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Open Letter to the Donor and Diplomatic Community

Subject: Atrocities in Ethiopia Must be Stopped

The Ethiopian People’s Congress for United Struggle (Shengo) condemns atrocities, including the killings of people as young as 8 years old, and the pitying of one ethnic group against another by Ethiopia’s repressive Federal, local police, security and militia, most recently in Oromia and the Gondar regions. We further condemn recurrent State sponsored dismantlement of the social fabric that makes Ethiopian society unique in peaceful coexistence of 82 ethnic groups; as well as the recurrent violence perpetrated by the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)—the heavily armed and financed force behind Ethiopia’s ethnic-coalition government, the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The current inter-ethnic violence between the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups and the TPLF engineered civil conflict in Gondar must be stopped immediately. Recent developments are ominous for the country and its 100 million people.

Shengo reiterates its consistent position that Ethiopia’s diversity is a national asset and should be coveted and not subverted. No political, civic or religious group or individual should feel free to use Ethiopia’s diversity as a wedge and a political instrument for power grab, natural resources capture, exclusion and marginalization by propagating ethnic hatred, division, demagoguery and demonization of any ethnic or religious group. The Ethiopian people need a narrative of unified struggle to preserve the country and the unity of its diverse population through the establishment of a genuine, just and all-inclusive democratic government. TPLF/EPRDF assault on innocent Ethiopians who protest and demand justice, freedom, respect for their human rights and representative governance continues to undermine such an important shift for a better future. The actions of the regime aggravate the situation and escalate it to a dangerous level.

On December 14, Bloomberg’s William Davison reported a menacing development that:

- Over 40 Oromo youth have been killed in 3 weeks of protest against the regime.
- Quoting sources such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, he says that “Real ethnic conflict broke out on December 12, 2014 and is underway...Many houses

burned, people killed and wounded.” Properties have been razed to the ground. The target group is the Amhara nationality. The number killed has now reached 70.

- Tesfaye Hirtasa told Davison that “Everybody is full of fear, no one has security... Things are not stable, we are totally in danger.”
- In the Gondar area of Metema, 60 people were killed; and the TPLF has incited intra-ethnic conflict between the Amhara and Qimant population who share the same culture, language, religion and geographical space,
- This development has the makings of ethnic war that will lead to ethnic genocide and to Ethiopia’s fragmentation. If this happens, no ethnic or political group will be spared. The TPLF/EPRDF will have no country to govern; and no country-wide natural resources to exploit.
- Most independent observers believe that ethnic violence and fear is incited by the TPLF. This may or may not be the case. We do not have solid evidence to validate contrary claims in this highly charged political environment. We know that in addition to the TPLF, ethnic parties, separatist groups and extremists are playing with fire that will prove disastrous for all.
- The TPLF’s well established track record of ethnic and religious divide and rule dictum and narrow ethnic nationalism aside, there are also several external forces that will be happy to disintegrate Ethiopia; and to see the society engulfed in a cycle of catastrophic ethnic and religious conflict and genocide. In this connection, we find it inexcusable to bomb the Anwar Mosque, a place of worship that is sacred to all faiths. Churches and monasteries have also been burned to the ground earlier.

We find it tragic for the country that instead of dealing with the root causes of the current peaceful protests and uprisings in different parts of the country, the regime declared a state of emergency in Oromia and sent Special Forces to the Gondar sub-region. In this regard, **Shengo is distressed by the fact that there is not a single statesman or women or credible political and civic institution in Ethiopia or abroad to express moral outrage; and to bring contestants** including the ruling party into the conference table so that conflicts are resolved through dialogue, negotiation and consultation. Shengo is absolutely convinced that, if not contained now, this dangerous escalation of inter-ethnic conflict between the Amhara and Oromo populations---the two largest in the country---will have catastrophic consequences not only for Ethiopia but for the entire Horn of Africa.

The lead responsibility to stop this catastrophe resides with the governing party, the country’s quarreling, divided and dysfunctional parties and civic groups, leaders of faith groups, elders and academics. The fractured opposition must grasp the reality that it is part of the problem. It is time for each group to place the people and the country above partisanship; to soul search and self-critique; and to begin the hard and **necessary work of collaboration, cooperation and unity now.** It can no longer afford to preach the tired doctrine of opposing the repressive regime without the willingness, readiness and capacity to offer a better alternative. It can’t afford to be timid.

