

**Sidama Intellectuals and Concerned Sidamas
Sidama**

March 29, 2006

HE Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
P.O.Box 1031
Addis Ababa
ETHIOPIA

Your Excellency Meles Zenawi,

Re: Looming Catastrophe in Sidama and Asking for Urgent Action to Reverse the Situation

The power of your belief in democracy and democratic process has inspired global community at the beginning of your governance. We think you had a noble conviction and courage to enable nations and nationalities of Ethiopia to decide on their issues without being patronised. There was a promising start and glimmer of hope for entire subjugated nations and nationalities of Ethiopia including the Sidama as your policies started to flourish in the first few years. In contrast, this had been an incurable headache for your predecessors. For us, who have tested the bitterness of oppression and slavery, it felt like bright future. The euphoria of enthusiasm engulfed entire nations and nationalities of Ethiopia including the Sidama, not believing they will be able to decide on their issues after almost a century. Such feeling was profound among all subjugated nations and nationalities. Peoples of Ethiopia started to use their respective languages for education and administration.

Dear Prime Minister,

When you left university studies with great optimism and conviction of liberating Tigray people from the ruthless tyranny of the derg, you had clear set of objectives and purposes. Your principle, we thought was the essence of respecting the rights of individuals and groups of people and enabling them to devise their destiny. Nevertheless, the Sidama started to lose its faith from the very beginning as the nation has been marginalised economically in addition to other undemocratic and unconstitutional treatments it receives. We think, you acknowledged the reality of this argument in the past few months to the Sidama EPRDF's representatives.

After certain periods of relative autonomy in the early 1990s, once again the people of Sidama started to suffer various forms of discrimination and unnecessary sacrifices of lives seeking the very principle for that you left university. Regional autonomy that the nation enjoyed for few years soon became compromised when entire Southern Ethiopia nations and nationalities merged together without the consent of the affected people including the Sidama. Since the merger, the Sidama region remains under constant surveillances from federal government despite your conviction and promises. Extra-judiciary arrest and harassment, intimidation of innocents simply because of their views, and killings of armless and peaceful demonstrators who were claiming their constitutional rights became day to day reality. The killers and conspirators were

promoted to the positions of more authority rather than being held responsible for their parts in the atrocities.

Today, innocent Sidamas are harassed, intimidated and suppressed in allegation and new waves of harassments is taking place in our region. A type of brutal treatment the Sidama people are receiving is becoming incomprehensible for genuine and democratic mind. People's quest is being stifled and their lives are made utterly difficult. At the moment, Sidama political cadres are preparing for another round of massacre simply because entire people are claiming the same quest for which many dozens of Sidamas lost their precious lives on May 24, 2002. We believe that this was not your principle and conviction. We trust that you do not want people to be voicelessly crushed forever. However, this is happening in Sidama region right now. The Sidama people are suffering various forms of marginalisation and political destabilisation. For example, since your government came to power the Sidama region had more than 9 presidents compared to perhaps, 2 to 3 regional presidents in other regions. This constant change has negative impact on Sidama society as it undermined continuity and trust. No one is daring to genuinely voice the need of Sidama people.

Dear Prime Minister,

We, Sidama intellectuals and concerned people are deeply saddened by the killings of armless and peaceful civilians who were claiming their basic rights enshrined in Ethiopian Constitution. Our sadness is immeasurable with regard to economic deprivation. Our people have become victims of what is ironically called "Green famine" with underdeveloped infrastructure.

While others nations and nationalities of Ethiopian with less than 1million population are granted regional autonomy, the Sidama people about 5million is suffering injustice claiming this very rights that is being enjoyed by others such as Adere (with less than a half million), Afar with (less than two million), Benshagul and Gumuz (with less than 2 million) to mention some. Enormous discontent in Sidama region is becoming paramount simply because of the lack of positive conclusion to the quest for regional status. Our nation today is felt like it left in the middle of ocean helplessly.

We urge you on behalf of voiceless Sidama nation to respect the constitutional rights of Sidama people without any pre-condition to halt looming danger due to continued failure of your government to positively respond Sidama regional quest.

CC:- US Embassy, Addis Ababa,
UK Embassy, Addis Ababa
Canada Embassy, Addis Ababa
EU Representatives' Office, Addis Ababa
AU, Addis Ababa,
Red Cross Office, Addis Ababa
Ethiopian Human Rights Office, Addis Ababa
Amnesty International, UK
Human Right Watch, USA
International Media Representatives, Addis Ababa