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**Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle (Shengo)**

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## **An Appeal to the AID and Diplomatic Community in Ethiopia**

**Subject: Support Human Rights & Free and Fair Elections;  
Speak out Against the Decimation of Independent Opposition  
Parties by Ethiopia's Election Board**

February 2, 2015

Shengo believes Ethiopia's 100 million people demand, and more importantly, deserve a free and fair election. However, the machinations by the ruling party of dismantling competitive opposition parties and replacing them with politically manufactured pseudo-opposition groups that are completely loyal to The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that dominates the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is reprehensible and totally unacceptable. This machination will lead to civil unrest and instability immediately after the ruling party declares victory. Over the past several months, the TPLF/EPRDF has used the country's Election Board as a political tool to penetrate, harass, subvert and dismantle multiethnic opposition parties with country-wide appeal. The All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP), the Unity, Democracy and Justice Party (UDJ) and the new youth-led Green or Semayawi Party are victims of this deliberate and well calculated dismemberment and disenfranchisement campaign. The TPLF/EPRDF has used Election Board that it dominates and runs to establish pseudo replacements that are subservient and adjunct to the ruling party. It is largely these parties and the TPLF/EPRDF that will participate in the election. The outcome is therefore predictable. This is a sham.

As part of the power consolidation process before the election next May, peaceful protests allowed under the Constitution and initiated by the UDJ and Semayawi have been suppressed and disbanded. Peaceful protestors including the elderly, girls and boys, party leaders and members have been whipped and

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beaten in broad day light in front diplomats. Many are in jail. A 70 year old mother attending church service were among those maimed by Federal and municipal police.

Shengo expresses its outrage concerning this recurrent abrogation of human rights, the rule of law and justice at a time when the country should be preparing to listen to alternative political voices. The ongoing onslaught is intended to pave the way for total electoral win by the TPLF/EPRDF. Sadly for the Ethiopian people, the competition will be confined to the ruling party and its pre-screened, vetted and anointed parties. In effect, the TPLF/EPRDF will compete against itself. The goal is 100 percent victory.

Shengo urges the donor and diplomatic community to reject the ruling party's pretentious position that there will be a free and fair election in Ethiopia and that there are independent parties willing to compete. This is entirely untrue. A free and fair election is untenable because genuine opposition parties have been decimated. There is no single independent press; and independent journalists are either in jail or have fled in droves. Civil society has been crushed. The media is dominated by the party and state. As Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Oakland Institute, the Committee to Protect Journalists and others have shown, the level of repression is unprecedented. The hope that there will be greater political space after the passing of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the strongman who led Ethiopia for more than 20 years has been shattered. Ethiopia is more polarized today than it was during the 2005 elections. Public confidence in the electoral and institutional processes has reached an all time low.

In Shengo's estimation, this recurring repression and suffocation of basic human rights inflicted on all segments of Ethiopian society will not stop the popular momentum for justice, genuine equality under the law and representative governance in Ethiopia. On the contrary, Ethiopia's youth is more determined and committed to democratic change today than it was 5 years ago. Harassments, jailings, killing, persecutions, forced migration out of the country etc. are unlikely to stop the momentum. Equally, opposition parties that have been disbanded will use the current opportunity as a game changer and will emerge stronger. In short, the TPLF/EPRDF is most likely to contribute to the formation of a more cohesive, durable, purposeful, wise, strategic and collaborative and nationally oriented opposition. We therefore urge opposition groups within and outside Ethiopia to set aside minor differences, reach out to and support one

another and focus on the future of the country and the prosperity of all Ethiopians.

Shengo believes that the TPLF/EPRDF is not capable of resolving Ethiopia's myriad of problems---the high cost of living, unemployment and underemployment, income and social inequality, the misuse of the country's natural resources including farmlands and waters, mineral resources, the plight of women, bribery, nepotism, corruption and illicit outflow of capital--etc. These national problems can be solved only through a just, fair, rule of law based and democratic government in which all stakeholders will have a say. It will take all Ethiopians to solve these intractable problems and propel the country to peace and prosperity.

Given Ethiopia's high dependency on foreign development and humanitarian aid, the donor and diplomatic community has a special moral responsibility to advance a democratic alternative rather than to continue shoring up a government that has lost legitimacy among the vast majority of Ethiopians. Shengo believes genuinely that Ethiopia's interests and the interests of the global community are compatible. A just, democratic, unified and prosperous Ethiopia is in the interest of Western and African democracies. It will serve as a beacon of hope not only for the Horn but also for the rest of Africa. But, this won't happen unless there is a concerted and genuine effort on the part of the global community.

In light of the dire situation facing Ethiopia and its 100 million people, we urge the donor and diplomatic community to give teeth by speaking out publicly and privately now on the following concrete and urgent issues:

1. Speak out both in private and in public against Election Board interferences in the electoral process and the legitimate functioning of multiethnic opposition parties
2. Establish an independent commission consisting of notable Ethiopians and foreign expert advisors to investigate government crackdowns, recent killings, unwarranted arrests and persecutions of peaceful dissenters throughout the country and bring those responsible for "crimes against humanity" and other killings to justice

3. Open political space for all opposition groups and allow opposition parties to move freely, raise funds, establish offices, campaign and present their programs to constituents without harassment and intimidation
4. Free all political prisoners including journalists, bloggers and democratic, social and political activists and leaders and members of the opposition without preconditions and without delay. This will restore public confidence in the electoral process and mitigate risks. It will also avert civil conflict
5. Reconstitute the Election Board and ensure that it is free, impartial and independent of governing party control
6. Free the judiciary system from party control and empower it to perform its functions impartially and independently
7. Provide opposition parties free and equal accesses to government controlled media
8. Disallow federal police, security and defense forces from interfering in the electoral process
9. Urge the Ethiopian government to allow foreign and Ethiopian human rights groups to operate in Ethiopia freely
10. Ask the Ethiopian government to accept and engage international and domestic election observers to monitor the electoral process and resolve electoral disputes consistent with international standards, and
11. Urge the Ethiopian government to extend the election by several months to give opposition groups to reconstitute themselves, establish offices and campaign vigorously.

Sincerely,

**February 2, 2015**

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