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**Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle (Shengo)**

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**An Open Letter to : President Obama, Prime Ministers Cameron and Harper, Chancellor Merkel, Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, Dr Kim, World Bank, Dr Donald Kaberuka, African Development Bank**

When Will the USA and the International Community Cease Being Complicit with the Ethiopian Regime's Tyranny?

The Government of the United States will convene a high level conference of African leaders in Washington from August 4-6, 2014, with President Obama hosting a dinner for African heads of government and state at the Whitehouse. The focus of the discussion is expected to be African-US political, economic, trade, development, investment and peace and security relations.

The Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle (SHENGO) welcomes this historic forum that places the African continent in the forefront of US public policy. We hope and expect that this Summit will go beyond the business as usual conversation of trade, investment, peace, national security and terrorism. Equally and perhaps more important in order to bring Africa to the modern world is for this Summit to discuss the vital role of good governance including press, religious and political freedom, the rule of law and independent institutions, civil society, the needs of Africa's bulging youthful population especially girls, brain drain, the private sector, the devastating impact of corruption and illicit outflow of capital that is bleeding African societies and the urgent need for free and fair elections. In our view, the dearth of these critical governance factors affects peace, stability and sustainable and equitable development.

We recognize that many African countries have extricated themselves from authoritarian and dictatorial rule and embraced multiparty democracy and governments that are accountable to the people. On the opposite side of the spectrum is Ethiopia where a punishing single-party system led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that dominates the ethnic-elite coalition, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), has virtually created and institutionalized a 'state of siege and terror,' under the pretext of fighting terrorism. The government of Ethiopia led by Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn has closed all semblances

of political, social and religious space. It continues to use the draconian Anti-Terrorism and Charities and Societies Proclamations enacted in 2009 to clamp down on all forms of peaceful dissent, extending its reach to opponents of Ethiopian origin who are now citizens of other countries. Simply put, the criminalization of dissent has created a climate of fear and disenfranchisement that is unprecedented in the country's history and unacceptable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Ethiopian government is now universally perceived as host of a terrorist state that punishes its own population on a daily basis. Ethiopians are left to fend for themselves. In light of this, there is a growing perception among Ethiopians that foreign humanitarian, development, security and military aid that is granted without serious monitoring and accountability contributes substantially to gross human rights violations by bolstering the arsenals of the TPLF/EPRDF. To our dismay and to the dismay of most independent observers across the globe, major bilateral donors such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada (the three largest bilateral donors), the European Union, China, an increasingly generous supplier and other credit provider; and multilateral donors such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank that channel \$4 billion in development assistance each year shore-up the regime without demanding that Prime Minister Haile Mariam's government respects human rights and releases political prisoners, including journalists.

### **The face of tyranny**

Ethiopia's abominable human rights records and economic mismanagement are well documented by credible human rights advocacy groups and think-tanks such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Genocide Watch and the African Coalition for Social Justice, the Oakland Institute, International Rivers, Freedom House, Global Financial Integrity, Transparency International and the Oxford University Multidimensional Poverty Index. Below is a summary of distress areas that could potentially lead to a social and political catastrophe not only in Ethiopia but the rest of the Horn.

This recurring assault on Ethiopian society is evidenced by the following:

- i) In a determination to divide and rule indefinitely, the TPLF/EPRDF pitilessly ethnic and religious groups against one another. Ethnic and religious divisions and claims on natural resources such as land are widespread and have reached an alarming stage. Ethnic cleansing is common with no one held accountable for atrocities in Gambella, the Awash Valley and the Ogaden and against the Amhara population. The suffocating political and social environment strengthens secessionist forces and contributes to terrorism.

