New Year's Call for Peace[1]

September 6, 2023

The Ethiopian year of 2015, which is coming to an end this week, had two opposing realities for Ethiopia. On one hand, the Pretoria peace agreement has ended the two-years of war in Northern Ethiopia; on the other, new conflicts and violence that broke out across different parts of the country, causing deaths people and destruction of resources. The consequences of these conflicts and destructions are still persisting and are likely to continue into the next year.

We, the undersigned local civil society organizations of this call for peace, have been issuing various statements and calls for peace, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia, individually or collectively. Among these are included the peace calls issued in September 2021 and September 2022 on the eve of the past two consecutive years. In the coming Ethiopian New Year, too, we would like to reiterate our calls and call up on the government to create a comprehensive peace convention to prevent conflicts, transform existing conflicts and peacebuilding as well as to create short-term, mid-term, and long-term solutions to bring about peace and stability.

Although the war in Tigray region was raging at the beginning of 2015 E.C., the peace agreement signed on November 2, 2022 in Pretoria have ended the two-years fighting that caused a lot of human suffering and material destruction. We believe that this has taught a lesson that any kind of conflict can be resolved peacefully if there is a will. However, there are still a lot of unresolved conflicts in different parts of Ethiopia this year. Furthermore, nascent and ongoing conflicts that have been observed this year threaten to worsen in the coming year.

The ongoing fighting with the armed forces operating in some areas of the Oromia region; similar fighting that started in Amhara region following the dissolution of regional special forces; the instability in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state (BGRS), where elections have not yet been held due to conflicts; the repeated communal conflicts and instability in the Gambella region; the public discontents and protests related to the restructuring of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' region as well as the administrative restructuring in the Oromia region that have caused violence and internal displacements; the tensions caused in religious groups and/or with political leaders; restrictions on citizens' freedom of movement, mass and arbitrary arrests of journalists and human rights defenders, enforced disappearances, killings of high-ranking government officials, and detentions of public representatives with impunity are all the symbols to the past Ethiopian year.

Despite these deteriorations, the start of the Zanzibar peace talks to end the ongoing conflict in the Oromia region; peace agreements reached with the armed forces operating in the BGRS and Gambella region were promising beginnings. In addition, consultative dialogue on transitional justice policy options as well as the start of participants' identification and agenda

[1] The original version of this statement was prepared in Amharic. In case of differences in translation, the Amharic copy will prevail.

collection for the national dialogue in Harari, South West Ethiopia, Sidama, and Dire Dawa city administration, are positive developments. The commitment and hard work of all stakeholders is needed more than ever for these initiatives to gain due attention and to find peaceful resolutions of conflicts become more accepted.

In the hope that the upcoming year 2016 E.C. will be a year where sustainable resolution of conflicts will be realized and where citizens enjoy their full rights and freedoms in Ethiopia, we call up on all actors involved in conflicts and their supporters, government authorities, political parties, civil societies, media and journalists, academics, social media influencers, religious leaders and international communities to join hands to:

1. **Create a Comprehensive National Peace Convention**!

   We believe that many of the violent conflicts are fueled or exacerbated by an old culture of resolving differences by force rather than through political dialogue and compromise. To address this challenge sustainably, a national peace convention involving all stakeholders should be facilitated and a national road map should be developed to harmoniously implement short-term, medium-term and long-term conflict prevention, resolution and peace building activities;

2. **Ensure an Independent Investigation and Accountability!**

   We believe that establishing a victim-centered accountability system not only gives justice to those who have been harmed by human rights violations and conflicts, but also helps to break the vicious cycle of revenge and increase the credibility of justice institutions. Those who have caused violent conflicts, who have passed decisions that harm the public's safety and national interest without a legal basis, who have attacked innocent people by taking part in violent conflicts, who have made hate speeches in public and incited conflicts, and who have exposed innocent civilians to violence, should be held accountable through an independent investigation and a fair judicial process. Furthermore, for a genuine implementation and legitimacy of the transitional justice initiative, participation of civil society organizations and international technical experts should be encouraged;

3. **Give due Attention to Sexual Gender Based Violence!**

   During violent conflicts and instabilities, sexual violence against women and children increases, and the problem is getting worse in Ethiopia. However, the weight of the problem has not been given due attention. Therefore, to prevent the violence, to provide health and psychosocial support to the victims/survivors, to make the perpetrators and accomplices of the violations accountable to the law, policy frameworks should be set and adequate measures should be taken, and all governmental and non-governmental organizations that are working on gender based violence work hard to its realization;

4. **Build a Protection Framework for Minorities, Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups**!

