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**OUR COMMON FUTURE: A PROPOSAL
SEEKING THE NEXT BREAKTHROUGH
IN DEMOCRACY AND MULTINATIONAL FEDERATION IN ETHIOPIA**

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**A PROPOSAL OF OROMO DEMOCRATIC FRONT
Our Common Future: A Proposal**

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia stands at a crossroads, once again. But this time the prospects facing it are much more starkly contrasting than during past instances of change. If it is put on one course of change, achieving a final breakthrough to a common democratic future looks distinctly promising. If such a course is blocked or not pursued by the stakeholders, on the other hand, the breakdown of order appears threateningly possible. The time to put the country on the right course is now. Unless a country-wide consensus is forged for doing so today, the country will continue its steady slide towards the abyss.

As things stand now, the worrying scenario mentioned above appears more plausible than the former. Are we exaggerating and being alarmist when we draw this pessimistic conclusion? If we are alarmist, we are justified to be so because the time to take corrective measures is now before the country has gone over the cliff and reached a point of no return. There are important reasons why all concerned should worry about Ethiopia's future.

The ongoing debate of the deaf in Ethiopia is just one of these reasons. Parties are talking past each other instead of conversing with each other. No one is genuinely paying attention to the pain and grievances or perspective of the other. As during many past periods in the country's history, the choices currently confronting it are, once again, posed in a binary either/or manner. Even though the Oromo is at the forefront of the struggle to bring fundamental change in Ethiopia, some continue to sidestep core Oromo demands and talk as if the choices are either defending the present order or restoring the unitary state of yesteryears. Unless prominence is given to the more forward looking alternatives espoused by the Oromo, Ethiopia's continued existence as a polity is questionable and we may all be condemned to live under a condition of sustained instability.

The present rulers of Ethiopia are absolutely convinced that there is no alternative to their style of administration. Even when admitting the need for some reform, however cosmetic, they can only think of reforming themselves. While endangering the country with its intransigence and refusal to make a shift in course, they shed crocodile tears for the country's possible implosion if they are toppled.

Consequently, they are determined to permanently preserve the status quo. However, societal rejection of their administration has been steadily growing and has now reached fever pitch.

The opposite stand, espoused by a very vocal sector, recognizes nothing valuable in how the present rulers structured Ethiopia and have ruled it for a quarter of a century. In this perspective, the present rulers put Ethiopia on a completely disastrous course from the outset by structuring Ethiopia into a federation curved along ethno-linguistic bases. Proponents of this stand see no alternative to dumping the present administrative system lock, stock and barrel.

The rancorous debate between these two opposing sides, hence, offers nothing new about the future. The present rulers are determined to preserve the status quo that has been rejected by most Ethiopians. Their vocal opponents look back to the time when the country was conceived as a unitary state with ethnic homogenization through assimilation as a strategy to forge a unitary nation and wish to restore it. But that conception of Ethiopia was militarily challenged by an increasing number of armed groups culminating in its replacement by the present structure. Hence, Ethiopian society is being offered the choice of either enduring the present failed approach to governance or the one preceding it, which has also disastrously failed. It is the stalemate between these two proposals, lacking any forward looking element, which worries us about the future of Ethiopia.

We wish to state one of our convictions up front. Structuring Ethiopia as a multinational state is a move in the right direction. And this move is due to neither the diabolical nor noble intentions of the present rulers. It was a historical necessity that was insurmountable at the time the military regime collapsed and the current rulers were catapulted to power. Consequently, the present rulers deserve neither commendation nor condemnation for embracing the principle of multinational federalism in Ethiopia. Structuring Ethiopia as a multinational state was as unavoidable as was the Dergue's Land Reform Proclamation of 4 March 1975. Both of these constructive developments in Ethiopia's recent history were however ultimately abused to serve negative purposes not because they were wrong but because those ruling the country are/were averse to democracy in both instances.

