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A note to CUD leadership and the neo-chauvinists.

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Dear CUD leaders;

Like any other Ethiopian national and non-partisan but a concerned Oromo, I would like to express my concern over the fact that you are detained and kept in jail without due process of law. Although I totally disagree with your political strategy and agenda, rest assured that I will fight for your right to express your views as long as it does not promote violence. I will also fight for the prevalence of the rule of law so that people are not arrested or detained for expressing their views. That being said and from the outset I have to highlight a fact that I don't belong to any group or political party and that this article is not intended to support one group and condemn the other one. I am just a concerned Oromo who is trying to understand the opposition agenda especially of the CUD regarding the never answered question of the Oromo people for freedom and equality. I am a bit at lose because on hand you – CUD - claim that you have the support of the vast majority of the Ethiopian people but on the other hand, facts on the ground suggest that the Oromos for example did not and do not support you at all. I am addressing this article to “you” it being not Hailu Shawl as a person but to CUD as an organization. Hence I am not expecting a reply from those CUD leaders who are in detention but rather from their supporters at home and in Diaspora who are free and have all the time and resource to reply if only they wish so.

This being said, I will try my level best not to be seen as someone who is accusing CUD because it failed to achieve its goal. I am also very much aware of a fact that it has been and continue to be part and parcel of our political culture that we are not accommodating dissenting views and hence I am going to be accused of siding with this or that group simply because I am going to disagree with CUD. In our country if one expresses his/her view which is deviating from the mainstream, that person is very likely to be doomed to be liable as an enemy. My close friends of long time, supporters of CUD already told me that Dr Marara and Dr. Beyene are no more the

heroes they used to be and that they are now “working for EPRDF” simply because they decided to join the parliament disregarding the “*fathwa*” as issued by CUD.

Please note that the random comparison I am making between CUD and EPRDF should not be seen as an _expression of my support to EPRDF. To the contrary. Being an Oromo and thus being member of a nation that suffered the most under EPRDF, I stand first on the line to witness the replacement of this regime by a democratic one. But we the Oromos are at cross roads. On one hand, we distaste EPRDF and wanted it to be replaced by an all-inclusive democratic government but on the other hand we fail to see sincerity in your political agenda.

In this article I frequently refer to “Amhara ruling system” and “Amhara elites” as the root cause of our problem and this should not be interpreted as me being against ethnic Amharas. As a matter of principle, I have no problem whatsoever with Amhara people (mass) who are as poor and disadvantaged as any other ethnic group in Ethiopia. The Amhara elites whom I normally refer to as “neo-chauvinists” are my targets. I am going to deal with two major issues here: your strategy to unseat EPRDF and your political agenda as seen by Oromos. As a prelude to all this however, I would like to raise one issue which revived a serious concern among us the Oromos. That is the issue of “**professional ethics**” as raised by some of the practicing lawyers who are now lining up to defend the right of the detained CUD leaders and supporters.

I was listening to an interview of one of the Ethiopian “defense lawyers” who was telling the world that he and his team have decided to defend the CUD leaders and supporters because of professional ethics. Professional ethics? Wow, I said!! This is the first time I ever heard from an Ethiopian lawyer that there is such thing called “professional ethics” which obliges practicing lawyers to go to court and defend “political prisoners”. The only time I heard that an Ethiopian lawyer defended non-common criminal detainees on *pro bono* basis, was in early 70s when an Oromo lawyer went to court and defended the numerous Oromo students who were expelled from Wingate Secondary school after their fight with the Tigres (Tigres and Eritreans). Then he defended them alone and managed to secure their release. That was in 1972-73 I believe, and now some 30+ years later I see a large crowd of practicing lawyers claiming that “professional ethics” obliged them to defend the “disadvantaged” CUD leaders. Nothing makes me happier than seeing Ethiopian lawyers invoking this principle as long as it is not ethnic-sensitive and non-discriminatory.

My problem is, however, why did it take these lawyers so long to realize that there is something called “professional ethics” although we have had one of the oldest Penal Code in Africa and the practice of arbitrary arrest and detention of political prisoners is not new to our history? If we leave the Haile Selassie and the Derg era out of this discussion and focus only on events which took place in Ethiopia since 1991, there were tens of thousands of Ethiopians who were detained, tortured, imprisoned, disappeared and even sentenced to death for committing political crimes which is not forbidden in international law. Although EHRCO has made numerous comments about these abuses, none of these Ethiopian practicing lawyers ever invoked “professional ethics” and came forward to defend the victims of political repression as projected and implemented by EPRDF. To the contrary it was foreign human rights NGOs who were making noises and

coordinating the dispatch of protest letters to the government of Ethiopia and still not a single Ethiopian lawyer was forthcoming to participate in that campaign.

What exactly triggered the invocation of this principle at this particular time when the brutality of EPRDF has been known all the way from 1992 onwards? How come these lawyers did not invoke the principle when tens of thousands of peaceful and innocent Oromos were imprisoned or killed by EPRDF security and law enforcement officials and now they invoke it when few CUD leaders are detained? What is the key word here? Is it the number of detainees, social/ethnic background of the detainees or causes of detention? I still fail to understand. Numbers wise, the number of those Oromos who were killed or imprisoned are hundreds of times more than those detained CUD members. I don't see any difference in their social background either. The Oromo victims were also as peaceful as the CUD ones although in both cases the government told the world that they were violent or advocated violence. Then what is that key element which triggered the invocation of the principle now in 2005? I suspect it is the ethnicity of the detained CUD leaders that matters a lot! I stand to be corrected if I am wrong.

Let me try to refresh the memory of these lawyers who are now invoking the "professional ethics" to defend CUD leaders by providing them with some of the very recent incidents of human rights abuses which took place in Ethiopia. It seems "they were not aware of" (or they did not care) that it took place. The examples I am referring to are limited to those abuses committed against the Oromos and people of the South both as individuals and/or as groups.

