# ADDIS DIGEST

## ETHIOPIA: A TRAGEDY IN THE MAKING

## Never say you never knew

After the "transition" fiasco, which ended by the establishment of a mono-ethnic, one-party dictatorship. Ethiopia finds itself poised for yet another tragedy which could have incalculable consequences for its people and the entire Horn region.

More and more people in the international community - including some TPLF apologists in the West - now admit that the democratization process has collapsed and given way to an "authoritarian one-party state", and denounce the dismal human right records of the regime. But at the same time, our warnings that this country is heading for a disaster of the kind suffered by the peoples of Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia are dismissed as "exaggerated" or "pure opposition rhetoric".

However, we are also encouraged by the rising tide of concern about the the situation in the country. It is this development and the fact that the concept of "conflict prevention" has been gaining ground over the past years that prompted our decision to propose a workable approach for the Ethiopian case.

If a preventive strategy is going to work, however, all those involved in peace building should go beyond concerns about massive human rights violations in the country and try to understand the new ethnic order these massive human rights violations and governmental terror are designed to protect and consolidate. This is why the first part of our memorandum will deal at some length with the ingredients of the impending tragedy.

The second part will deal with the theory and practice of "conflict prevention". We believe that despite past failure, this concept could still be relevant to Ethiopia and should therefore be given a chance. But at the same time, we contend that for conflict prevention to work, there is a need to define and implement a coordinated and global peace building strategy by people who are ready to learn from past experience and shortcomings, who have the courage to be open to creative and sometimes unconventional methods and who are committed to a long term and sometimes low profile approach with determination to continue even when there is no visible progress.

The purpose of our appeal to Western governments and intergovernmental organizations and NGOs who are involved conflict prevention is to study the Ethopian situation with more serious scrutiny and with some sense of urgency. As concerned Ethiopians, we are producing this document so that none of those concerned about peace and prevention can say they "never knew". We are urging them to act now, not least because we consider it would be indecent and immoral for Western diplomats and NGO activists to fly in and out of a "disaster coutnry" to "manage" a tragedy which they did nothing to stop while there was still time.

## I. THE INGREDIENTS OF A TRAGEDY IN THE MAKING

Conflicts in any society should not be looked upon as an abberation, but as an unavoidable and necessary mechanism for social change. By the same token "stability" should not be mistaken for genuine peace as this could ultimately lead to a sitation of tacit or even explicit support of authoritarian regimes on the grounds that they at least maintain law and order.

Suppressed conflicts and/or stability maintained through repression or other coercive methods is only postponed violence. Seen from this angle, it can be argued that "prevention" is not avoiding conflicts or maintaining "stability" at all costs. It should not be taken as an end in itself, but as part and parcel of a global and long-term peace building strategy.

The most relevant definition of the scope and objectives of "conflict prevention" has been developed by Commissioner Pinheiro who goes even further than "peace building" and suggests "structural stability" as the ultimate policy goal of conflict prevention. By the notion of "structural stability", Professor Pinheiro denotes a dynamic situation whereby the European Union policy objectives for Africa - peace, stability, development of democracy and the respect of human rights - could be achieved through viable political structures, healthy social and environmental conditions with institutions capable of managing changes and accommodating inevitable tensions and conflicts without resorting to violence.

Even a casual observation of the Ethiopian situation shows how dangerously far this country is from being "structurally stable". Close scrutiny also suggests that if unhealthy developments are not checked in time, the country is heading for a disaster which could potentially combine the elements of Rwanda's tragedy of ethnic hatred and fear, the disaster

in ex-Yugoslavia with its lot of ethnic cleansing and the Somali clan war with its indescribable chaos. The situation is all the more alarming in that the country is heading for trouble in the midst of indifference even among the intergovernmental organizations and NGOs working in the field of conflict prevention.

What are the ingredients of this impending tragedy which warrant our fear?

1. The political and socio-economic conflicts are being compounded and perverted by the ethnic time bomb.

2. One of the few remaining Stalinist constitutions in the world which now governs Ethiopia not only fails to provide the institutional mechanisms to solve these problems, but is, in itself, an "invitation to revolt".

3. These conflicts and the absence of mechanisms to accommodate them would have been overcome had it not been for this country's historical and cultural setting, and current government violence which combine to inhibit the emergence of a viable "peace constituency".

## A.     THE ETHNIC TIME BOMB

### 1. ONE PARTY RULE - SO WHAT?

Even by the admission of its most zealous Western apologists, what the extremist TPLF has established in Ethiopia is "authoritarian one party-rule", with all the evils that go along with this kind of mis-rule. After the unwarranted euphoria that attended the fall of the Menguistu dictatorship, all major human rights groups, professional associations, intergovernmental institutions and Western NGOs are now regularly denouncing the TPLF regime for its "gross violations" of human rights. There are now more political prisoners in Ethiopia than in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa combined. Ethiopia is second only to China for the number of detained journalists. Torture and extrajudicial executions are frequent. Citizens disappear without leaving any trace. There is no due process of law. The right to property is arbitrarily and systematically violated. Mass lay-offs on political and ethnic grounds are throwing tens of thousands of citizens and families into destitution overnight.

Although no one in the West now denies this bitter reality, the dangers facing Ethiopia are systematically ignored or down played. Concerned Ethiopians' warnings are labelled as exaggerated "opposition rhetoric". The argument is that one party dictatorships have existed and do exist elsewhere without necessarily degenerating into an uncontrollably violent situation. Ethiopia itself, so the argument goes, has never been a democratic society and "much improvement" has taken place in comparison to any other situation the country had known in the past. Moreover, that situation could change for the better as the democratic struggle against the dictatorship steadily gathers momentum. Put bluntly, the response to our concerns by some quarters in the international community is "One party rule -- so what?".

Such arguments only betray ignorance of the country's historical and cultural past and a misreading of the ingredients of the present crisis which is unprecedented even by the standards of this violence-prone society. We believe that while there is need for more consistency in the defence of human rights and democratization in Ethiopia, those concerned with conflict prevention and peace building should go beyond this. They should scrutinize the kind of "new order" these massive violations of human rights are designed to protect and consolidate.

