



Saving Ethiopia for Good: The Case for National Dialog, Reconciliation, and a New Order

IMBYLTA GROUP
(<https://hageraden.org/>)

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The combination of ineptitude and scheming by the ethnicist ruling group of Ethiopia has finally pushed the country into the grim world of cycles of civil war. The morning after the end of the "hot" phase of the ongoing internecine civil conflict, Ethiopians will rightly ask about the way out of the conflict trap. The "normal politics" of stage-managed elections and pathological lies have failed miserably. Our grand solution is an all-inclusive transitional political settlement that involves two stages:

- (1) a robust peace and reconciliation process to produce a consensus agenda for national salvation; and*
 - (2) the election of a constituent assembly or a transitional Shengo to draft a citizen-based constitution to pave the way for cleaning up the oppressive structures of ethnic supremacy and the looting of public assets.*
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The future of Ethiopia is looking grim by the day. In the Spring of 2021, the **Imbylta** group held a series of consultations under the motto of “save our country.” Mindful of the deep structural nature of Ethiopia’s political crisis, we called attention to the need for understanding and delineating the immediate as well as long-term structural solutions to Ethiopia’s existential angst. Leaving such pressing matters as the cessation of hostilities, ensuring peace and security outside of the war zones, and dealing with myriad shocks (Covid-19, locust invasion, drought, etc.) to the many other Ethiopian groups who know better, we have chosen to do our part by contributing practicable ideas about the morning after—*what should come after the end of hostilities and elections*.

With this in mind, we made public last April a bold and lengthy analytical document, the **Declaration** (www.hageraden.org), which explains what systemic transition should look like if Ethiopians are to extricate the country from the quagmire of polarizing political ethnicity onto a fighting chance to build a democratic order. The Declaration discusses in some detail three possible pathways (Prosperity-led, Government of National Unity, All-Stakeholder Shengo), and explained why the third, the all-inclusive approach, has the best chance of producing an irreversible transition from tyranny to a free society.

Our country, one of the oldest independent states in the world, continues to careen from one crisis to another with an alignment of domestic and foreign enemies. We wish to update you on our thinking in light of recent momentous developments in Ethiopia. A lot has indeed happened in the months between April 2021 and September 2021:

- Parliamentary and regional elections were held, which gave over 95% of the seats in the Federal Parliament to the ruling Prosperity Party.
- The elections in Oromia (which accounts for about a third of the parliamentary seats) were virtually uncontested, another 20% of the electoral districts could not hold elections, and a good number of the rest are being contested in court by the opposition parties. In other words, the much-touted elections produced no mandate for PP since two-thirds of the districts did not witness free and fair elections that meet international standards. This confirms our pre-election claim that the country’s deep-seated problems cannot be solved by manipulated elections.
- Administrative border conflicts and ethnic cleansings continued unabated in several regional states, who have been strident in claiming quasi-sovereignty, with the Federal security forces apparently and recklessly watching in willful complicity.
- The civil war between the two factions of the former EPRDF, the TPLF wing, and the Biltsigna wing, to control the Ethiopian state and economy, intensified with an alarmingly high price to life and property. Self-servingly dubbed a law-enforcement operation, the disastrous civil war centered in Tigray has now been fully

internationalized fully to produce a deep hostility toward the Abiy regime by the West.

- The civil strife has also been nationalized by the *Kitet* call against TPLF terrorism in the face of the great damage inflicted on the Federal forces and massive lootings and lootings by the TPLF in northern Wollo, Afar, and southern Gondar. In the meantime, the pogrom against Amhara and other residents in Oromia and the Southern Nations by the so-called Oromo Liberation Army and its supporters has continued unabated. The mind-boggling propaganda to misrepresent the conflict as Tigre-Amhara or TPLF-Federal, rather than about who will be at the helm of ethnic federalism, has done much damage to the Truth and the government's credibility.

Ethiopia's deep-seated internal polarization and external vulnerabilities have predictably created enormous confusion about the root causes of the national malaise and how to address them thoughtfully to save the country:

- We wish to update the scenarios that informed our call last Spring for a two-stage process (National Dialog and Reconciliation followed by an election of a Transitional Shengo).
- We wish to underscore the fact the root cause of the existential crisis is the conflict between the Ethiopian people and the beneficiaries of the ethnocentric system rather than between TPLF and Biltsigna per se.
- We would like to explain how and why our conception of National Dialog and Reconciliation differs from the similar-sounding proposals proliferating in the media by narrowly self-serving armed and extremist political groups and their external sponsors.

So, what form should our call in April for a national dialog take at this pivotal moment to achieve our recommended outcome—peace with justice and a citizenship-based constitution? To begin to answer this vexed question, we need to clarify concepts and tease out the lessons from best practices in post-conflict settings that are relevant to Ethiopia.

