inability of the EPRDF government to discharge the responsibility and obligation of upholding the inviolability of Ethiopia's borders and sovereignty;

(8). Concerned that the ravage of widespread hunger, the sky rocketed prices of essential commodities, high unemployment and the prevailing abysmal poverty,

compounded with the horrid corruption the current system of government has stooped into, are threatening the wellbeing of our peoples;

(9). Convinced that it is a longstanding desire of the Ethiopian peoples that various political groups coordinate their activities to create an atmosphere whereby a culture of respect for each other, tolerance "and accommodation would prevail in the political landscape of the country, so that a genuine democratic transition will be possible; under which solutions to the outstanding problems of the country could be realized through a peaceful competition between alternatives agendas that seek to provide solutions;

(10). Aware of the inability of various opposition political parties to mobilize the population around a common minimum political agenda and thus unable to emerge as a force to be reckoned with by contributing to the peaceful struggle; Therefore, we have initiated the "Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia" based on the following mutually agreed principles. The "Forum" will be open to all political organizations, groups, and individuals upon the unanimous consent of all members.

(11). Common Principles of the "Forum"

Building a prosperous Ethiopia based on the equality of all its nations, nationalities and peoples where human and democratic rights are respected, and where socioeconomic justice reigns supreme. Specifically,

1 1.1. Respect for human rights in all its entirety;

11.2. Establishment of free and independent justice system to ensure the rule of law.

11.3 Respect for democratic rights without any limitations. i.e.

(a). The right to organize and act freely without limits,

(b). The right to speak, to write and to express one's ideas freely,

(c). The holding of free and fair elections by neutral election administrators, and

(d).The formation of a multiparty democratic system.

11.4 Concurrently respect individual rights, the rights of the nations, nationalities, peoples and groups.

11.5 Uphold the unity and sovereignty of Ethiopia

12. Common Goals of the "Forum"

12.1 Organize discussion forums to facilitate discourse and debate around fundamental issues that are current on the political landscape of Ethiopia so as to identify common positions that we may be able to adopt jointly.

12.2 Engage in a coordinated struggle in order to exert pressure on the ruling party and government to create conducive political environment for free and fair elections and plan a common strategy for the forthcoming local and national elections of 2010.

12.3 Jointly act against the illegal pressures and abuses perpetrated by the ruling party on the opposition political parties and their members and supporters, civic society organizations and individuals and the free press, each of which are critically essential for building a democratic system of government.

12.4 Issue joint statements in order to seek solutions to the burning issues of public and national concern and engage in legal and peaceful recourse to mobilize public support for the issues.

12.5 In order to garner international support for the common objectives laid down above, launch a concerted diplomatic campaign.

Therefore, we call upon all the peoples of Ethiopia to support this auspicious initiative undertaken to address the pervasive shortcomings that have hitherto been characteristic of the opposition political parties.

1. United Ethiopian Democratic Force **(UEDF)**
2. Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement **(OFDM)**
3. Somali Democratic Alliance Forces **(SDAF)**
4. Arena Tigray for Democracy and Sovereignty **(Arena)**

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