## 2. MORE VICIOUS THAN AN "ORDINARY" ONE-PARTY RULE

For the first time in the centuries old history of Ethiopia, an extremist group, openly but wrongly claiming to "represent" one of the country's numerous ethnic groups, has gained control of the state apparatus, its armed and security forces and of all the commanding heights of its economy including land and natural resources, which by virtue of the Stalinist Constitution imposed on our people are declared the "exclusive property" of the State. TPLF has also grabbed the emerging private sector through the so-called "Revolutionary Democratic investors".

The EPRDF, a creation of TPLF which in turn is controlled and manipulated by the Marxist-Lenist League of Tigray (MLLT) - is nothing more than an instrument of indirect rule in the hands of ethnocentric extremists. What is common knowledge in Ethiopia is now a reality recognized by many foreign observers of Ethiopia. Commenting on the May 1995 "elections" the Economist characterized this group as a "classic umbrella organization" with "Mr. Meles and his Tigrean comrades at the center, holding on to the essentials of power guaranteed ultimately by the Tigrean core of the army". Dr. Makau wa Mutua, project director at the Harvard Law School Human Rights Programme, in an article entitled "Ignoring the Lessons of History", went even further and blamed the "Tigrean dictators" for having "sought to perfection the British colonial policy of indirect rule through which imperial control over the "natives" would be exercised by their "kith and kin".

## 3. ORCHESTRATING ETHIC HATRED AND FEAR

TPLF's rule is based on a deliberate policy of ethnic hatred and fear as in Rwanda. The hate propaganda instilled by the government controlled mass media may not be as brutal and direct as in pre-genocide Rwanda, but its long-term effects are no less devastating.

TPLF's propaganda objectives are to induce Tigreans and non-Tigreans alike into believing that the ethnocentric dictatorship is "by Tigreans for Tigreans". Discrimination in favour of an emerging Tigrean oligarchy is practised ostensibly. Workers and professionals are laid off massively and replaced by Tigreans. Hardly a week passes without the government controlled media reporting development and construction works in Tigray region and the incorporation of TPLF owned firms.

When the commander of the new Ethiopian Air Force - himself a Tigrean - announces in an interview with a pro-government paper that the first class of pilots to graduate from the air

force's training school are all Tigreans "by historical accident"; when the government's "Ethiopian Investment Authority" discloses that during the years 1991-96, the total sum of investment in Tigray region is equal to that invested in all the other regions combined or that the per capita share of investments for the same period was 601 birr for Tigray region, 50 birr for Oromiya and a ridiculous 7 birr for Amhara region ... no one should claim this is a wanton act of provocation.

It is a machiavellian strategy calculated to take advantage of the "anti-Tigrean passion" it provokes in order to persuade the Tigrean people that TPLF is not only their benefactor but also their sole protector against all the other ethnic groups in the country. By so doing the extremists try to force our brothers in Tigray to bind their fate with that of the extremist group thus given that group a "strong base" for the continued domination of the country.

This dangerous policy is weakening the democratic and moderate elements in ALL the country's ethnic groups and paving the way for violent ethnic confrontation, the main actors of which will inevitably be extremist forces claiming, like TPLF, to "represent" the interests of their respective ethnic groups.

### 4. ETHNIC TERRITORIAL CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS

In addition to the policy of isolation of our Tigrean brothers, TPLF's policy is based on pitting people against people. The so-called "federal democratic republic" is a highly centralized one-party state operating on the lines of the former Soviet Union. The country is divided into nine "ethnic regions", all controlled by surrogate ethnic organizations accountable not to their people but to the Central Committee of the EPRDF and ultimately to the politburo of the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT).

The country's regional borders were redrawn in 1991. The redrawing not only reflects the political and military balance of power that prevailed in the country in the aftermath of the TPLF takeover but is also designed to perpetuate this supremacy by fanning "horizonal" conflicts among ethnic groups.

Although the eastern part of the former Tigray administrative region inhabited by the Afars has gone to the Afars, the Tigray regional state now includes a big slice of Amhara territory from Wollo and Gonder which has lost the very rich farming lands of Setit Humera close to the border with Sudan and Eritrea. The expansion of Tigray region is only one aspect of the "restructuring" process, however.

The regional borders have been redrawn in such a way that almost all major ethnic groups have some sort of territorial claim over their neighbours. The Oromiya region claims territory "given away" to the Somali region. The Amharas in Benishangul demand their territory's return to Amhara land, those in Wokaiet (Gonder) oppose "annexation" by Tigray region. The Oromos claim the Western Assosa region, traditionally part of Wollega, but now incorporated in Beneshangul region, etc.

"Horizontal" conflicts among ethnic groups have already been observed in these and many other areas and are bound to intensify as long as TPLF's policy of pitting people against people is allowed to continue.

### 5. OVER 6 MILLION "ETHNICALLY INCORRECT" ETHIOPIANS

In a country where interaction among peoples has been going on for centuries, none of the so-called ethnic regions are ethnically pure. According to the latest data provided by the Central Statistical Authority (CSA) 432,534 Oromos are "enclaved" in Amhara Region. There are 1,700,000 Amharas, 260,000 Guarages and some 874,000 "others" living in Oromiya region. In the grotesque "Harar regional state" where ethnic Hararis account for 7.2% of the state population, "alien" ethnic groups constitute the vast majority of the population with Oromos representing 52% and the Amharas 32.6%. A study of CSA's data shows that some six and one-half million Ethiopians live, sometimes for generations, in an ethnically "wrong" region. TPLF's "federal" arrangement completely disregards this reality. Those "ethnically incorrect" Ethiopians are left with a terrible choice: Returning to their ethnic regions if they are to enjoy their rights as Ethiopian citizens or staying where they are and settling for a second class citizen's status.

This is a very serious and potentially dangerous problem particularly in towns and urban centers in the southern half of the country where the "ethically incorrect" invariably account for a vast majority of residents.

### 6. ENCLAVED MULTI-ETHNIC MAJORITIES

This is not a problem of "Amhara miniorities" living outside the Amhara region as some "experts" on Ethiopia would have us believe. In a country where Amharas account for only 29% of the population, 67% of all urban residents declare Amharic as "language usually spoken at home". The problem in the country's urban centers concerns Amharic speaking multi-ethnic majorities rather than Amharas alone.

