



**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.*

**RAGPEHA**

**GRAPECA**

**WORKING FOR PEACE IN ETHIOPIA**

Paris, June 1994

**GRAPECA**  
Société Générale Paris

43 Rue Gazan  
Gare de l'Est

Paris XIV  
n° 00050380466 - 69

## WORKING FOR PEACE IN ETHIOPIA

Paris, June 1994

### ***I - THE ORIGIN OF GRAPECA***

#### **1.- From SCVR to COSETH**

Ethiopian intellectuals who founded GRAPECA in France in august 1990 were essentially the same ones who were engaged in clandestine activities of solidarity with victims of repression and violations of human rights under the dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam.

The first group "Solidarity Committee with Victims of Repression in Ethiopia" (SCVR) was founded in 1979. Since the dictatorial regime did not allow any legal means for the expression of solidarity the group within Ethiopia had to operate under conditions of absolute secrecy.\*<sup>1</sup>

To support that effort of solidarity Ethiopian intellectuals abroad were organized under "Comité de Solidarité avec l'Ethiopie" (COSETH). COSETH's activities against repression had to be carried out discretely to prevent the disclosure of the existence of an underground network which works in favor of victims of political repression.

S.C.V.R. presented annual reports on the situation of Human Rights in Ethiopia and on its activities to the NGO's which supported it. COSETH tried to draw the attention of a wider public abroad by participating at conferences and seminars which were organized on the problem of human rights. It always tried to draw attention to the quasi insurmountable difficulties which the work had to face under a particularly repressive regime and called on a collective effort of reflection on the method of intervention apposite to the situation. \*\*

---

\* See "Ethiopia : The struggle for Solidarity" COSETH, May 1985.

1

\*\* See article : "Les naufrages de la répression" in DEFI Journal de Terres des Hommes (France), June 1984

## **2.- From COSETH to GRAPECA**

After ten years of activity SCVR and COSETH, in taking stock to evaluate the work that had been carried out to date and do delineate new perspectives for further action, arrived at the conclusion that solidarity work, important as it is, does not provide durable solution to the problem of Human Rights violation in the country. That is why beginning from 1988 the team was engaged in collective reflection and debate in the light of the dramatic situation in the country which was marked by repeated famine, war, armed conflicts resulting in numerous death and gross violation of the rights of citizens by all protagonists of the conflicts.

The debates and reflections were articulated around four main ideas :

1.- Ethiopia has always been a country at war. During the last 150 years, Ethiopia had to defend itself from over twenty tentative external invasions and suffered numberless internal conflicts. A cursory examination indicates a harrowing fact : during all that period Ethiopia did not have even a decade of total and continuous peace.

2.- The culture of violence which has become an integral part of Ethiopian society has not only engendered wars and conflicts but it has also kept it bogged down to an infernal cycle of which "famine - war - famine" is merely a dramatic manifestation. If famine, repression, ethnic conflicts, injustice and the absence of democracy explain the conflicts, the latter only aggravated the problems and on its part helped to perpetuate violence.

3.- Thus overwhelmed by a culture of permanent and vicious cycle of violence which manifests itself in every aspect of the country's national life the Ethiopian people never had the possibility to reflect on their problems, and even less to try peaceful alternatives.

4.- The problem of human rights abuses, serious as it is, is thus only an aspect of the misfortune that has befallen the people of this country and it will never find a solution unless it is integrated in an overall strategy of a struggle for peace and against war. The struggle has to start by a serious and profound study of the causes and consequences of violence, and putting in place coherent and detailed alternatives which are likely to guarantee peace by

setting up alternative structures both as a means of engendering collective reflection and as a catalyst for the formation of a wider public opinion in favour of peace and reconciliation in the country.

It is taking these observations as a starting point and convinced that even at the height of the war a small minority should and could reflect upon the means of constructing peace, that in August 1990 the initiators of COSETH decided to establish "GROUPE DE RECHERCHE ET D'ACTION POUR LA PAIX EN ETHIOPIE ET DANS LA CORNE DE L'AFRIQUE" (GRAPECA) that is "Research and Action Group for Peace in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa" (REGPEHA). From the very beginning the group was supported by Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD) and the Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme (FPH).

## **II - MESURES TAKEN BY GRAPECA**

In less than a year after GRAPECA was formed the flight of dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam (May 1991) and the coming to power of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front appeared to create a new opportunity for peace in the country. Since that time the main thrust of the action by GRAPECA was two pronged : to strengthen the dynamics of the peace process which came about after years of devastating wars and to engage in long term measures with the view of establishing a durable peace in the country.

