



We are embarrassed to call them Ethiopians!
Open letter number 1

At the Ethiopian Electronic Distribution Network, (EEDN), we are a group of Ethiopians who exchange news, information and opinion on something very near and dear to our hearts: the plight of Ethiopians inside the country. We are prompted to write to you because of a continuing repression of political lobbying and activism in Ethiopia. You may not have heard this, but only last Saturday, December 7, peaceful demonstrators have been attacked by state security forces. Around forty men and women of the organisers beaten till their bones were broken, and taken to detention centres. Others too have been rounded up and meted out similar abuses. Even passers-by have suffered likewise.

Of course some try to flee the injustice and harsh political environment, and the international community has heard of their unfortunate fates: Ethiopians being trafficked as domestics and prostitutes, Ethiopians drowning at sea as they, Ethiopians being tricked into having their organs harvested in isolated routes of flight by non-scrupulous illegal traders. The list of woes such Ethiopians face is far too long. You may have heard also of Ethiopians whose ancestral homes have been bulldozed and their lands leased to foreign companies who pay pittance to the treacherous power holders.

Do you wonder why those inside the country are not helping to stop the problems at the root of these issues? More than fifty journalists of the free press are locked up. Even private bloggers who reported on political, economic or even social events have ended up behind bars. There are no civil society organizations in the country either to fight for the rights of Ethiopians. Most such organizations have been stymied or closed down by a draconian law that stipulated that they raise 90% their running costs locally! Imagine raising such resources in that poor land. Ethiopia is of the poorest countries in the world. The majority of its population lives below the poverty line. It is money it cannot raise!

We are forced to rhetorically ask: How else does a public lead its destiny? If its public cannot engage in political lobbying and demonstrations, how does a nation express its deeply felt needs and sense of political direction? How can a nation under such repressive measures relate to its own state and its officials? Ethiopia is a peace loving nation. Why should it be pushed into unnecessary aggression? When a public in such a country responds to a call for demonstrations, it is exercising the right to engage in political activism. Like any right minded public, it is expressing its intention to organize and to choose a new set of leaders and

political directions. Clearly those who came out for demonstration on Saturday were exercising that right.

For the government to unleash the batons and repressive instruments of its brutal police force against peaceful demonstrators is uncalled for. Its blatant use of force is part of the preparation to claim victory in the elections next year in 2015. We all remember what they did in the last one: they used similar force, rigged the elections and claimed a 99.6% win. We are embarrassed to call them Ethiopians. Please join us in informing the policy-makers in your countries about this verdict? Thank you very much.