The fundamental aim of this Proposal is articulating an alternative to the two proposals discussed above. Its core intention is recognizing and preserving what is positive in the status quo as well as the one preceding it. This stems from our conviction that some progress has been registered during each of the previous two incidents of change. When posed in this manner, the intention of this Proposal is undeniably reformist. Even at this eleventh hour of a popular revolution precipitated by the regime's refusal to implement the minimum of reforms in its core policies and basic modus operandi, we believe reform and reformism offers the best route out of the country's malaise. It aspires to build on positive developments during these instances of change instead of aspiring to totally scrap them. All stakeholders must admit one fact. The only thing unchangeable in human history is the inevitability of change. Hence, it is better to anticipate the inevitably coming change and plan for it than to be overwhelmed by its unexpected consequences after it has occurred.

What constitutes the litmus test for evaluating the preferred direction of the coming change? We believe the answer lies in Martin Luther King's now well-known observation that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Thus, the next process of change in Ethiopia should position the

country “on the arc of the moral universe ... bending toward justice.” Morality demands the search for justice for all.

Seeking justice for all is the fundamental aim of this Proposal. Because what is considered as just by one set of actors is often denounced as unjust by another group of actors, even the term “justice” could be controversial in the Ethiopian context just like so many other concepts.

What principle can help close the gulf separating these kinds of contrasting stands concerning justice? We propose that if the exercise of any right does not unjustly infringe on another’s ability to freely exercise their rights, then justice for all would be realized.

This Proposal is deliberately written in a concise form for a reason. The more is stated, the more detractors would find reasons to argue against it. We are not afraid of debate but wish to avoid the hair-splitting type of exchanges that so bedevil political discourse in Ethiopia. We are also not directly addressing the issues that are subjects of ongoing controversies in the country. Instead we are dealing with the premises, traditions and mentalities—worldviews—lurking behind the positions currently confronting each other. Unless these underlying assumptions are seriously interrogated and their hindrance to charting a better future is unearthed, we are condemned to relive our past and dismal present. To prevent Ethiopia from sliding into further chaos, many, including some from the international community, are calling for dialogue between Ethiopia’s contending stakeholders to resolve the impasse. Dialogue is the only alternative. However, no dialogue can tackle the impasse without meaningfully addressing the mindsets that underlie the ongoing conflict. This Proposal is prepared with this in mind.

1. THE MEANS DETERMINES THE END

Political movements in Ethiopia disagree on almost all issues except one. And that exception is democracy. Not a single Ethiopian movement is opposed to democracy. All movements agree that the installation of a democratic order should be the aim of the ongoing struggle. This common aspiration, hence, constitutes the factor potentially uniting the country's gravely divided movements. Hence, this is an asset that is worth cherishing, preserving and promoting. A potential area of contention is perhaps the undue focus on outcomes rather than the process of democracy and the quality—their impartiality, professionalism, and openness—of the institutions that serve as the pillars of genuinely democratic society.

The controversial question is how the struggle for democracy should be conducted. Specifically, what means of struggle is likely to lead to democracy and what is not? The answer can be found by revisiting the recent history of Ethiopia. On several occasions during the last half century, Ethiopian movements have employed armed/violent struggle as the means to achieve democracy. They have fallen far short of their intended aspiration in each instance. The experiences of numerous other countries corroborate this tragic end result of armed struggle.

At this stage, asking the following provocative question appears pertinent: What is insanity? The equally provocative answer is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.” Consequently, if democracy is truly our common aspiration, we should reconsider our attitude regarding armed struggle. Armed struggle has not culminated in democracy in the past and is not likely to do so in the future.