It is clear to Shengo that Ethiopians of all ethnic and religious groups have reached a tipping point. The world ought to understand that a vast majority of Ethiopians reject the Apartheid like system of governance that pities one ethnic and religious group against another. They seek global and country statesmanship that would heal deep wounds; **and that would bring all stakeholders together** for a meaningful and substantive dialogue so that an all-inclusive,

just, fair and democratic governance will be established. In this connection, we urge Amhara and Oromo political and civic leaders, opinion makers and media to help themselves by desisting the ill-advised temptation of blaming one another, propagating hatred and mutual suspicion, advocating revenge on behalf of their ethnic groups. This culture of demonization and mutual destruction will only prolong the agony both groups face. The senseless and recurring ethnic cleansing of Amhara farmers who live and work in Oromia should stop. The TPLF/EPRDF regime that reduced the number of Amharas by 2.5 million and successively showed massive decrease in its Census must stop playing with demographic data.

Shengo is fully cognizant that the world community is preoccupied with the global campaign against ISIS and other extremist forces. The government of the United States, the leading bilateral development, humanitarian, military, intelligence and other provider to the Ethiopian regime has followed a short-sighted policy of defending a system that terrorizes its own population. In the long-term, no repressive and dictatorial regime survives unless it responds to popular demand. The argument that stability overrides human freedom, justice and the rule of law is no longer tenable in the case of Ethiopia.

Shengo expresses genuine concern that today's hotbeds of budding civil conflict in countries such as Ethiopia would trigger the next Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Yugoslavia or Yemen. This possibility can be averted if the world community pays closer and immediate attention to what is going on the ground. For stability to occur and last, Ethiopians must enjoy the fundamental right to protest peacefully and to express their voices by acknowledging a common country and a shared future. Recurrent State sponsored violence against dissidents and peaceful protesters has virtually reduced all notions of freedom and respect for human rights to less than zero. It is therefore legitimate for the Ethiopian people to abolish the current repressive government system that divides and punishes them each and every day. They can achieve this **objective only if** they cooperate with one another. The struggle for justice is an all-Ethiopian issue. It is not an Amhara or Tigray or Oromo etc. issue.

In the light of unfolding events in Ethiopia, Shengo joins other Ethiopian political and civic groups as well as prominent individuals in urging the global community especially Ethiopia's donors, foreign investors and governments with vested interests in Ethiopia's future---the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and other members of the European Union, China, Egypt, India, Turkey, all members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the African Union---to give immediate attention to the simmering conflict that the world has ignored so far. The world community has a moral and substantive responsibility to avert a potential catastrophe in one of the most important countries in Africa. The adverse consequences of State sponsored repression and violence can no longer be denied or ignored by sponsors and financiers of one of the most hated and illegitimate regimes in Africa today. The highly touted ethnic-federal system of devolution of power to regional states has literally failed. It is the Federal government commandeered by the TPLF that dictates all policies and programs. Unfair and unjust land grab of lands from pastoralists, farmers and urban citizens and distribution of these lands to members and families of the governing party, its domestic and foreign allies—all done in the name of development—illustrate the repressive and dictatorial characteristics of the regime; and the severity of the issue.

Whether it is the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians in Gambella, the Omo Valley, Afar, the Gondar sub-region, Oromia or Addis Ababa or the killing and ethnic cleansing of Amharas, the social and political consequences are the same. It is the dismantlement of the cultural, social, religious and economic bonds that Ethiopians should enjoy by living with one another; rather than by killing one another. Massive marginalization, displacement, dispossession, hopelessness and disempowerment all done for the benefit of elites of the governing party, government and state are so common that Ethiopians no longer acknowledge the existence of their government. Regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, the vast majority express their frustration that they are never consulted or have no voice on matters that affect their lives and livelihoods. They want change now.

Prime Minister Hailemariam acknowledged that the country is bleeding and suffering from poor and repressive governance in general and from party, government and state rent-seekers and new profiteers in particular. Institutionalized plunder by a few has deepened and broadened poverty. It has polarized Ethiopian society to a level unprecedented in the country's history. For the vast majority of Ethiopians it is a luxury to eat two meals a day. The regime's claim that the country has been growing at double digits for several years is not borne by evidence on the ground. Ethiopia is still one of the three or four poorest countries in the world. It is still food aid dependent. The recent drought that the regime was forced to acknowledge publicly affects more than 15 million people. Children are dying each day from the worst drought in 30 years. Almost half a million livestock have perished. No one really knows how many people are perishing each day because of the famine. The regime does not allow independent investigative reporting. Even in normal times, more than 14 million people depend on some form of food aid, including the World Bank's Safety net program initiated following the 2005 elections. Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of youth migration in the world. Females continue to suffer from one of the worst cases of under-representation in education, public service participation and the modern private sector.

