



Open Letter: Extricating Ethiopia from Cycles of Civil War

TO: The Government of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Political Parties, Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations, Inter-faith Forum of Ethiopian Religious Leaders, African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, United Nations, European Community, and the Governments of the United States of America, Russia, China, and India

FROM: The IMBYLTA Group on Systemic Political Transition in Ethiopia
<https://hageraden.org>

DATE: September 11, 2021

We wish the people of Ethiopia a Happy New Year. Let peace, prosperity and unity prevail in 2014 E.C.

It is fair to ask why Ethiopia is so prone to political crises. Proper diagnosis is, after all, essential for proper treatment. Getting recent political history right is an important part of the political diagnosis.

After 27 years of misrule by the authoritarian and secessionist the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), Ethiopians rejoiced at the glimmer of hope that came with the rise of Dr. Abiy Ahmed. Much of that hope has, however, been dashed in the three years since. The emptied prisons are now filled with political prisoners. A large number of churches and mosques have been burned under the Government's watch and bafflingly apparent complicity; millions have been killed or displaced in every regional state, orchestrated by well-organized and ethnic politicians. The low-intensity civil war, at least five years in the making, has now taken the malignant form of a mutual annihilation contest between two modern armies—one led by the TPLF and the other by the ruling Prosperity Party (PP).

More alarmingly, ordinary youth are now being drafted to join the civil conflict to the detriment of their lives, the social fabric, and the economy. Ethiopia's political problems, for sure, are deep-seated and rooted in the polarizing system of ethnic apartheid that the TPLF instituted in which self-serving elites from various communities are invested. Talk of federalism and confederalism are intended to mask the impulse of control and plunder that identity politics encourages.

In April 2021, the IMBYLTA group of patriotic Ethiopians, recognizing the toxicity of divide-and-rule ethnocentrism, issued a roadmap for systemic transition that we called a **Declaration** to save the country (the document is downloadable from www.hageraden.org). We highlighted the following critical points by way of offering a compelling vision for the future of the country:

(1) Ethiopia is in a deep systemic crisis, and it can get out of the quagmire only through a grand bargain among fundamental stakeholders. The end goal is to pave the way for a systemic transformation rather than the failed “normal politics” of managed elections and law-enforcement operations;

(2) The grand bargain should be anchored in the core values of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia, recognition for the ultimate sovereignty and empowerment of all Ethiopians (as free citizens entitled to all internationally-recognized rights) and the unity of its multicultural people and the agency of Ethiopians rather than foreign geopolitical interests; and

(3) Our preferred roadmap for a systemic transition, following the ceasefires, embraced a two-stage modality: an all-inclusive National Dialog for truth and reconciliation which should produce an elected interim parliament (Shengo). The primary duties of the Shengo are to oversee a caretaker government of technocrats, the drafting of a citizen-based constitution, the establishment of several commissions to clean up the dense odious web of oppressive laws and structures and oversee free and fair elections.

In the months since April 2021, three momentous developments have vindicated our vision. They also complicated the transition we had envisaged (see our **Update**, www.hageraden.org). Stage-managed elections produced a 95 percent dominance by the ruling PP; a full-fledged civil war spearheaded by the TPLF and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), both of which have been labeled terrorists by Parliament, has replaced the localized flareups of ethnically-motivated political violence; and a concerted effort by the willfully ignorant but imperious Atlantic West and a hegemonic Egypt have chosen to vilify and destabilize the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) and unfairly punish the much-abused Ethiopian people. A life fear, uncertainty, hunger, and death has now engulfed the country.

Ethiopia, compared to peers, has historically been a model country of inter-communal embrace and peace. The TPLF and PP are currently engaged in a massive disinformation and misinformation campaign to hoodwink the Ethiopian people and the international community that this war is between the TPLF/OLA and the GoE. We have long argued that the manufactured socio-political polarization is between good (the Ethiopian people) and evil (the avaricious and polarizing TPLF/OLA and PP). The war in Ethiopia is ultimately about ending constitutionalized discrimination.