Addis Abeba's case perfectly reflects the problem. Although the proportion of ethnic Amharas stands at 48.3% that of residents who declare Amharic as "mother tongue" is 68.8%. Another 22.9% use Amharic as a second language. This means that some 92% of the capital's population use Amharic as a medium of communication. Had it not been for its special status, Addis Abeba, which is enclaved in Oromiya region and as such is claimed by some Oromo nationalists as the capital of Oromiya, would have been under Oromo administration even though ethnic Oromos represent only 19.2% of the city's population.

Due to a host of practical reasons (language of instruction for children, work opportunities, political and economic rights, etc.) practically all the urban centers, particularly in the southern half of the country, oppose being administered by one specific ethnic group and demand "special status" like the one enjoyed by Addis Abeba.

Such demands have already given rise to violent confrontations. The problem of these multi-ethnic enclaved majorities will remain a burning issue of Ethiopian politics until a democratic solution is found to meet the legitimate aspiration of all involved. In the event of escalation of armed and political conflicts, this problem could lead to terrible tragedies reminiscent of those suffered by ethnic enclaves in former Yugoslavia.

### 7. APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA'S "POPULATION REGISTRATION ACT"

TPLF's "democratic federation" could not possibly work in a democratic context which recognizes the cardinal principal of "one man, one vote" for all the country's citizens wherever they may live within Ethiopia's borders. For the tiny ethnic Harari minority to "democratically" seize power in the "Harari Regional State", there must be a way of "neutralizing" the region's 92% non-Harari multi-ethnic population.

There are only two ways to do this: one is to introduce a system of physical ethnic cleansing which would involve initiation of vast population movements aimed at forcibly uprooting the "ethnically incorrect" and obliging them to return to their ethnic regions. This search for ethnic purity is practically impossible to achieve as literally millions would have to be evacuated from hundreds of urban centers across the country. Although people belonging to the "wrong ethnic group" have already been massacred, expelled from their lands, robbed of their property and fired from their jobs and ordered to go back to their own regions, TPLF has not as yet produced a legal framwork for such "ethnic cleansing" as it would have entailed the equivalent of apartheid South Africa's "Group Areas Act".

The other "solution" is political ethnic cleansing which means curtailing the fundamental democratic rights of millions of Ethiopians and reducing them to second class citizens is they reside outside of their ethnic region. This is the path chosen by the extremists!

Under TPLF's electoral law, all citizens have the right to vote but those living outside their ethnic regions cannot stand for office if they do not speak the language of the ethnic group empowered in the region. The language criterion, at the root of this discrimination, is only a pretext and a smoke screen used to abuse foreign observers. The real basis for discrimination is ethnic origin.

Even if we leave aside the case of the enclaved multi-ethnic Amharic speaking majorities, we see that the system is designed to serve TPLF's surrogate ethnic organizations and exclude from the political process millions of Ethiopians in rural areas who are not concerned by the language barrier.

The degree of integration of Ethiopia's ethnic groups is such that in the urban areas, the vast majority of Ethiopians whatever their ethnic origin, switch to the country's lingua franca, Amharic, whereas in rural areas, people whatever their ethnic origin "usually speak at home" the language of the predoment ethnic group in the area. For example, the 1984 population and housing census showed 11,477,320 ethnic Oromos in rural areas , but the number of those who "usually speak Oromigna at home" was 12,281,353. This means that some 800,000

non-Oromos in rural Ethiopia have adopted Oromigna as their first language. The total of Oromigna speakers could be double that if we include those in the Oromo rural areas who use Oromigna as a seocnd language. From the data provided by the 1994 housing and population census, out of the 2,830,000 non-Oromos living in Oromiya, 1,900,000 (ie 67%) speak Oromigna as either a first or second langauge.

What this means, is that the "ethnically incorrect" cannot be identified by applying the language criterion. The only way to exclude them from the political process is to identify citizens their ethnic origin. Hence the need to introduce TPLF's version of South Africa's infamous "Population Registration Act", which obliges all voters' identity cards to specify clearly the ethnic origin of the holders.

### B. INSTITUTIONAL DEADLOCK IN A VIOLENT SOCIETY

One major ingredient of any conflict prevention/ peace building process is enhancement of viable political institutions and constitutional arrangements with built-in norms to accommodate and manage conflicts without resorting to violence. In Ethiopia, the problems mentioned above, which are serious enough to warrant fears of violent conflicts in any society, are compounded by the lack of such mechanisms. Constitutions and elections have always been considered as marginal instruments of power by the rulers, and futile and irrelevant exercises by the ruled. The present Stalinist constitutional arrangement - far from representing a departure from this historic pattern - is an invitation to revolt.

### 1. CONSTITUTIONS AND ELECTIONS: MARGINAL AND IRRELEVANT

It is impossible to understand Ethiopia, the present political crisis and the apprehension of most Ethiopians concerning the future of peace in their country without referring to the endemic violence which marks its history ancient or recent. For centuries, our people have suffered beyond imagination, trapped as they were in seemingly endless vicious circles of foreign aggression and manipulation, internal strife, poverty and famine.

Even the demise of the infamous Zemene Mesafint (era of the princes), when Amhara, Oromo and Tigrean warlords devastated the country in a chaotic civil war that lasted over 85 years (1769-1855) did not bring peace and stability: since that time the people of Ethopia have enjoyed hardly a decade of consecutive total peace.

The country's top leaders, be they emperors or presidents, usurped power by force of arms and battled to maintain their hard won victories. From the middle of the last century up to the present day, the prevailing atmosphere of violence at the top of the country's "leadership" has been such that all the top leaders - except Emperor Menilik and the exiled dictator Menguistu Haile Mariam - died a violent death: suicide, killed in battle, poisoned or murdered in prison after being deposed. Death or deposition of a leader has often triggered the bloody process of "transfer of power". Ras Tefferi Mekonen's usurpation of power in 1916 and coronation as Emperor Haile Selassie in 1930 was supposed to be a new chapter

in the country's history. Although the business of securing and maintaining power continued to be governed by the same old rules, formal instruments of government like elections and constitutions were introduced.