The reason for this tragic consequence of armed struggle is quite simple if we are willing to stop and think. Any group employing armed means can prevail over the incumbent dictatorship only under one condition. And that is excelling the incumbent in precisely those behaviors that are inimical to democracy: secretiveness, unquestioning obedience top-down diktats, and intolerance of differing opinion. Because of the need to excel in these undemocratic behaviors in order to defeat the incumbent dictatorship, democracy becomes the first casualty of armed struggle within the movement conducting it. And a movement that itself is undemocratic cannot be expected to become a democratizing agency. No one can practice democracy in the external arena while internally suppressing it. And no internally democratic movement has ever succeeded in successfully conducting the protracted armed struggle that overcoming tyranny entail. Even established democracies are forced to significantly curtail civil freedoms during times of war and serious security threats.

Armed struggle, hence, is ineffective in ushering in democracy and effective only in replacing one form of dictatorship with an even more repressive alternative. Breaking out of this vicious cycle is possible only by dispensing with the common practice of blaming the incumbent for forcing armed means on those seeking democracy. A dictatorship obviously fears and hates democracy more than anything else. As the result, it prefers to maneuver its opponents into engaging it on the undemocratic plane, where it has the upper hand. Those genuinely seeking democracy should consciously avoid struggling in the manner preferred by the incumbent dictatorship.

As the country gradually inches day by day into armed struggle as a default and unavoidable option, it is hard to argue against an oppressed people's right to defend itself against violent repression by the ruling party. The temptation to avenge our killers and defend against the onslaught of our oppressors is a natural human reaction. Self-defense, by all means in one's disposal, is an inviolable right. However, we still need to stop and think seriously about where this slippery slope lands us: into the arms of another tyranny.

Even if armed struggle is proven to be unavoidable due to the sheer brutality of the ongoing repression on the civilian population, its negative consequences and how to limit its negative repercussions need to be looked at closely and dispassionately—even if doing so at a time when sections of the country are being turned into bloodbath is seen as ivory-tower intellectual conceit.

The reason why armed struggle replaces one form of dictatorship with an even more repressive alternative has been stated. The dictatorship that captures power by armed means has another complicating nature. It becomes imbued with a high degree of self-righteousness even as the struggle is underway. This is due to the fact that the leadership overseeing the struggle invokes democracy to motivate its followers to pay the highest sacrifice. Such a leadership ultimately assumes that it alone epitomizes democracy. Any criticism of such a leadership runs the risk of being portrayed as opposing democracy and mercilessly suppressed.

After coming to power, such a dictatorship also loves to invoke the memory of the martyrs who died in the struggle as the current regime does *ad nauseam*. It harangues the public non-stop that it owes a debt to the martyrs and does not state when this debt is paid up. Hence, the dead ends up indefinitely dominating the living. And all sorts of crimes are likely to be committed in the name of those who no more are in a position to express their opinion.

Moreover, the ownership of armed struggle steadily narrows during the struggle ultimately being monopolized by the secretive conspiratorial top leaders or even the top leading personality opening the way for the cult of personality. This appears to be innate to armed struggle and has repeatedly recurred in world history.

The ownership of non-violent struggle, on the contrary, has to continuously expand to embrace all participants. In fact, the only way non-violent struggles can succeed is through widespread public ownership and their active and creative participation in it. The aim and strategies of non-violent struggle are openly declared in order to attract a widespread participation. Once owned by the public in this manner, the path to narrowing the ownership of the struggle is blocked forever. Over all, the ultimate aim of non-violent struggle is openly declared and pursued—imbuing it with a high degree of internal democracy; and can thus culminate in the installation of a democratic order.

Sacrificing one's life is sadly inevitable in the conduct of both non-violent and armed struggles. But the leaders of armed struggle often end up considering human life as just one of the many resources expended during its conduct. They ultimately draw a balance sheet of the deaths they inflict on the enemy and their own casualties. This cavalier attitude towards human life ultimately devalues it. Combatants are discouraged from openly expressing their grief about the death of their own comrades, to say nothing about that of the opposing force.