All of these and more have become routine. The overarching narrative and message of this open letter is that, if Ethiopia wishes to join the family of prosperous nations, it must replace poor, repressive and exclusionary governance with law and institution based, people anchored and centered representative governance now. The lack of freedom, gross violation of human rights, total disregard for the rule of law, decimation of civil society and independent media, criminalization of political pluralism and peaceful dissent are anathema in attaining sustainable and equitable development. Shengo is saddened by the reality on the ground that the world keeps ignoring Ethiopia; and keeps pumping billions of dollars in aid to a dysfunctional and self-serving regime as if this would heal societal ills and relieve hunger and hopelessness. In fact, more and more aid is producing the exact opposite-- more repression, more political arrests and killings, deepening poverty and income gap, more wealth for the few, more illicit outflow, more dependency, more human exodus, more ethnic conflict etc. Are donors and governments that support the repressive regime accountable? We think so.

Two recent examples illustrate repressive and oppressive governance poignantly. In early December this year, the TPLF that dominates the EPRDF regime triggered fire at one of the country's oldest prisons in Gondar that houses more than 3,000 prisoners. Fifty political prisoners perished by both the fire whose origin remains unknown and from machine gun fires by police commandos and other security personnel. In most civilized and caring

societies, government officials take quick action to extinguish the fire. They do not use machine guns to keep prisoners, most of them political, locked in so that they die burning. To let political and other prisoners burn and or to gun them down in cold blood instead of saving their lives and transferring them to other locations is not only inhumane but a crime against humanity. There is no difference between killing these Amhara prisoners and youth in Gondar and killing Oromo youth in Oromia. Every life has value and should count.

In the same sub-region of Gondar whose lands have been severely diminished through deliberate and systematic land grab and incorporation of lands into Greater Tigray, the population is being forced to defend its very survival. Many of the political prisoners who died during the fire were jailed because they protested this deliberate dispossession and marginalization of the Amhara population. Adding to the injustice and further fueling the growing popular outrage against the regime throughout Ethiopia, Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn announced that he is ready to cede a vast tract of land 1,600 kilometers in length and 20 to 60 kilometers in depth to the government of Sudan. This land mass stretches from northern Gondar bordering Eritrea and affects the sub-regions of Gojjam, Wollega, Illubabor, Kaffa, Gomu Gofa and the Gambella regional state. The impact on tens of millions of Amhara, Oromo and Annuak will be devastating. Ethiopia's territorial integrity, national security and sovereignty will suffer irreparably. The rivers and water basins from which Ethiopia and its 100 million people would benefit immensely will be affected. Peaceful relations between the Ethiopian and the Sudanese people will be affected unnecessarily adding to volatility in the Horn of Africa.

We know of no government anywhere in the world that willingly and deliberately cedes territories that have been defended by successive governments and several generations. The Ethiopian regime has an obligation to the Ethiopian people as a whole to explain publicly that it won't cede territories and that the rights of the population residing in the affected communities will be respected. Otherwise, the decision should be considered null and void and non-binding on Ethiopia.

This dangerous situation in northern and western Ethiopia is not an isolated phenomenon. Shengo knows of no ethnic or religious boundary to the injustices inflicted on ordinary Ethiopians, especially youth, by the governing party each and every day. As mentioned above, the TPLF's pillar of control is prime urban and rural land. It is an instrument of control and riches. Political elites fight for control. There is ample documentary evidence to show that Ethiopians suffer from one of the worst cases of land grab in the world. There is ample evidence to show that the TPLF pits one ethnic group against another in order to sustain its dominance in collaboration with other ethnic elites. There is ample evidence to show that diversity and religion have been politicized as instruments of hatred and cynicism, division and control. It is not uncommon for neighbors to watch the uprooting of their neighbors and even relatives from their lands and homes. For example, an estimated 150,000 Ethiopians have been forcibly evicted from their lands and homes in Addis Ababa alone.

Shengo believes that urbanization is a must. There is direct correlation between rapid urbanization and economic and population growth in every country. Since Addis Ababa was established as an urban hub, it has expanded considerably and will expand further. The Atse Haile Selassie and the Socialist Military governments both had ambitious urban plans that extended the current boundaries of the city. These plans were intended to accommodate future economic and population growth. The TPLF/EPRDF regime dismissed earlier plans and came up with the Masterplan in line with its growth policy and the Constitution that governs land use. If we accept growth and development, we should be cautious not to dismiss the Masterplan as the culprit. It isn't. If and when implemented it will affect millions of Ethiopians positively and negatively. Therefore, like most reasonable Ethiopians, Shengo does not object to the Masterplan or any other urban plan. We do not believe that Ethiopians object to urbanization either. An estimated two million Ethiopians move to urban areas each year. However, we object the way it is conducted and for whose benefit. The Masterplan is a plan that should be debated by the public. It should be carried out carefully and systematically with due process of law, public discussion and participation and proper and adequate compensation to the displaced. This is the role of the Federal government. We repeat that urbanization is real and inevitable. It must be planned properly and it must serve the public good. The Masterplan should not be a contest between and among different ethnic elite groups, rent-seekers and profiteers at the expense of ordinary Ethiopians including displaced farmers. It should not be done at a cost to human life. At minimum, those whose lands are seized must have alternative jobs, lands and other means to support their lives at the same level as before or even better.

