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**Ethiopian Dialogue Forum Press Statement
On the Ethiopian Council of Ministers
Proclamation regarding Oromiya's special Interests in Addis Ababa**

July 3, 2017

EDF (The Ethiopian Dialogue Forum) is a civil society initiative established to facilitate the exchange of ideas by Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia, and to promote the interpretation as well as formulation of viable alternatives for the development of the country in all spheres.

The Ethiopian Dialogue Forum has thoroughly reviewed the new proclamation made by the Minsters Council and rejects the Tigray People's Liberation Front dominated council of Minsters ploy of "weaponizing" its 1994 Constitution Article 49 (5) that provides "a special status" to Oromia concerning Addis Ababa. The Article mentions "the special interest of the State of Oromia in Addis Ababa" and stated that "particulars will be determined by law." Twenty six (26) years later, the minsters council chose an opportune

time to issue a proclamation in response to the popular revolt by millions of people in the Oromo and Amhara regions. So, this proclamation is an attempt to distract the public and pit the political opposition and social forces in Ethiopia one against the other. It is a legislative device to divide and conquer and reap short term political gains.

EDF contends that the Constitution itself was not drafted, and endorsed through a free and democratic process that involved all parties in Ethiopia. Instead it came about from a flawed process that barred multinational parties and patriotic Ethiopians from sitting on the Table and deciding the prospect of post-1991 Ethiopia. For the last several years opposition members and scholars argued that the ruling party must facilitate a constitutional amendment while the ruling party did not give adequate attention to this request.

Multiethnic democratic countries around the world use the constitutional preamble “We the people” to show their solidarity and unity, to approach their shared resources and to manifest a unified political and economic nation. A few good examples are the United States, Australia and India. Their Constitutions begin with introductions to their solidarity through the use of the simplest language to show they are living as one political and economic entity.

It is this fundamental principle of “We the people” that bestows political power to the hands of people from multiethnic countries, private citizens, whose consent yields democratic government through periodic provincial and national elections! Contrast this with the TPLF/EPRDF engineered Constitution of 1994 that established the current ethnic and linguistic federal system. Its preamble reads as follows:

“We, **the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples** of Ethiopia: Strongly committed, in full and free exercise of **our right to self-determination**, to **building a political community** founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring a lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order, and advancing our economic and social development...

Fully cognizant that our common destiny can best be served by **rectifying historically unjust relationships** and by further promoting **our shared interests**; convinced that to live as **one political and economic community** is necessary in order to create sustainable and mutually supportive conditions for ensuring respect for our rights and freedoms and for the collective promotion of our interests.

The Ethiopian Constitution bestows authority and sovereignty to “Nations, Nationalities and People” rather than on Ethiopian citizens. As a consequence, the regional states or “Kilils” have evolved as “sovereign” entities with the powers to: a) define their boundaries and restrict ownership of natural resources, b) the movement of people, goods, and services. In so doing this constitution hampers the free flow of free and equal Ethiopian citizens with incredible talents, resources, technologies “segregating” them into ethno-regional provinces. This undermined national cohesion. It exacerbated ethnic tensions and conflicts. It served as the best tool of the TPLF elite to divide and rule all Ethiopians. In so doing the pursuit of the common good, the durability of Ethiopia as a country, and its socio-economic, political and environmental sustainability are severely diminished.

On the Fate and Rights of Addis Ababans

Central to this ploy of divide and rule is stocking suspicion and fear between the two largest ethnic groups, the Amhara and Oromo. Since early 2015, millions of Oromo and Amhara nationals showed fierce and bold determination to free themselves from the tyranny of the TPLF. The Amhara, especially the youth in Gondar, expressed their solidarity to the Oromo youth and the public in Oromia reciprocated with a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. By stipulating and stressing about Oromo “special claims and demands” on Ethiopia’s bustling capital-Addis Ababa-the new proclamation aims to drive a wedge between Oromos and a multitude of Non-Oromo Ethiopians that call Addis Ababa home. The diverse people of Addis Ababa have always yearned for unity and equality under the law where they see special interests as an unjust act.

