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Andimta - Ethiopian Civil Discourse Association

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A Call for an Impartial Support to the Cause of Civility in Ethiopia

Andimta – Ethiopian Civil Discourse Association (A-ECDA) is an Association that aims and works for the creation of a civil political culture marked by peaceful coexistence and harmonious dialogue. As an Association that promotes civility and civil discourse, A-ECDA has been gravely concerned about the conflict in Northern and other parts of Ethiopia. However, even more concerning is the way parts of the international community and some international media are mishandling the situation at hand.

We strongly believe that it is imperative that any concerned party with the intention of supporting efforts to resolve the conflict in the country should thoroughly understand the complex nature of the ongoing conflict and the deep-seated political differences and grievances in Ethiopia’s nascent democracy. The political transformation the country is undergoing, as the government would suggest and we agree, requires a delicate, nuanced and context-driven handling of its domestic affairs.

We are of the view that the best for Ethiopia and also for the US as a longtime ally, is for the United States government to work and walk very closely with the elected Government of Ethiopia. We support the US government’s endeavor to bring about a peaceful solution to the situation and underscore the need to deal with the matter with the utmost caution and impartiality. It is encouraging that the government of the United States has repeatedly stated its primary objective in Ethiopia and the horn of Africa as the maintenance of peace and security, and the support of All-inclusive national dialogue. Although such objectives are helpful, it is equally concerning that US government’s acts, resolutions and strategies seem to lack in context and nuance regarding the situation in Ethiopia.

It is a widely accepted understanding across the Ethiopian public that US government’s approach lacks strategic balance and fairness between the government and other warring parties in a manner seemingly overlooking: the legitimacy of the Government of Ethiopia which is in power following a national election widely accepted to be by far the most peaceful and democratic albeit its shortcomings; and the terrorist designation by the Ethiopian parliament of the latter. Treating all parties as political equals, and siding with a party without due consideration to context and history would derail the aspired means of resolution through dialogue.

In this connection, we want to state that the economic sanctions and the punitive measures pursued by the US government with the purpose of pressuring the government to submit to its political demands lacks moral ground and factual basis. It is, to say the least, counterproductive. A case in point would be the recent decision by the US government to deny Ethiopia trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). AGOA had directly created 200,000 jobs and indirectly created millions, the vast majority being women who lead families under them. Removal of AGOA eligibility would only worsen the condition of ordinary Ethiopians who have no connection at all to the ongoing conflict without any meaningful impact on the Ethiopian government’s policy towards the conflict.

We also believe that some misleading, biased and unsubstantiated coverage of the conflict by foreign media would adversely affect the possibility of a peaceful resolution to the conflict through political dialogue. The recent alarmist report by CNN, for example, alleging that Addis Ababa is encircled by TPLF forces and could enter the Capital in a matter of hours had created unnecessary hysteria among the

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international community only to be found untrue as the forces were engaged in a conflict more than 300 kilometers away from the Capital. A similar dereliction of journalistic duty has been committed by a misleading report by Reuters that claimed the state of Emergency (SOE) Proclamation compels citizens to hold ID cards that disclose their ethnicity when this is not the case.

Such unethical and irresponsible media reports - increasingly perceived among Ethiopians as information warfare - have the potential to empower disruptive voices thereby hindering civil discourse by influencing stakeholders towards a particular way of thinking. These media wrongly inserting themselves as part of the disinformation/misinformation campaign are playing a pernicious role against the path of civility and peaceful settlement of conflicts.

This unfair treatment by governments and the media has resulted in public uproar within Ethiopia and beyond. Mass rallies held by Ethiopians across the nation and globally, as well as movements such as #NoMore - a movement protesting outsiders' mishandling of the crisis in Ethiopia - is sweeping the social media and gaining momentum as it spreads and turns into an African movement.

We strongly believe that what is needed is a constructive engagement and well-meaning support from the USG, other international partners and the Media. As Tibor Nagy, former assistant secretary of state for African Affairs rightly noted, "the solution [to the current crisis in Ethiopia] is going to come from within, not from without." Involvement of outsiders with a misguided foreign policy and rhetoric has always had adverse long-term consequences in countries. Donald Booth, former US Ambassador to Ethiopia, agrees that outsiders have to be careful not to formulate the answer to the current situation in Ethiopia but only play a supportive role by giving a space for the crisis to be resolved internally through civil discourse.

As an Association dedicated to the cause of peace and civil discourse, we therefore make a plea for a reconsideration of engagement to the US government, the international community and some media organizations when dealing with the crisis in Ethiopia. Instead of adding fuel to the flames of friction that engulfs the nation, we reiterate that it is incumbent upon the international community and the media to play a constructive role that is geared towards achieving peace through civil discourse, and refrain from actions and rhetoric that may erode civility within the country and exacerbate the present situation.

With Kind Regards,

Executive Committee,
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