



Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement



fondation pour le progrès de l'homme

CONSTRUCTING PEACE IN ETHIOPIA

INTRODUCTION: A TORMENTED REGIONAL CONTEXT

Neither the end of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia and that of General Siad Barre in Somalia, nor the end of the Cold War have brought peace to the tormented region of the Horn of Africa. On the contrary, as armed conflict has broken out in Djibouti, all of the countries in the region are now at war. The prospects for peace have never seemed so dim.

IN ETHIOPIA: The victory of the EPDRF and the EPLF have not slowed down the process of political, economic and social decomposition. Nor has it stopped the spiral of increasing violence. As a European Parliament resolution observed, one year after the EPDRF took power "Ethiopia is facing a serious and unprecedented political and institutional crisis and a generalized, bloody civil war is to be feared in the country".

IN SOMALIA: The fighting that preceded the fall of General Siad Barre, as murderous as it was, gave only a taste of the deadly anarchy and endless suffering inflicted on the populations of this country by countless armed gangs.

IN THE SUDAN: The Islamic regime of General Al Bashir and Mr. Tourabi, called the "Khomeiny of the Horn", has intensified the war against the black African, Christian and animist populations in southern Sudan. And perhaps more serious still, this conflict has shown the existence and the strength of a new alliance in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region: that of Teheran and Khartoum, with the Fronts in power in Addis Abeba and Asmara, bound to the latter by treaties of cooperation.

IN DJIBOUTI: In this former French territory of the Afars and the Issas, rivalries with ethnic overtones have degenerated into armed conflict. The Afar-dominated Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) has taken up arms against the regime of President Goulede who is of Issa origin.

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French Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development

ALL OF THESE CONFLICTS are interrelated. If there is no solution to the crisis, they may degenerate into a regional conflagration. It is even possible that other African or non-African countries which feel concerned (or threatened) by the problems in the Horn (attempts at Islamist expansionism, exacerbation of ethnic problems, dismemberment of States, ...) may join the conflict. This would mean that the entire region from "Chad to Djibouti" would be involved in the crisis. There is no doubt that this evolution of the situation in the Horn would have a considerable effect on relations between Black Africa and the Arab countries, between Christians and Moslems, between secularists and fundamentalist forces.

II. OUR PROJECT "CONSTRUCTING PEACE IN ETHIOPIA"

With its 55 million inhabitants, Ethiopia is located in the heart of the Horn of Africa and its problems.

For more than two years, the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD) and the Foundation for the Progress of Mankind (FPH) -with the assistance of the Research and Action Group for Peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa (RAGPEHA), a group of Ethiopian intellectuals have launched an initiative to help construct durable peace in Ethiopia.

1. Our efforts in favor of peace in Ethiopia are based on a three-fold observation:

a. In the popular image all over the world, Ethiopia has become a schoolbook case of famine and misery. It is true that for at least a century, the country has undergone "major famines" every 15 to 20 years on the average. But we have also observed that as far back as one may go in recorded history, Ethiopia has always been and remains a country at war. Outside aggression and internal conflicts have been the constant feature of national life. The case is a serious one: in the last 250 years, Ethiopia has barely known a decade of total, continuous peace.

b. This semi-permanent state of war has not just given rise to a culture of violence which makes resorting to arms almost the normal means of solving conflicts. It has also created a vicious circle of violence-famine-violence in which the country is entrapped. While war causes famine, we have observed that famine, by destabilizing society and particularly the peasants breeds war and violence. This is the basis of the profound conviction behind our action: the fight against hunger and for development in Ethiopia must go hand in hand with a continuous effort in favor of peace in the country.

c. Peace in Ethiopia requires a serious, permanent effort as tenacious as the deep-rooted culture of violence in Ethiopian society. Efforts must be made to raise public awareness on issues of peace so as to create, for the first time in the history of the country, a vast movement in favor of peace and against war. As

peace in Ethiopia is above all the affair of Ethiopians themselves, we felt that our contribution could take the form of encouragement of an effort made by Ethiopians to think out a solution collectively. This work was geared to seeking alternatives which would ensure peace and to elaborating an action programme based on established diagnoses for peace and national reconciliation.

2. Our joint actions with Ethiopian forces for peace.

Guided by these observations, for more than two years we have been working with Ethiopian intellectuals grouped in the "RESEARCH AND ACTION GROUP FOR PEACE IN ETHIOPIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA" (RAGPEHA).

