

A PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH  
A CENTER FOR CIVIC EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA

BY

*The Steering Committee for Convening a Founding Workshop*

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## I. Background

It is now a little more than three years since Ethiopia has made another attempt at getting rid of one the most ruthless totalitarian rules in the Third World. During this brief period, the new Transitional Government has taken series of measure that have far-reaching implications for the future of the country with regard to socio-economic and political life of society at large. The banning of the defunct "National Shengo" (parliament), the constitution, the military establishment, the ruling party (WPE) along with its client mass organisations, etc., on the one hand, and the instituting of a seemingly Coalition Government (TGE), restructuring of the geographical set up of local government units, initiating a new economic policy orientated to the "free" enterprise model, formation of a constitution Drafting Commission, ... on the other, are some of the under takings that are more or less accomplished since the overthrow of the *ancien regime*.

Despite these and other similar measures and highly publicised virtues of political pluralism and Politico-economic liberalisation, the transition from autocratic rule to democratic governance is being put to a litmus test. This modest scepticism, among others, could be explained by some alarming practices of the incumbent Transitional Government witnessed in due process of the period of transition. These occurrences relate to abuse and defrauding amply displayed at times of the 1992 local and 1994 national elections and other undertakings corresponding to attempts at exercising rights as sanctioned by the "Chapter for The Transitional Period".

Due to the Challenges that a successful transition towards a democratic socio-political environment poses, it is our firm belief that providing civic education and prompting awareness with regard to constitutional rule becomes indispensable. The committee is of the opinion that, coupled with the breach of trust by officialdom, the breeding ground for forfeiting of rights and neglect of duties also flourish in a situation where illiteracy in civic virtues and culture is prevalent. Hence the need to make eligible citizens and organised components of civic society to be exposed to the basics of civic education and norms and standards of democratic governance.

## II. Justification

Ethiopia's attempt at embarking on positive socio-economic and political transformation appears to have encountered a number of challenges some of which could be summarised as follows :

- The growing high handedness and repressive tendencies of the country's ruling elite ;
- The ever present "Culture of violence" as an aspect of the *modus operandi* of the Ethiopian body-politic still expressing itself by way of inflicting damages that approximate gross human right violations ;
- The absence of a formidable and strong civil society contributing to failures in counter-balancing the unmitigated lust for power of political factions in general and the ruling groups in particular ;
- The growing socio-economic hazards accumulated over the years and further augmented since the seizure of power by the incumbent Transitional Government contributing to the prevalence of apathy and in-difference on the part of considerable portion of society ;
- The over politicization of ethnic differences in a manner utterly distorted and designed to serve ulterior motives which eventually could pose a serious threat to the development of a democratic culture unless carefully tackled before it is too late.

We strongly believe that one important contribution to the creation of durable peace and democratic governance in the country is the promotion of civic education that informs citizens not only about their rights and duties but also standard rules and practice of a democratic government and its various institutions. If pursued with conviction and perseverance, one can justifiably hope that this venture can infuse perceptions and values expressed in the form of an advanced political culture as an aspect of everyday practice of informed and conscious citizens. The risk of falling back to the appalling practices of yester-years could be minimised and gradually eliminated provided that all concerned make concerted efforts by underlining on the benefit and legitimacy of the ballot box as opposed to



overcoming differences through the instrumentality of the barrel of the gun. More importantly, such an undertaking of establishing a center for civic education and democratic governance will positively contribute to the on-going debate regarding the making of a New constitution and instituting a government based on the norms of the democratic exercise.

### III. General Objectives

The establishment of the center for Civic Education is expected to facilitate the realisation of the following objectives :

- 3.1. Bring together community leaders, academics, political and religious groups, NGOs, youth and women Associations, minority groups, human rights activists and researchers to deliberate and effect exchange of views on civic culture and modes and manners of democratic governance ;
- 3.2. Organise workshops, seminars and symposia in which those listed 3.1. above could participate with the objective of bolstering their knowledge as regards the benefits of developing civic culture and practice ;
- 3.3. Solicit the support of government institutions and functionaries (Courts, administrators, the police, schools) to contribute towards the entrenchment of awareness on the part of the general public by emphasising on the advantages of civic education and prevalence of the rule of law ;
- 3.4. Work towards the inclusion of Civic Education in the curricula of the different levels of educational set ups ;
- 3.5. Sponsor the undertaking of research on the various aspects of the subject and facilitate the dissemination of research findings in the form of brochures, proceedings and text books ;

- 3.6. Organise panels and public lectures on themes and topics that are relevant to the various aspects of the ongoing drives to institute a popularly elected democratic government.

#### IV. Immediate Objectives

- 4.1. Organise the permanent Center for the Promotion of Civic Education and Awareness on Democratic Governance in Ethiopia ;
- 4.2. Work out a Memorandum of Association for the Center and seek official recognition and registration ;
- 4.3. Organise workshops and seminars on such themes as :
  - Democratic Rights and Democratic Government
  - Constitution and Human Rights
  - Standard norms and practices pertaining to elections and electoral procedures
  - Challenges in Multi-ethnic and Multi-religious societies
  - Conflict Resolution Mechanisms
  - Pluralistic Democracy and Economic Development
  - Alternatives and Options in Identifying Appropriate Forms of Government Structures (Unitary, Federal, others ...)
- 4.4. Launch media campaigns to popularise the objectives of the Center through and invite potential members and Associate Members to contribute towards the attainment of stated objectives of the center.

The steering committee has already approached academics and researchers interested in the venture from the Addis Abeba University and the Ethiopian Teachers Association. Attempt is already underway to enlist the participation of representatives of professional associations, mass

organisations, the NGO community, academic and religious circles, Jurists and political parties by posing as an adhoc committee and facilitate the launching of the Center.

The establishment of the center is to be announced at the founding workshop tentatively scheduled for february 1995. The timing is purposively selected to precede the instituting of the national legislature that would allegedly create a constitutionally elected Ethiopian Government. It is anticipated that the duration of the Workshop would be 4 days. A total of about 100 participants are expected to attend the workshop sessions. The steering committee looks forwards that about 15 well researched papers relevant to the various themes of relevance would be presented serving as focal points of discussion and deliberation. It is anticipated that a complete proceeding of the workshop will be published and this is hoped to be used as one of the texts for the subsequent undertaking of promoting Civic Education in the various fora and platforms anticipated to surface as a result.