- a. In 1992, and following an agreement reached at the then Transitional parliament, OLF took the initiative to encamp its fighting forces in the hope that the agreed upon terms of consolidation of the future Ethiopian army would be implemented properly. TPLF did not follow a suite and as a result only the OLF fighters were disarmed and sent to Didessa valley where most of them perished. These OLF fighters numbering between 15 and 20 thousand, were detained in Didessa make shift prison and doomed to death as a result of torture or malaria. Not a single voice of concern was heard from any of the current lawyers who are now invoking "professional ethics". These Oromos did not die in the process of disintegrating Ethiopia but rather they came in 1991 from the bush all the way to Finfinne to cement the foundation of the new democratic Ethiopia by participating in the Transitional Government. They did not die with weapons in their hands either. They were peaceful, un-armed young boys and girls who only wanted peace, freedom and equality among the people of Ethiopia. Then, why didn't these lawyers invoke the principle and come to their defense?
- b. As residents of Finfinne we all witnessed the very recent peaceful demonstration organized by Macha - Tulama where thousands of Oromos from the capital and periphery participated protesting against the transfer of the seat of Oromiya from Finfinne to Adama. Although the demonstration was sanctioned by the government and was totally peaceful, EPRDF security forces opened fire and killed several and arrested thousands. Quite a number of elderly Oromos were wounded, mistreated and thrown in to jail. Macha - Tulama was banned and its assets were confiscated and given to the state without due process of law. Yet none of these practicing lawyers invoked "professional ethics" to

defend these innocent Oromos who were thrown to jail (some are still in detention without charge or trial as we speak) or those sentenced to long term imprisonment. Why?

- c. Another recent incident was that of the detention, torture and later expulsion of more than 300 Oromo students from the nations' University simply because they raised their voices of concern against specific policies of EPRDF. These peaceful students were detained at Kolfe and Kotobe make shift detention centers during which they were severely tortured. Some 28 of these students are still kept behind bars at Aqaqi prison, the very place where most of CUD supporters are kept, on behalf of whom the lawyers are now invoking "professional ethics". I never heard of any of these practicing lawyers coming in the defense of these innocent students invoking the "professional ethics". Why? Was it because of ignorance or arrogance? Why didn't it ever cross their minds that these innocent Oromo students also deserve the defense of practicing lawyers, on the same footing with the CUD members they are now proudly telling us representing?
- d. What about the very recent incident of the mass killing in Gambella region where EPRDF security forces killed hundreds of innocent civilians which created an uproar at the international level? The incident took an international magnitude but none of the practicing Ethiopian lawyers ever came forward to defend these people invoking the principle of "professional ethics" even though EHRCO did write a lot about it. Why? Don't these Gambella victims fall within the definition of "the people" that the lawyers are now "defending" at national courts? They were also peaceful citizens who only demanded their rights.
- e. And the mass killing of innocent Sidama civilians who were murdered cold-blooded by EPRDF security forces simply because they were protesting against the change of the status of the city of Awassa? Why didn't these lawyers invoke professional ethics and come to defend the rights of those who were detained and tortured?

I have no problem if these lawyers defend the detained CUD members invoking every possible justification but if they want to invoke "professional ethics" then it should not be discriminatory. From the human rights point of view, one can't invoke the principle at will to defend CUD leaders and keep silent when it comes to the defense of victims from other ethnic groups. Defending victims of human rights violations or other persons who are deemed to be disadvantaged on *pro bono* basis is a known practice but they were always invoked on a non-discriminatory fashion.

This fact that you kept quiet when non-Amharas were arrested *en masse* and thrown in to jail, summarily executed or sentenced to death for committing political crimes etc, reminded me of a belated confession by one German pastor who was a by-stander during the mass killings by Hitler's security forces. This is what he had to say: *first they killed the Romas (Gypsies) and I did not care because I was not a Roma. Then they killed the Jews, again I did not care because I was not a Jew. Then they came after the communists, and even then I did not bother because I was not a communist. One day they came to kill me. By then there was no one left to care for me.* (not a direct translation) If you were not raising your concern and invoking "professional ethics" when our people of all walks of life were mistreated, detained, and got killed, how do you expect

us to raise our voices now in support of the CUD leaders who are detained for exactly the same reasons – political crimes (even though Meles categorized both as treason) ? We rightly feel betrayed. You were never there for us when we needed you the most and it is difficult for us to convince ourselves to forgive you and stand by you. A friend in need is a friend indeed – goes the saying. We the Oromos have serious doubts that you are a friend indeed. The burden of proof is on you and you had ample time to prove just that.

Now back to the two main issues, where I have serious concern about your sincerity and the real content of your political agenda. The **first** one is your strategy to unseat EPRDF (which has an indirect relation to the cause of the Oromos) and the **second** one is your never clarified agenda regarding the oppressed people of the South in general and the Oromos in particular – directly related to the Oromo cause. I understand both deserve elaboration and independent approach but for the sake of time saving I took the liberty to place both of them in one basket. Here they are.

Your strategy to unseat EPRDF:

You are talking about being elected by 70 million Ethiopians. Of course as a politician, especially one from a third world country, you have to exaggerate (a politically correct word) to gain more or maintain the support you already enjoy. But we do know for sure how much vote you got and from where. To begin with, among the 70 million population of Ethiopia, only 26 million qualified to cast their vote. According to the information available to me not a single electoral district in Oromiya and the South voted for you except in one or two places where you capitalized on the disagreement between the different Oromo organization i.e. OPDO, OFDM and ONC. You also did not get a single vote from the entire Tigray region (population of more than 3 million). Hence your entire vote came from Amhara region and Finfinne which does not constitute more than quarter of Ethiopian population. It is also a public knowledge that among those who cast their vote in urban areas especially in Finfinne, people of different ethnic background voted for you not necessarily because they liked you or your agenda but because they hated Meles. Whatever the case was, and despite the widely reported election frauds, you won an unprecedented number of votes and managed to secure nearly one-third of the nation's parliament. The wonder work that you won 100% seat in Finfinne administration is something which you and your supporters should be proud of. Despite all the success, you turned around and told your constituency that you are not going to join the parliament or take over the administration of Finfinne unless Meles admits total defeat.

