

## **Establishment of the Ethiopian Human Rights League**

### **I. A Short Account of Ethiopia's Past and Present**

#### **Human Rights Situations**

Gross violation of human rights in the majority of developing countries is a very well known fact, and hence, the issue has been the great concern of the international community in general and democratic countries in particular.

Ethiopia, which embraces various nationalities and different religious sectors, had experienced armed conflicts initiated for different motives. The major victims of the said armed conflicts have been the civilian population in general and children, women and old people in particular. Besides this saddening loss of lives and destructions caused by wars in which they were not directly involved, Ethiopians suffered for centuries under the rule of absolute monarchs to whom the concept of democracy and human rights have been quite alien. These continuous suppressions coupled with economic backwardness and illiteracy had led the majority of the population believe that any violation of human rights committed by the state is the result of the order of God sent against them as a punishment for the sin they might have committed. This belief in turn had made the people submissive and indifferent to whatever injustice the governments have been committing against their subjects, and no significant direct protest has therefore ever been attempted.

The natural consequence of this undemocratic rule of absolute monarchy was the non-existence of any human rights group in the country

Unfortunately enough, the military regime which succeeded the rule of absolute monarchy in 1974 was a direct continuation of its predecessor in its undemocratic nature and had been running the machinery of suppression in its full capacity to the disservice of the people. For nearly seventeen years, arbitrary detention, arrest, mass killing, house to house search and seizure, expropriation of property without due process of law and other inhuman activities were the day to day occurrences in the country. Protesting against these grave violations of human rights was interpreted by the government as an invitation for more serious and barbarous physical reprisals. In short, the rule of law was replaced by the rule of the gun. This reign of terror had resulted in grief and moral degradation on the people in general and among the intellectual circles in particular. Therefore, the alternative left to the people was to seek the mercy of God and the assistance of the democratic international community to alleviate what has be-fallen them. Obviously, attempting to form any human rights group under this regime was unimaginable.

At this particular moment, the military regime is overthrown, and is replaced by a transitional government. The transitional period Charter of the new government which provides for the right to form any political or non-political

organization is promulgated on July 22, 1991. However, uncertainty on the protection of their rights and freedoms, the feeling of threat on their security, and the moral humiliation they experienced for the last many years is still prevailing on the greater part of the public. This feeling seems to emanate from the following facts:

1. it is because the past horrifying situation is a fresh memory of the people;
2. the new government is not tested with time whether it will keep its words to respect human rights as it claims to do;
3. the people are aware that there is no organization or group to cooperate and inform or to submit petition in case human rights are violated in the future.

In addition to these, the transitional government has arrested and is continuing to arrest officials of the previous government and persons alleged to have had connections with the old regime. Whether the trial of the people arrested is to be conducted in accordance with the law is what the people are anxious to see in the future.

The past and present situations of Ethiopia we have briefly stated above lead us to the conclusion that establishing a human rights league would help:



1. to raise public awareness of the rights to life and property and other freedoms;
2. to rehabilitate the public moral humiliation prevailing and to develop the feeling of security and confidence;
3. to prevent the occurrence of human rights violations in the future by consulting with and petitioning to the concerned government authorities or groups when human rights violation seems imminent;
4. to expose to the Ethiopian people and to the international community when human rights are grossly violated.

Establishing a Human Rights League according to our assessment of the situations is, therefore, an urgent issue of the time which will be the first of its kind and the beginning of an encouraging tradition to the country.

## **II. Objectives of the League**

The main objectives of the League shall be the following:

1. to introduce to the public the basic principles of human rights embodied in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

2. to gather information concerning the human rights situation in the country;
3. to consult with concerned government authorities or groups to prevent or interfere with any imminent human rights violation;
4. to petition to the concerned government authorities or groups for redressing when human rights are violated without due process of law;
5. to expose human rights violations to the Ethiopian people and to the international community;
6. to give moral assistance to victims of human rights violations, and material assistance to children of victims of same as much as capacity permits;
7. to cooperate and share experiences with organizations, groups and individuals who promote or support the cause of human rights protection;
8. to undertake its activities on the basis of impartiality;
9. to submit activity and financial reports to those concerned.

### **III. Organization and Function**

1. The League shall have an executive director, a research officer and other support staff as may be necessary.

2. The League shall have a general assembly of members as its highest policy making body.
3. The League shall have its office in Addis Ababa.
4. The Sources of fund of the League shall be members contributions, assistance or donations from non-governmental organizations and institutions, groups and individuals which promote or support the cause of human rights protection.
5. The League shall have its own detailed internal rules of procedure which shall be made known to those concerned.