Both non-violent and armed struggle require a high degree of selflessness, including the willingness to lay down one's precious life. However, participants in armed struggle are more nonchalant about taking the life of the opponent—precisely because they are selfless enough to put their own life on the line. On the contrary, non-violent struggle is premised on making the loss of any life unnecessary. And regrettable, when it happens. Those engaged in non-violent struggle do not aim to t life but to give their own if necessary. Participants in non-violent struggle value their own life as much as they value that of their persecutors. And when any life is lost during the non-violent struggle, the public turns out to mourn and celebrate the life of the martyr.

Armed and non-violent struggle have contrasting impacts on the internal solidarity of the incumbent dictatorship. Armed struggle tends to approach the incumbent as a monolithic entity and aspires to demolish it by force. This external threat plays into the hand of the top leadership of the dictatorship who portrays any threat against it as a threat to anyone sharing anything with it. The rhetoric of the armed opponent may give more prominence to denouncing the top leadership of the dictatorship. But in practice this denunciation runs the risk of steadily expanding to include the society that spawned the top leadership of the dictatorship. This top leadership would also do everything to fuel this fear of the society that spawned it.

On the contrary, non-violent struggle has the potential of driving a wedge among factions and interest groups within the camp of the dictatorship. Non-violent struggle does not approach the dictatorship as a monolithic entity but a collection of human beings. It does not dismiss outright the existence of individuals with conscience even within the camp of the dictatorship. Non-violent struggle deploys moral arguments in order to impact the conscience of all involved. Some, even in the camp of the dictatorship, are liable to be impacted by this form of persuasion. Hence, non-violent struggle has the potential of drawing a wedge between moderates and the extremist core of the dictatorship.

2. THE DIVISIVE ROLE OF ETHIOPIAN HISTORY

The preceding section cited Ethiopia's history of the last half century in order to evaluate the efficacy of armed struggle in charting a common democratic future. Hence, imagining and working for the realization of a common democratic future inevitably involves looking back at the past. But this does not appear promising in the Ethiopian context. Reading and interpreting history tend to be very divisive. The heroes of one set of actors happen to be the villains of another. And one group's history is considered as fiction by another. What is seen as the Golden Age of one group is portrayed as the dawn of the Dark Age for another. Even the depth of Ethiopian history is just as controversial. Does the history of contemporary Ethiopia uninterruptedly stretch back for several millennia or is it only a little over a century long?

Why is the history of other African countries rarely as controversial? Perhaps this could be due to the fact that the powers that created the other African countries packed up and left after independence. In Ethiopia, however the state was created by indigenous actors and the society from which the creators of the contemporary state were home-grown and have had nowhere else to go. And, as in any other processes of state formation, armed conquest was involved in bringing present-day Ethiopia into existence. But unlike other democratic countries, where the initial act of coercion by force was

ultimately replaced by voluntary consent, force still remains the factor holding Ethiopia's disparate cultural/linguistic societies together. As the result, when and how Ethiopia was put together still remains the subject of an emotive debate. The politicization of the reading and interpretation and re-interpretation of Ethiopian history thus still rubs raw nerves. This has the implication of rendering the historicization of politics in Ethiopia inevitable. Consequently, political stands tend to be backed with a specific interpretation of past history. When politics should rather be about solving problems facing today's and tomorrow's generations! Unless a way is found around this mutual politicization of history and the historicization of politics, imagining and realizing a common democratic future will thus remain unattainable.

Finding a way around this burden of Ethiopian history that stands in the way of imagining and articulating a common democratic future is way beyond the scope of this very brief writing. Instead, what will be attempted is proposing a few approaches on how to stem the obstacle posed by differing readings and interpretations of Ethiopia's history. Even this modest attempt has a lot of dangerous, risky and controversial implications.