The ethnocrat propagandists would like to convince us that group rights and the accompanying we-versus-them politics is inevitable. It most certainly is not. The overnight abandonment of socialism with the fall of the Derg attests to the fleeting fate of alien ideologies to the Ethiopian body politic. Political misdiagnosis has serious implications for what is to be done: while *negotiation* to bring about ceasefire may be limited to the three combatant ethnic warlords (TPLF, PP, and OLA), a *national dialog* must include unarmed stakeholders representing the broad spectrum of Ethiopian interests to producing a lasting political settlement. The two political processes should not be conflated, and our contribution is focused on the longer-term process of national dialog to forge an accountable, democratic process of authority.

We are certainly heartened by the recent calls for a negotiated settlement of the hot civil strife to be followed up by a meaningful national dialog. These calls have come from Ethiopia (by religious leaders, civic organizations, and political parties) as well as the international community (AU, IGAD,

UN, EU, USA, Russia, India, and China). The focus has been the end of hostilities in the northern parts of the country, and addressing the looming humanitarian catastrophe in the Tigray, Afar, and Amhara regional states.

The urgent need to launch a meaningful national dialog to chart a peaceful future for the country, often mentioned in passing, has not received the serious attention it deserves. The problem with these generalized calls is that they display an inability or unwillingness to appreciate the deep-seated and peculiar nature of the Ethiopian political crisis. They also conflate negotiation among combatants with a national dialog for power-sharing that represents all sectors of society.

While the demand for silencing the guns and launch an ambitious rehabilitation program is necessary, it is not sufficient to restore lasting peace and prosperity if what follows it is a power-sharing arrangement between the ethnic lords in Mekelle and Addis Ababa. It is instructive here to note that entrenched civil strife was going on well before the hot war in Tigray, Amhara, and Afar. The call for a national dialog and reconciliation on the heels of a ceasefire **MUST**, therefore, be informed by a reasonable roadmap that will settle for good the competing visions about the future of the country.

Here is where the proposal put forth by IMBYLTA can make a huge difference, at least in the realm of ideas. As noted above, a robust all-stakeholder National Dialog, informed by Ethiopian realities, is an important first step following the end of hostilities. These goals and deliverables should undergird a consensus National Unity Agenda to be endorsed by all participants who are committed to Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, popular unity, and free citizenship. The National Unity Agenda will succeed only if it paves the way for an inclusive Constitution and free and fair elections.

The recent call for national dialog, especially the interfaith forum and the coalition of CSOs, has commendably demanded that the GoE provide an unprecedented free space for an inclusive process of truth-finding, reconciliation, and imaginative political settlement. This bold suggestion recognizes the fact that the ruling party has established a number of commissions for peace-building, resolving conflicts over administrative borders, and the like, all of which have proved to be window-dressing exercises because they have been hopelessly captured by the ruling party.

While we are skeptical about the willingness of PP to allow for such an independent dialog process by invoking its electoral mandate, what must be clear is that this process must address the country's structural problems if it is to succeed. Success, in our considered opinion, can be achieved only if the dialog ends with elected Constituent Assembly to draft a new, citizen-based constitution.

Our preferred roadmap, informed by the dream of democratic politics and a competitive economy, is the more challenging one of replacing the current parliament by an interim Shengo which would double as a constituent assembly. The details are available in the Declaration document.

The conflation of myopic and racist geopolitical interests with domestic stooges has brought us nothing but politically-motivated terrorism and state failure. We, therefore, urge all Ethiopians to look beyond the smokescreen of misinformation and shortsighted interests to explore ways of extricating the country for good from the worsening structural quagmire. We call on the Ethiopian Government to expeditiously end the conflicts raging in various parts of the country and permit an independent and inclusive process of national dialog to craft lasting solutions. We urge foreign friends of Ethiopia to listen to the thoughtful voices of those Ethiopians at home and in the Diaspora. They must strive to help the anchor country of the Horn of Africa chart a win-win dispensation by constructively engaging as dispassionate observers and impartial enforcers of key agreements.

Respectfully,

The IMBYLTA Group

Contact: hager.adenzi@gmail.com

Endorsed by: Ethiopian Dialog Forum, Vision Ethiopia, Hager Adin.