### **1.- Enhancing the Peace Momentum**

After considering the fact that the new dynamics for peace in Ethiopia can not bear fruit unless a means is found to maintain its momentum, also taking into account that the fate of the transition will affect the country's future for many years to come GRAPECA was actively engaged in the effort for a democratic and peaceful transition. It was as a result of that, that in less than three years, our group was the initiator of three conferences devoted to the cause of peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

#### a) THE FIRST PARIS CONFERENCE (July 1991)

This conference, which was supported by CCFD and FPH, was engaged in the study of "The problem of the transition from war to peace and from dictatorship to democracy". About twenty Ethiopian intellectuals gathered to discuss the problem in the light of the experience of 17 countries from five continents. Those who witnessed and had a first hand practical experience in Afghanistan, Algeria, Benin, Cambodia, Colombia, Chili, Chekoslovakia, Haiti, Kurdistan, Laos, Nicaragua, Poland, Spain, Uganda, Ukrain, Vietnam and Zimbabwe were engaged in a debate lasting five days with Ethiopian intellectuals of whom six came from the University in the country.

The debate in which the conference was engaged upon and which was continued amongst the prime movers of GRAPECA, fifteen monthes later, resulted in a document entitled "Contribution to a Plan for Peace and National Reconciliation in Ethiopia".

The strategy in the GRAPECA document proposed the holding of a peace and reconciliation conference in Ethiopia in which all forces in the country convened to define an action program with the objective of a peaceful and democratic transition towards a pluralist society.

#### b) THE SECOND PARIS CONFERENCE(March 1993)

It is to put into practice its call for the holding of national conference as proposed by its plan for peace that GRAPECA took the initiative for the second Paris conference.

The objective had been to convene a preparatory meeting between the representatives of the major political forces (EPRDF - the party in power included) for the purpose of discussing the steps to be taken for holding a national reconciliation conference in which all major forces could participate.

Despite the absence of EPRDF which declined the invitation the conference - also supported by CCFD and FPH - was held in the presence of seven major political organizations of the country. After three days of deliberation it concluded its task by launching an appeal so that all the problems in the country could be solved by peaceful means and to that end it created an organizing committee for the national conference for peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia. The organizing committee which was presided by

the coordinator of GRAPECA Dr Negede Gobezie has discharged its task properly. Ten months later, in December 1993, the conference devoted to peace and reconciliation was held in Addis Abeba.

c) THE ADDIS ABEBA CONFERENCE FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN ETHIOPIA (December 1993)

The conference which was held from 18 to 22 December 1993 was attended by more than 160 delegates of 53 political, labour, cultural, religious and economic organizations and 60 "elders" who came from all parts of the country. It had not only the massive support of the Ethiopian people, but that of the international community as well. The opening ceremony was honoured by the presence of representatives from 31 governments (United States, Russia, China, all the member states of the European Union, etc.) OUA, UNO, EEC, and about twenty NGOs. The conference was concluded after drafting an alternative plan which enables peaceful transition in Ethiopia and after establishing the Council of Alternatives Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE) to apply the plan.

Even before the second Paris Conference in March 1993 GRAPECA had envisaged in its strategy to foster peace in Ethiopia, the creation of such a structure which would be able to achieve four objectives to avoid a tragic and incontrollable situation in the country. These objectives were :

- To marginalize the forces of war by making clear that contrary to our traditional secular politics, large sectors of society can be mobilised and succesfully stage a peaceful resistance against an anti democratic force from what ever quarter.
- To coordinate the struggle for peace and democracy before the country falls into the "somali" situation.
- To propose a coherent minimum objective as an alternative for peace and democracy around which large sectors of society as well as the international community could rally.
- To present to the existing regime a credible structure capable of undertaking a dialogue at the national level which it has to engage in sooner or later in order to avoid another cycle of war and violence.

The creation of CAFPDE is the result of this strategy envisaged by GRAPECA and constitutes a historical step by way of putting in place in the country a democratic culture hence peace.

All these help to consolidate a force for constructive dialogue with the existing regime and thus enhances the process of transition. GRAPECA henceforth puts the accent of its effort on the second and long term aspect of its plan for peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia.

## **2.- The long term peace building tasks**

The success of the Addis Abeba Conference and the creation of the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy (CAFPDE) permits a guarded optimism regarding the transition as it provides an alternative program for peace and democracy which could be presented to the people and a structure for constructive dialogue with the front in power.

This new situation which is the result of an initiative by GRAPECA, allows it to put more energy and resources towards its long term peace building tasks as outlined in the second part of its peace plan. In attacking the profound causes of violence in Ethiopia this action in depth is formulated around three complementary tasks : uprooting the culture of violence, reinforcing democracy and cultivating the spirit of cohesion and brotherhood between the ethnic groups in the country.

To discharge its task properly the "The Circles for Democracy and National Reconciliation" organized around GRAPECA and which operate in Ethiopia as well as abroad, are reorganized to allow a level of specialization. While still functioning as forums for collective reflection and concrete action, the circles are henceforth regrouped in four sections which are more or less autonomous.

### **a) SECTION FOR INITIATIVE AND EDUCATION FOR PEACE :**

The main priority of this section would be to uproot the endemic culture of violence. As already noted violence has a long and deep root in the history of Ethiopia. It is the cause for economic and social backwardness, it can not be uprooted once and for all unless the causes which undermine the foundation of the society - under development and social injustice - are

eliminated. There will not be peace in the country unless there is an economic system in which all the nation participates. To achieve that objective the effort in this direction will be accompanied by a struggle to uproot the culture of violence.

