

Ethiopia Strengthening Democracy, Election Culture

Ujulu Obang 03-31-15

Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority and the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in collaboration had organized consultative forum on March 14, 2015 designed to assess the level of free air time and news paper column utilization of contesting parties.

Briefing the forum, Ethiopian Broadcast Authority (EBA) said political parties have not utilized fully the free airtime and the space allotted to them in the print media during the past two weeks.

Speaking on the forum, EBA Monitoring and Capacity Building Director, Deressa Terefe said the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has managed to use 98 percent of its allotted air time in the radio, 100 percent in television and 86 percent in the print media.

He said EPRDF partner parties have used only 51 percent of the time allocated in radio and 33 percent in television while opposition political parties have used 37 percent of the time allocated in radio, 53 percent in television and 2 percent in the print media, the director stated.

According to the director, capacity limitation, lack of cooperation on the part of some media outlets and breaching of law are among the major reasons problems encountered during the stated period.

EBA Director-General, Zeray Asgedom on his part said that except few institutions, more or less, it could be said that the media have been working cooperatively with all the political parties and they have provided them with technical support in order to promote and publicize their programs.

He expressed hope that the media would whole heartedly cooperate with the parties coming up with their campaign promotions as usual and indeed they are expected to provide technical assistance and studio related support to the political parties.

In line with this, Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority said that so far political parties are conducting their promotion in an encouraging manner. However, there encountered various problems related to formulation of incompatible programs, inclusion of materials prohibited by the Constitution and electoral code of conduct, dalliance and submitting programs long overdue and wrangling to consume some other time and urge to broadcast live while live election promotion is not allowed.

The Authority has called on all political parties to play by the rules of the game, observe the electoral code of conduct, abide by all the rules and regulations of the land and refrain from propagating speeches that incite racial hatred and flare instability across the country.

NEBE Chairperson Prof. Merga Bekana said that nation is exerting utmost effort to conclude the upcoming election in an exemplary manner. In this regard, he said NEBE is exerting strenuous effort to successfully accomplish the coming election through provision of awareness enhancing training to the political parties and the general public.

He said the various mass media institutions have established election desks intended to solve problems and provide quick response to the needs of political parties. And this has played its own role to undertake law-abiding campaign and publicize same contents.

According to him, the training provided by NEBE has helped the parties to run their campaigns in a peaceful manner. And there has no encounter of major problems except some irregularities observed in the promotion of some parties. The Chairman stressed that the election-related activities are going in a smooth manner and it could help to conclude the election in a desirable democratic manner.

Pertinent to election, Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn has also said that we have a constitutional system in this country in which democracy in general and multi-party democracy in particular constitute a mandatory and existential issue. This is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country where there are a lot of interest groups and individuals who have to be embraced by a democratic system.

We are very keen to see multi-party democracy in this country to flourish. There is no reason for the government to back-track from democratic discourse and multi-party democracy. We have more than 90 parties which are registered and legally operate in this country and they have all rights to do so within the bounds of the law.

In every country, an incumbent government always has more advantages vis à vis other parties. But we have a legal system that provides all the necessary protection for opposition political parties and their members. We feel that even though this is a fledgling democracy that needs to improve every day, we have enough room for parties to exercise their rights.

When you talk of creation of level playing-field in terms of media usage, the government uses public media to implement its programs and address various issues. Of course, the opposition party members can also use the public media whenever they need to do so. We occasionally have media debate with opposition party members on basic agenda items of the country. Specifically, we might remember the debates on anti-terrorism and civil society organization laws. If the opposition parties want to have more engagement with the media, I think they have to work more closely with it.

This is election year and statistics shows us that the opposition parties have not fully utilized the air time and news paper column allocated for them in the public media during election period. I think they have to improve their ability to use their allocated time efficiently and effectively, though it is not the fault line of the government.

In an election, the decisions are made by the people, and not by the parties. It is the people who can decide the number of seats the ruling party or the opposition should get. Multi-party

democracy is gauged in terms of the process of the election, not of the result. Obviously, EPRDF (the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front) is a dominant party and farmers, micro and small enterprise developers and the majority of city dwellers are its support base. If you want to understand the composition of the support of political parties in this country, you have to see the support base of each party.