   Minorities as well as vulnerable and marginalized sections of the society, including women, persons with disabilities, older people and ethnic minorities, are worst recipients of violence and discrimination wherever violent conflicts occur. A national, legal and

institutional response should be designed to provide appropriate and special protection for these sections of society;

5. **Ensure Meaningful Public Participation!**

We believe that many violent conflicts are triggered due to the decisions made by the federal and regional governments without a meaningful participation of citizens and without having the consent of the majority. Therefore, before making structural changes and taking actions that may cause popular discontent and suspicions among communities, authorities should be obliged to have a means of meaningful participation of the concerned public;

6. **Establish an Early Warning System!**

Lessons can be learned from past Ethiopian conflicts that there is a noticeable trend where discontents turn in to violent conflicts. Therefore, the government should fulfill its obligations to maintain peace and stability by establishing a system for alerting and devising preventive measures by pre-assessing tensions that may turn into violent conflicts, and civil society institutions and international organizations should pay enough attention to prevent further damage caused by conflicts.

7. **Extend Humanitarian Assistance without Interruption!**

Immediate, uninterrupted, sufficient, and continuous food aid, health services and other basic supplies as well as long-term rehabilitation support should be extended without restrictions to the millions of citizens who have been displaced from their homes, whose homes and property have been destroyed, and who are in displacement camps and who are at risk of hunger and starvation. Suspension of humanitarian assistance due to the challenges international humanitarian assistance organizations experience in their work including violence and diversion would only worsen the situation to the people in need of the assistance. The government is also responsible for ensuring an appropriate accountability system in response to challenges humanitarian aid organizations experience;

8. **Stop Hate Speech and the Spread of Misinformation**!

Over the years, we have noticed that hate speech and incitement can fuel and exacerbate violent conflicts. Politicians, government authorities, mass media, social media influencers and others should refrain from disseminating false information, and from using dangerous language and incitement that would result in human rights violations;

9. Protect the Civic Space!

Human rights defenders and journalists, as well as civil society organizations and the media, are being subjected to arbitrary arrests, torture, forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and other acts of harassment as a result of their work. As this stifles their rights to freedom of expression, organize, and peaceably assembly, which are protected by law, and hinders them from fulfilling their job responsibilities, the government should fulfill its constitutional obligation to ensure adequate protection of the civic and media space;

10. <u>All Stakeholders for Peacebuilding!</u>

Peace requires the collaboration of all stakeholders. Therefore, we call up on civil society organizations, political parties, media, the international community, religious leaders, elderlies, faith-based and community-based organizations, and traditional institutions to carry out their respective responsibilities individually and collectively.

We, the undersigned local civil society organizations, pledge to play our part to prevent conflicts from turning into violence, to resolve violent conflicts through peaceful means, and to make conflict transformations and peacebuilding initiatives inclusive and sustainable. We would also like to state that we are ready to work in cooperation with all stakeholders in the implementation of the above calls.

We wish the new year 2016 E.C. to be a peaceful and when we find lasting solutions to all our problems, where conflicts are eliminated, human rights are respected, citizens who are vulnerable to violence are protected, hate speech and misinformation is stopped, the rule of law is upheld, and where citizens meaningfully participate in peacebuilding and establishing a democratic system.

Happy New Year!

The undersigned CSOs that are issuing this New Year's Call for Peace are:

1. Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations (CEHRO)
2. Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO)
3. Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Center (EHRDC)
4. Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD)
5. Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE)
6. Ethiopian Women Lawyers Associations (EWLA)
7. Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR)
8. Setaweet Movement
9. Inter-Africa Group
10. Ethiopian Women Rights Advocates (EWRA)
11. Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA)
12. Ethiopian Labor Rights Watch (EWRA)
13. Inclusive vision for democratic Ethiopia (IVIDE)
14. East African Initiative for Change (I4C)
15. Women Association for Peace and Social Justice (WAPSJ)
16. Development for All
17. Addis Power House
18. Ethiopian Initiative for Human Rights (EIHR)
19. Good Samaritan Association
20. Siiqqee Women's Development Association
21. Women Can Do It (WCDI)
22. Mezizigwa Loka Yesetoch Limat Mahber (MLWD)
23. Sara-Fitih Kehulum Yesetoch Mahiber
24. Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Mass Based Association (EWDNA)

25. Enhancing Child Focused Activities (ECFA)
26. Mizan Youth Lawyers Center
27. Peace for Ethiopia Charity Organization
28. Good Hands for Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights Development
29. Ethiopian Media Women Association
30. Mizan Journalists Almuni Association
31. Good Governance for Africa – East Africa (GGA-EA)
32. Center for Human Rights and Peacebuilding
33. Hope for Children Association
34. Dire Integrated Community Development Organization
35. Hopeful Generation for Development