- ii) The TPLF ethnic-elite that wields real power and vows “political power or death” is pushing Ethiopia toward fragmentation and ethnic and religion based civil war. Ethiopia’s long held tradition of peaceful coexistence among Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Muslims is now broken. This aggravates instability and may lead to another failed state in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is fortunate that Christians and Muslims understand the divide and rule strategy and tactics of the TPLF and have refrained from open religious conflict a Rwanda-like genocide. There is no guarantee that this understanding will continue.
- iii) The ruling party has, under the pretext of development, disenfranchised indigenous people in the Afar, Beni-Shangul Gumuz, Gambella, Omo Valley and Southern Regions. Its “Villagization” program funded by donor monies is intended to resettle more than two million Ethiopians evicted forcibly from their ancestral lands. Oakland Institute, International Rivers, Human Rights Watch and others point out that thousands have been forced to seek refugee status rather than accept forcible eviction. We note with appreciation that on July 14, 2014, a UK High Court ruled on allegations that the UK Department for International Development did not assess evidence of human rights violations in Gambella and that it was obliged to apply rigor in the provision of UK aid to Ethiopia. On January 12, 2012, Human Rights Watch concluded that the donor supported “Villagization” program has been “marked by forced displacement, arbitrary detentions, mistreatment and inadequate consultation.” Other donors should follow the UK model.
- iv) Rural farmers and urban dwellers have been evicted from their farms and homes to make room for new investors. Vacant lands have been granted to members of the ruling party and to foreign investors. These evictions, dispossessions and forced resettlements cause social, environmental and political catastrophes; and contribute to instability and civil conflict.
- v) Despite ominous signs that Ethiopian society may disintegrate and regional war in the Horn of Africa ensue, the TPLF shows no sign of respecting human rights and of ceasing its divisive and destructive policy of political power and economic monopoly at any cost. The party and state own more than 50 percent of the modern sector and all of the country’s natural resources.
- vi) The governing party has virtually wiped out independent media; imprisoned tens of journalists with trumped evidence; and forced at least 150 to flee the country for fear of retaliation. “After Eritrea, Ethiopia is the second top jailer of journalists in Africa and one of the ten worst jailers in the world.” As recently as July 11, 2014, the CPJ reported that “On June 25, 2014, 20 journalists from the state broadcaster in Oromia were denied entry to their stations,” allegedly for reporting on human rights abuses and massacres of Oromo students by TPLF special forces. These recurring assaults on journalists, political and civil opponents as well as indigenous people have been condemned by human rights groups; while the donor and diplomatic community remains silent and turns a blind eye.

## Donors need to live their values

- i) The donor and diplomatic community pours in \$ 4 billion dollars per year purportedly to alleviate poverty. As Human Rights Watch documented in its highly acclaimed fact-based report, "Development without Freedom," the Ethiopian government uses aid as another tool to reward and enrich friends and to punish opponents. Aid has not reduced poverty or alleviated major social ailments. Sixty-four percent of children are stunted. Literacy is 30 percent compared to the African average of 70 percent. In 2013, Ethiopia ranked 107<sup>th</sup> of 169 countries in access to education. In the same year, Freedom House gave Ethiopia a rating of 30 percent out of 100 in economic freedom. We agree with the conclusion that "Ethiopia is one of the un-freest countries" on the planet; and one of the un-healthiest. The latest Competitiveness Index ranks Ethiopia 140<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries. In 2012, UNDP's human development index gave it a ranking of 173 out of 178 countries.
- ii) Development and food aid dependent Ethiopia is at the same time afflicted by massive capital flight. Each year, billions of dollars are siphoned off illicitly and moved out of the country. In 2000-2009, Ethiopia lost \$11.7 billion; and in 2012 the University of Massachusetts confirmed Global Financial Integrity's (GFI) calculations and put the annual outflow at \$3.4 billion. Appalled by this massive outflow, GFI summed up the cancerous social and economic effects on Ethiopian society as follows:

"The people of Ethiopia are being bled dry. No matter how hard they try to fight their way out of absolute destitution and poverty, they will be swimming against the current of illicit capital leakage." The donor and diplomatic community can no longer afford to ignore this state system induced corruption and massive outflow to which foreign aid contributes.

- iii) We find it hard to believe that donors are still reluctant to condition aid on Ethiopian government commitment to respect human rights, the rule of law and free and fair elections. Ethiopia is a prime example that aid to the dictatorial government won't reduce poverty. In 2014, Ethiopia's per capita income is \$490 compared to the African average of \$1,700. We therefore find it unconscionable that aid dependent Ethiopia is among the most corrupt countries in the world. Over the past decade alone, this country that is unable to feed itself lost \$25 billion in one of the worst cases of illicit capital from one of the poorest and least developed countries in Africa.
- iv) The donor and diplomatic community is fully aware that the Ethiopian government spends several hundred millions of dollars each year to strengthen an already sophisticated and elaborate security system that goes beyond the country's real needs to defend itself against external threat. The reach of this security apparatus is unparalleled in Africa and is used routinely to monitor and suppress dissent and to destroy mobile, telephone, Internet, Facebook and other social media within and outside the country. Numerous bloggers, journalists and other media persons have been

arrested and or forced to flee the country. This massive amount could have been used to alleviate poverty and generate employment opportunities for millions of youth.