Here is where I totally disagree with you and why from the very beginning I was against your mode of struggle. Many of my friends did not agree with me then and I even lost my friendship with some of them. But look at what has happened now. Following your call for civil disobedience *a la* CUD, nearly one hundred families lost their loved ones and in the end you also ended up in jail. Do you think you achieved your goal? The menu on the plate has changed now. During and after the election, your supporters were talking about democracy and betterment for Ethiopia but now they are all engaged in fighting for your release. You see how the attention can easily be changed? And the world does not care. You totally misunderstood Meles, it seems. This is the man who did not have mercy on his closest friends and comrades the likes of Siye Abraha and

Tamrat Layine. Why did you think he would be different to you? In addition to being at the head of a minority government, which by nature can only stay in power with the help of guns, Meles has never been a democrat in his entire political career. Then why did you think that he would sit and negotiate with you on power sharing?

The mother of all political struggles by an individual or political party is to assume power, because political power is the key to implement whatever designed projects a person or a party may have promised to the people during the campaign. Power is so important and without being there on the top, there is no way one can change or improve domestic or international policies. One cannot introduce and implement economic reforms either. Among the many ways of achieving political power the most common and globally recognized “civilized” way is a democratic means i.e. legal forum. Despite all these vivid advantages of being at a legal forum, Ethiopian politicians were seen to repeatedly withdraw from a legal forum and prefer the “illegal forum” thus exposing themselves and their supporters to an agony while the fate of the nation is left in the hands of the very brutal regime which was meant to be removed in the first place. You told the Ethiopian people that you were neither joining the parliament nor taking over the administration of Finfinne because you said your constituencies did not want you to do so. Whether they actually told you so or not, I am not privy to that discussion but from my personal point of view your refusal to join the parliament was a fatal mistake. I dare to say so because there were precedents similar to this episode – and very catastrophic ones which we witnessed since the removal of the imperial regime. I want to present two of them where organized groups refused working on the legal forum and ended up in disaster.

a) One is the case of MEISONE. In 1977-1978, this organization composed of highly educated Ethiopians of that generation, was enjoying an enormous popularity and support from the peasants especially after the February land reform declaration. Although not to that level, it also enjoyed quite a convincing support from the workers in Finfinne and other major “industrialized” regions of the nation. There was no doubt that they (MEISONE) were the new rulers in the making had it not been for the Derg which did not give them free ride. These intellectuals of MEISONE were very confident in what they were doing and the overwhelming support they were enjoying from the population. Mengistu did not want to share power and at one point he even realized that MEISONE was a threat to him and hence he started pressing them to accept his superiority. To cut the long story short, MEISONE, complained that it could not enjoy the legal forum anymore and hence decided to leave Finfinne to embark on new struggle from the field. It chose an “illegal” forum because it fully counted on the peasants with the help of which it thought could have returned to Finfinne as their true representative. It did not work out. The peasants betrayed them for different reasons and these cream of the society - leaders and members of MEISONE were hunted like wild animals and were killed without due process of law. The organization collapsed like a sand hill within a very short period of time even though the Ethiopian people especially the peasants who were the direct beneficiaries of MEISONE’s political / economic agenda were truly supporting it.

b) The second event was the withdrawal of OLF from the Transitional Government in 1992. Because of the facts which were not disputed then and now, that EPRDF soldiers were harassing OLF supporters, ransacked their offices, killed their members and supporters it decided to

withdraw from the Transitional government and opted for armed struggle. In doing so it fully counted on the full support of the entire Oromo nation from Haraghe all the way to Denbi-Dollo and Kamisie in Wollo and the support was indeed overwhelming. OLF, totally undermining the strength of EPRDF and over-estimating its capacity and capability, decided to leave Finfinne. It was difficult in those days to come across a single Oromo soul not supporting OLF except the very few OPDO members. Few months down the road, OLF forces were crushed, sent to jail or summarily executed *en masse*. Its supporters i.e. the entire Oromo mass was subjected to an unprecedented degree of repression, arrest and killing which some even equated it to a genocide. Today, OLF is trying to get back to the legal forum because it realized now more than a decade later that it is difficult to achieve political objectives by using force especially after 9/11 where armed struggle is almost equated to terrorism.

Now tell me if your decision to resort to “illegal” means of struggle by boycotting the parliament was is the best choice? Do you think that you are really doing service to the Ethiopian people by subjecting them to further abuse and killing in the hands of EPRDF forces simply because you were not given the top political seat? It is true that there were precedents in contemporary political struggle where political parties opted to withdraw from the legal forum and return to the bush but that was doable if and only if one can count on a well-trained and equipped army and material resource i.e. cash crop or mineral/oil to finance the war. That is what Savimbi did and despite its short-lived re-appearance as a guerilla leader, it created a head ache for the ruling MPLA party. In your case you have neither an armed group nor financial power to justify your latest course of action.

I don't blame you. We Ethiopians grew up full of ourselves and that we belong to a nation of “the heroes”. Because we never had peaceful transfer of power in our history, any political power gained short of using force is considered to be unworthy, cowardice and a sign of weakness. That stereotype assertion still runs in the minds of most of our Amhara elite politicians and pseudo-politicians alike, that power should be assumed only through force. Otherwise, how can one explain the fact that an opposition party who gained such a large seat in the parliament and full control of the nerve-system of the nation - Finfinne, refused to join the parliament?

In my opinion, your decision not to join the parliament and the Finfinne administration is not the right one and for the following reasons:

a) You un-necessarily expected too much from the international community. History of modern Ethiopia shows that the West was never interested in the establishment of democratic government in Ethiopia. During Haile Selassie, they were interested in geo-political advantage, during Derg, they were for the sphere of influence and now for global fight against terrorism. In all these years, neither the fate of the Ethiopian people nor democracy was at the centre of their attention. What matters for them is their national interest and not the well-being of Ethiopians. Blair and Bush live in glass houses and therefore they cannot throw stones especially after what they have done in Abu Gharib. And when it comes to their national interest especially fighting global terrorism, Meles is fully meeting their demands and hence you have no added value whatsoever.