EPRDF has 80 percent of our people living in rural areas engaged in farming. We know there is lack of engagement on our part with those in the upper strata of society. We are working on engaging them but we cannot be sure whether we can get enough votes from them. If contesting parties want to be competent enough, it is up to them to convince those who have been a strong support base for the EPRDF. We have 25 million students in our school system. These are youth groups with huge aspirations and demand. The EPRDF has around 2 million members from this group. You can imagine how big this party is.

With all its limitations as a fledgling democracy, I can say it is flourishing. Democracy means building democratic culture. It is not something you can bring in one day and teach everyone to be democratic. We have undemocratic practices in our societal makeup, including households where the husband decides everything and the children and the wife are not part of that decision.

All theories expounding human and democratic rights come to the conclusion that the right of individuals to elect their representatives is an exercise of one of the fundamental rights set out in the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). In short, the right to vote is an inalienable element of human rights.

The UDHR provides that elections must be transparent and should ensure the participation of the public. Elections which possess this attribute are not only pivotal in the establishment of a people-centered government but also serve as a cornerstone for the respect of human and democratic rights. Democracy is all about securing the will of the people, which can be expressed genuinely through elections alone.

All advocates of human rights agree that each and every political party vying to form a government must respect and ensure the free exercise of the right to vote of citizens. Naturally while doing so the parties should make no distinction of any kind based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. It's precisely because the right to vote is a universal right that its exercise should not be abridged for any reason whatsoever.

In any nation where democratic process is the norm, it is normal for different political parties to contest for political power. Within that process, Political power is held only through peaceful and democratic manner and not through violence.

Countries such as Canada, India, Britain, etc. are well known for their advanced democracy, good governance and the rule of law. Their population benefits as a result of those democratic values and norms. In countries such as those mentioned where democracy, good governance, and adherence to the rule of law is the norm, political power is contested through peaceful and democratic means.

In those countries where democracy, good governance, and respect for the rule of law is mandatory substance, political power is gained only through peaceful and democratic means (destructive and violent activities have become things of the past and have long given way to peaceful, legal and constitutional activities). As a result, people become more and more sophisticated and adopt peaceful and democratic means to solve any problems they might be confronted with. Dialogue and tolerance has thus become rigueur of civilized country exercising full-fledged democracy.

Political parties in those democratic nations have the tendency of conducting rigorous de bates during elections. However, all that process is guided by their constitution and laws of the land, including guidelines of their electoral board. Further, those grueling campaigns and debates are conducted peacefully and in a civilized manner because all contesting parties realize that everything is done to advance democracy, the rule of law and mainly to benefit the society at large. At the end of the day, when ballots are counted and a party is declared a winner, all contesting parties congratulate each other and all parties take their respective seats for a common goal to start the business of the nation and serve the public at large.

Therefore, a lesson or two can be drawn from such a civilized political culture where democracy, good governance and the rule of law have evolved and have been functional for many years and where these values are strictly adhered and respected by the public at large.

Four elections in Ethiopia have, among other things, demonstrated that the Ethiopian people, despite the fact that they were deprived of all those democratic values and norms for many years, they have shown their dedication and commitment to advance the above mentioned civilized values and norms. The forth national election showed the whole world that despite their limited experience in those civilized norms and values, Ethiopians came out in millions, waited long hours and peacefully voted for the parties they want. Further, Ethiopians in an unpredicted number from every corner of the nation showed the whole world that they too can exercise their democratic rights and can peacefully and democratically cast their votes (ready to democratically advance.

The whole world witnessed this unpredicted experience. It also showed that Ethiopia after many years of autocratic and dictatorial regimes is highly determined to stick to the track of democracy, good governance and sustainable development. Last election further demonstrated that the Ethiopian people are committed to carry on those fundamental democratic values and maintain the civilized culture of mutual co-existence.

They have clearly demonstrated that there is no turning back or giving up to obsolete and backward mentality. They have given a clear message in that regard to those who aspire to bring back their detrimental and destructive beliefs. The election further demonstrated that political power is achieved through democratic, free and fair election.

Preparations Well Underway for the Upcoming Election

Regulations for elections in Ethiopia are included in three major proclamations: the "Amended Electoral Law of Ethiopia" (Proclamation No. 532/2007) and the "Revised Political Parties Registration Proclamation" (Proclamation No. 573/2008). These and other regulations and directives concerning the organization of elections are comprehensively presented in a document entitled "Compendium of Electoral Legislation" published in 2011 by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.