As part of our support to RAGPEHA in its research and action for peace in Ethiopia, the CCFD and the FPH organized a 5-day seminar, open to Ethiopians of different backgrounds, to discuss the various aspects of a plan for peace in the light of the experience of seventeen countries on five continents, presented by witnesses and persons involved in the peace process.

After this meeting held in Paris, reports on the proceedings were published in French, English and Amharic. These documents were widely distributed to the Ethiopian community within and outside of the country.

The success of the Paris conference has encouraged new our joint action in three complementary directions:

- Promoting the idea of a detailed, very concerted plan for peace with the Ethiopian population, intellectuals and leaders, at home or in exile. The elaboration of the plan must be non-partisan and must address the questions posed by the reconstruction of a country ravaged by war: the themes discussed in the Paris conference could serve as a point of departure.

- Seeking support for our initiative from the leaders of major powers, in particular in Europe and the United States, and from international institutions and non-governmental organizations.

- Elaborating and discussing concerted proposals which can contribute to the plan for peace.

III. A CONFERENCE FOR THE ADOPTION OF A DURABLE PLAN FOR PEACE

The texts of the Paris conference and the discussions which followed have led the RAGPEHA members to draw up a draft plan for peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

The initiative we are envisaging consists of facilitating dialogue between Ethiopians in view of preparing a national conference at which the various aspects of a plan for peace will be discussed. RAGPEHA's draft will be submitted to all participants, who will be

asked to make amendments to this document or to present their own proposals before the conference opens.

The process for launching invitations to this conference and the follow up procedures have been designed to promote the achievement of the two objectives we have been pursuing since the beginning of our common "peace in Ethiopia" project: encouraging dialogue between Ethiopians and helping the movement for peace in the country to adopt a text to serve as a reference for work in education for peace and public awareness campaigns.

1. Encouraging dialogue between Ethiopians:

The Paris conference was considered a success by all the Ethiopian participants, whether they were in the opposition or sympathizers of the government. Intellectuals who came from all political and ideological horizons, ethnic origins and religions, were able to discuss for five days on the future of their country in a spirit of broad-mindedness. As a constructive base for a peace plan had been laid down during the conference, the discussions continued in the same spirit.

Now the dialogue must be broadened to include as many Ethiopian organizations and leaders as possible. The purpose is to enable the Ethiopians to seek, together, "a minimum to convince as many as possible".

2. Supporting public awareness campaigns on issues related to peace:

The document to be worked out at the Paris meeting will be the basis for a public awareness campaign in Ethiopia and will contribute to the creation of a vast movement for peace and against war. It will be used as a reference text for establishing "CIRCLES FOR DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION", which will constitute the backbone of the movement for peace and national reconciliation. Members of these circles will be Ethiopians of good will from all walks of life and all political, ethnic and religious convictions.

IV. THE NEED FOR SUPPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR THIS INITIATIVE

The initiative that we are envisaging will need the support of the leaders of major powers, in particular in Europe and the United States, and from international institutions and non-governmental organizations. The European Community and the Member States have expressed concern about the evolution of the situation in Ethiopia. The European Parliament, after having noted the failure of the transition arrangement reached in London in May 1991 under the auspices of the United States, made an urgent call for the organization of a national conference (the powers of which are to be determined by an agreement among all political forces) to pave

the way for a democratic transitional government acceptable to a majority of the Ethiopian people." (Resolution B3-1032 and 1042/952).

The Human Rights Committee of the American Congress has recently expressed the same concern. In a letter addressed to the President of the transitional government, Mr. Melesse Zenawi, it denounced de violations of human rights perpetrated by the government and ethnic organizations and the upsurge of violence in the eastern, western and southern regions of the country, and asked the government to initiate a dialogue with all of the political and ethnic organizations and to increase the effort to find peaceful solutions to the Ethiopian crisis and thus to avoid wars and conflicts (Letter of 8 October 1992).

We appreciate these initiatives which are welcome to many Ethiopians who consider that holding a national conference is practically the last chance for peace in their country.

Our initiative follows the same direction. The dialogue between Ethiopians which we are trying to encourage can make an immediate contribution to efforts being undertaken to prevent the situation from degeneration as in Somalia.

For this reason, we solicit your support which will be extremely precious to us in both the preparatory and implementation stages of this meeting.