Just look at the recent Bill introduced to the House of Representatives of the USA by Congressman Smith of New Jersey under a title “Ethiopia Consolidation Act of 2005”. Among the four justifications¹ presented to assist Ethiopia, not a single mention is made about human rights, democracy, poverty or under-development in Ethiopia. The main reason remains “America’s national interest” in the region.

Like all other Ethiopian who grew up under the imperial regime, we all have this wrong perception about ourselves and the place of our country in global politics. We were told that the world needed us. That was then. Today, the world remembers us only because of our famous athletes or chronic shortage of food and starvation. That being the case, the West simply does not care a bit about us. An assassinated former prime minister (Hariri) is much more important to them and the UN than the human rights of dozens of CUD political leaders who are detained arbitrarily or the lives of thousands alleged OLF sympathizers who were summarily executed. If there is any international concern about Ethiopia, it only comes from individual researchers (former peace corps and the so called Ethiopianists for example), human rights activists and the likes of the Carter Centre. The report of Anna Gomez (*I heard the Ethiopians baptized her as Hanna Gobeze*) is nowhere to influence the attitude of Blair or Bush towards Ethiopia. Then what is their impact? Are they in a position in whatsoever manner to influence the foreign policy of Bush and Blair? International human rights organizations have produced series of reports of gross violations of human rights of citizens for example in Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt etc, but the above mentioned leaders of Western Democracy are rather preoccupied with the removal from power of democratically elected leaders like Mugabe, Hugo Chavez and Luhashenko. Keep in mind that they already removed a democratically elected president Aristide of Haiti from power, because of America’s national interest *a la* Bush. In short, we don’t have any leverage whatsoever which would have forced the West to press on Meles to negotiate with the opposition. While you are in detention and face mistreatment in the hands of EPRDF law enforcement officials, Meles and his top officials are wining and dining with some of the international leaders whom you thought would defend you to the end. As simple as that!

b) It appears to me that you are so full of yourself to the extent that you did not mind to discount the Oromo and people of the South from your campaign agenda. You and your supporters claim that the entire Ethiopian people voted for you and still rally behind you but fact on the ground suggest that you did not have a single follower in a non- Amhara region (with the exception of Gurages). Unless your understanding of “*the people*” is equivalent to “*the Amharas*”, I don’t see any link between your assertion and the reality on the ground. The Oromos unanimously and rightly so disregarded your call for civil disobedience but when the OLF aired a brief message that they should rise up against EPRDF they did so without any hesitation. You see the difference? They simply don’t see anything plus for them in your agenda but they fully trust OLF no matter how ineffective it may be.

Civil disobedience

Political parties and groups aspiring to achieve certain political objectives were seen applying civil disobedience at different times in history. Americans and Gandhi’ India used it to weaken the British colonial might. ANC and the civic society used it to weaken the apartheid regime of South

Africa. But the civil disobedience as applied by the above countries against the respective brutal regimes is quite different from what CUD tried to apply. Lately, Georgia and Ukraine successfully applied civil disobedience and managed to unseat the ruling party. But in the case of Ethiopia, civil disobedience *a la* Georgia or Ukraine obviously did not work and in my opinion, for the following reasons:

- a. unlike in Ukraine and in Georgia where the professional army is composed of members of all ethnic groups in the country, the Ethiopian army, security and intelligence is mainly composed of ethnic Tigres especially at the commanding level. In Ukraine and Georgia the military by law is not allowed to be a partisan and hence their task is to protect their respective nations territory from *foreign aggressors* regardless of which party is ruling the nation. In Ethiopia, we have a EPRDF army totally loyal to the ruling party which leaves no room for defection no matter what. Their task is not only to defend the nation from foreign aggressors but also to defend Meles from "*aggressive citizens*". The same is true for Ethiopian Police Force.
- b. One of the elements of your *fathwa* is that you urged Ethiopians to boycott the purchase of products from EPRDF owned factories. I fail to understand your logic here because I never heard citizens of one nation boycotting purchase of products of companies belonging to an opponent but from the same nation. Such a boycott could have made sense if the companies were owned by foreigners or where the owners are said to be transferring capital out of the country which is not the case here. Hence your *fathwa* is affecting the employees – poor Ethiopians who earn their daily bread only by working for such companies and not EPRDF.
- c. Our country is known to be one of the poorest in the world and yet you are calling for a civil disobedience which included strikes, stay-homes etc. It seems that you are not aware of the reality that nearly 90% of the population of Addis Abeba who voted for you are daily laborers and petty trades whose daily bread depends on their daily activity. They don't have bank savings and stocks of food on which they can survive for the duration of the strike but you expected them to listen to you and stay at home. Not only you miscalculated the reality but you also subjected these very supporters of you to starvation. I am sure your middle class constituency did not have to suffer this much because they naturally have a reserve of "food or money" to survive on.
- d. Ethiopians, thanks to the combination of propaganda and counter-propaganda between AAPO (now CUD) and TPLF, is divided along ethnic lines than ever before. Hence every time when Meles targets one ethnic group, the other ethnic groups seem to remain indifferent, to say the least. When Oromo students from university were expelled not a single non-Oromo student supported them. The participants of the peaceful demonstration as organized by Macha and Tulama were bitten arrested and detained but not a single non-Oromo group ever raised its voice of concern and support. Now you expect these offended group of people for example the Oromos to listen to your call and become "disobedient". It does not work!

- e. From the outset, you already laid out your plan as to what you are going to do with Meles and his *entourage*. That naturally sent a scaring message to EPRDF and no wonder you were met with strong resistance. You did not want to give Meles ample time to clean his exit road so that he will not be charged with whatever crimes he had committed once he leaves the office. Meles does not have a safety net in Ethiopia and there seem to be no place where he could take a refuge and yet you wanted him to accept defeat and surrender to you. He knows that he had committed serious crimes and offended so many Ethiopians that once he leaves the Office, he would not continue living a decent *tranquille* life. He knows it very well and therefore he had to apply all possible repressive methods to prolong his stay in power. Put yourself in his shoes and tell me what you would have done?