Addis Ababa represents the future of Ethiopia where close to 5 million Ethiopians from all ethnic and religious groups live side by side. The city represents a global and inevitable trend, namely urbanization. For all its effort to ethnicize and provincialize, the TPLF cannot stop this national and global trend toward urban concentrations. Greater urbanization means the rural poor will come forth to these spaces and a great Ethiopian mosaic shall emerge transcending ethnic, religious and linguistic barriers. Increased urbanization also means the demand for food, safe drinking water, sanitation, energy, shelter, schools and other social and physical infrastructure increases. In due course, the Ethiopian governments will be forced to respond to the rise of such an urban cosmopolitan public that refuses to define itself only by its ethnic identity. Addis Ababa represents the epitome of such a pan-Ethiopian political public. It is an Ethiopian tent built by the Ethiopian people and owned by all Ethiopians.

The Oromo people are part of this tent. Playing them against other fellow Ethiopians will not solve the root cause behind Oromo alienation in Ethiopia- Ethnic Based Authoritarianism. To our knowledge, the Oromo people who sacrificed their lives in

defense of Ethiopia never asked for special preferential treatment. It is also true that no one asked the millions of Addis Ababa residents about their identity or the future fate of their city. EDF believes that similar to all other Ethiopian citizens, the Oromo people are demanding justice, and unfettered equality under the law and genuine democracy. EDF also believes that respect of Oromo ethnic identity, history, traditions, cultures, socioeconomic and political rights and the use of their language is in the interest of all Ethiopians. These fundamental human and civil rights of the Oromo people should never be subject to negotiation. Authority should not be vested in the TPLF and its cronies to grant or to deny these fundamental rights.

The TPLF Constitution recognizes in Article 49 (1) that “Addis Ababa shall be the capital city of the Federal State.” Article 49 (2) recognizes the city’s autonomy. It reads, “The residents of Addis Ababa shall have a full measure of self-government. Particulars shall be determined by law.” This provision is however circumscribed by Article 49 (3) that “The Administration of Addis Ababa shall be responsible to the Federal Government.” In so doing, it effectively nullifies the right to self-rule and administration of nearly 5 million Ethiopians who call Addis Ababa their home. Residents of the city have literally no voice in policy and decision-making. The Constitution further stipulates in Article 49 (5) about the “special interests of the Oromia region with regard to Addis Ababa and its environs”. Who then is the “owner” and “governor” of Addis Ababa? It is the TPLF-dominated federal government that dictates policy and decision-making in Addis Ababa including the allocation of lands.

EDF believes that these constitutional provisions are developed in a flawed, and ambiguous manner to obfuscate the real hegemonic power in Ethiopia- the TPLF elite. The policy and structural problems that emerge with governing cities like Addis Ababa are therefore manifestations of the structural inequities and defects of the present ethno-federal arrangement. It therefore behooves each and every Ethiopian to ask the fundamental question of whether or not any special consideration and privilege granted by the ruling party aggravates ethnic hatred and division, or diminishes cohesion and

synergy that are vital for a modern metropolis. EDF believes that the rights, interests and voices of the millions of Addis Ababans should therefore be heard, articulated and fought for.

A Call for Action

The TPLF-led very repressive regime is in panic. The timing of the proclamation is self-serving and is intended to distract the Ethiopian people from the hard work of mobilizing themselves against one of the very repressive regimes on the planet today. The state of emergency has failed to enforce submission. To the contrary, Ethiopians express their anger, frustration, rejection and revulsion openly and without fear. EDF asserts that the new proclamation is another attempt to divide the Oromo people from other Ethiopians.

EDF is also confident that such gimmicks will not stop the inevitable- political transition in Ethiopia. Toward that end, however, Ethiopians must recognize the fundamental premise that the TPLF-led regime responds with cunning and manipulative tools whenever popular will threatens its existence. Unity of purpose and action, EDF asserts, is therefore essential to overcome the age-old tactic of divide and rule.

Finally, EDF genuinely believes that fundamental democratic change is imperative in Ethiopia. We therefore call on all Ethiopian civic, religious, political and professional groups as well as prominent individuals within and outside the country to set aside minor differences and work toward ushering a new democratic Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Dialogue Forum calls on the United Nations, donor nations and the international community as a whole to take a very serious action to defend peaceful political change and democratic reforms in Ethiopia.

Long Live Ethiopia!

Ethiopian Dialogue Forum (EDF)