



# **Vision Ethiopia Ninth Conference**

## **Rethinking the Ethiopian Transition**

### **Call for Papers**

**September 25, 2019**

Following eight successful conferences, of which the last two were held in Ethiopia, the Board of Directors of Vision Ethiopia, an independent and nonpartisan network of Ethiopian academics and professionals, is pleased to announce that the ninth conference will be held in **Washington, D.C.**, on **March 21 and 22, 2020**. Consistent with our previous conferences, the Board calls upon scholars, professionals, civil servants and political and social actors to explore a wide range of issues that are relevant to transition, including the challenges of conducting a free and fair election; lessons learned from successful or unsuccessful transitions; and the roles of culture, education, State and non-State actors, and foreign powers (including Nile basin and Red Sea politics) in attenuating (accentuating) conflict and national unity.

The last few months have witnessed breathtaking developments in Ethiopia, both positive and negative. On the positive side, there initially appeared to be exceedingly encouraging signs of democratic reforms, which included the lifting of a draconian State of Emergency, the reduction of tension with Eritrea, the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and the desire by the Government to accommodate and engage opposition groups in the political process to advance a post-conflict democratization process and rebuild national unity. Unsurprisingly, these overtures and steps earned the new leaders of the ruling party unqualified support and acclamation from genuinely peace-loving Ethiopians, both at home and in the diaspora.

On the other hand, several questions and uncertainties have emerged in the course of time that dampened the hopes and aspirations of the people of the country to live in peace, freedom and fraternity. Many have started to question whether Ethiopia is actually better off today than it was before the new administration assumed power. The power base within and outside the ruling party has continued to be grounded on ethnicity. Inter-ethnic and clan conflicts have become acute and



frequent occurrences, necessitating the establishment of military “command posts” in several parts of the country. Ethnically motivated loss of lives and internal displacements of millions of people, which are intricately linked to the political and institutional structures of the country, have eroded the social fabric of the nation.

As of June 2019, there were an estimated 3.2 million internally displaced people. The Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and regional and city administrators were assassinated. Churches, monasteries, mosques and heritage institutions were burned down and ransacked, in alarming similitude to the most extreme forms of radicalism witnessed in other parts of the world. In the milieu of these ominous developments, there is also an ongoing campaign to break up the age-old Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church by creating a rival Synod. At the time of preparation of this call for papers, prayers and protest demonstrations are being held in many parts of the country.

The absence of cohesion within the ruling party has exacerbated the problems, as there are now multiple centers of powers. The fracture within the ruling party has resulted in government ineffectiveness, ethnic and clan rivalry, and inability to maintain law and order. Fraud, corruption, illicit trade, illegal weapon circulation, human trafficking and crimes have worsened the fragility of the State, endangering the peace and security of the citizens, and of the diplomatic community. Security warnings of foreign embassies have become routine. In September 2019, aid agencies indicated that some 8 million people are in need of food assistance. Rampant inflation, severe foreign exchange shortage, debt, austerity measures, unemployment, forced outmigration, rural-urban influx, and the shift in the demographic structure of the country have heightened the propensity of the Ethiopian youth to be receptive of malevolently crafted propaganda. Social media and certain registered media outlets are worsening the situation by fanning the flames of hate.

The cumulative effects of the above have all but eroded the confidence of many in the effectiveness of the transition. Government actions and/or inactions are often open to various interpretations. Difficulties in running the day-to-day affairs of government and the major parastatals and national projects, and the wide gap between rhetoric and reality, have increased the uncertainty about the direction of the transition. How the Government addresses the double-edged sword of economic



recovery and national unity, will determine not just the success of the transition but also the unity and territorial integrity of the country.

Many also question the feasibility of conducting a free and fair election under these circumstances. Whether election should precede constitutional reform, or vice versa, has continued to be a contentious issue. Ethnic-based parties espouse the former in the name of defending “the federal” system, while others put blame on the constitution as the primary source of the problems facing the country.

It is, thus, against these backdrops that the Ninth Conference of Vision Ethiopia will be held in Washington, D.C, with a view to providing an independent forum for all to discuss the challenges facing the transition, including the ethnic and religious conflicts, and to generate ideas that will help thwart the collapse of another State in the Horn of Africa. The theme of the conference is appropriately chosen to be: “Rethinking the Ethiopian Transition”. It is hoped that authors would fairly and independently assess the path taken by the transition thus far, and evaluate the requisites that enable free, fair and unfettered election. Studies on minority rights and the youth are also welcome.

Papers must be supported by reliable evidence. Authors must show that their manuscript is grounded on pertinent literature, and contextualized to the country’s situation. The integrity of the data should be tested and the research should meet ethical standards. Materials must be geared towards benefiting all Ethiopians, and avoid sectarianism. Authors and panelists must be dispassionate, forward-looking and objective, and avoid parochialism. The manuscript must be focused, and identify which transition problem it is trying to resolve.

Manuscripts and proposals for panel discussions will go through a normal review process. The decision about the format, venue or date of presentation of an accepted paper or panel proposal is at the discretion of Vision Ethiopia. Papers may be written in either Amharic or in English. However, speakers are encouraged to consider reaching a wider Ethiopian audience, as the primary mission of Vision Ethiopia’s conferences is the creation of public awareness of important issues of national significance. Completed papers not exceeding 5000 words in length along with an abstract and a conclusion must reach [Visionethiopia18@gmail.com](mailto:Visionethiopia18@gmail.com) on or before **January 31,**



**2020.** Please note also that presenters and participants must cover their travel and accommodation expenses. Travellers from outside the United States must make their own visa and other travel arrangements.

As in previous cases, we aim to transmit the proceedings of the conference live and to make open space available for the media. The copyright of the videos is the property of Vision Ethiopia. Media owners that want to transmit the proceedings of the conference must show that they have the capacity to reach a wider audience in Ethiopia, and contact Vision Ethiopia before **January 31, 2020.** For more information about Vision Ethiopia, please visit <http://visionethiopia.org/>