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Ethiopian Multinational Federalists Support Force (EMFSF)

Manifesto of the Ethiopian Multinational Federalists Support Force

March 22, 2021

PRELUDE

In the last three years, Ethiopia has moved from a hopeful moment of a democratic transition to the precipice of falling apart as a state. The combined effect of the turmoil caused by a mismanaged and derailed political transition, the impact of protracted state-sponsored conflicts and the chaotic management of the political space, has led to extremist forces capturing the federal government and seeking to turn back the clock on the progress the nations and nationalities in Ethiopia have made in their quest for equality.

These forces, the neo-assimilationist proponents of a unitary autocratic order, seem intent on dismantling the cornerstones of the political settlement of 1991. Their targets are the Ethiopian constitution of 1995, the multinational arrangement and the relative peace of the last three decades. Following the political opening that commenced in 2018 as an opportunity, they mounted an incendiary campaign against the core principles of the 1991 political settlement, which ensured the survival of the state and established Ethiopia as an anchor of stability in the Horn of Africa.

Once ensconced in power, the prime minister who gained power as a reformist revived the assimilationist discourse of the last century, centralized decision-making and sabotaged the multinational federal division of powers. His new party, the Prosperity Party, made it clear through its constituting documents, that its ultimate political goal is the restoration of the pre-1991 unitary system and the destruction of the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination. Soon the program of undoing the 1991 settlement began to unfold, culminating in a war against democracy, constitutionalism and multinational federalism.

Notwithstanding the democratic deficit and autocratic excesses of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) period, Ethiopia was arguably an example of a multinational federation that worked in cultivating a culture of tolerance and obviating conflicts. Even the political parties that used to espouse secession had accepted multinational federalism and abandoned armed resistance as a means for politico-legal solutions to problems. There is no doubt that their goal is to take away the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination and self-rule.

As EMFSF representing the cause of the proud nations and nationalities in Ethiopia, we now proclaim that we reject a vision of a unitary state ruled by an all-powerful autocrat. We will never waver from our conviction and commitment to our values. We live by the values of respect for human dignity, rule of law, freedom, equality, solidarity and responsibility. We are the children of the generations that struggled and sacrificed for democratic multinational federalism, pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for nations and nationalities, gender equality, and social justice. It will be a dereliction of our duty if we sit around idly in the face of the rise of lawless autocracy.

Therefore, we, members of EMFSF, recommit ourselves to fight rouge elites who have now captured the Ethiopian federal government and turned it against the people and their aspirations. Our symposium, held on March 13, 2021, has laid the foundation for the adoption of a political manifesto of the nations and nationalities, which, we believe reflects a consensus of political forces committed to democratic federalist solidarity.

THE PROMISE OF MULTINATIONAL FEDERATION

1. In adopting a federal arrangement, the drafters of the constitution apparently sought to resolve the longstanding problem of national oppression in Ethiopia. In our view, the multinational federation is the only viable institutional governance option that can adequately accommodate the demands of territorially concentrated language groups while responding to historic political marginalization through the exercise of the right of nations to self-determination.
2. The Ethiopian state can continue only if it remains a federation of the willing, in which sovereignty is vested in both in the federal government and its constituent entities. Any other choice of institutional design where federal unit boundary lines are delineated by any other factor than the geographical distribution of national groups is unsuited to addressing the historical injustices and current grievances of the country's nations and nationalities.
3. Tampering with the multinational federal arrangement would regenerate conflicts. The surge in interstate and intrastate conflicts under Prosperity Party rule resulted from the subversion of multinational federalism and the constitution. The way to reduce communal conflict is to address the constitutional demand of Ethiopia's national groups for more federalism and self-governing national subunits. Any unconstitutional measure to deny the demands would result in the proliferation of conflicts.
4. The multinational federalist forces seek a clean break from its past in order to proceed to carrying out a profound democratic reform, and a transformed horizontal relation among ethnonational groups premised on the recognition of the principle of deep pluralism. The anti-federalists' warmed-over vision of unitary Ethiopia, relegated to the

dustbin of history five decades ago, can be implemented only by perpetrating uninhibited violence against the vision of a multinational federal democratic state.

