

**Keynote address by H.E. Mr. Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Federalism.**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 13, 2010**

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Governments,  
Excellencies Heads of Delegation,  
Honorable Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to Addis Ababa for the Fifth International Conference on Federalism which is being held in Africa for the first time. Allow me to thank you all for joining us today. My special thanks goes to my colleagues the Heads of States and Governments who have honored us with their presence at this unusually busy time in the African calendar.

No two countries are the same in all aspects. Every country is bound to have its own unique characteristics. Democratic Federalism like all other forms of governance has to be designated to fit the unique circumstances of each country. No two federal systems can thus be identical. However, federal democracies across the globe are bound to have some basic common features and are bound to face some common challenges. It therefore goes without saying that they can learn from each others' experiences and draw valuable lessons from expert analysis of their common endeavors. A forum such as this one provides us a unique opportunity to do so. That is why I believe the International Conference on Federalism is a unique and very valuable school on Democratic Federalism to all of us.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ethiopia has throughout its long history endeavored to develop a system of governance that embraces its diversity- one that helps it to transform its extraordinary diversity from an existential threat to a deep well of strength and dynamism with little success. Indeed the management of its diversity has for centuries constituted a primary challenge- a challenge that has massively contributed to its centuries long journey backwards from the frontline of world civilization to one of the poorest countries on earth. Our experiment with Democratic Federalism over the past two decades must thus be seen as one in a line of attempts to achieve unity in Diversity. All indications so far suggest that this is at last a successful experiment.

Our federal system has allowed us to introduce a democratic system of governance that is fast maturing and consolidating. It has enabled all the peoples of Ethiopia to maintain and celebrate their individual identities while at the same time constituting the bigger family of Ethiopians. It has empowered all the peoples of Ethiopia to manage their local affairs autonomously and to mobilize all their resources to improve their livelihoods and develop their communities while at the same time becoming active participants in common national affairs. It has allowed us to design our governance system to fit the circumstances of each locality and thus serve the people better while consolidating our common democratic governance. Democratic Federalism has enabled us to forge a common Ethiopian identity- one that is not separated and above our diverse identities but one that is constituted by the magnificence of such diversity. It has become the bedrock upon which a stable and peaceful nation is being constituted. It has become the solid basis upon which we are building a young and dynamic nation out of one of the oldest states on earth.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

For more than seven years now, our economy has achieved double digit growth rates- one of the fastest and most sustained rates of growth in the world. Our growth has affected every corner of our vast nation. The fruits of our success has been very broadly shared as ours is the most equitable economy in our development. Democratic Federalism has played a vital role in our economic success by empowering every citizen and every community to contribute to our development and to benefit from it in a fair and equitable manner. Our system of governance has contributed to the success by consolidating peace and stability in our country and paving the way for all of us to join hands in rebuilding our nation.

This is why we state that Democratic Federalism is one of the two pillars of our national renaissance. Together with the establishment and consolidation of an effective developmental state in our country it has enabled us to begin the long road back to the frontlines of our civilization. Just as our failure to embrace our diversity had over the centuries been one of the primary cause of our retreat from the front ranks of human civilization- the successful management of our diversity through Democratic Federalism has become one of the pillars of the ongoing Ethiopian renaissance.

Our federal and Democratic system is still a fledgling system. It is work in progress. Naturally therefore it faces many challenges and has a number of significant weaknesses. A section of our citizens and particularly a section of our

political class, however small, has yet to fully embrace our new system. Some amongst them are too wedded to the past to recognize that Democratic Federalism is not a system to promote centrifugal forces in our nation but one to effectively neutralize such tendencies. Some amongst them are too scared by the past to recognize that our system is not old wine in new bottle but a fresh start to rebuild our unity on the basis of equality and the freely expressed will of the people. We have yet to overcome their fears and build broad and deep national consensus on the matter.

Our Federalism is based on a system of multi-party Democracy. Democracy is a new experience for our old nation. Our institutions of Democratic governance need further consolidation. Our culture of democratic discourse needs further refining.

While we are thus keenly aware of the long journey we have yet to travel in order to consolidate our system of Democratic Federalism, we have nevertheless achieved enough success to assure us that we have embarked on the right path to national renaissance. While we are eager to learn from the participants of this conference and fellow Democratic Federalists, we nevertheless feel that this about learning to further improve and perfect our system and not about a completely new start. That is why we feel doubly honored to be able to host this great school of federalism.

Allow me to conclude by wishing you all fruitful deliberations and a happy stay here in Addis.

I thank you!