First, is it perhaps possible to agree that there is no such thing as the clinical and absolutely objective writing of history? Hence, the work of even the most refined professional historians is inevitably influenced by their biased preferences of some data, reading or perspective over others. Even research in such supposedly clinical subjects as physics, chemistry and other physical sciences is affected by preferential tapping of data and paradigms. This results from the fact that understanding any objective reality involves some degree of abstraction. A society's means of understanding its past does not stand still: it continues to evolve, on account of the advent of new technology, and changes in philosophical perspectives and social tastes and sensitivities, necessitating a rereading and re-interpretation of the past. In addition, the archival material normally cited by historians is itself produced by contemporary chroniclers with their own biases—some selected in and many others left out. Hence, treating any history as Gospel truth should be approached with the utmost care.

Second, can we agree that the notion of “people without history” is not only wrong and unjust but also serves as the rationale for the commission of injustice? Every society has a past although maybe its ancestors did not have a literate culture to document it in writing. Hence, the history of the world should ideally be the sum total of the histories of all humans. Likewise, the history of a particular country should be the sum total of the histories of all sectors of its population.

Third, the literature which serves as the source for writing history is often assembled by individuals belonging to the dominant sector. This, hence, stamps history with a bias favoring the victor when documenting a particular process of state formation. History speaks in the commanding voice of the victor and mutes out the faint voices of the vanquished. The situation and suffering of the victim is rarely even mentioned. This has an inevitable implication. History written based on such a biased documentation ends up humiliating the descendants of those victims. Such was the history of Ethiopia that motivated some groups to develop a thirst for a kind of history differing from the one officially taught in schools. The end result was the politicization of Ethiopian history mentioned above. If we really want to end this, the state and state organs ought to favor the history of Ethiopia that reflects the role of all communities, which history should be taught in schools. This requires accepting that all communities have played a role in shaping contemporary Ethiopia.

Fourth, can we agree that there is no such thing as a completely blameless society? Every society has committed aggression against one or another of its neighbors at some times while finding itself at the receiving end of aggression by one or another of its neighbors at another time.

Finally, none of us chose the family/society into which we were born nor the particular locality or country where we were born. As individuals, we have the choice of moving to another country and of changing our citizenship. The society into which we were born, however, cannot exercise this option. Its only option is finding a way to peacefully live with its dignity upheld with the other societies thrown together to shape the population of the country. The focus of the effort of Ethiopia's political movements should be working out the terms that allow such a dignified and peaceful coexistence among all the cultural/linguistic communities composing the Ethiopian population.

Proposal: Hence, can we agree to live with differing readings and interpretations of Ethiopia's history on one condition? That it should not permanently demonize and criminalize a particular sector of the Ethiopian population, exclude any other from being part of the state, or deny that injustice was ever committed. Otherwise, our divergent reading and interpretation of Ethiopian history would permanently stand in the way of realizing a common democratic future.

3. THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

One of the most controversial and unavoidable issues in jointly seeking and charting a common democratic future concerns the invocation of the right of self-determination by marginalized groups, including the Oromo, who otherwise make up close to half of the country's population. Returning to the debate surrounding this issue is not promising because contrasting stands have congealed. Instead, we should focus on the right to self-identification, without which self-determination or any other political project is impossible. Hence we start by addressing the controversial nature of self-identification because it is another matter standing in the way of forging a common democratic future in Ethiopia. This is yet another factor that sets apart Ethiopian politics from that of other countries, at least in Africa. This kind of controversy is almost non-existent elsewhere in Africa where individuals freely identify themselves either as members of their ethnic community or citizens of their country depending on the context. In Ethiopia, however, controversy rages over whether individuals first and foremost refer to themselves as Oromo, Amhara, Sidama, Afar, Guraghe, Somali, Tigrean, Anyuak, etc. or strictly as Ethiopians.

Delving into this topic runs the risk of just contributing to the presently raging controversy instead of defusing it. A volume can be written on the topic and yet fail to suggest a way around it. The aim of this brief writing is to suggest a number of simple principles that could point to a way to how to defuse this raging controversy.