By the way, the so called “Orange” and “Rose” Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia you frequently refer to, seem not to be that successful. Today both Yushenko and Sakashvili are very much hated by the very people who facilitated their access to power. Both presidents seem to fail to meet the expectations of their constituencies and are now facing severe criticism. It is easy to be in an opposition but it appears to be quite a different matter to run a country. Just to tell you how difficult it is to be on the top after capitalizing on popular support, let me tell you one recent anecdote from Ukraine. Yushenko apparently asked God for guidance right after deciding to run for presidency. God answered to his payer and gave him three sealed envelopes. In the middle of the campaign when bombarded with series of questions related to un-employment, low salary scale and pension fund, Yushenko asked God what to do. God told him to open the first envelope and he did. It reads – *promise to the people that you will improve everything!* He promised everything to his people and won the election. After being in power now for almost two years as a president, the socio-economic situation in the country went from bad to worse and he rightly began panicking. He asked God for guidance and the reply from heaven was “open the second envelope and act” and he did. It reads, *put all the blames on the previous regime!* Yushenko did so but soon he realized that new opposition groups were created and were intensifying their election campaign to unseat him. As usual, he pleaded to God for help. The Almighty God told him to open the third envelop which he did. It read “*start the whole exercise all over again*”. Yushenko returned to a campaign trail once again promising his fellow Ukrainians everything under the sky, and of course blaming the previous regime for his failure.

Your Political Agenda as seen by the Oromos.

You can not win the support of the Oromos unless you properly address the national question. It seems to me that you are ill-advised by the likes of obbo Andargachew who are denying the existence of nations /nationalities in Ethiopia in the first place. He argues that in Ethiopia, there is no single group which “developed” to the level of nation/nationality. Subsequently, he said that there is no reason to invoke the principle of the Right of Nations to Self-Determination. You can call us “gossa” “nation or nationalities” but regardless of the name you are attaching to us, we the Oromos put on a table a demand which should be dealt with if you are genuinely seeking unity of Ethiopians and the prevalence of peace. Whether you call us gossa, ethnic group, nationality or nations there is an underlying and indisputable fact that your fathers and grandfathers grossly violated our fundamental human rights. What actually matters is not the nametag but the fact that

violation of human rights took place against us because of our ethnicity. Rape remains a crime whether it is perpetrated against a teen-age girl or a grown up woman. Whether we were at the stage of “gossa”, “nation” or “nationality” the crimes committed by your fathers against the Oromos remain a crime and there is an indisputable national question placed on the table. And if you are not ready to solve these problems today I don’t think you will succeed in achieving your goal of maintaining the “unity of Ethiopia”. You don’t seem to include this issue in your political agenda which in our opinion should have been given a priority. Don’t forget that political agenda is like consumer goods to be sold at an open and free market. An agenda which is qualitative and effective is very likely to be easily sold whereas those which are of less quality are difficult to be liquidated. For us the Oromos and no matter what, the political agenda of most of the Oromo organizations are more palatable than yours and easy to liquidate at the current market. That is why we the Oromos are not with you. Your agenda is not meeting our demands to say the least.

We Oromos strongly believe that today Ethiopia is more united than ever. If at all there is a danger in her disintegration, it is only because of you, your chauvinistic and arrogance attitude which is the root cause of all our problems when it comes to the unity of Ethiopia. For you the starting point is the assumption that we were so united and it was only the EPRDF who came and disturbed that secured unity. But I am telling you that underneath that perceived pre-EPRDF unity, there was always a hidden dissatisfaction of nations and nationalities of the non-Amharas. If you remember, the word *gossa* existed during Haile Selassie and it was only abolished in early 70s. I remember when the then flamboyant MP, Mr. Zewde Bedada waged an impressive campaign for the removal of this word “gossa” from official forms, and I believe he succeeded. What I am trying to say is that the *gossa* thing existed all the way through our history but what EPRDF brought in to our life is the recognition, albeit *defunct* of the notion of the right of nations to self determination based on which it “divided” the “united Ethiopia” according to regions.

When it comes to the issue of Ethiopian unity, nobody wants the maintenance of that unity more than the Oromos but you are making it difficult for us to achieve that dream. Every time we make an attempt and take extra step towards that direction, you are pulling us back simply to remind us of your fathers ruling system’s ugly past. We came long way to somehow “forgive” you for what your fathers have done to us but you are disappointing us by telling us that the crimes were never committed in the first place. You are also revealing that you are not actually recognizing the fact that we have the right to exercise our fundamental human rights to self-determination and you want to rule us once again. No offence, but your behavior seem to defy all human genealogy that it is almost impossible for you to be different from your fathers and grandfathers. You were supposed to be ashamed of the crimes your fathers and grandfathers had committed against us and come extra mile to meet us. That is what the Germans did after Hitler’s demise. Although I am not equating your fathers crimes to that of Hitler’s, we the Oromos would have loved to see you recognizing that fact and work on bridging the gap. To the contrary, you continue to be proud of the “heroic” acts of your fathers and expect us to come on all our fours to be “friends” with you. Instead of filling the gap and working on a healing process, you continue adding salt to the wounds to the extent that you are aspiring to return to power by disregarding us. Do you really expect us to be accomplice to this crime in the making? I told *obbo* Andargachew, once bitten, twice shy! We learned it the hard way and there is no way you can take us for a free ride anymore. Your political agenda has to be crystal clear to us before we even contemplate

supporting you. Here is your homework – just few questions to test your sincerity. And please take your time and give us a genuine answer even if the answer may fall short of contributing to our efforts to understand you and your political agenda.