Since the Imperial Constitution of 1930, Ethiopia has experienced three successive regimes and three constitutions, all presented by the rulers as "a radical break" with past practices and designed to solve once and for all the chronic problem of politics in Ethiopia: instability and absence of popular participation.

Each of the three constitutions came at the end of a "transition" period and served only as a marginal instrument of the incumbent's power, secured and maintained by "other means". All three regions not only decreed the political, ideological and socio-economic options of the rulers as the "supreme law" of the land but tried to pre-empt any and all legal attempts to change the established order. Haile Selassie's Constitution not only established the monarchy as the only viable form of government for Ethiopia but also went further and decreed that the crown would remain "perpetually" attached to his dynasty. Menguistu's Constitution was to serve during the entire era of transition to socialism. Somewhat more modestly, Meles declared his document would serve as the country's supreme law "for generations to come".

Successive elections organized by the rulers and held on the terms dictated by them and within such constitutional frameworks have been systematically "result oriented" (the UN euphemism for seriously fraudulent elections). As they were not organized in a manner that would allow the people to choose between "maintaining a government in power or changing it", they were always "won" by those already in power. Needless to say, none of them addressed the country's real problems let alone contribute to solving them. As such they were considered by the people as irrelevant and futile exercises.

## 2. TPLF'S STALINIST CONSTITUTION: AN INVITATION TO REVOLT

Although Westerners have labelled it as democratic, TPLF's Constitution is a text book case of a Stalinist Constitution. It rejects the principle of separation of powers, using rather the Stalinist principle of "Unity of State Authority" which in fact is the constitutional expression of Lenin's revolutionary call: "All power to the Soviets". Power is vested in an omniscient "supreme organ" found in all Stalinist constitutions as the "highest organ of state authority". (Article 108 of Stalin's 1936 constitution, Articles 62 and 50(2) for Menguistu and Meles respectively).

Theoretically, this "highest organ of state authority" is the elected parliament. In practice, however, this supreme organ is the inner core of the ruling party: the Workers' Party of Ethiopia under Menguistu and the Marxist Lenist League of Tigray (MLLT) under Meles. This means that whatever power and authority is vested on the "Highest organ" this power is surrendered to the handful of individuals at the top who by virtue of the principle of "democratic centralism" control and manipulate the "ruling party".

Constitutionally, all power is concentrated in this "supreme organ", which appoints and dismisses the Executive, has supreme authority in appointing and dismissing judges, and jurisdiction of final instance over all matters relating to the interpretation, protection and enforcement of the constitution.

In line with the Stalinist Constitutional theory of "Programmatic Positivism" which considers constitutions as "dynamic instruments" to enhance and guide society's evolution towards an ideal, TPLF's Constitution is not a "constitution" as such but a document which embodies the social, political, economic and cultural programme of MLLT.

## 3. FUTILITY OF MULTI-PARTY ELECTIONS UNDER A ONE-PARTY CONSTITUTION

The futility of elections within the framework of a one-party constitution is so clear to Ethiopians that practially all opposition groups have rejected Western calls for participation in TPLF's electoral process. Even if by some miracle, the elections were to be free and fair, winning them would be meaningless. An opposition party winning elections after a campaign calling for private ownership of land for example, would have to revise the constitution or continue with TPLF's economic policies as embodied in this constitution.

But even a casual look at the amendment procedures of the Constitution with its own built-in mechanisms of self perpetuation shows that no hope of amendment can reasonably be entertained "until the second coming". If a party wants to introduce private ownership of land, a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament is not enough. The proposed amendment must be supported by a majority in ALL regional parliaments.

The dangers for democracy and peace in the country become clear if one considers that the tiny "city regional state" of Harar-- which in any case does not have much to do with rural land and whose population does not even account for 0.25% of the Ethiopian population-- could frustrate the freely expressed will of all the other regions combined.

The country therefore finds itself in a situation where those Ethiopians advocating legal and peaceful struggle would be obliged to mobilize practically the entire society in order to change a system imposed by a tiny minority. This is precisely what is inviting violence in Ethiopia. More and more people are having serious doubts as to the capacity of the "peace constituancy" to meet this overwhelming challenge.

## C.     A "PEACE CONSTITUANCY" UNDER SIEGE

Short of widespread violence and escalating armed conflicts, the only way to change the situation in Ethiopia is a vigorous pursuit of the democratization process aimed at massively mobilizing and organizing society for the peaceful struggle. But this is precisely what the frequent human rights violations, and the suppression of civil society and the free press are designed to pre-empt.

Given Ethiopia's historical, cultural and political setting, the idea of peaceful and legal political struggle and change is to say the least a novelty. It is an uphill struggle being waged against tremendous odds. Although it was launched in earnest with the 1993 Paris and Addis Abeba "Peace and National Reconciliation Conferences" which led to the creation of the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE), this struggle is now being considered by many Ethiopians as already lost. In any case, the least one can say is that this young and fragile "peace constituancy" is seriously besieged. Under the combined pressure of several negative factors it is fast becoming irrelevant to the peace building process in the country.

## 1. VIOLENCE BY THE INCUMBENT REGIME

This, in fact, is the single most important factor which inhibits the emergence of a sound peace constituancy in Ethiopia. Massive human rights violations are steadily undermining all the ingredients of the peace building process in the country. No opposition organization is allowed outside the capital. The government strangles the free press (which in any case is not distributed outside Addis Abeba). Trade Unions and other professional associations are ruthlessly repressed and are giving way to "independent" organizations created and manipulated by the governing party. Governmental "non-governmental organizations" dealing with civic education, human rights, development issues, democratization, etc. are being created and recommended for funding to the donor community through some complaisant Western NGOs.

These attempts to inhibit the emergence of a palpable peaceful alternative are doing irreparable damage to the deadlocked peace process in the country, not least because they encourage the prevailing popular attitude which looks upon calls for peaceful change with suspicion and profound scepticism.

## 2. POPULAR SCEPTICISM ABOUT PEACEFUL CHANGE

In a country where for the past 200 years at least, no "transfer" of power has ever taken place through peaceful means, the culture of violence has so perverted the minds of both governors and governed that any political or civic organization opting for change without resorting to arms has to overcome profound public scepticism.