Based on these proclamations, regulations and directives, all promulgated by the House of the Peoples' Representatives, the majority of preparations for this year's May election are now largely complete. The procedures have been steadily followed over the last few months by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia according to the timetable laid down; and all these efforts are aimed at conducting a democratic, free and fair election at the federal and regional levels.

Recently, Public Relations Director of the National Electoral Board, Ato Demissew Benti said that over 34.8 million electors, accounting for over 97 percent of the eligible voters, had taken their election cards in preparation to cast votes in the election, adding that of the total electors registered, 16.7 million were females.

The Director noted that "fifty-seven of the 60 political parties registered to contest the election have fielded candidates that will compete for seats in the federal parliament and regional councils." He said that "more than 6,000 candidates including 11 private contestants have been registered; over 1,308 of them women." Of the total candidates, 1,884 will contest seats in the National Parliament, the House of People's Representatives and 4,166 will contest seats in the Regional Councils of the nine Regional States and the two Chartered Cities.

According to him, the National Electoral Commission has worked very hard in organizing, preparing and giving electoral guidelines to different political parties, independent candidates and to the public at large in order to conduct a civilized and world class electoral proceeding during the upcoming fifth national election. Things are coming up quite well vis-à-vis the National Electoral Board thus far and the Electoral Board has now finalized its preparations and all indications show that the upcoming fifth national election will be peaceful, free, fair and democratic.

The Board has continued its further preparations. These have included the allocation of budget and offering training for election officials and briefings for the public on a regular basis.

The election law limits the maximum number of candidates in any one constituency in Addis Ababa to 12, and the NEBE decided that in constituencies where this figure had been exceeded, lots should be drawn to decide on the proper number of candidates. In Addis Ababa, a total of 328 candidates were fielded by 25 political parties.

The NEBE therefore arranged for lots to be drawn to bring the numbers down to the correct figure. Candidates from the six parties which attracted the highest numbers of votes in the previous election were automatically qualified but the other candidates were drawn by lot.

The Head of the Addis Ababa branch of the NEBE, Ato Getahun Gebremedhin, said the process followed appropriate legal procedures and that as the parties were all aware of the law, there had been no complaints

As part of its job of enhancing civic awareness about the electoral processes and contributing to the country's effort to build a democratic system, the Board has also given training to election officials who will staff the special polling stations in the military academies and in the higher education institutions.

It has also provided training to law enforcement bodies that have huge responsibility to legally resolve disagreements that may arise between political parties during the election. For instance, in this regard, NEBE had offered a two-day training workshop in Adama town recently.

Speaking on the training, NEBE Deputy Chairperson, Addisu Gebre-Egziabher said ensuring rule of law is essential to conclude the election in a fair, free, democratic and credible manner. And the training provided to law enforcement bodies could contribute a lot to iron out problems and further enhance democratization process.

He stated that the culture of democracy is being strengthened in Ethiopia with time. The election processes are also governed by international principles and conventions that are acceptable far and wide. According to him, ensuring the rule of law has paramount importance in making the upcoming election fair, free, peaceful and democratic.

It has also conducted training for election officials to staff the Defense Force special polling stations. It also noted that training will also be offered to those involved in higher educational establishments and at the special polling station at the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam at the end of March.

As part of election effort, the Joint Council of the Political Parties has agreed on nine subjects as the agendas for the televised debates between the political parties during the debating sessions as part of the efforts to help voters make informed decisions in choosing where to place their vote. The subjects identified for debate in the televised election programs cover a variety of subjects: the Multi Party System and Building Democracy; Federalism; Agricultural and Rural Policy; Urban Development and Industrial Policy; Good Governance and the Rule of Law; National Security; Foreign Policy; Infrastructure; and Education and Health.

So far the debate on the multi party system and building democracy, federalism and agricultural policies and implementation has gone very well. The contestants have presented their views to the voter public and the voter is thought to have ample knowledge on the various alternatives used to cast its vote.

In view of the fact that the principle of give-and-take is a feature of politics, it is a mark of modernity to refrain from a mutually harmful political struggle and endeavor to make sure that democracy takes root. This can be accomplished by, among others things, respecting the right of the public to participate in the affairs which affect its interest.

All political actors must never lose sight of the fact that elections are an integral part of a win-win political struggle; they have to realize that regardless of the difficulties they may face as of any developing democracy, they should contribute their share to the building of a stable multi-party democracy that is underpinned by the genuine expression of the will of the people through free, fair, democratic and credible elections.

