

ADDIS DIGEST

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Editorial

THE PEACE PROCESS FRAGILIZED

The demise of the regime of Colonel Mengistu did not usher in the period of democracy and lasting peace much desired by the Ethiopian people and all those in the international community who hoped that at long last Ethiopians would reconcile their differences and work together for a better future for the people. Although the fierce fighting that raged during the last months of the former regime had ceased, numerous military clashes in different regions, repeated and gross violations of human rights and serious socio-economic problems continued to destabilize the country during the entire transition period which will officially come to an end next month.

Nobody aware of Ethiopia's history and the complex problems currently facing the country expects peace and democracy to prevail overnight. Absence of peace in

Ethiopia has deep historical, economic, social, psychological, cultural and political roots. For too long, Ethiopian society has suffered destabilization due to incessant clashes of the ruling elites, the revolt of the people aimed at instauring a just order and repeated wars of resistance against foreign aggressions. Because of these, the people of Ethiopia as a whole never enjoyed peace, democracy and social justice. As a result, our country has been plagued by backwardness, famine and oppression. Conflicts caused by lack of democracy, under-development, poverty and injustice have only led to more oppression, backwardness, poverty and injustice, thus paving the way for further conflicts and confrontation. Up to now, Ethiopian society never enjoyed the breathing space to break this vicious circle.

The negative consequences of this vicious circle are not limited to only the social and economic spheres. In the political domain it has given rise to a culture that values violence as the normal choice to resolve political differences, the inclination to view all opponents as mortal enemies, to exaggerate minor differences as irreconcilable opposition and to consider any and all expression of dissent as a declaration of war.

Although GRAPECA is committed to a protracted peace-building process, our efforts during the past four years had focused on trying to somehow break this vicious circle by enhancing the peace momentum which came about with

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GRAPECA

Groupe de Recherche et d' Action pour la paix en Ethiopie
et dans la Corne de l' Afrique.

Research and Action Group for Peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.

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the fall of the former regime. This was done for two reasons:

First, we believed that unlike some quarters who conceived the transition period only as a process of transfer of political power from one group to another, this transition period should be viewed as a unique historic opportunity which should be used to launch the process of political, cultural and psychological changes that could help us shatter the vicious circle of political violence that had bedeviled our society for too long.

Secondly, we believed that the on-going transition process was a decisive one affecting the future of the country for many years to come. We asserted that if the transition succeeds in moving the country from a dictatorial and violent system to one based on democracy and peace, and not limit itself to turning a transitional government into a permanent one, then it would create the necessary conditions for the Ethiopian people to build lasting peace. Conversely, if the process derails, we expressed our fear that the existing conflicts will escalate and other forces unable to express their opposition peacefully might resort to armed struggle thus replunging our country into the age-old vicious circle of repression, violence and famine.

To avert this danger, GRAPECA spared no effort to encourage dialogue among the various forces in the country as can be witnessed by the initiatives we took to organize the two Conferences on Peace and Reconciliation in Ethiopia which took place in Paris in 1991 and 1993 and the crucial role our members played in the historic Addis Abeba Conference of December 1993 which led to the creation of the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE).

Given the incumbent government's refusal to engage in any serious dialogue with the democratic opposition and the ever-present danger of indescribable Somalia-like chaos, GRAPECA's strategy was geared to intensification of peaceful political initiatives and struggle based on the demand for free, fair and genuine elections and the writing of a Democratic Constitution. To this end, we maintained contacts with democratic opposition groups, took it upon

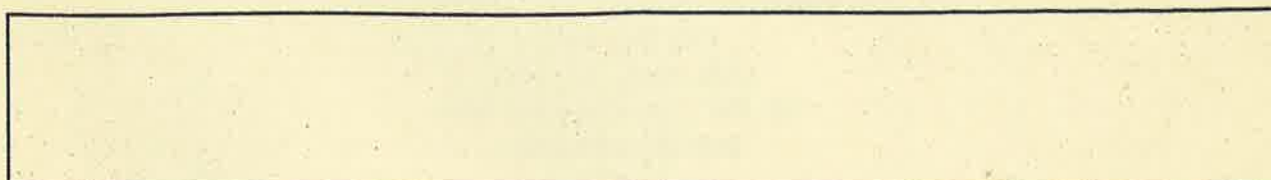
ourselves to serve the cause of peace by producing working documents, reports, a plan for peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia, a document on free, fair and genuine elections and a democratic constitution all intended to serve as a basis for constructive dialogue with the regime and/or to pave the way for the creation of a credible peaceful alternative force in the country.

Now it is clear for most Ethiopians that the four year transition period is coming to a close without effecting commendable accomplishments consonant with the democratic aspirations of our people. As has happened so often in the past, a group enjoying military supremacy is trying to impose its political will, its ideology and hegemony. As has happened so often in our country, one sector of society considering itself the "victor" has arrogated to itself all rights and denied these same rights to the rest of society which is considered as the "vanquished". As in the past, the net result will not be peace but rather further conflict and instability as more opposition groups are being pushed to raise arms as the only means left of expressing dissent.

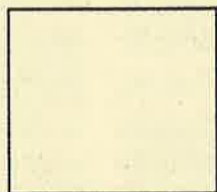
There are now two main dangers facing the country. The first is marginalization of those forces which have opted for a peaceful political process and will have to face growing brutal repression in the coming months and the scepticism of more and more Ethiopians who are being won over by the arguments of the radical opposition. The second danger is multiplication and escalation of armed conflicts fueled by the futility of all attempts at dialogue with a regime now perceived by almost all Ethiopians as a minority totalitarian group which will never willingly accept the challenges of democracy. It is superfluous to add that the combination of these two factors is a recipe for disaster for our war-weary people.

As a group dedicated to peace construction in Ethiopia, GRAPECA is more than ever determined to redouble its efforts to avert the impending disaster. In spite of the cultural and historical odds against a peaceful political process in our country and the incredibly irresponsible attitudes of the incumbent regime and its foreign friends and indeed because of all these factors, we believe there is a crucial role for our group to play not only to save the peace process in the short run but also to lay the ground for lasting peace and progress for the peoples of Ethiopia.

ADDIS DIGEST (April 30, 1995)



***THE ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS
COUNCIL***



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