A robust national dialog, for sure, is the necessary entry point for bargained political settlements that would bring a negotiated peace in conflict-prone Ethiopia where interminable violent contests to capture the State are constitutionalized. Peace, based solely on an accord among combatants in a civil war, is necessary but it is not sufficient for inclusive reconciliation. Ethiopia should chart a bold, inclusive, and innovative reconciliation process to usher in the New Year of 2014 E.C.

Furthermore, how the dialog is conducted is as important as the expected outcomes—broad consultations and clarity of the endpoints are essential elements for success. A successful national dialog process must produce a consensus “national agenda of

institutional transformation” by accommodating all fundamental interest groups of society. As we explained in the Declaration, a national consensus must emerge from the inclusive and protracted national dialog that embraces *Ethiopian sovereignty, the indivisible unity of its people, full accountability for the loss of life and property, and a citizenship-based constitutional order.*

Experts in national dialog and reconciliation have pinpointed certain guiding principles to follow in the context of a hyper-polarized political environment where incumbents still control a wide network of stifling control over the political, economic, and social institutions of a country. Creating space for an autonomous process of deliberation and negotiation is vital for avoiding capture and backsliding:

- The central government must demonstrate a capability to monopolize large-scale violence rather than the annihilation of competitors along with a willingness to enter into a broad-based power-sharing arrangement to end the civil conflict;
- The conveners, including the observers, of the national dialog, should have the credibility of competence and political non-partisanship;
- The broadest possible representation is key to obtaining legitimacy;
- The truth about past grievances should anchor reconciliation by all means;
- The process and outcomes of the dialog should be clear at the outset, including the mechanism for monitoring and implementation of commitments.
- The technical and financial resources must be identified and obtain to underwrite the involvement of large numbers of participants and consultations.
- There should be an effective communications strategy to build trust and ownership of the process.

We have earlier identified three possible pathways of transition out of the current quagmire which is pictured in the flow diagram below:

The first possible pathway is what most are hoping for— for the Abiy government to be sober-minded enough to recognize that, just as a manipulated 99% electoral win did not save TPLF, a flawed election amid a civil war that purports to produce a 95% electoral win will not save the incumbent Prosperity Party (PP). It also means that the hegemonic ruling party must win the hearts and minds of the majority of the Ethiopian people to stand behind it by being honest to the people and enter a transitional arrangement with all stakeholders—not just the armed ones. PP will have to limit itself to restoring law and order and assuming a reasonable but defiant posture in engaging external detractors.

For this option to work, the government must also allow an independent National Dialog process to discover a winner-all solution to the country’s structural problems while establishing full accountability. It is not our job, of course, to dictate the modalities other than to insist, for the sake of the country, that a genuinely Ethiopian process of inclusive

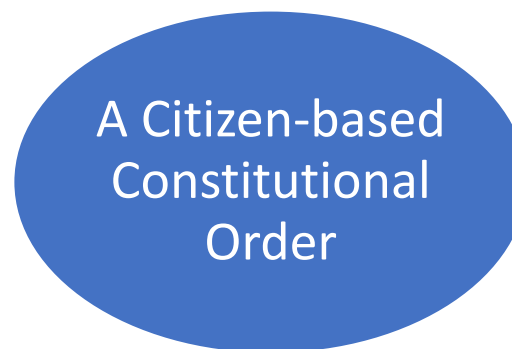
reconciliation be given a chance to conclude with the election of an independent Constituent Assembly to draft a democratic constitution.

The second possibility, possibly the worst of all outcomes, is an EU-USA mandated shortcut that limits negotiation to primarily the TPLF and PP and perhaps, secondarily, to the OLF and other opposition parties. This shortsighted strategy of restoring the EPRDF in a different guise to serve as a client regime in the emerging, Egyptian-orchestrated, neocolonialist scramble for the Horn of Africa is an insult to both the democratic aspirations and the long-term economic interests of the Ethiopian people.

The third way, our preferred path, embraces Ethiopian exceptionalism, African freedom, and the core principles of a democratic dispensation. As we painstakingly explain the Declaration, Ethiopians deserve an inclusionary political settlement that renounces discriminatory ethnicism or any form of theocracy and instead embraces a strong and equally accountable government. This is an arduous road but a well-crafted national dialog is the first step in the journey of a thousand miles that will produce prosperity with freedom for all.

Thank you all for constructively engaging with all pan-Ethiopian forces to ensure that Ethiopia will survive and thrive!!

Three Possibilities for Constitutional Reform in Ethiopia



* *All-inclusive* conversations to craft a National Agenda for change.

* *An autonomous* process, not controlled by the Prosperity Party or other narrowly-based groups.

* A process that is *free* of external geopolitical pressure.

* Urgency of *peace* and stability.



Option 1A (Possible PP Model): Change some articles of the Constitution (such as Art. 39), using the existing legal mechanism for amendment.

Option 1B (Possible PP-plus Model): Election of a *Constituent Assembly* from each *Woreda* while honoring the results of the 2021 fraught elections.

Option 2 (Imbylta Model): Election of a *Transitional Shengo* which also serves as a *Constituent Assembly*.