SOLIDARITY AND ENDURING COMMON VALUES

1. The oppressed nations and nationalities of Ethiopia have fundamental values, which lie at the heart of our common destiny. Our relationship is forged, not just on our shared linguistic and cultural affinities, which are very strong indeed, but our shared common cause, vision and destiny held together by the principles of respect for human dignity, the rule of law, freedom, equality, solidarity and responsibility, and our collective aspiration of living together in harmony and peace.
2. The solidarity among the nations and nationalities in Ethiopia will endure and a more robust cooperation will continue to advancing our common cause and peacebuilding in Ethiopia and beyond. We are united on the major issues of Ethiopian politics. Ethiopia cannot once again become a unitary political entity and a uniform cultural area. Such an arrangement is neither possible to install nor strong enough to sustain. Building a common economic space and a common political community undergirded by a democratic order, bound by a longing for a lasting peace and a sustainable development, is the only way forward.

VIOLENCE AND ATROCITY CRIMES

1. Under the guise of law enforcement, western and southern Oromia had been under military command for the last three years. Unconstrained security forces committed egregious human rights violations including rape, extrajudicial executions and burning of homes, farms and harvests. Leaders and members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and supporters, specifically thousands of innocent farmers, businesspersons, students and community leaders, were thrown into prisons and internment camps unlawfully. People under state custody in different parts of the region including the capital city are denied their fundamental constitutional right to due process of law.
2. In other regional states, similar violations occur with impunity. On July 18, 2019, more than 174 Sidama were massacred by security forces the prime minister sent to their region to crackdown on citizens demanding to hold a referendum for statehood. The Konso, Wolayta, Kemant, Agaw, Benshangul Gumuz and others were subjected to unspeakable violence simply for demanding to exercise their constitutional right to self-rule.
3. A total war on the Tigray regional state waged by combined force made up of the Ethiopian military and Amhara regional state Special Forces, supported by large contingents from Eritrea and Somalia as well as drone support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has turned Tigray into a wasteland, devoid of its inhabitants and

resources. The operation, carried out after cutting off all communications, has caused incalculable human and material tragedy in the region.

4. The regime now stands accused of perpetrating war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Tigray and similar crimes in Oromia and Benshangul Gumuz regions. Amhara regional state security forces had perpetrated similar atrocity crimes against the Qimant and other peoples in the region. In these regions, and all over the country, the regime has committed dehumanizing atrocity crimes, the evidence of which is now emerging.
5. The prime minister stands accused of treason for inviting foreign forces mercilessly to annihilate the Tigray people. In addition, he stands accused of inviting Sudanese authorities who state that they had the permission of Ethiopia's prime minister to move in and capture vast tracts of land along its border with Ethiopia at the invitation of the Ethiopian prime minister. This is a violation of the government's duty to protect the Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
6. Civil war, grave humanitarian crises and alleged war crimes, ethnic cleansing, imprisonment of prominent opposition political leaders, rampant intercommunal conflict, insecurity, displacement, political malaise, administrative paralysis and malfeasance of politicians now characterize the country's body politic. The country is now on course to witness not just a return to authoritarian rule but a calamitous state collapse and national dissolution.