Contrary to this principle adopted by the world community, the TPLF often serves a private or group purpose. Its Masterplan cannot be justified without participation by those affected and without providing them with viable alternatives and adequate compensation. For almost a quarter of a century, the TPLF has dismissed the notion that citizens have the right to express their voices and to demand inclusion, participation and consultation on all matters that affect their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren. We pose a simple question. Who is the ultimate beneficiary of this expansion; and who pays an immense price for generations to come? The story of bribery, corruption, massive illicit outflow of funds and all forms of rent-seeking shows that the primary beneficiaries are party, government and state elites and their allies at the Federal, regional and local levels. At the local levels, people are coopted to survive and in some cases to thrive. Evidence shows that the lion's share of land grab that serves as a bedrock of shameful wealth and income goes to members of the TPLF, including high security, police and defense officials. Without distinction to ethnic or religious affiliation, the beneficiaries defend the system regardless of social and political consequences. Let us not forget that they are vested and greedy. They are in fact willing to kill, club maim and arrest their own brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers whenever citizens, especially youth, seek justice and protest peacefully. The regime justifies its criminalization of peaceful dissent by tens and thousands of Oromo youth and other youth in Bahir Dar and Gondar etc., because it feels threatened by the outpouring of public outrage. It prefers power and wealth over fairness, justice, peace and democracy.

In any case, those who protest the Masterplan in Oromia, land incorporation into Greater Tigray in Gondar, the ceding of vast territories to the Sudan, incitement of ethnic division and intra ethnic killings in Gondar, ethnic cleansing in Beni Shangul Gumuz, Gambella, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples and Oromia reject the system that oppresses them using all types of instruments including deep rooted and institutionalized ethnic division. Whatever the cause, protesters should not be killed, clubbed or expelled from their homes and lands. Shengo is dismayed by the continued human toll, property losses, fear and marginalization—all hallmarks of the repressive state.

Shengo urges the global community to demand accountability from the Ethiopian regime. Those who killed innocent people should be brought to justice. Donors and governments close to the governing

party must recognize the notion that the simmering conflicts in one of the most important countries in Africa will have far-reaching consequences.

On our part, we are calling all Ethiopian opposition groups, civil society and academics to stop demonizing one another, bickering among themselves and urge them to begin to collaborate in serving the common good. Divided along ethnic, religious and political lines we will all continue to be irrelevant. The only rationale and wise way going forward is to decide to collaborate, cooperate and unite for the sake of the country and all of its people.

Shengo urges the global community under US leadership to convey the following essential and critical steps to the Ethiopian government before the country implodes.

1. Establish an independent commission consisting of notable Ethiopians, especially from the Amhara and Oromo nationality groups and the Ethiopian Orthodox and Islamic faiths to investigate recent government crackdowns, recent killings, unwarranted arrests and persecutions of peaceful dissenters throughout the country; and bring those responsible for “Crimes against humanity” and other crimes to justice.
2. Free all political prisoners including journalists, bloggers and democratic, social and political activists without preconditions and without delay.
3. Open political space throughout the country and allow opposition parties and independent media to operate freely.
4. Stop inciting ethnic conflicts either directly or through cohorts.
5. Rescind the draconian Anti-Terrorism proclamation.
6. Lift the Martial law in Oromia; and
7. Stop pitying the Amhara against the Qimant population in Gondar.
8. Call on all opposition groups to stop propagating hate and ethnic cleansing.

More than the billions of dollars in aid that is often siphoned off by party and government elites and their allies, what Ethiopia’s 100 million people need most is peace, respect for human rights and the rule of law and a democratically elected government that is accountable to them. Shengo believes that such a government will advance sustainable and equitable development, mitigate risks and establish an institutional foundation for peaceful resolution of conflicts.

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CC:

H.E. President Barak Obama, President of the United States of America
H.E. Honorable John Kerry, Secretary of States, United States of America
H.E. President Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Union
H.E. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations
H.E. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Secretary General, African Union
H.E. Francois Hollande, President of France
H.E. Vladimir Putin, President of Russia

H.E. Xi Jinping, President of China
H.E. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
H.E. David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
H.E. Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
H.E. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan
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