Elections can be free and fair when voters are able to cast their ballots freely. Political parties play a vital role in rallying the public to exercise its right to vote and demonstrate that it is the decisive actor in the political process. After all, a democratic election is unthinkable without public participation.

Towards Sizeable Election Campaign

Campaigning for the May general elections has so far been officially commenced. Accordingly, all the contesting parties are expected to promote their election agenda as per the rules set to this purpose. And the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and opposition parties may benefit from election campaign provided they do not engage in preaching of hate speech and bickering on worn-out and impractical issues (they are long awaited to focus on concrete policy alternatives which are near and dear to the public).

The debates conducted between contesting parties as part of electioneering always revolve around certain issues which have been pretty much settled. One of these issues is federalism. Ethiopians have been living under a federal structure of government for the past 20 years and frankly speaking the reality on the ground leaves no room but for federalism. It is therefore sad to see some wasting their breath even though it is quite clear now that whether one likes it or not, Ethiopia can never go back to being a unitary state. Instead of making the necessity or otherwise of federalism for Ethiopia a campaign platform, it is preferable to couch the debate in terms of whether the concept of federalism has been correctly understood and what form of federalism works for the country.

Several untenable arguments have been made about the constitution of Ethiopia ever since its adoption two decades ago. There is no denying that the constitution has proven to be the tie that binds the people of Ethiopia and can go a long way towards fulfilling their aspiration if it is properly put into practice. Even if it contains provisions which some may find objectionable, it is better to deliberate on how they can be addressed in a manner which ensures that the constitutional order becomes more democratic and protects the long-term interest of the nation.

Moreover, in view of the fact that the constitution enshrines internationally accepted provisions which are instrumental in building a democratic system any political party or individual running in the upcoming elections must refrain from bashing the constitution and be committed to working within the overarching framework it establishes.

Among others, land ownership is a perennial debate topic. The constitution decrees that land ownership is exclusively vested in the State and peoples of Ethiopia and that it shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange. Following the constitution's ratification, a series of legislation has been enacted setting out the mechanism by which it can be legally possessed as

well as guaranteeing the right of citizens to possess both rural and urban land and protection against eviction from their possession.

Hence, any debate on land ownership should focus not on privatizing it, but rather how to assure its optimal utilization to the benefit of citizens and close the loopholes which opens the door for the misuse of such a finite resource. Any debate that neither anchored in the reality nor is framed in a language easily understood by voters is bound to be a dreary and ultimately futile exercise. That is why such a debate has to deal with subjects that have a direct bearing on the day-to-day life of the public.

Further agenda which forms part of election campaigning in Ethiopia revolves around whether individual rights should have precedence over group rights or the vice-versa. It does not matter for the public who is on the right side of such an ideological divide.

What is important for it is the demonstration of an unswerving commitment by all contestants vying for office to the unabridged observance of all the rights set out in the constitution, be they individual or group rights. As the constitution actually affords full protection to both types of rights, any divergence of view on which of them should be accorded primacy is immaterial in the Ethiopian context.

In this regard, the country's intellectuals should taking part in debates which are of great use to enhance democratic culture and hammer out ideas that have no practical value and are tedious. They also should propose ideas which are helpful in engaging in productive dialogues that lead to practicable policy recommendations on federalism, constitutionalism, land tenure, human rights and other critical matters.

Given that campaigning is all about winning the hearts and minds of the electorate, it should go beyond lambasting the track record of a contesting party and present better policy proposals which are easy to comprehend. While it is reasonable and natural for the ruling party to be appreciated for its achievements, at the same time it must come clean about its weaknesses. It should explain convincingly what it plans to do in order to counter accusations that its weakness does not match its performance on the economic front.

On their part, opposition parties need to understand they cannot win over voters just by exposing the ruling party's flaws and are obliged to tender feasible policy options that take into account the facts on the ground. They have to abandon their usual argument that they will come up with viable policy ideas in consultation with the public; as aspirants for office it is they who are duty-bound to sell to voters a set of policies they believe are in the former's interest.

And they must put stop to blaming their shortcomings on others. Voters certainly do not deserve such outdated campaigning tactic. Elections become lively when contesting parties engage in debates on contentious policy issues which grip the public's attention. The victorious party is usually determined by who did well in these debates.

In conclusion, all political parties running in the May general elections must see to it that they do not resort to such negative campaigning strategies as smearing the reputation of or inciting hatred towards their opponents since this does no one good and is counterproductive.