- a. Whether you like it or not today, part of Ethiopia is demarcated and named as Oromiya region. This is a fact. Although the constitutional guarantees as stipulated in Article 39 regarding self-administration is not fully implemented, the fact that Oromiya appeared on the political map of Ethiopia means a lot for all Oromos. Judging from the speeches and writings of many of your supporters, and your ad hoc statements, as well as Part -3(1) of your Manifesto, it is crystal clear that you don't feel comfortable with this arrangement and hence you are suggesting its change/amendment. Assume you come to power now, what will you exactly do with this Article 39 which stipulates regional administrative divisions granting the Oromos the appearance of their mother-land – Oromiya on the map of Ethiopia? Are you going to strengthen the Article and ensure that the constitutional guarantees granted to the Oromos based on which they could continue to effectively administer their region **OR** you will go back to the imperial type arrangement of provinces thus delete Oromiya from the political map of Ethiopia?

b) Unlike in the bad old days where your fathers imposed on us the mandatory use of Amharic language as the only official language of the nation, today, thanks to the efforts of the selfless Oromos who sacrificed their lives while fighting for its implementation, *afaan Oromo* has effectively replaced Amharic in the entire Oromiya region. The Geez alphabet is also replaced by Qubee. Tell me now what are you going to do with it? Are you going to effectively and honestly contribute to the works of the Oromo intellectuals to further develop *afaan Oromo* and *Qubee* **OR** you will revive your father's style and impose on us the use of Amharic at all levels and de-legalize *afaan Oromo*?

- c. Compared to the Geez which despite its hundreds of years of existence could not be developed to its full capacity, *afaan Oromo* proved to be one of the fastest developing languages of Ethiopia. Will you help us in legalizing the use of *afaan Oromo* as one of the official languages of Ethiopia and as one of the languages at the Ethiopian parliament? **OR**?
- d. The current set-up is that Finfinne is recognized as the seat of Oromiya. When Meles decided to move the seat to Adama thousands of Oromos protested against and so many were arrested. Assume you come to power, will you recognize that Finfinne continues to be the seat of Oromiya or?

For some reasons, my dear CUDs, I find it more and more difficult to trust you because it appears to me that it is an innate that you only consider yourself as the only legitimate entity in Ethiopia to administer the nation. A Turkish friend of mine once told me an anecdote from his country. It goes like this: one beautiful morning a frog and a scorpion decided to go for a picnic in the nearby forest just across the river. After having fun the whole day and when they were returning home,

they found the river over-flooded. Apparently the scorpion did not know how to swim and the frog of course did not want to leave her friend behind. But knowing the nature and character of the scorpion – that he is deadly poisonous she hesitated to offer any kind of help. The Scorpion pleaded for help asking the frog to carry him across the river but the frog remained hesitant because of the poisonous nature of the scorpion. The scorpion swore in the name of all possible gods of the jungles that he will not sting her during the transfer if only she agreed to carry him across the river. At last the frog agreed and the scorpion jumped on the back of the frog and the journey began. Half way in the middle of the river, the scorpion stung and inflicted severe pain upon the frog. The frog not knowing what to do, asked the scorpion “why the hell are you doing this to me? You know that I am poisoned and my muscles are not functioning anymore and subsequently we both are going to drown and die”. The scorpion replied – “I am sorry, it is in our nature and I can not change it”. The frog could not swim anymore and they both perished. You got it! To compliment this anecdote with an Amharic saying, *Ke jib jimat yettesera kirar, kiqnitu iniblaw- iniblaw bitcha naw*. For us Oromos, you are just like that. You are proving yourself to us and the world that Ethiopia can only be governed by you and every time we make an attempt to ensure the equality of the Ethiopian nations/nationalities through the recognition of their right to self-determination you cry foul by saying that the nations unity is in danger. Because you are made of that *jib jimat*, you think of yourself as the only “a ruler” and “superior” to all other ethnic groups.

We have all the reasons on earth not to trust you. You and your fathers have been betraying our innocent elites who trusted and carried you across the turbulent river. Oromo heroes and founders of Ethiopia – people like Gobana Dache, Habteghiorgis Dinagde, and lately Haile Fida are few among the hundreds of thousands of your preys. They trusted you and carried you to cross the river but you stung them. Unlike the scorpion above you were “smart” enough or “lucky” that it is the Oromos who perished while you continue exploiting us the remainders.

It was during the *idget behibret zemecha* when at one of the meetings we had with peasants from Arsi, a peasant group leader, complaining about the slow disarmament pace of feudal landlords, told the crowd the following anecdote: a woman shouted for help saying that a snake “entered” her. The neighbors came to rescue her and yet she continued crying “snake” “snake” but the neighbors could not see any. Where is the snake? they asked. It has gone she replied. Then why are you still shouting snake? they asked. “*The snake now knows the way and I am afraid that it will come back again*” she concluded. Now you know why we continue to be worried about your political agenda. We suffered a lot under your fathers and grand-fathers ruling system and we don’t want to see it recurred. We still bare the wounds and scars from that regime and because you are the by-product of that repressive system, we rightly shouted and continue to shout “look, the neftagnas are coming back”. Because you already know “the way” it is very easy for you to return and continue depriving us of our fundamental right of nations to self-determination. Now tell us one good reason that would have convinced us to support you? Your political Manifesto did not make an effort to deal with an Oromo issue. Only now that you have realized that you are not supported by the Oromo people you started looking for an Oromo whose name ends with “sa” and of course you found woizero. Midek “sa” to give your organization a look of multi-ethnicity. But the problem is dear friends, now we are too conscious about every move you make and we know exactly what you wanted to achieve by doing so. You did it for long time but not anymore.

Your method of “appeasing” other ethnic groups seem not to change from what it used to be during the reign of Haile Selassie. You targeted and included one individual from a non-Amhara ethnic group and then attempt to attract the support from this “privileged” group. Your selection of Ms. Midek”sa” as a “running mate” is a true reflection of that *modus operandus* but believe me it won’t help you to win the hearts and minds of the Oromos. To the contrary, it showed your disregard to our concern that you can still continue with business as usual by including one “sa” in your ranks and files and then claim that you are representing all groups in Ethiopia. There was Yilma Deres”sa” in the king’s cabinet as well but that did not reflect a true representation of the Oromos in the nation’s affairs. Choosing running mates during elections is quite normal. It is also normal that aspiring leaders chose running mates based on their added value. Al Gore selected Liberman as his running mate because the later had an influence on the Jewish community. But your selection of Ms. Midek”sa” definitely will not have any impact whatsoever on the attitudes of the Oromos towards your political agenda. As a “political party” composed of the “elites”, you were supposed to be smart enough to comprehend that.