FAILURE OF GOVERNANCE

1. One of the vices of the EPRDF government is the blending of party and government. In the footsteps of its predecessor, the Prosperity Party treats state institutions as its private property and uses it against its political opponents. The approach has brought the country to the verge of dissolution. Governing a multinational country is about harmonizing conflicting interests, not following one's self-righteous path. The Prosperity Party must come to its senses, set its priorities straight and consider saving the country from more bloodshed.
2. The Prosperity Party's record of governance is abysmal. The prevailing reality of the country to mention but a few, lack of independent judiciary and justice system, grave human rights violations across the country, rampant corruption, lack of good governance and accountability deficit, show an assault on the principle of the rule of law. The economy has run to the ground, pivotal national institutions dismantled and the country isolated regionally and internationally. The government is demonstrably unable to protect the country's sovereignty, defend its territories and remove foreign forces out of the country.
3. The Prosperity Party declared a war of choice on Tigray and Oromia. Tigray is the foundation of Ethiopia's proud heritage. Oromia is the geographic, demographic and

economic center of Ethiopia. Instead of diplomatic response to political problems, the Prosperity Party that usurped federal power has brought the country into a civil war that has no apparent endgame. The Ethiopian state cannot continue to exist by destroying its cultural and political foundation in the name of fighting a phantom junta and annihilating its core under the guise of fighting an illusory enemy.

UNDEMOCRATIC ELECTION

1. The 2021 election, postponed from 2020, was supposed to be the final act to end authoritarian rule and mark the first step toward a more open, participatory and accountable politics. Unlike past elections, the upcoming election was expected to be free, fair and competitive. However, it is already evident that the elections are being organized to suppress legitimate voices and exacerbate existing political contradictions. It is already clear that the election is shaping up to be not free, not fair and not competitive.

A. UNFREE

- i. Election is a political act, a civic obligation and a free expression of preference among alternatives. As such, an election cannot take place amid chaos or under duress. Citizens cannot make their voices heard and choose a government under duress. With most parts of the country in conflict zones or under military command, conducting an election that can legitimately be considered free is impossible.
- ii. A free election presupposes freedom of association. This is not the case in current day Ethiopia. Prominent opposition party leaders are in prison, their party offices are closed and government security forces constantly intimidate their members and supporters. Parties with broad acceptance among the people are excluded from the political marketplace. Furthermore, the impartiality of the electoral board is in question. Taken all together, the country is not ready, stable and safe enough to conduct free and fair elections.
- iii. A free election requires free expression of ideas. The government and the party controls the majority of media outlets. There is no independent media that is left in the country. Only outlets that support the official line are in operation. Ethiopia is once again described as one of the greatest jailers of journalists. Dissenting voices cannot be heard while the drumbeat of war is propounded daily and the adventures of “the great leader” are made the mainstay of the print and broadcast media.

B. UNFAIR

- i. Holding elections that were scheduled to be held in May 2020, allegedly because of the COVID 19, is appropriate. In retrospect, the reason for postponement was not the pandemic since the infection rate was significantly lower than the rate at which the disease is currently spreading. We believe the election was postponed to afford the

ruling party sufficient time to clear the electoral field of competition of strong opponents. With nearly all credible opponents incarcerated, there is no chance the elections are going to be competitive.

- ii. The existing electoral system in Ethiopia cannot be the basis for conducting credible and legitimate elections. In its composition and in its conduct, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has confirmed the suspicion that it is an executive arm of the ruling party. Some members of have not severed their loyalty to their previous political parties who are contesting the elections. The NEBE has less credibility now than the body that run national elections two decades ago.
- iii. Courts play a critical role in settling disputes that arise from contested electoral outcomes. To be regarded as impartial arbiters in settling electoral disputes, they maintain public trust even when they render verdicts and credibility pillars of democratic governance. However, the officers of Ethiopian courts of the court have not shown sufficient independence as guardians of a stable democracy. As defenders of those in power, the courts cannot be trusted to adjudicate electoral disputes and obviate the consequent post-election violence.
- iv. If electoral disputes escalate to disruption of law and order, security forces might be called on to restore order. The Ethiopian military, security and intelligence forces have never shown restraint from using force and independence from political activities and partisan involvement. The security sector was always organized, trained and funded to ensure regime security rather than public security. With this record of accomplishment, and reputation, it has limited capacity to act as a national security system that will serve and protect the constitution, the franchise and sanctity of the vote.

