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SMNE condemns the massacre of Oromo students, Afar pastoralists and crackdown on journalists: A Call to Action for All Ethiopians to Stand Strong for a Better Future!

We in the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) strongly condemn the horrific killing of innocent Oromo students, peacefully protesting at various universities in Ethiopia. They were decrying the forced displacement of Oromo farmers and the take over of Oromo land for development near Addis Ababa where many have been forced out of homes and from land they and their families have lived on for years, if not centuries. This is another part of the TPLF/EPRDF strategy to dominate and exploit the people, similar to what they have been doing in Gambella, the Omo Valley, Benishangul, the Ogaden, the Afar region, the Amhara region, and now in the Oromia region around the city. The Oromo are not alone for this is a kleptocratic and brutal regime who have left a trail of serial human rights violations throughout the country.

In the last weeks, the people of one district in the Afar region have also been attacked by the ethnic apartheid regime, again due to their protest of land grabs. *We strongly condemn the massacre of Afar pastoralists in this area of the Afar region where TPLF/EPRDF forces recently murdered 12 innocent civilians, including women, children's and elders, as they tended to their grazing animals.* Many others were injured and over a hundred homes were burned in wanton destruction. Arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, disappearances and other human rights abuses have accompanied these attacks, not only in this place but in other places in the Afar region as well. Their land is also being leased for the business interests of regime cronies and foreign investors who seek to capitalize on the land and resources without consulting with the local people, as required by law, or without compensating them for their losses. It is government sponsored robbery and murder.

Who has been spared? TPLF/EPRDF greed has led to the stealing of resources and to the shedding of blood. It has polluted our land-- from the north to the south, from the east to the west. *We are outraged by these acts against all our people and want to express our deepest sympathy to the families of those who have lost loved ones and prayers for the recovery of the injured. These Oromo students and Afar families had a future that could have blessed a country. It is a loss to all of us.*

We are incensed with the injustice that greatly affects families, many of whom no longer have their loved ones, homes, land or property. In a nation known for its poverty, these people have descended even further into deeper poverty, homelessness and greater challenges for the future. The TPLF/EPRDF's brutal crackdown may be driven by several fear-based goals: 1) to maintain control, 2) to alienate and divide Oromo from other ethnic groups so there is no unity against authoritarian rule, 3) out of fear the TPLF/ERPFD will collapse and violence will break out against power-holders.

We call on media groups to be extremely cautious so they do not report TPLF/EPRDF-provided propaganda without substantial documentation and verification from witnesses on the ground. Ethiopians on the ground should do their duty to document what is going on and who is responsible, from the top offices of government to the streets. In the future, this kind of documentation will be needed in a court of law.

The formation of the SMNE from the beginning has been a social justice movement to advance the freedom and rights of all people, not just a few or one ethnic group. Contrary to that ideal, the TPLF/ERPDRF is based on grabbing rights for themselves and forgetting about the rights of everyone else.

We believe it will only become increasingly more difficult for this one group to thrive while everyone else can hardly survive, especially if we stand together, on behalf of each other, for we are part of the diverse family of Ethiopians. When our fellow family members from the Oromo or Afar ethnic groups are hurt or killed, we are also hurt; when they mourn, we also mourn; and, when they are in pain, we are also in pain. Like we have said before, a nation is like a human body with different parts, all making up the whole.

When pain is inflicted on one part of the body, the rest of the body is not well. In the last days and weeks, their pain is also ours, and we do not want some others among us to be the next target. The pain in our body is systemic and requires a systemic approach where all our parts work together for the healing of the whole. The same applies to our nation, no one is securely free until all are free. This is why we formed the SMNE, knowing that freedom would never only come to one ethnic group, whereas in a free and healthy society, everyone is more assured of their freedom. Unless we take care of the whole body, all its parts are at risk.

We all know that the one group that is the greatest threat to this one body of Ethiopia is the TPLF. Because they were such a tiny group of people (6%) compared to the whole, their agenda from the start was to maintain their rule by dividing and conquering others. Both minorities and majority groups were subject to such manipulation. In the case of the minorities, they could be marginalized, exploited and excluded from the mainstream with relative impunity or ignored until something they had coveted by the regime elites. For years, the TPLF/ERPDRF believed they could get away with it because these minority voices could hardly be heard.