The Section for Initiative and Education for Peace will as a result undertake a campaign of education for peace with the objective of creating a vast movement for peace and against war.

It will have the task of elaborating and proposing non violent alternative solutions for the problems in society. Such a strategy will contribute considerably towards the construction of peace in a society where violence and resorting to violence had been presented as a matter of course even when there were peaceful means which the protagonists could explore before resorting to violence.

A third part of its action would be to encourage dialogue as a means of resolving conflicts. It would be similar to what GRAPECA has been carrying out in the past three years, that is this section will organize meetings, conferences and debates to enable Ethiopians to look for solutions to the major problems in their society by dialogue and peaceful means.

#### b) SECTION FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIC EDUCATION

Its principal task would be to take all the necessary initiatives to consolidate a democratic culture in the country. The transition of a society from dictatorship to democracy and to peace, had never been easy. Although democracy is unlikely to be a way of life in the society before a long period of apprenticeship, it is important to establish a legal framework which governs the right of the individual and that of the people. This section has the task of consolidating this process by making the following its center line of action :

- The defence of Human rights. By launching a public awareness campaign in defence of the rights of the individual and the people. This action will be centred on the rehabilitation of the values of solidarity and the respect for the individual which existed in traditional Ethiopian society and the adoption of the concept of human rights as accepted in international and Pan African conventions.
- The launching of a campaign for civic education. The reinforcement of democracy entails a minimum level of understanding of its rules, the functioning of institutions which guarantee its exercise and citizens willing to

participate in the elaboration of those rules, in the working of its institutions and prepared to defend these institutions when they come under threat. This function of GRAPECA will be one of its principle tasks during this phase of the transition when the country is looking for a democratic structure.

#### c) SECTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The implementation of democracy and the construction of peace need not depend on political organizations alone. The society as a whole should have an adequate means of taking part in major decisions which affect its future. The development of Civil Society as an instrument of consolidating peace and democracy need not be underlined. The need here is to underline the necessity of creating an Agency for the promotion of Civil Society other than GRAPECA the task of which would be :

- To take inventory of traditional associations in the Ethiopia society and to encourage their development with necessary modifications aimed at encouraging new forms of association which meet the need of a democratic society.
- To facilitate the development of an "NGO culture" by providing legal and technical councils, by organizing training for leaders, initiators or members of associations.

#### d) SECTION FOR THE INTER ETHNIC RELATIONSHIP OR "BROTHERLY PEOPLES"

Cultivate the factors which contribute to national cohesion. That is a task of desicive importance for establishing democracy and consolidation of peace in Ethiopia. The unity of the country can not be assured without the wish of its people to live together and the installation of a state based on a pluralist and multi-ethnic constitution. Putting in place institutions which guarantee the equality of all will not be sufficient by itself to ensure national cohesion. The relationship between ethnic groups will rest on the ambitious and unscrupulous politicians as long as the democrats of all ethnic groups are not mobilized to foster the ideals of voluntary union and brotherhood among the peoples.

The group "BROTHERLY PEOPLES" aspires to encourage development of inter-ethnic groups to undertake :

- works on collective reflection which is oriented towards the research of solutions for the ethnic problem of the country. At the beginning the work can consist of elaborating MODUS VIVIANDI which allows the democratization of relations between political and intellectuals elites of the country. By demonstrating the harmonious relationship between themselves as an example, this multi-ethnic group can then bring to the people the message of brotherhood and solidarity.
- The effort of extracting the positive aspect of the common heritage which will be the symbol for the national cohesion.
- The systematic denunciation of using ethnic factors for political objectives.

Each section functions autonomously. The leadership of GRAPECA, where leaders of sections are represented, coordinates these activities taking into account that the initiative in every domain is well integrated with the global strategy of fostering peace.

### **3.- A monthly journal and RADIO SELAM**

The Public awareness campaigns in which all the sections participate is assured by a monthly journal published in Addis Abbeba and by the weekly broadcasts of Radio Selam which are followed by 8 to 10 million people in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries.

The objectives of the journal and the radio, as outlined in the program of GRAPECA are articulated along two major lines :

It is first of all necessary to foster the idea of peaceful transition towards a democratic society. In that framework it deals with current problems, encourages all efforts for dialogue, denounces all the factors of destabilization of peace be it from the government or the opposition, and proposes peaceful alternatives to the problems which could surface at every stage of the process of transition.

In order to reinforce the alternative forces for peace and reconciliation, 15 minutes of every Radio Selam broadcast (of one hour) are allocated to the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia. CAFPDE

prepares the programs without any intervention on the part of GRAPECA, be it on the level of choosing the subjects or their content.

The second aspect of the work deals with peace and civic education. Three themes predominate in this work : campaign to uproot the culture of violence, to reinforce democracy and promote the spirit of brotherhood and reconciliation between the different ethnic groups in the country.