C. UNCOMPETITIVE

- i. The 2021 election is not competitive. We believe the election scheduled of May 2020 was postponed not because the COVID 19 infection rate was higher than its current rate. The party in power is now insisting on holding the elections in June not because it is confident that it can win a contested election but because it has completed its work of eliminating credible and strong competition from the opposition. With nearly all credible opponents behind bars, there is no chance the elections are going to be competitive. Where competition does not exist, there is no democratic election. What is coming up is not a democratic election but a coronation.
- ii. The electoral playing field is not level. Prosperity Party has everything at its disposal. The party and the government are indistinguishable. As such, the party controls the entire state apparatus and uses it to advance its party advantage with no accountability. The party commands an inexhaustible source of finance to fund its campaign. It spies on the activities of its opponents or has no qualms coercing voters

to cast their vote in its favor. It can and is using the law enforcement apparatus to persecute, imprison or even assassinate its political differences.

- iii. The fundamental reason why the election cannot be competitive is the fact that the election is inextricably linked to the Prosperity Party's future. Prosperity Party was created not to advance an ideological cause but to eliminate EPRDF's periodic evaluation that might result in the removal of leadership. Consequently, the party is a motley coalition of former EPRDF parties with diverse interests and contradictory dreams, held together by a common desire to cling to power and privilege. Losing this election is certain death for Prosperity Party and unknown future for the party bosses. To obviate this eventuality, the party will do anything to "win" the election rather than lose and disintegrate.

UNDESIRABLE OUTCOMES

1. If the election proceeds as planned, Prosperity Party will make sure it "wins." The day after election day, Ethiopia is going to be led by a person accused of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing. He would be a prime minister who invited foreign forces to commit atrocity crimes against his compatriots and allowed violation of his country's sovereignty. As such, he will make Ethiopia an international pariah. Foreign governments and investors will find it hard to deal with a criminal.
2. It is becoming self-evident that the upcoming election is unlikely to resolve the existing political crises. It is indeed difficult to fathom a national government that would be established after an election that excludes Tigray on account that the region is unstable and Oromia by effectively neutralizing Oromo opposition parties cannot be legitimate. We fear that this election could lead to a pre and post-election crises that would constitute a worse outcome than holding the election.
3. The consequences of post-election crises is not going to be confined within Ethiopia's borders. The collapse of authority in Ethiopia will have debilitating repercussions for the Horn of Africa region, which is already reeling from the destabilizing effect of Ethiopia's war against its citizens.

THE WAY OUT

1. The Prosperity Party is responsible for the unstable state of affairs in the country. The party's exclusionary politics, militarization of politics and violation of fundamental human rights has brought the country to the verge of collapse of authority. With its dreadful record, the Prosperity Party does not have any legitimacy left to address the pressing problems facing the country.
2. Ethiopia's prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has continually rejected dialogue and suggestions for an interim power sharing arrangements. The 2019 Nobel Laureate is now suspected of committing crimes against humanity, crimes against peace and

crimes against war. He cannot be trusted to be the mediator convening a national dialogue of all stakeholders and facilitate the creation of a national consensus that can salvage Ethiopia. He must resign as prime minister. Only then can the country return to addressing the bigger issues of ending war, resetting the aborted political transition and protecting the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

3. We urge the international community to put pressure on the governing party to rethink its unrealistic political goals before the planned election in June 2021. The priority for all must be to bring competing political forces together to participate in a national dialogue, produce a new political compact for the country and forge a political consensus that can obviate prolonged conflicts and reset the transition back on course.
4. To conduct a genuine national dialogue, all opposition political leaders and members of political parties must be released without precondition and immediately. The expected outcome of the national dialogue is establishing a transitional government that will serve as a caretaker government until free, fair and competitive elections are conducted and a popularly elected government is established.

Finally, in humble submission to our the cause of our people, we, the members of the EMFSF, extend a call to all peoples in Ethiopia to stand together and act in concert to commit to the struggle to prevent an rising autocracy that has become the source of all discontent, division and disorder in the country.