The only solution in view of such scepticism was pursuit of the democratization process and emergence of a credible "peace constituancy". In fact Ethiopians massively supported the 1993 Paris and Addis Abeba Peace and Reconciliation Conferences in the hope that a palpable mass-based democratic alternative would emerge from this initiative. Now, the euphoria which attended these conferences is hardly perceptible in the country. Brutal repression having led to collapse of the democratization process, the idea of peaceful change is becoming less and less credible in the eyes of Ethiopians.

Growing popular scepticism is such that those who argued from the beginning that given our secular tradition of violence and the fact that TPLF is a minority ethnic based dictatorship

which will never accept the challenges of democracy and peaceful struggle and suggested armed struggle as the "only viable alternative" are having the upper hand.

### 3.    THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: SENDING THE WRONG MESSAGE TO EVERYONE

During the years of the Cold War, Ethiopians lived with the illusion that their struggle against the Menguistu dictatorship and for a democratic system had the support of the West. This illusion continued during the months that followed TPLF's seizure of power, particularly in the light of pronouncements by the American and other Western governments, that human rights would be a crucial factor in their relations with the new government in Ethiopia.

Blind support by some Westerners and inconsistant attitudes by others who condemn the TPLF for massive human rights abuses without even envisaging concrete steps to stop the deterioration of the situation, have not only led to dissullusionment but are also sending the wrong messages to almost everyone in the country: the unprincipled stand on the question of human rights is emboldening the government to continue with its dangerous practices. Those who naively thought their peaceful struggle for democratization would have massive diplomatic support are being discouraged. Those who opted for armed struggle as the only way to bring TPLF to its senses are arguing that the only way to be taken seriously by the international community is to pursue the path they have chosen ...

## II. PREVENTION: WHAT WORKABLE APPROACH FOR ETHIOPIA?

Since the UN document "Agenda for peace" was published in 1992, the simple and straightforward idea of taking preventive measures before conflicts degenerate into "unprecedented human tragedies" has proved so attractive that concerned quarters in the international community have already organized dozens of major seminars and conferences, forwarded series of recommendations and created several bodies to give substance to and implement "conflict prevention".

Despite this however, the international community seems to be taken by surprise with almost all the major conflicts particularly in Africa. Discussions of the basic tenets and modus operandi of conflict prevention in light of the situation in Ethiopia have helped us discover major shortcomings which can explain why those who are genuinely working towards conflict prevention have not been able to prevent anything up to now.

We believe therefore that any workable approach for Ethiopia, or any other country for that matter, should start with a critical analysis of the theory of conflict prevention and should propose ways of rendering some of its basic tenets workable where possible and forward alternative concepts where necessary.

Our intention is not to provide a blue print for preventive action but rather to provoke discussion among those who are involved in prevention and peace building. More detailed and

concrete proposals will be submitted in due course to those willing to invest time and energy to help efforts being waged by Ethiopians to save their country from the impending disaster.

## A. PREVENTION: PUTTING THE PEACE PROCESS BACK ON TRACK

It is now generally admitted that conflict prevention should be undertaken as part and parcel of a global peace building process. Just as it is a truism to say that management and attempts to resolve conflicts follow unsuccessful attempts at prevention, it can be asserted that the need for prevention arises as a result of a more or less serious crisis in the peace building process. Just as conflict prevention is advocated to avoid violent confrontations, peace building measures should be initiated and intensified so that there is no need to prevent conflicts in the first place.

As a "crisis phase" in the peace building process, the fundamental aim of prevention should therefore be putting peace building efforts, which in any case should preceed and follow preventing, back on track,

All those who associate prevention with peace building point to the need for a comprehensive approach. We cannot but agree with this strategy. But we say that in order to be effective, such an approach should be clearly defined. More importantly, we do not believe such a global approach would succeed if it ignores the fact that in a country being targeted for preventive action some tasks are more relevent to the endangered peace process and should be underaken with some sense of urgency. This indicates to the need of a double rack approach: comprehensive approach when it comes to peace building efforts and focusing on urgent tasks when there is a need to salvage a peace process in crisis.

### 1. THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Peace building is a steady enhancement of the democratization process, respect of human rights, development of civil society, establishment of a viable political institutions and constitutional mechanisms with the built-in capacity to accommodate conflicts and peaceful change. This process involves several actors: Society at large, the incumbent government, opposition forces, civil society, foreign powers, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Although the ultimate objective of peace building is reinforcement of a society's "peace constituancy" this task cannot be accomplished if due attention is not paid to the task of marginalizing forces and factors which inhibit its development. All the above mentioned "actors" involved should be scrutinized with the aim of determining their positive or negative roles in the peace process.

In Ethiopia, no hope of consolidating the peace constituancy can be entertained unless this effort is accompanied by a vast and vigorous peace education campaign aimed at overcoming popoular scepticism concenring peaceful struggle. But our experience has already shown that

however massive and vigorous, no such campaign can achieve the desired goal on its own unless it is supported by the emergence of a palpable movement for change capable of establishing the peaceful path as a credible alternative method of struggle.

For such a strong "peace constituancy" to emerge there is a need to come out openly and struggle against governmental violence and massive human rights violations which, as we have noted earlier, constitute the most formidable obstacle to enhancement of the peace process in Ethiopia. We do not see how those involved in prevention/peace building could work towards a "targeted reinforcement" of the local peace constituancy without simultaneously "targeting" the dictatorship for some sort of pressure, as its policies are threatening the very survival of the "peace constituancy".

A comprehensive approach would also imply action at the international level and trying to persuade those foreign actors in our country's peace process who by action or omission are undermining efforts to enhance the peace constituancy and thus obstructing the country's march towards lasting peace.

### 2. FOCUSING ON URGENT TASKS

All the elements of a structurally stable society are interdependent. In other words, they are mutually reinforcing or mutually destructive. Steady progress and implementation of these elements can maintain a society in a "virtuous circle" where as one or several missing elements can throw it into a prolonged "vicious circle" with violent conflicts serving both as catalysts and perpetuators of such tragedies.

When a peace process is clearly in crisis, the major objective of prevention should be to avoid at all costs the setting in of this "vicious circle" and to break it at the weakest possible link in an effort to initiate a virtuous circle.