On the other hand, their biggest fear has always been of having the Oromo and the Amhara work together. They never wanted these two major population groups to see each other as part of the same family or even to live as peaceful and cooperative neighbors. Ethnic harmony could create the strength to oust the TPLF/ERPDRF from power. Another threat to their domination was for Christians and Muslims to unite to work together, especially in Oromia.

TPLF/ERPDRF had to attempt to undermine years of relatively peaceful existence in Ethiopia between Muslims, Christians, Jews and traditionalists. To do so they have instigated conflict through government-sponsored violence in false flag operations, then blamed one or the other for it. Whether religious or ethnic divisions have been the goal, the TPLF/ERPDRF has used similar tactics. They have spread rumors, incited grievances, stirred up old wounds, and masterminded propaganda to maintain division and hostility along ethnic, religious and also political lines. Instead of trying to advance healing, reconciliation and helping Ethiopians to move on from those wounds, some hundreds of years old, they purposely foment and exploit them for their own self-interest.

To the Ethiopian people, this is now a call to all of us, to not lose our focus. That means we must refuse to feed on these ethnic or religious problems or we will help them achieve their goal. Do not be tricked into hating your neighbors--whom we are to love-- in order to keep the ethnic apartheid regime of the TPLF in perpetual power. Instead, the rights we all have wanted for the last 23 years are truth, freedom, justice, equality, accountability and prosperity. This is not the right of one ethnic group, but the right of everyone in the country, including those who are not part of the TPLF/ERPDRF.

All of us Ethiopians should try to stand together to replace this ethnic hatred regime with a better system where neither the Oromo or the Afar or anyone else is excluded from the benefits of citizenship. Now is not the time to lose sight of the bigger goals, which is a free Ethiopia for all. Because of this, other groups cannot stay on the sidelines. We should have learned how to defeat their favorite manipulative tactics by now, since they use them repeatedly.

In the past, when they massacred the Anuak in Gambella, the majority of Ethiopians ethnic groups like the Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray remained on the sidelines, thinking it was not their concern. The same thing happened in the Ogaden when the genocide began and outsiders were blocked from access. The majority of Ethiopians remained isolated among their own ethnic groups.

When it happened to the Muslims last year, many, but not all, of the other people of Ethiopia remained silent. For a long time, they have been doing the same to the Afar and the Oromo, but it does not stop there but extends to every region of the country. With all this, they do not want Ethiopians to see the beauty of the diverse family we all belong to---our family who are hurting in many different places.

This is a problem. We know our beautiful country of Ethiopia is not perfect and we know many of our problems are not only recent, but go back much further than the last 23 years of TPLF/EPRDF rule. To resolve these problems, we must do it as a family. In any family with a conflict, they must come together and talk about the pain, reconcile and make meaningful changes so they can forgive each other and move their family on to a better future. These issues should not be passed on, but resolved by the present, not next, generation.

Whether we Ethiopians agree or not with many issues, our ancestors have given us much in common. They lived together, intermarried and passed on their blood to those now living. This mixture of blood, which runs through the veins of each one of our ethnic groups, gives us life and nourishment to carry on as a one people. Even more importantly, we Ethiopians do not only share the land, language, and customs, but what we really share is the same Maker of our lives, a Holy God who views his children equally, regardless of ethnicity. With God there is no favoritism.

Dear fellow Ethiopians, we cannot give in to ethnic hatred, bitterness, and revenge, which is like giving our lives up for destruction and passing on the curse to our descendants. Worse yet, it is totally misusing the gifts God gave to us; gifts meant to become a blessing to others.

Let the death of these Oromo students and Afar civilians, the pain of those wounded, the grief of family members facing the loss of family, the suffering of those locked up in jail, the hardship of all Ethiopians who are not seeing any future in this country, the mothers who cannot feed their children, the orphans who have no family to care for them, and those Ethiopians living in poverty and misery, bring us to humbly love God and neighbor in ways that will change our land. Let us start seeing others as ourselves. In the eyes of God, there is no us and them for we are all created in the image of God.

As we mourn for these people, let us start talking to each other rather than talking about other. May God heal the hard spots in our hearts where we have been carrying hatred and bitterness instead of loving one another for our humanity has no boundaries. With changed hearts and forgiveness of self and others, a new, more unified and more prosperous Ethiopia for all is possible. Let us stand together for what is right and good, starting today.

May the rivers of love, forgiveness, kindness, acceptance, and justice overflow from our people, bringing life and blessings not only to Ethiopia but to Africa and the world.

Please do not hesitate to e-mail your comments to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE at: Obang@solidaritymovement.org