First, can we agree that the right to self-identification is a fundamental human right that belongs to the self-concerned and to no one else? Stripping individuals of this right amounts to violating their humanity. It is like treating them as objects instead of conscious subjects. Whoever says to individuals "you are allowed to call yourself only A and not B" is exercising supremacy. Such a designator is also asserting ownership of the designated. Those exercising this type of supremacy by appropriating the others' right to self-identification are in the position to also change their mind and say "from now on you can only identify yourself as X and not Y." As the result, those whose right to self-identification has

been appropriated in this manner are forced to lead a precarious life always questioning how they will be designated next.

Second, can we agree that the right to self-identification is a fundamental democratic right in the absence of which it is impossible to organize for any common purpose: political, social, cultural, religious, etc.? Individuals have to identify themselves as workers, women, members of cultural/linguistic community, etc. in order to organize to pursue a common objective. Restricting this right in any manner would ultimately lead to curtailing the right to assembly and organization. After all, the human being is fundamentally a social creature.

Third, can we agree that self-identification can be invoked in a multiple and contextual manner? Individuals can identify themselves as workers in one context. And as women at other times. And as women workers in yet another context, in which self-identification both as worker and woman is invoked. Likewise, why is it not possible for individuals to identify themselves as Oromo in one situation and as Oromo Ethiopians under another?

The answer is quite simple. Until recently being an Oromo was officially portrayed as antithetical to being an Ethiopian. This mentality is still reflected in the discourse of a vocal sector of Ethiopia's elite. It is this mentality that drove some Oromo activists to articulate being an Oromo as antithetical to being an Ethiopian. Rejecting those who reject you is a natural human reaction. If at some time the dominant system denied Oromo identity as part of Ethiopian identity or tried to eliminate its traditions or discourage the use of its language through various means, one should not be surprised if those at the other end thought the same, and tried to assert the right denied. The only way to resolve this problem is by accepting that being an Oromo and an Ethiopian is not mutually exclusive and is indeed possible.

Fourth, can we agree that the right to self-identification can be invoked to serve constructive or destructive purposes? When this right is invoked to attack and belittle others, it definitely serves a destructive purpose. When it is invoked to seek justice for oneself as human beings, however, it plays a constructive role. Struggling for justice for the self should not amount to denying justice to others. And when it does, a red line has been crossed and should be corrected. Only when such a red line is crossed is the right to self-identification serving a negative purpose.

4. HOW TO INSTITUTE INCLUSIVE CHANGE

Ethiopia has undergone several incidents of tumultuous change during the past half century. There is one thing common to all these incidents of change. A particular group or even an individual ultimately monopolized the political space subsequent to the change that unfolded. Some of these changes started with widespread societal participation. This was the case especially with the process that brought the imperial era to an end. But soon after the imperial regime was unseated, various rival groups fought each other with the aim of monopolizing Ethiopia's political space. This rivalry pitted against each other several nascent parties that claimed Marxism-Leninism as their ideology, and pioneered the practice of the "Red Terror" in order to self-righteously liquidate members of their opponents. The military clique simply appropriated this practice and employed it to demolish the rival civilian parties. Meanwhile, several processes of liquidation occurred within the junta at the end of which one officer managed to monopolize the political space.

When the military regime was overthrown in May 1991, the incoming EPRDF signaled its willingness to share political space with other movements by inviting them to join the Transitional Government. Within a few months, however, more and more of these non-EPRDF organizations were either systematically eased out or left the Transitional Government out of frustration. The course was set thereafter ultimately culminating in the monopolization of the political space in Ethiopia by the EPRDF. In the course of the following decade, the same process unfolded within the EPRDF, and one person eventually monopolized the political space, until his natural death.

We cannot change how these previous processes of change unfolded. But we can, and have to, identify and deal with the mentality that made the monopolization of political space inevitable in both instances. Otherwise, we will remain stuck in the vicious cycle of witnessing groups and individuals replacing each other as the monopoly holders of the political space. In undemocratic systems, monopolizing political space enables monopolizing the economic and other spheres as well.