This means that all the tasks of peace building - civic education, training, institution building, adminstrative and political reforms, free elections, fostering respect of human rights, dialogue, mediation, etc. cannot be undertaken with the same sense of energy under all circumstances.

The greatest and most immediate danger to peace in Ethiopia is the deplorable human rights situation. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved unless those involved in prevention and peace building consider respect of fundamental human rights as the most urgent task of the day. If gross violations of human rights, mass arrests, summary executions, disappearances continue, there is no use talking about "institution building", "civil society", "civic education", "viable institutions", etc. This is something which should be stressed specially in light of the attitude of Westerners who, instead of pressuring and challenging the dictatorship to live up not only to international standards but also to its own rhetoric of democracy, press freedom, multi-party system, etc. have been putting pressure on the opposition to take part in "multi-party" elections under the terms dictated by the ruling party and within the framework of a one-party constitution which in fact negates free and fair elections.

## B. SUSTAINED ACTION RATHER THAN EARLY INTERVENTION

The notion of "early intervention" is the centerpiece of conflict prevention. The first important prerequisite for this is setting up what some have called "early warning systems". This implies systematically gathering information and analysing available data to detect a possible crisis at an early stage. Despite this apparent clarity the last few years have witnessed human tragedies without the international community effectively intervening to avert them. We have no reason to believe that it would be otherwise in the future and particularly in Ethiopia if the prevailing confusion on the objectives and scope of the "early warning system" is allowed to continue.

If, as is notw admitted by almost everyone, respect for human rights is an integral part of conflict prevention and peace building, how can an "early warning system" be taken seriously when there is no "warning" concerning this country where we have well over ten thousand political prisoners? If development of civil society is considered essential to democratization and peace building why is no one advising "early action" in a country where established independent unions and professional associations are systematically and brutally decapitated? If the enhancement of viable institutions capable of accommodating conflicts is an essential element of a structurally stable society how is the cause of prevention and peace to be served when the internatioanl community ignores this cardinal issue and fails to consider TPLF's Stalinist constitution as a "warning sign" of serious conflicts ahead?

Although the single most important factor in failure of "early action" is absence of the political will to intervene, which will be discussed later, it can also be explained by the lack of a correct reading of the right signals and failure to give the right answer to the cardinal issue of early intervention: how early is early?

## 1. ONE-EYED READING OF PARTIAL SIGNS

Lack of clarity on the kind of signals tha could warrant early action is such that more often than not actual explosions of conflicts are taken as "warning signs" of conflicts. It is interesting to note here that major international conferences devoted to the problem of prevention rarely discuss potential trouble spots like Ethiopia, but only Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, etc. all of which are countries where conflicts have already degenerated into humanitarian tragedies and where one has no conflict to "prevent", but human disasters to manage.

One major explanation for this is the undue emphasis on events rather than on the root causes of violence. The existence and intensification of armed conflicts, mass and violent demonstrations, social unrest and acts of terrorism can surely serve as warning signals. But they are not necessarily the right signals of an impending crisis under all circumstances. Focusing on them can give a dangerously wrong impression that absence of such spectacular events means that a country is at peace.

Moreover, the emphasis on events is particularly inhibitive of early action as it is often based on a "one-eyed" reading of "instability". It is assumed that only such actions initiated by those opposed to the established order are dangerous to the peace process and worthy of being considered as "warning signs". Violence by the government, state-sponsored terrorism, massive human rights violations, extrajudicial executions, corruption, nepotism, ethnic discrimination, etc. are rarely taken as "warning signs". Compared to more or less sporadic acts of defiance by the opposition we believe that all forms of violence by the established order are more subversive to the peace process and should therefore be considered as primordial elements of any early warning system.

In any case, such events, correctly read or not, are only partial signs. Many people involved in prevention and peace building now seem to agree that depending only on them to assess a situation in a given country could be misleading. They rightly suggest that an early warning system must also be based on a thorough analysis of the political, social, economic and historical setting of that society. Taking into account these factors is definitely the right approach to the Ethiopian situation. In fact we consider these as more relevant warning signs than terrorist acts which would have remained isolated and epiphenomenal events had it not been for the deep-rooted culture of violence in the country and the institutional deadlock which leaves no room for peaceful and legal struggle and change.

## 2. How early is early?

Measures suggested to prevent conflicts include working for respect of human rights, establishment of viable political institutions, setting up of conflict accommodating mechanisms, good governance and civil society, encouragement of dialogue, etc. Such measures are not however specific to prevention. They are standard components of any serious peace building strategy and as such should be undertaken whether there is a crisis to prevent or not. From this it becomes clear that no intervention aimed at enhancing these peace building measures is too early. If anything prevention would only mean pursuit of these measures with more sense of urgency until the peace process is put back on track and gathers enough momentum to be self-sustaining. That is why we believe it would be more appropriate to speak of "sustained action" rather than "early intervention". Sustained action denotes a dynamic process whereby peace building efforts should be undertaken before, during and after the prevention phase. The concept has the tremendous advantage of helping avoid the present confusion over warning signals. It would mean firmly adhering to the "double track" approach outlined above and working for the steady enhancement of a society's peace constituency and not waiting for the "right moment" to put no less determined political, economic and diplomatic pressure to bear on those undermining democratization and peace building. As a dynamic and global approach it would also help underline the flaws of the "phase by phase" approach which in practice has only served as an excuse for postponement of early action and invariably led to a process of "phase by phase failure".

## C.    THE PHASE BY PHASE APPROACH: POSTPONEMENT OF INACTION

The phase by phase approach is another major component of conflict prevention. It it based on a classification of countries according to the degree of gravity of the situation and on suggestions of specific measures to deal with each specific phase.

Mr. Michel Rocard's report to the European Parliament (June 1995) proposes that countries considered for possible preventive action be classified in three categories: "Countries being monitored"; "countries in crisis" and "countries which are the theatre of local war". The European Commission's communication to the Council (March 1996) suggest "situations without obvious tension"; "'situations of tension" and "open conflict".

The specific measures proposed to deal with different phases include calls for dialogue between the parties, mediation proposals, pushing for internal political and constitutional reforms, attachment of political conditions to the granting of economic aid. As the situation deteriorates, the proposed measures go all the way from "selective or blanket embargo" to military intervention either to support humanitarian efforts or to maintain or restore peace.