On the contrary, they owe the public the duty to explain to it clearly what tangible options they put on the table in terms of accomplishing greater economic growth and extricating Ethiopians from poverty, building a democratic system where citizens' rights are fully respected, broadening the political space, ensuring observance of the rule of law and prevalence of good governance, holding free, democratic and credible elections, combating corruption, equitable allocation of resources, among others. Engaging in theoretical analysis which does not result in concrete actions on the ground is a waste of everybody's time and must be avoided entirely.

Election Where Various Policy Alternatives Vie

One of the critical factors determining the level of the success of the May national elections is the ability of all contesting parties to present freely their policy alternatives to the public.

Elections in developed democracies are platforms which enable the free expressions of the will of the public; they are not sham exercises. That's why the elections need to be a forum where policy alternatives compete.

Both the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and opposition parties are duty-bound to see to it that all policy alternatives can be disseminated without any obstruction. It's only when all stakeholders, namely political parties, do their part to achieve this goal that the electorate can make an informed decision from among the options on the table.

The ruling EPRDF owes the duty to keep honor its pledge that the May elections will be free, democratic, peaceful and credible. It is entitled, as any political party running for office, to promote its accomplishments and its policy alternatives. While doing so, for the sake of enrichment of democratic culture in the country, it must encourage other contesting parties to play fair game based on rule of law.

On their part, opposition parties should work towards ensuring that the whole process is peaceful and democratic in cognizance of the gain they must make when they decide to take part in the elections. Given that all parties aim to obtain voters' approval, they have to demonstrate due respect to the voter public.

As the fate of a nation and its people hinge on elections, they must not be conducted for the sake of complying with formalities alone. In advanced democracies elections are vital events which provide a forum where competing ideas on the direction a nation should take are thrashed out and decided upon; they lay the foundation for sustainable growth and prosperity. Consequently, the political parties which present to the public an election ticket that citizens believe is in their interest usually win elections in which they are allowed to exercise their right to vote freely.

It is incumbent upon all parties running in the upcoming fifth general elections to learn from their past mistakes and focus on how to bring voters to their side through democratic and

civilized electioneering instead of resorting to essentially undemocratic and ultimately counter-productive strategies like smear campaigns. Otherwise, the elections will be remembered for all the wrong reasons including violence, rights violations and a disregard for the rule of law.

Political parties would do well to realize that the only way they can hope to garner votes is by offering the public well-articulated and easily understandable policy options. If, however, they choose to shirk their responsibility and turn to maligning their opponents' reputation as their chief campaigning strategy, the democratization process will take an undesirable turn. Such undemocratic behavior is also bound to cost them whatever faith the public has in them. True democrats are always prepared to accommodate differing views since they submit to the will of the public and do not shy away from an intellectual battle.

The violence which marred some of the previous elections basically occurred because a few elements chose to follow the undemocratic path that resulted in undesirable consequence. Elections held in a nascent democracy like Ethiopia cannot be expected to be totally unflawed. Hence, any irregularity that may occur during an election can be addressed constructively if the process is peaceful and democratic.

The EPRDF-led government has the obligation to follow closely that all state and party structures run neutrally in favor of burgeoning democracy and support the peaceful and democratic activities of opposition parties. The current political space is thought to be as much wide to accommodate all political parties and the government is responsible to ensure smooth flow of peaceful election activities used to engage parties and access the public with their policy alternatives.

The Constitution has decelerated equality for individuals and has also granted freedom to engage in any party activity. Hence, no limitation on the side of parties to promote their policies so far as they do it in a peaceful way that avoids hatred and creation of animosity between the various nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia. And it is the sole right of the electorate alone which ought to decide who can best defend its interest.

To be frank, the ruling party, EPRDF, has done enough and gone a long way to facilitate the conditions which enable opposition parties to spell out the alternatives they believe advance the welfare of the people of Ethiopia. It has also provided training to its members and observers related to election and election code of conduct, which in one way or another helps to sweep away irregularities and effect smooth flow of election in one way or another.

And the parties, far from squandering it, need to take such an opportunity, with both hands. Laying all their blame at the door of the EPRDF while failing to do their homework can neither propel them to election success nor help them conceal their shortcomings. They will have to criticize no one but themselves if they are found wanting in presenting confidently the alternatives they have in store to the public.

Democracy Indispensable Way Forward

Democracy has been for centuries the preferred mode of establishing a government for it promotes the free expression of ideas, the amicable resolution of disputes and respect for the rights of everyone.