We the oppressed nations and nationalities do not share your view that the unity of Ethiopia should be maintained at all cost. We give priority to the unity of Ethiopians. But you, as your name rightly suggests, are telling us to first ensure the “Unity” of the nation and then we can talk about the problems of the nations and nationalities. Sorry friends, we the oppressed people are telling you the opposite - let us first talk about the equality of the shareholders in that stock and only then we can talk about the form and context of that common house.

We the Oromos are for the unity of our country not because you wanted us to do so but because we profoundly believe in it. After all, this is a country which is built with blood and bones of our Oromo heroes. Unlike your fathers and fore-fathers who were known only to exploit her, by displacing millions of the people of the South thus bringing misery to our country, the Oromos never displaced any Abyssinian. They honestly died for her independence and unity of and equality among her people. While you the Amharas were boycotting the formation of a Transitional Government in 1991, the Oromos, as led by OLF, fully participated in the re-building of a post-Derg democratic Ethiopia. You refused to participate in that process simply because you were not at the driving seat and for you Ethiopia should be led only by you - the Amharas. As usual, you came from nowhere and pose yourself as vanguard and custodian of her unity equating yourself using an Oromo proverb to *an outsider who wept louder than the bereaved*.

If you consider that today Ethiopia is more divided than before, I can challenge you and argue that you are totally wrong. The unity you are talking about was a fake one which undermined the freedom of other nations and nationalities for example the Oromos. The Oromos were forced to compromise their feeling and hide their identity to secure their place in the society especially in public/civil service areas and this is not a sign of unity. It is like a family in remote villages of Ethiopia where one hardly talks about the abusive nature of most husbands because women were not provided with a forum where they would have brought their case for redress. And yet, we talk about a family unity in these villages as if there is no abuse taking place. But as soon as some of the women especially in the rural areas start invoking their rights to equality, we (the men) usually begin condemning them not necessarily because they infringed upon anyone’s rights but simply because they demanded their right to be equal.

The fact that women are liberated and continue fighting for their equality with men and freedom from oppression does not mean that there is less love relationship in the family nor an increase in the rate of divorce. To bring a practical example, the inclusion of Articles 666 in our old Civil Code and Articles 77 – 80 in the Revised Family Law of Ethiopia which guaranteed the right to a divorce did not result in the increase of divorce rate in our society. To the contrary, it strengthened family unity and cohesion because the unity is based on equality which catered for genuine love between the couples and a safety net for the women to count on just in case the husband becomes abusive. I hope you have no problem with it!

For some reasons it seems to me that you are not really fighting for the Unity of Ethiopia but to restore the Amhara ruling system. Otherwise, how can you explain your behavior when in 1991 instead of joining the OLF, TPLF and others in preparing the ground for a true democracy to prevail in Ethiopia you opted to form an exclusive ethnic Amhara party (AAPO) whose agenda is not the unity of Ethiopians but rather a very narrow alleged “interest of the Amharas”? It surprised us all because facts on the ground suggest that compared to other ethnic groups in the country the Amharas were the least hurt by the Derg and as a matter of fact by any of the previous regimes including EPRDF.

When situation permitted both TPLF and OLF dropped their secessionist agenda and agreed to form a Transitional government with the sole intention of maintaining Ethiopian unity. But you went the opposite way and formed your AAPO and did not want to take part in the TG. What the TG actually did was, it allowed the oppressed people to enjoy their fundamental rights on the same footing with others without infringing on the rights of the others including the Amharas. The fact that the Oromos were granted the right to use their language definitely strengthened their belief that they are the Ethiopians and of course it did not have any negative impact on the Amharas.

You seem to worry about the “unity of the nation” apparently because of the inclusion of the rights of nations to self-determination in the London Charter text of which appeared in the Negarit Gazeta No.1 of 22 July 1991.² I don’t think you really understood what was meant by that stipulation because the Charter does not indicate anything which may pose a threat to the unity of Ethiopia. By participating in the Transitional Government, both TPLF and OLF committed themselves to ensure the equality and freedom of our people from oppression and lay solid foundations for Ethiopian unity. The intentions of TPLF and OLF were fully reflected in the London Charter and they seem to have no problem with this arrangement even if it meant to be within One Ethiopia. But you seem to have problem with the wording itself that nations/nationalities were granted the right to administer their own affair. I don’t understand why ethnic Amharas who always pose to be the defenders of Ethiopian Unity in this case failed to participate in the process of cementing that unity. It seems to me that you are not in favor of the mentioning the word “self-determination” but for the oppressed people it is a guarantee to live in love and peace and equality with other Ethiopians. Do you think that the inclusion of such an Article and its actual implementation on the ground created division within Ethiopians? Do you think that there is more ground now for disintegration than what it was under Mengistu or Haileselassie? For me, there is more in what is unifying us now than in what separating us and

that seem to be the reason why OLF came to be part of the formation of Democratic Ethiopia in 1991.

Indeed you are irritated to see other languages competing with and in the case of Oromiya even totally displacing Amharic. Every time the word *Qubee* or *afaan Oromo* is mentioned in the course of formal discussions, I could not help but see my fellow Amharas feeling uncomfortable. *An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb* goes an Oromo saying. You are terrified and unnecessarily so by seeing the once perceived “unified” nation is “disintegrating” in to regions. Wake up guys! The world has gone so far and you still think like your feudal fathers and grandfathers. Recognizing the rights of nations to self determination or granting regional self-administration should not be seen as dividing a nation. The Netherlands have 12 provinces each with their own independent flags while they all believe in one common Dutch flag. They do so because their right to exercise a regional self-rule is recognized in the first place and they don’t feel that one group is dominating the other. The same is true for Switzerland. So take it easy and try to be open-minded. Free your minds from this outdated mentality of being “superior” to other nations in Ethiopia. You are representing just one of the minority ethnic groups in Ethiopia and no more no less.

