

Ethiopia's S.O.S

Appeal to all Ethiopian political leaders inside and outside the country

Distinguished leaders,

I write to you today with a heavy heart as our hamlets, villages, towns and cities across this ancient and proud land are once again filled with the thick cloud of sorrow. As has been the case over the last quarter of a century we have once again returned to the cemetery for a familiar ritual of carrying the precious bodies of our young. They have been stolen from us by sheer force of brutality. Their untimely deaths committed by none other than those who were supposed to protect them makes the pain even more unbearable. We say farewell to our young and not so young with bullet wounds all over their bodies. We say farewell with agonizing pain in our hearts. Our funeral processions have become our freedom marches where we mix the blood of the dead with the tears of the living. From Gonder to Nekempte, from Ambo to Dangila, from Gambela to Chagni, from Addis Ababa to Maji, and so many other places we have endured the indiscriminate brutality. Day and night, mornings and afternoons they poison the air with the smell of sulphur.

How could it be, then, that you, our leaders, continue to wrangle over our 'differences' while the very survival of our country is on a knife's edge? How could it be that you distinguished leaders continue to sit in compartmentalized and self-imposed ghettoized corners of politics and remain unmoved by the sorrowful call of our mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers to rise above your pronounced political calculations and interests? What would be the benefit if family members argue with passion over what belongs to whom while their house where all their belongings are on fire? Wouldn't it make sense to come together and put the fire out first? There are times when in-depth intellectual analysis and thorough discussion are required, when crafting good social or political frameworks. There is also a time for a common sense approach to respond to an immediate and present danger. We are at the threshold of such real danger at this juncture of our country's history. Thus the need and urgency for unity as such requires our common sense intelligence and instinct to avert catastrophe.

Yes, we have been sliced and diced to the lowest possible denominator by our tormentors. Our perceived or real differences have been magnified and twisted by those who will not shrink for a moment, using our differences to carry out their abhorrent acts of violence and advance their destructive political agenda. It is long over due that we say no to division and reject the forces of polarization. You, the distinguished leaders, must demonstrate the message of peace and collaboration to the ordinary citizens by showing the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood in public. As leaders you must come together without delay and realize the urgency of the situation.

The hallmark of great leaders and leadership is like the captain of a ship who steers his crew through stormy weather to reach safety. When all seems impossible, and hope and optimism are shadowed by fear and uncertainty, great leaders see opportunity in the most unlikely moment. The people you

claim to lead are in need of such leadership. You must be the voices of reason, unity and partnership, not messengers of hate, animosity and division. In the face of brute force, you, our distinguished leaders, must send a clear proclamation of love, peace and coexistence and this message of peace must include those who wage war on unarmed and peaceful protesters.

Our power is only as deep and as solid as our unity and as feeble and thin as our division. The people of this ancient land who lived alongside each other for centuries during good times and not so good times have an unbreakable genealogical, social and cultural bond. The longstanding and deeply-rooted sense of harmony and shared values have endured many internal and external pressures and proven to be resilient and unbreakable. We are meant to be together, sharing our happiness and sorrows, in times of our trials and tribulations. These historical bonds and values must be nurtured and strengthened and your role, our distinguished leaders, is vital in maintaining and fostering the message of peace and cohesion.

In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, one of the greatest peacemakers and advocates of global justice, “None of us comes into the world fully formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human. I am because other people are.” This spirit of Ubuntu, an African philosophy of peace, justice and inclusion, transcends race, color, religion and all forms of perceived or real differences. It is a message of peace for all. We must embrace this spirit if we have to travel in the path of durable and inclusive peace.

Distinguished leaders, this appeal is the appeal of millions of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandparents and all those who yearn for peace, justice, democracy and freedom. You must hear these cries, and you must respond with a generous heart that envisions a better future for the next generation. It is my sincere hope and belief that you, our distinguished leaders, will anchor this country’s future on the solid ground of living together in peace and harmony.

Peace, freedom and justice for all.

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