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A NEW YEAR'S CALL THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE STAND UP TOGETHER TO REGAIN THEIR STOLEN FREEDOM! A press statement issued by Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)

The Ethiopian New Year of 2004 should not continue to be a year of darkness as have been the years in the past. It must be a year of legal and peaceful struggle. The struggle we wage must be one that brings an all-round freedom to the Ethiopian people, including the members of EPRDF. The struggle must be free from racism, vengeance and bitterness. It must be a struggle that brings each and every one of us closer together and strengthens our unity more than ever before. The first goal of our struggle must be ridding ourselves of fear. This New Year must be a year in which we cease pointing our fingers at each others but ask ourselves what is expected of us to wage the struggle for freedom and what we ourselves have contributed to it so far. The dawning of the New Year must also be the dawning of freedom for which we have been hungering for years.

Therefore, Unity for Democracy and Justice issues the following New Year call to the following bodies at home and abroad.

1. TO THE PEOPLE OF ETHIOPIA

Throughout your long history you have stood united and repelled foreign aggressors and brought down domestic dictatorial leaders. Despite the struggles you have waged and the sacrifices you have made, your hunger for freedom remains unsatisfied. The struggle for freedom that is being waged in the Arab World and its outcome is inspiring. The time for sitting and waiting has passed. Every citizen must stand up and struggle to become a master of her/his freedom. All must stand for the freedom of each and each must stand for the freedom of all. The key to solving the problems of our country is freedom. Stand for freedom.

2. TO THE YOUTH OF ETHIOPIA

You are the heirs to many distorted images and concepts that resulted from the political struggles and the social upheavals that had taken place before you in the past. The ethnic based rule of the present regime does not make things better. In fact, it makes matters worse. The political, economic and social trends we see during the rule of the present regime does not green your hopes. Rather, it wilts them. When you demand that the complex matters be given political solutions, the responses you have been given were threats, intimidations, unemployment, poverty and hunger that force you into exile that is often fraught with suffering and death. If there is an option put before you, it is supporting the policies of hunger and oppression of the ruling party for tidbits of short term benefits. You have been denied quality education. While you have the strength to develop your country through you labour. You have been denied the right to work for a living for the last 20 years. When you challenge the ruling regime and demand solutions, the response has been labeling you as hooligans and vagrants and throwing you into the Shewa Robit, Zuway and other prisons throughout the country. The ruling regime wants to see you as a lonesome and hopeless segment of the society condemned to remain as carriers of the EPRDF "throne".

The Youth of our country! Your hope and your future are in your own hands. Within you, there is a potential power that can change not only you but also your country. The first step that you should take to release this positive energy is to rid yourself of fear that successive oppressive regimes have instilled in you. Beginning from day one of the Ethiopian Year 2004, you must declare “war” on fear. Pick up the flag of your predecessors and mark the beginning of your role as apostles of constructive change. Do not expect anyone to deliver to you your freedom on a silver platter. Raise your heads, join hands and march forward in the legal and peaceful struggle for freedom that is long overdue. HAPPY NEW YEAR!

3 TO THE OPPOSITION PARTIES OF ETHIOPIA

Ever since the disintegration of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), the people have been in a state of depression. Instead of serving the people’s agenda, we have spent too much time disagreeing and clashing among ourselves and, as a result, caused much damage to our cause. This is unwisely. If we are to be of any use to our people who are suffering from hunger and oppression, we must stop the bickering among ourselves, strengthen our unity and wage the struggle for freedom in a well coordinated manner. In this regard, the trend of coming together and narrowing our differences that is now seen within MEDREK is commendable and encouraging. It must be strengthened and continued. Other genuine opposition parties must rally behind the cause of MEDREK so that we can struggle effectively with a common front. We extend our call for cooperation even to those opposition parties that owe their existence to the support and blessing of the ruling party and are, directly or indirectly, supporting the same, to stand on the side of the people and struggle for their freedom. It is not too late. There is still time.

4. THE RULING REGIME

We call upon the ruling regime to take notice of what is going in the Arab World and learn a constructive lesson from it. It would be a tragic mistake to think that what is going on in North Africa and the Middle East would not happen in Ethiopia because the needs of the people have been met and that the people have signed a contract for you to stay in power for the coming four years, as you would like to tell us. We urge you to respond positively to the demands of the people for change and create a situation where in a peaceful change could take place in our country. It has been seen over and over again that dictators often fail to learn from the fates of other dictators. We advise you, our rulers, to learn from what you see in the Arab World and avoid the death and destruction seen there from repeating itself in Ethiopia. We would like to assure you that the people would not take destructive measures in order to ensure their rights. If you give a peaceful and meaningful response to the legitimate demands of the people, you would be the first to benefit and to register a result that will be valued today and for generations to come.

5. THE ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA

The majority of you, the members of the Ethiopian Diaspora, left your country because of the oppressive political atmosphere in Ethiopia. No doubt, there are others of you who left the country in search of better economic life. Although you are physically far away, we know that your heart is always with the Motherland. Particularly in the 2005 election, you have practically and amply demonstrated that you are ready to stand on the side of your people. But after 2005, you seem to have cooled down and to bear the suffering of your people within yourselves. Even those among you who are especially active have shown a scaling down of their activities. In fact, there seems to be a tendency amongst you to be engaged in energy dissipating debates and issues that could be described as “luxuries” at this juncture of our struggle and in pointing condemning fingers at each other, a mistake that we are working hard to correct here at home. The

primary issue that is common to us all now at home and in the Diaspora is the call for a struggle for freedom. There is no alternative but to join hands and wage the struggle as we have been doing so far. The political struggle is blighted by a shortage of funds. You could make a crucial difference in the outcome of the struggle by your generous financial as well as political and diplomatic support.

6. THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The political oppression and the economic degradation that prevail in our country are not conducive for a decent living and should not be tolerated by anyone any more. UDJ appreciates the constructive and supportive efforts that the International Community is making on the side of the struggle that the people of North Africa and the Middle East are waging. We believe that the International Community should redouble its efforts in supporting the people's struggle for freedom that is the foundation for world peace and economic stabilization. We call upon the International Community to give support to the struggle of the Ethiopian people to extricate itself from the life of oppression and hunger.

UDJ would like to take this opportunity to wish to all the Ethiopian People and members of the International Community here and abroad a Happy Ethiopian New Year.

Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)
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