### **What we can do to avert catastrophe**

In short, it is time that donors make a bold move by supporting their own core values and promote human rights, press and religious freedom, the rule of law and democracy rather than continuing to shore-up the Ethiopian single-party dictatorial state that suppresses human rights and plunders Ethiopia for private gain. These values are fundamental in advancing stability and sustainability. Ethiopia's 94 million people, especially the voices of independent journalists, democratic activists, political dissidents, indigenous people, females and religious leaders must be heard. We say this unequivocally because most Ethiopians, especially youth who constitute the majority of the population, prefer democracy over authoritarian and dictatorial rule. In 2005, millions went to the polls and elected the opposition; an election whose outcome was reversed by the then Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Since then, hopes of political and social reform have evaporated. Mr. Hailemariam's government needs to reform soonest.

### **Ethiopia deserves to join the family of African democratic nations**

Prime Minister Hailemariam will be among the guests at this Summit. We showed his government's unrelenting assault on all segments of society, most recently exemplified by **the** precedent setting arrest, interrogation, abduction and subsequent rendition of Mr. Andargachew Tsige, a prominent political activist on June 24, 2014 by Yemeni and Ethiopian Security. This has formally and brazenly escalated and broadened the reign of terror by the TPLF and the ruling ethnic coalition, the EPRDF which it commands. A UK citizen, Mr. Tsige's forcible and criminal abduction and rendition to Ethiopia where he is undoubtedly facing the harshest treatment possible is an abrogation of international covenants and civilized behavior. Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the government of Yemen had an obligation to notify the Embassy of the United Kingdom. Ethiopians are angry that Yemeni authorities colluded with the Ethiopian government and handed Mr. Tsige to his tormentors; and the UK failed to demand his release the same way that it would have done if he were not an African. The same can happen to anyone of us.

SHENGO and other democratic and human rights groups believe that Mr. Tsige's case follows a systematic and recurrent pattern of state-sponsored witch-hunting, pursuit, arrest and imprisonment of political, social and religious dissenters within and outside Ethiopia that has gone on for almost a quarter of century. The situation has in fact deteriorated sharply under Prime Minister Hailemariam's watch. Similar renditions illustrate the point. In June 2014, Mr. Okello Okuway, an Ethiopian from Gambella and a Norwegian citizen was arrested in South Sudan and extradited to Ethiopia. He faces charges as a terrorist. Earlier Kenya detained and

extradited two Ethiopians of Oromo nationality accused of having links to the Oromo Liberation Front. They were sentenced to life in prison and one of them died in prison in 2013. Kenya arrested and extradited an Ethiopian with Canadian citizenship accused of belonging to the Ogaden National Liberation Front. He faces charges as a terrorist. Human Rights Watch reports that other political refugees have been sent to Ethiopia from neighboring countries.

Equally and as galling, the onslaught on the rights of indigenous people, civic, religious and political activists that espouse peaceful dissent has reached a tipping point. In January 2012, Human Rights Watch concluded that Ethiopia's Villagization program funded by donors was "marked by forced displacements, arbitrary detentions, mistreatments, and inadequate consultation with indigenous people in Gambella." On July 14, 2014, a UK High Court ruled on allegations that the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) "did not assess evidence of human rights violations in Ethiopia and should do so" soonest. Shengo notes with sadness that the donor community has failed to monitor similar abuses in connection with the massive Promotion of Basic Services project initiated in the aftermath of the 2005 elections. It is often used to punish opponents. On July 12, 2014, Human Rights Watch reported that the UK provides more than 300 million British pounds of aid to Ethiopia each year, "while the country's human rights record is steadily deteriorating." We call on the donor and diplomatic community to press the Ethiopian government to end its relentless and recurring human rights violations. These violations will only lead to a cataclysmic end, including genocide and civil wars.