When a country "with no obvious tension" finds itself in the category of "country at war", it is clear that the "phase by phase" approach has turned out to be a process of "phase by phase failure" for all those monitoring a country for possible preventive action.

This failure cannot be attributed to inadequacy of the proposed specific measures or inconsistency in their implementation only. We believe it is due to the flaws inherent in the "phase by phase" approach itself.

### 1. NO "WALL OF CHINA" BETWEEN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

Classification depends on perspicacity and effectiveness of "early warning systems" which, as we have noted earlier, have their own shortcomings. But even if we were to establish such credible systems they will only end in reflecting the complexity and dynamics of conflicts and highlighting the difficulties of attempts at classification.

In the first place it is very difficult to establish clear cut borders between the different phases. In fact in most cases, the distinctive features which characterize successive phase can combine and coexist in a country being monitored. This definitely holds for Ethiopia where no clear classification is possible as the situation is a complex and explosive mixture of armed and political conflicts, violently suppressed socio-economic and political aspirations in a country with no instituional mechanisms to correctly address the fundamental issues concerning the country's transition towards a more viable pluralist order.

Secondly, if it is difficult to classify countries, it is hard to see how the other tenet of the phase by phase approach ie taking the right action for the right situation, can possibly be implemented. How can the specific measures worked out for a specific phase be applied when one is not even sure in what specific category a country finds itself?

### 2. MORE DIFFICULT MEASURES IN MORE COMPLEX SITUATIONS

An effective strategy of prevention demands that everything possible be undertaken to arrest deterioration of a crisis situation at the earliest possible phase. The phase by phase approach ultimately negates this strategy because it ignores the fact that worsening conflicts come with their lot of supplementary problems and complexities which tend to further paralyse prevention efforts. This approach tries to confront difference situations by "reserving" more and more coercive and contraversial measures - as the crisis deepens. Such "compartimentalization" of situations and measures leads to postponement of action based on the wrong assumption that it would be possible to undertake more difficult measures under more complex situations.

In the case of Ethiopia for example, the international community has clearly failed in putting pressure on the dictatorship to respect the most fundamental human and democratic rights let alone revise and reform its conflict-breeding polices and institutions. If, for whatever reason, human rights advocacy has proved an impossible task at a time of relative peace and tranquillity, it is hard to see how this same international community would be more effective on more controversial issues in a context of escalating conflicts.

### 3. THE NEED FOR A GLOBAL APPROACH

The cause of prevention and peace building could be served better by a global approach which is more in line with the concept of "sustained approach" as outlined above. This would mean that instead of trying to classify situations and measures, prevention and peace building should be taken as a process, and measures should be contemplated and implemented in light of the entire cycle of prevention, peace building and structural stability.

This does not of course mean that military action should be envisaged to stop human rights violations. What is suggested is that as soon as the human rights situation, the economic and political options of a given government are found to be conflict generating, the specific measures envisaged for differnet situations must be combined and applied to save the endangered peace process before it is too late.

What does such a "global approach" mean in the case of Ethiopia where the situation is characterized by a combination of practically all the saliant featres of the phases from a "situation without obvious tension" to that of "open conflicts"?

Even if we start with the assumption that this country could be classified in the category "without obvious tension" we see that the Commission's declared aims for this particular phase include peace building, establishment - under respect of democracy and fundamental human rights - of viable political and socio-economic structures, mechanisms for peaceful conciliation of interests viable democratic models etc. As for recommended instruments, we have: targeted assistance including training, education, social and economic cohesion, democracy building, good governance and civil society, institutional building, political dialogue, watching changes, voicing concerns".

These are sound prevention/ peace building measures which if pursued in earnest could effectively contribute to enhancement of the peace process. It is in fact lack of vigour and consistency in the implementation of these measures which leads to the higher and more complex category of "situation of tension".

It is only when a country reaches this dangerous stage of "situation of tension" that the Commission's strategy of prevention recommends - among other instruments - the "intensification of peace building measures" and "threats of sanctions".

A global approach would simply mean that those interested in prevention peace building should not necessarily wait for a situation to deteriorate in order to "intensify" peace building measures and that "threats of sanctions" or other coercive instruments should not be "reserved" for a higher phase when they could be used to prevent crises from assuming serious proportions.

## D.    ABSENCE OF THE POLITICAL WILL TO ACT

All those working in the field of prevention agree that one of the more important prerequisites for "early action" is "reduction of the gap between analysis and the decision to act". This is a question of political will and unfortunately the international community's attitudes towards recent tragedies particularly in Africa have shown that it could not be taken for granted.

We do not believe it would be enough to provide information and analysis for the international community to engage in preventive action. It is also necessary to launch a vigorous and sustained campaign aimed at creating favorable political conditions for this political will to exist.

In the case of Ethiopia, such a campaign should try to pursuade European governments and intergovernmental institutions which have no vested interests in supporting the dictatorship, to understand the seriousness of the situation in the country and exert concerted efforts to help Ethiopians prevent a tragedy. The other aim should be to put pressure on those Western governments like the US administration to withdraw their blind support of the dictatorship and its conflict generating policies.

The campaign should center on the most urgent item of the day which is taking concrete steps against massive human rights violations. It should not be diluted by more ambitious and remote objects like "institution building", "political and constitutional reforms", "free and fair elections". These, we believe, are tasks best left to Ethiopians themselves and could be accomplished only under more favorable conditions free of the climate of terror that now prevails in the country.

Working single-mindedly in the defense of human rights would be a tremendous service to the cause of prevention and peace building not least because such an approach would remove some of the major "pillars of inaction" we have already experienced in Ethiopia.

### 1. THE UNCONVINCING "COMPLEX SITUATION" ARGUMENT

Ethiopia's future, the kind of political and constitutional order that could lead to peace within a pluralist and multi-ethnic society, is a complex issue even for Ethiopians themsevles. But "complexity of the situation" cannot possibly be an argument when it comes to upholding and defending internaitonally accepted standards on human rights which the dictatorship itself claims to espouses. In any case, we do not see anything complex in acting concretely against torture, mass arrests, summary executions, etc. in a country under a one-party dictatorship holding more political prisoners than in all Sub-Sahara African countries combined.

