

# NEW NEWSLETTER ETHIOPIA

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## DEMOCRACY: A PEREQUISITE FOR PEACE

Once again, Ethiopia is heading for another deadly famine due not only to drought but also to intensification of military activities in the north.

Over the last decade of famine, exile and suffering for our people, Ethiopia's democrats had been putting due emphasis on political factors to explain the causes underlying this tragedy. Many in the international community and specially the donor community had long been reluctant to establish a link between politics and famine for fear of being "involved in politics" and in the interest of providing quick and efficient relief to the victims.

Now there seems to be a change in emphasis. More and more people are reaching the conclusion that peace is a basic prerequisite if famine and suffering are to be done away with in Ethiopia and the Horn. The last few months have witnessed events which underscore the importance of peace and dialogue. Religious leaders in Ethiopia made a joint call for negotiations to continue. Exiled Ethiopians, casting away their past differences, came together to discuss the future of their country as was the case with the EPRP-initiated conference in Toronto, Canada. Foreign friends and organizations like the UPSALLA, "Life and Peace Institute", a Swedish NGO consortium called "Future for Africa" and the German-based Evangelisch Akademie, organized conferences to encourage dialogue among the conflicting parties.

This new emphasis on peace and concerted effort towards achieving it are encouraging and provide new momentum for all those who have been working in this direction for years. But we fear that this search for peace will not bear fruit unless and until all those concerned take yet another step forward and clearly assert that democracy is a prerequisite for peace. Just as it is now recognized that famine cannot be done away with unless peace is restored in the region, it should be affirmed that peace will remain an unattainable dream as long as our peoples are denied their fundamental human and democratic rights.

It is this emphasis on democracy which led almost all the country's democratic opposition forces to call for the setting up of a transitional government which will pave the way for genuine peace negotiations and a multi-party democracy in Ethiopia.

It is now clear that negotiations between the Ethiopian government and the two fronts have reached a deadlock and that the danger of further disaster is imminent. Declarations about "peace talks" have already given way to calls for "non-stop mobilization" by a government which has completely forgotten the vague and half-hearted promises of "democratic changes" made last year. Triumphant statements by EPLF leaders on the coming "short but fierce struggle before lasting and reliable victory" indicate that the organization is aiming at military victory which according to Issayas Afeworki is "only months away". TPLF's refusal to come to terms with multi-party democracy continues to obstruct the march towards a credible democratic alternative to the dictatorship.

It is in this context that the call for setting up of a transition government becomes not only extremely urgent but is seen by many as the only means of avoiding further disaster.

It is of course up to Ethiopians themselves to see to it that an alternative force of peace and democracy emerges from the present dangerous context. But we also believe that foreign friends who are concerned about peace in our country should recognize the need for a strong democratic force to counter the deadly illusions of "decisive military victory" entertained by all the warring parties.

While continuing the efforts aimed at encouraging dialogue among these parties, we believe that the international community should adopt a more balanced approach towards political forces in Ethiopia by doing all it can to encourage the emergence of a strong democratic alternative which Ethiopians perceive more and more is the only instrument for peace and progress in our country.

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