

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN ETHIOPIA

ORGANISED BY

THE CATHOLIC COMMITTEE AGAINST HUNGER AND FOR DEVELOPMENT, THE
FOUNDATION FOR PROGRESS OF MANKIND, AND RESEARCH AND ACTION
GROUP FOR PEACE IN ETHIOPIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

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I INTRODUCTION TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PEACE SEMINAR

Following the dramatic and eventful change of government and regime in Ethiopia, there are opportunities that await and challenges that have confronted the Ethiopian people, and indeed the whole world in general and Africa in particular.

With the view to widen the window of opportunity open for a durable peace-cum stability, it was felt by the organizers that a seminar was required.

The underlying rationale behind such a seminar was that it was strongly and rightly believed by the organizers of the seminar that it is easy to win a war and lose the peace. Peace is not just the absence of war and that durable peace can only

come about if the state of violence has also been eliminated which in some cases tend to be very difficult. In view of this, it was strongly felt by the organizers of the seminar that ensuring a durable peace after the decades of war and violence requires a much deeper understanding of many complex and intricate internal factors and dynamism as well as external factors which requires a serious study and examination.

Based on the above, the organizers of the seminar have provided a unique opportunity for Ethiopians of all persuasions from inside and outside the country to get together for five days to discuss, exchange views and ideas as well as to reflect on the complex issues related to the short and medium term strategies and measures of how to move from war to durable peace and reconciliation by taking into account the lessons learned from historical successful and un successful experiences of transitions to peace in many other countries.

Having studied and examined the experiences from a variety of countries*, (Algeria, Afganistan, Columbia, Kampuchia, Vietnam, about the process of transition from war into peace and stability; from dictatorship to democracy, the Ethiopian participants who come from both at home and abroad have reached the following understandings.

1. The participants are encouraged by the convening of Seminars which would facilitate the the transition from war into a peaceful situation as well as the trend from dictatorship to democracy in Ethiopia. However, they noted that there are specific peculiarities and problems in this transition Ethiopia.

Among the specific concerns identified by the participants at the seminar include:

a) While the Interim Government has committed itself to the principles of democracy and respect for fundamental human rights, the actual implementation thereof have not yet taken root. On the contrary there has been violations and infringements of such rights.

b) While there was a commendable attempt to set up a broad based transitional government, most participants expressed their concern on the criteria of selecting "representatives" of political parties, nationalities, and prominent individuals. Furthermore, most participants also expressed their concern that there was no ALL-Party transitional seminar as was originally anticipated and promised which could have ushered in the much sought after durable peace and stability.

However, the participants were encouraged to learn that the Transitional Government formed plans to hold a series of seminars. For the sake of durable peace and stability, there can be NO alternative other than to continue to broaden the basis of the transitional Government to include ALL the parties that have so-far been excluded as well as encourage the active participation of representatives of civic bodies from inside and outside the country, and prominent individuals who are believed to make substantial contribution to such a process.

One of the the central tasks that must be performed during the transitional period ought to be the prevention of violence and intimidation. All parties must adhere to a peaceful and non-violent means of competition. It is the sincere wish of the

participants that all armed struggles be changed to peaceful democratic struggles.

II - POLITICAL CONDITIONS FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

It was resolved by the participants that decent, civilized and peaceful political competition should replace violence of any kind including intimidation of actual or perceived opponents.

Furthermore, the following conditions for peace and reconciliation have been identified :

1. legalisation and registration of all political parties and other forms of associations with firm guarantees for the right to life, safety and security of their members.
2. the establishment of an independent judiciary system
3. the establishment of independent mass Media,
4. The establishment of a secular and democratic state which ensures equality of all citizens before the law, a fair and equitable access to resources with a sufficient degree of devolution of political and economic power that would ensure grassroot democratic participation.
5. the prevention of party dominance of and interference in governmental-administrative and academic institutions.
6. The detachment of the armed forces from party politics;
7. The establishment of an independent election commission;
8. A constitutional guarantee of free and fair elections.

Finally, the participants have also expressed that organising the Ethiopian society along tribal ethnic and other primordial

lines could result in grave socio-economic, cultural, political and military consequences.

III : ON THE ECONOMY

The ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of Ethiopian society both in historical and contemporary perspectives implies the necessity of basing a multi-party democracy on the economic sovereignty of the individual, groups, nationalities and other social groupings.

Given the permanent emergency situation the country finds itself in with 7 million people at risk from famine and no less than 20 million malnourished people and tenth of thousands of displaced or unemployed persons, the absence of any sustainable economic strategy and coherent policy in the country extremely alarming. Most participants felt that the country need no less than a National Charter of Economic Bill of Rights in order to give concrete meaning to boost the confidence of the people on their own government.

It was felt that economic participation of the people and the benefits they derive therefrom is as important as their political participation. But the precondition for both is the prior existence of peace, national reconciliation and broad consensus.

IV : ON THE COMPOSITION OF THE ETHIOPIAN ARMED FORCES

It was agreed that the Ethiopian armed forces must reflect the multi national and multi-cultural nature of Ethiopian society.

V : ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Participants strongly felt that the foreign policy and relation of Ethiopia must be guided by the sovereign right and actual socio-economic and cultural interest of the whole Ethiopian people.