First, these recurrent monopolizations of political space resulted from the mentality of “winners take all.” Not only that, the winning party is determined to indefinitely keep its gains. This means that losers lose everything and permanently. As the result, the losers have no stake whatsoever in the incumbent order. This drives the opposition not to acknowledge anything worthwhile in the policies and practices of the incumbent ruler. Neither does the incumbent acknowledge anything positive in the policy proposals of the opposition. In fact those in power view opposition to the regime as criminal. Change stemming from these mutually confrontational stands can have no other outcome but zero-sum. Second, the feeling of self-righteousness slips in to further complicate this already complicated political contest. Each party portrays an absolute conviction that its stand, and only its stand, can serve the interest of the country or the people which it purports to represent. This often extends to the effort of trying to make the rule of the incumbent coterminous with that of not only the administration but also the Ethiopian state. As the result, successive rulers have done everything possible to wrap the state around themselves in order to signal that any threat directed against them is also a threat to the survival of the Ethiopian state itself. The country is currently on the verge of a frightening possibility due to this mentality.

Third, differentiating the state and government, which has never happened in Ethiopia to date, becomes well-nigh impossible so long as this mentality prevails. The bureaucracy, the military, police, the judicial system, etc. are believed to belong to the incumbent and to promote strictly its interests under this dispensation. Even the Constitution is believed to be an instrument tailored to reflect and enforce the vision and interests of strictly the incumbent ruler. Consequently, all these pillars of state institutions have undergone significant overhauls after each incident of change to date.

Demolishing these institutions and starting all over again after each incident of change is a very expensive undertaking in a country as impoverished as Ethiopia. It is also wrong because all forms of administration have positive and negative aspects. And positive aspects can be preserved and refined while removing the obviously negative ones. This requires both the incumbent and opposition agreeing on a couple of matters. The incumbent rulers should acknowledge that their policies and practices are not perfect by admitting that they are fallible human beings. The opposition should likewise acknowledge that not all the policies and practices of the incumbent stem from its diabolical intentions but also from burning question at the time it rose to power. And any policies and structures instituted by

the incumbent to accommodate historically-rooted demands need to be preserved. So long as this kind of mentality replaces the one prevailing until now, both the defenders of the status quo and agents of change will have something in common.

Our proposal, hence, is a simple one: Those wanting to preserve the status quo can and should acknowledge that accepting some changes may serve such a purpose. And those seeking change should similarly acknowledge that preserving the positive aspects of the status quo could ease such a process.

5. SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

We, members of the opposition, love to hold the ruling party responsible for all of Ethiopia's predicaments. Doing so may be politic but we should not mislead ourselves by our own rhetoric. This does not mean to exonerate the ruling party from its responsibility for the current crisis and debacle in which its security forces are turning the country into a bloodbath and one huge prison. There are undoubtedly problems introduced by the present rulers. There are others that they inherited and exacerbated instead of defusing. And there are still others that are beyond the control of the present rulers regardless of their claim to be fully in control.

For example, climate change is truly becoming a problem defying even the most powerful countries. And in the Ethiopian context, this challenge is further compounded by the simultaneous depletion and pollution of natural resources and galloping population growth. This makes the prioritization of poverty alleviation higher than any other pursuit. The present rulers should be commended for putting development at the top of their priorities although whether they are genuinely and fairly implementing it could be debated. And any incoming regime must be prepared to refine and build on their efforts.

6. TECHNICAL MATTERS

This Proposal has not addressed such technical issues of caretaker government and other transitional arrangements. These issues will be addressed in a separate proposal, to be shared with different stakeholders and developed collaboratively. This decision stems from our conviction that such matters are less controversial than the attitudinal and traditional mind-sets that stand in the way of imagining and realizing a common democratic future.