### 2. INCONSISTENCY OF THE "NEUTRALITY" POSTURE

Not taking sides in favor of one or the other of the parties to a conflict can be a key factor in conflict management and resolution. But when a given situation dictates resolute action to isolate a repressive and powerful "war constituency" and enhance a beseiged "peace constituency" struggling for survival, then "neutrality" is not only morally wrong but can also cause irreparable damage to the peace process.

If we leave aside those vociferous NSOs and some Western governments who were not "neutral" during the struggle against Menguistu and now try to justify their partisan position by posing as "neutral", many are those who genuinely believe they could promote the peace process in Ethiopia by "not taking sides".

This is inconsistent with the often repeated truism that human rights and democratization are essential ingredients of peace building. If those involved in prevention believe human rights are relevant to peace then simple logic would suggest that they take sides against a regime whose repressive policies breed violence and do everything in their power to isolate that regime.

### 3. THE SEARCH FOR DIALOGUE ALIBI

However complex and protracted the struggle may be, the solution to Ethiopia's problems would be the instauration of a genuine national dialogue. In fact, this is the declared objective of all opposition forces. Partisans of armed struggle argue this dialogue could be imposed on the dictatorhship only by force of arms while those in the peaceful opposition argue this could be done through peaceful means.

This having been said, we do not believe that "search for dialogue" should be considered as "crucial and immediate objective" at all stages of a conflict. Undue emphasis on dialogue - as against other relevant and urgent tasks of prevention - can in fact prove pointless and even counter productive.

In Ethiopia and under present conditions dialogue is pointless when the single most important task of prevention is action in favor of human rights and against massive repression. If

dialogue is a process of give and take, the democratic alternative forces who are subject to ruthless persecution, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, etc. have nothing to offer at the negotiations table. The cause of prevention and peace would be better served if the international community was to adopt a principled stand against blatant human rights violations and bring pressure to bear on the dictatorship instead of launching unwarranted calls for dialogue where there is not much to "dialogue" about.

In the absence of a principled stand, a call for dialogue is a poor substitute for action and has always proved counter productive at least as far as the Ethopian situation is concerned. "Mediation" attempts by former US president Jimmy Carter and the US Congressional Task Force on Ethiopia have only been used to hide the contradictions between the US administration's objectives of democratization on one hand and continued support of the dictatorship on the other. Such calls only served as an alibi for inaction and have further fragilized the peace process in the country by increasing the arrogance and intransigence of the incumbent government, discouraging those Ethiopians committed to peaceful change and encouraged the "war constituency" in the ranks of the opposition.

## CONCLUSION: A WARNING NOBODY TOOK SERIOUSLY

Many observers- both foreigners and Ethiopians alike - now agree that under TPLF's misrule our people have become "ethnic sensitive" as they had never been before. This "sensitivity" has already been allowed to develop into ethnic hatred. However serious this trend may be, we believe "ethnic hatred" is nothing compared to what we may call the Absolute Evil: Ethnic fear which leads people to the deadly irrational equation "My survival depends on the elimination of Others!".

The incident at the Ethiopian embassy in Washington during Meles Zenawi's visit to the US in October 1996, when all non-Tigrean diplomats and embassy staff were forced to take leave of absence for alleged "security reasons", clearly shows that TPLF's leaders have already reached this stage of irrationality.

If taken seriously, this is a clear warning to all those who care about conflict prevention and peace as it shows the degree of exacerbation reached in interethnic relations in our country. What remains for the extremists is to persuade our brothers in Tigray to share their fear of others and that their survival as a people is threatened by the remaining 94% of our country's population. The other "logical" step would be for extremists like the TPLF leaders - this time from other ethnic groups, to persuade "their" respective peoples to look upon all Tigreans as a threat to their own survival. If extremists from all ethnic groups are allowed to make such abuse of the ethnic problem in their struggle for power, then the stage would be set for the kind of tragedy suffered by the peoples of Rwanda, Burundi and ex-Yugoslavia.

We believe, however, that it is not too late to reverse this dangerous trend provided that the country's democratic forces remain clear-headed and determined in their search for a solution based on the respect of the legitimate aspirations of all ethnic groups and on promotion of unity in diversity.

We also believe that in this uphill struggle Ethiopians need and deserve the support of all those in the international community who stand for peace and democratization. For such support to materialize, however, the least our foreign friends could do is to recognize there is a problem in Ethiopia and that something should be done to avert the impending disaster. Unfortunately this is not the case at present.

We find it somewhat strange that major conferences and symposiums convened to work out strategies on conflict prevention have systematically been devoted to countries where conflicts have already gone out of control and measures proposed as appropriate for the "prevention" phase had long become irrelevant.

Potential crisis areas like Ethiopia are not discussed in any of these gatherings. At the most recent of such major conferences - the "European Conference on Conflict Prevention" held in Amsterdam (27-28 February 1997) - our country was not included in the agenda which discussed the African continent region by region. The only two Horn countries concerned by this "prevention" conference were Somalia and Sudan.

The working paper prepared for the conference alluded to our country but this was done in a deadly simplistic manner: "In Ethiopia, Colonel Menguistu's Marxist regime of the Amharas (sic) was finally overthrown by rebel forces of other ethnic groups (sic) and the Eritreans declared independence". When one Ethiopian intellectual present at the conference raised the issue of that country's non-inclusion in the discussions, the Chairman at one of the workshops responded by a sententious "Ethiopia is not a priority".

Whatever the reasons for such incredible myopia (realpolitik, unwarranted partisanship, lack of information and/or understanding of this country's historical and present setting, failure by Ethiopians themselves to articulate their concerns, etc.), it is clear that as long as people working for conflict prevention continue to confuse it with management or resolution of human tragedies, none of the major disasters threatening elsewhere in Africa could ever be addressed before it is too late.

## TO ALL OUR READERS

*Given the gravity of the problem and the necessity of urgent action, GRAPECA has recently set up a Special Task Force to coordinate efforts being exerted both by Ethiopians and our foreign friends aimed at averting this impending disaster. If you want more information on this Task Force and further details about the initiatives it intends to take, and if you are ready to devote some time and energy to participate in this effort, please feel free to contact us at the following address:*

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