The citizens of countries that do not abide by the precepts of democracy suffer from suppression and injustice. On the contrary, a country which is the beacon of democracy and protects the inalienable rights of its people as human beings is well on the way to building a nation which is prosperous, at peace with itself and is capable of defending its honor on the international stage.

Though it has been half a century since the movement for democracy began in Ethiopia, the ride continues to be bumpy and fraught with all sorts of difficulties to this day. For instance, the nadir in the history of Ethiopia happened during the ruthless and unscrupulous derg regime that ends in blood bath and malignant terror. The tragedy hatched by derg loomed following the 1974 revolution that bogged down the country's democracy-building process for decades.

Unfortunately, the inability of its leaders and people to draw lessons from the death of thousands of their compatriots during the 17-year rule of the military dictatorship had perpetuated strife and discord. Consequently, the predicament that left its scar has still cast its long shadow, though the impediments standing in the way of putting together a stable democracy that accommodates differences and advances the national interest is surely thriving little by little in a confident way.

At a time when efforts, albeit at a nascent stage, are being made to build a democratic system in Ethiopia, the events taking place in Ethiopia are improving with time, though at the cost of back bone breaking endeavors of the country. Currently, unlike the previous elections that piggybacked tensions between the ruling and opposition parties, recent elections including the previous general election has not encountered any acutely palpable problem due to growing democratic culture and preparations made on the side of the government to bar any foreseeable problems before the election date draws near.

Accordingly, no major wrangling between parties than fight to become victorious through debate(though typical of waging dog eat dog competition through media campaign whenever elections come around). And no significant rows, if any could be avoided easily. Now a days there are traceable signs that the parties are making genuine attempt to bridge their rifts when it comes to national agenda like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam(GERD).

Needless to say, any political party that claims to be committed to a peaceful pursuit of political objectives cannot have the moral high ground to sermonize about democracy if it lacks the courage or the willingness to resolve differences democratically. Hence, all actors on the different end of the political spectrum need to display tolerance and respect for their "opponents". A party which does not undertake its activity abided by its by-laws and a party that curbs freedom of expression of its members is thought to be unfit to gain political power at a national level and govern people(no matter how far it waffles about defending the gains of true democracy).

In countries where the concept of democracy has taken root lawmakers who were voted into office have the utmost respect for the electorate because citizens have the freedom to vote for whoever they like. On the other hand, elections taking place where multi-party democracy and the rule of law are not cherished are bound to bring about a dictatorship. This in turn will result in the exclusion of the majority from the political space, disenfranchisement and eventually the demise of democracy.

Democracy is not a mere item for Ethiopia; it's an issue of existence. There exist heartfelt interests for democracy in Ethiopia, which is a home of over 90 million people. Accordingly, the only way to practically realize this noble interest is to undertake peaceful election that can accommodate true interest of the electorate through mass participation, which in turn could ensure the prevalence of democracy in Ethiopia.

Democracy is about citizens' right to elect their representatives, to express their opinion, and to oppose, support or abstain. It's a mechanism which assures respect for human and democratic rights, equality of citizens and the rule of law. Though democracy is a process which grows and flourishes over time, it cannot be put into practice without the active participation of the public.

National election drawing near, the people of this country are preparing to exercise their fundamental democratic right of electing or be elected as a citizen by casting their votes for the party or a candidate of their choice for the fifth time. Over sixty different political parties are as a result working based on the code of conduct(including those who do not sign it) in order to have a peaceful, free, fair and democratic election.

Individual candidates and the public at large fulfill their citizenship and democratic right in a manner ethical and responsible while conducting a peaceful, free, fair and democratic upcoming fifth national election. Further, the public at large must give a deaf ear to those who would like to disrupt and disturb our nation's economic and political progress and focus on the real value of peace, stability and socio-economic and political progress.

Insofar as elections are mechanism by which citizens freely choose their representatives either directly or indirectly, it is a matter of fair game to mobilize the electorate to vote. If elections are to be free and democratic, contesting parties should respect the rule of the game and prioritize the interest of the public before their own.

Violence or any other illegal activities are issues of the past and with no fruits to bear. Therefore, violence cannot and will not be the answer, but legal, constitutional and civilized dialogue. Using civilized, peaceful and modern means, the Ethiopian people will make the Fifth National Election free, fair and democratic. It will be an exemplary to many other nations.