Despite the never-ending allegations by you that EPRDF dismantled the unified Ethiopia, it did not create any Liberation Front. All the Liberation Fronts (TPLF, OLF, ONLF, ELF and EPLF etc) were created during or before Mengistu’s time. What happened after the removal of Mengistu from power was that most of these Liberation Fronts dropped their initial agenda of secession/ independence from Ethiopia and opted to participate in the Transitional Government thus preparing the ground for a democratic Ethiopia, while you the Amharas decided to pursue different line. For you, Ethiopian Unity can only be achieved if and only if the Amharas are the ones at the centre - as a leader - but not as an equal member of a group.

What TPLF and OLF did after coming to power and at least up until 1992, was that they tried to cement these demanded rights by the oppressed nations and nationalities of Ethiopia in the newly enacted Constitution by including Article 39. If there is any dissatisfaction by the Oromos and other oppressed nationalities it is not the inclusion of the Article in the Constitution itself but the non-implementation of the letters and spirits of the Article. Article 39, if only implemented properly, is a guarantee for the oppressed nationals /nationalities to live in equality. But for you, the Amhara elites, the inclusion of this Article in the Constitution is the sign of disuniting Ethiopia. I don’t blame you. You grew up without being affected by the previous ruling systems (you were actually a direct beneficiary) and hence any change or mention of the Rights of Nations to Self-Determination has a chilling effect on you.

The standard of measurement for Ethiopia’s unity should not be the fact that the language of instruction at school and deliberations at courts remain Amharic. It is also not to have a fake unity. What exactly is that made you uncomfortable if the Oromos for example use *afaan Oromo* instead of Amharic? What is wrong with Article 39 (if only it is implemented properly) when we all know that the national question in Ethiopia existed for as long as the Amhara ruling system existed and that it is not because of this article that the nations unity is in danger?

I have been trying hard to understand you and your agenda for a democratic Ethiopia but I fail to see any convincing argument in it which could remotely indicate that you are for Unity and Democracy. I have all the reasons to remain suspicious of your objectives. I may be wrong and stand to be corrected but judging from your writings and public speeches it seems to me that you want to restore the rotten Amhara ruling system under the pretext of “Ethiopian unity.” You seem to forget though we already placed the last nail on the coffin of the Amhara ruling system in February 1975. Although you tend to believe in reincarnation thus hoping to see that buried system alive once again, we the oppressed people will make sure that we add more nails and seal the coffin so that it never re-appears.

By design or coincidence, you seem to disregard the concern and undermine the capacity of the sleeping giant – the Oromo people and wanted to find “solutions” by yourself and by excluding them. While you know that OLF is the salt and pepper for the Oromos you did not even dare to establish contact with the leadership of this cardinal organization for a common strategy. In my opinion, any attempt to solve our nation’s problem without solving the problem of the oppressed nations and nationalities in general and that of the Oromos in particular will end in disaster.

Tell us what is on your menu for us – the Oromos? You have dozens on the list but they all boil down to one main menu – Ethiopian unity. It reminded me of one restaurant in remote town of Kyrgyzstan where I was offered exactly the same type of food for *entrée*, *main course* and *dessert* for the entire duration of my stay there which lasted for about two weeks. But we Ethiopians especially the oppressed people have all the right to chose between restaurants and in doing so we will retain the right to chose the best one which offers different menu. Instead of offering us only “unity” from breakfast all the way to dinner, we prefer to have, freedom, equality, non-discrimination and a beautiful dessert called Unity and only in that order. You still have a chance, if only you are willing to do so, to change the *chef* (cook) and adjust your menu according to our above need. We have no problem becoming one of your frequent customers and even promoters of your “business” to the outsiders provided that you meet our gastronomical demands of course.

Had your agenda been clearer to us, believe me the 30+ million Oromo people would have been advised to apply measures against EPRDF and play a significant role in ushering in an all-inclusive democratic government. As a matter of fact, no one would have loved the change of EPRDF regime more than the Oromos because they suffered the most. Arbitrary detention, torture, killing and disappearance of hundreds of thousands of innocent Oromos have been our fate for the last fourteen years. However, there is still a room for us to create a forum where we can speak the same language with you and prepare a ground for a democratic government. But such a possible coalition should not take a form of an Oromo-Amhara “coalition” against the Tigres. It should rather be a coalition of all democratic forces, organizations and individuals from different ethnic groups including those from Tigray who are against the policies of EPRDF as a ruling party and have a vision to explore avenues for the creation of democratic Ethiopia.

24 December, 2005.

¹ The four points issued to justify the need to assist Ethiopia were, a) Ethiopia is an important partner in the Horn of Africa region whose stability is vital to United States interest in east Africa and the Middle East; b) Ethiopia has been a strong US ally in the fight against global terrorism by its participation in the coalition of the willing in Iraq; c) Ethiopia has a strong military, which has been involved in international peacekeeping operations since the Korean conflict in the 1950s, d) historically a nation with a large Christian majority, Ethiopia has experienced significant growth in its Muslim population and Christians and Muslims for the first time are nearly equal in number, which places this key East African nation on a religious fault line that will require proactive efforts to minimize conflicts.

² Among the 20 Articles of the Transitional period Charter only Article 2 is dedicated to the right of nations to self-determination and even then there is no indication covertly or overtly suggesting the dismemberment of our country. The said Article states that “..the rights of nations to self-determination is affirmed. To this end, each nation, nationality and people is guaranteed the right to *a) preserve its identity and have it respected, promote its cultural and history and use and develop its languages, b) Administer its own affairs within its own defined territory and effectively participate in the central government on the basis of freedom and fair and proper representation, c) Exercise its right to self-determination of independence when the concerned nation/nationality and people is convinced that the above rights are denied, abridged or abrogated.*