

The Oromo Democratic Front (ODF)

Statement on the election of Dr. Abiy Ahmed as Chairman of Ethiopia's ruling party

March 28, 2018

The Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) welcomes the election of Dr. Abiy Ahmed as Chairman of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and as Ethiopia's incoming Prime Minister. He comes into office at a critical period when the country is facing many domestic and regional challenges. He takes over a divided country, a fractured political system, a broken economy, a frayed social fabric amid a complex regional environment. The biggest challenge would be bringing about national reconciliation, ensuring justice, citizenship rights and equality for all. Ethiopia has age-old issues as well as new ones and we hope the new EPRDF Chairman would be the prime minister of all the 100 plus million people instead of just the party apparatus and a fraction of society. We wish our country would be one where every Ethiopian is able to live in peace and harmony, where all ideas and opinions are entertained and respected, and where all citizens participate in the affairs of their country and equitably benefit from its resources without any fear or discrimination. We are certain that without genuine democratization, the cyclical crisis that grips the country from time to time won't go away.

To that end, we call upon the new administration to immediately rescind the State of Emergency, to revoke all laws designed to stifle the human and constitutional rights of citizens, to release all political prisoners, and to launch dialogue with all credible political organizations, both inside and outside the country.

The Ethiopian people have been yearning for freedom, justice and democracy for generations. Countless lives have been lost and ever-diminishing resources unnecessarily squandered in pursuit of these noble goals. The crisis of the last three years and the immense sacrifices paid by the Oromo people in particular and the country in general attest to this. We believe the time has come when Ethiopia embarks in earnest on the course of a truly democratic transformation. It is our sincere hope that the appointment of the new PM is not going to be just a change of guard, but a harbinger of the meaningful reforms the dire situation demands. We also hope that Prime Minister Abiy would face the challenges squarely and carry out institutional reforms, including those of the judiciary, electoral systems, the media, and the security sector.

We in the Oromo Democratic Front are convinced that Ethiopia's intricate and complex political problems cannot be solved by the ruling party alone; hence it must open up the political space and allow all stakeholders to play their parts towards resolving the country's chronic and age-old political and socio-economic challenges. The ODF is prepared to shoulder its responsibilities in this regard.

We wish the new Prime Minister success in his new endeavor, especially his reform agenda. We would also like to pay tribute to the departing Prime Minister, Ato Hailemariam Desalegn, for his exemplary move in stepping aside from his post to pave the way for change and a fresh start that the country needed.

This change in the ruling party would have been impossible without the sustained popular struggle of the last three years in particular and the sacrifices made. We would also like to take this opportunity to hail the Oromo youth, as well as those of the rest of Ethiopia who have singularly shouldered the role of challenging the authoritarian system with immense costs. We pay tribute to all the martyrs as well as all those who experienced various forms of physical and emotional suffering. At the same time we congratulate the leadership of the

Oromo People's Democratic Organization, especially Team Lemma, first for carrying out reforms and change within its ranks, and for courageously facing the challenges along the road.

Likewise we call upon the people of Ethiopia to sustain their exemplary patience and to give the new administration a breathing space by preserving peace and harmony among all communities and by eschewing all acts that may only play into the hands of detractors wishing to derail the reform process.

Freedom and Justice for All!

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