On July 11, 2014, Tom Rhodes of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a human rights group that caters to journalists and had assisted 41 Ethiopian journalists in exile since 2009 reported that "On June 25, 2014, 20 journalists from the state broadcaster in Oromia were denied entry to their station's headquarters" allegedly in connection with student protests in the region that led to massacres by TPLF special forces. "The fear of being imprisoned next" has become common. Numerous journalists and others fled the country because it is a pattern for dissenters to be arrested and imprisoned "on trumped charges or none at all." On July 18, 2014, AFP reported that 9 bloggers and journalists arrested in May this year—shortly before Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to Ethiopia—were charged with "terrorism for having links to an outlawed group and for planning attacks." The draconian Anti-Terrorist and Societies and Charities Proclamations are now used routinely as blunt legal instruments to arrest and imprison anyone who struggles for freedom and justice, the rule of law, civil, human rights and political rights. AFP confirmed that "seven journalists have been jailed under the Anti-Terrorist Law, including two Swedish journalists sentenced for 11 years in 2012 and later pardoned" by the state. Ethiopians jailed have no such lack. "Eskinder Nega is serving an 18-year sentence for having links with Ginbot 7.

On July 8, 2014, the TPLF arrested 4 young and rising political leaders: Habtamu Ayalew and Daniel Shibeshi of Andinet, Yeshiwas Assefa of Semayawi and Abraha Desta, lecturer at Makelle University and member of the Executive Committee, Arena. These recent arrests contribute to the thousands of political prisoners including Eskinder Nega, Reeyot Alemu, Andualem Aragie, Bekele Gerba, Abubeker Mohamed, Tesfalem Woldeyes, Andargachew Tsige etc., etc. whose indomitable moral courage generations will never forget. Sadly, TPLF's security apparatus carries on these onslaughts with substantial technical, professional, logistical, informational and financial support from Western governments, especially the US, UK and Canada with the purported purpose of fighting and containing terrorism in the Horn--Alkaid a, Al-Shabab and other extremist and terrorist groups--against the Ethiopian people and avert the types of atrocities inflicted on the people of Kenya. Ethiopians are committed to anti-terrorism that is targeted at these and similar groups. Unfortunately Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorist Law makes no distinction whatsoever between real terrorists of the Alkaid a type; and political dissenters, independent journalists, human and religious rights advocates and or indigenous people. The CSO Law has virtually decimated civil society.

In short, Ethiopians face broad, sweeping and nation-wide crackdowns in the Amhara, Oromia, Gambella, Ogaden, Tigray, Addis Ababa, Afar and other regions that show the Anti-Terrorist and CSO laws are used as legal instruments against anyone who advocates and promotes freedom, justice, the rule of law and democracy. The world should know that these laws are intended solely to maintain TPLF minority rule permanently. The current unprecedented state of siege under Prime Minister Hailemariam is either ignored or unnoticed by the donor and diplomatic community. Ethiopians are left to defend themselves. We conclude from this systemic repression that no dissenter of any political, ethnic and religious persuasion at home or abroad is safe. Relentless arrests and extraditions by TPLF agents outside Ethiopia's boundaries are presumed to send a chilling message to human rights advocates; spread fear and division; weaken the opposition; and hinder the democratic momentum to replace the dictatorial regime by a democratic one. We believe that regardless of the level of repression and the number of arrests the struggle for justice in Ethiopia is unstoppable.

### **Time for Ethiopians to defend human rights and speak with one voice**

We call on Ethiopians wherever they reside to air their views in defense of human rights, the rule of law and democratization. We call on the donor community and people of good will across the globe to demand that the Ethiopian government led by Prime Minister Hailemariam respect human rights and release political prisoners. We further call on the donor community to condition all aid on Ethiopian government commitment to respect human rights and the cessation of relentless political harassment, arbitrary arrests, persecutions, imprisonments of

dissidents, confiscation of property. The Ethiopian people deserve to join the family of nations that enjoy democratic institutions and accountable government leaders.

Finally, we call on Ethiopia's political and civil opposition within and outside the country to agree on a unity of purpose that will serve all stakeholders, namely, save the country from disintegration and preserve Ethiopia's independence and territorial integrity; and enhance greater solidarity in defending and promoting freedom, justice and democracy for the country's 94 million people. It is no longer defensible to adhere to TPLF's corrosive policy of ethnic divide and rule and expect a better alternative in governance. We owe it to this and succeeding generations that we set aside minor differences and collaborate to serve the common good.

Cc:

Human Rights Watch

Amnesty International

Committee to Protect Journalists

Genocide Watch