

# Vision Ethiopia 10<sup>th</sup> Conference

## ***Post-TPLF Ethiopia: The Path Forward***

***January 8 and 15, 2021***

With the end of the political, economic and military dominance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia, there are incalculable challenges and opportunities to advance sustainable democracy, rule of law and equitable economic development in the country. The TPLF, which was at the front and center of many of the problems faced by the Ethiopian people over the last three decades, has predictably faded into the dustbin of history. While the causes of its demise are multifactorial, ranging from tyrannical rule and rampant corruption, to the recently perpetrated treasonous attacks against the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), the most prominent of them all is the one rooted in the pathological constitution it imposed on the people of Ethiopia when it assumed power. Indeed, the fact that this aberrant organization was born with the seed of its own destruction was evident in its obsession with ethnic hatred that could be traced back to its founding manifesto. It may serve as a lesson for similar groups to heed that the catastrophic collapse of the TPLF is but an affirmation of the time-honored historical truism that the ultimate fate of a party that pivots its power on ethnic-based philosophy is assured self-annihilation.

Although the TPLF is removed from power, many concerned citizens and observers of developments in the country contend that there are still numerous outstanding issues that still require cogent dialogues and bold discussions. Even as we speak, the country is governed by the ethnic-based constitution whose primary objective is the promotion of the dissolution rather than the preservation of the integrity of the nation. Ethnic violence is claiming the lives of countless innocent civilians across the land, and a dark cloud is hovering over the prospect of conducting free and fair elections. Years of corruption and economic mismanagement by the TPLF oligarchy have pushed the national economy to the brink.

The ethnic federalism, which is unique to Ethiopia, continues to fuel conflicts among people that have coexisted in harmony for generations, resulting in genocidal violence, destruction of property, and displacements of biblical proportions. Innocent civilians have been slaughtered in various parts of Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz and other regions; and more recently, the

retreating TPLF thugs have committed atrocious crimes against Amharas and other ethnic groups in Mai-Kadra and neighboring villages.

Justice is demanded by those whose ancestral lands and other properties have been forcibly usurped by force by the TPLF. Disquietingly, the federal government has shown inexplicable insensitivity to respond to the legitimate demands for recognition by the Amhara inhabitants of Humera, Wolkait, Tsegede, Tselemt and Raya who have been subjugated, tortured and subjected to untold repression because of their identity. Similar cases abound in other parts of the country, including Wolaita, Guragie, and various zones of the Southern region.

Extremist groups and terrorist organizations such as the TPLF and OLF, who have committed egregious crimes with impunity, have not yet been labelled as such by the government in power. As a result, some of them have continued to carry out horrific attacks on defenseless civilians the likes of which have not been seen since the dark days of the Rwandan Interahamwe.

The large sums of aid and donated money siphoned off from the nation's coffers and stashed away in foreign bank accounts by TPLF leaders will continue to cause unimaginable economic pains and challenges for years to come. The international community and financial institutions have yet to honor their moral responsibility and heed the pleas of the people of Ethiopia for return of the wealth blatantly stolen from them.

It is with these backdrops that Vision Ethiopia, in keeping with its proven tradition of excellence and neutrality, has organized a series of roundtable discussions to tackle some of the most critical questions of our time. The questions to be addressed include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The constitution is the legal document that has legitimized the current ethnic federalism, which incontrovertibly is the source of the pervasive conflicts in Ethiopia. So, what is the framework for abolishing ethnic federalism and ratifying a genuine constitution that guarantees individual rights, ensures equality of all the people under the law, and ensures the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country?
- One of the legacies of the TPLF regime is the illegal appropriation of fertile lands from neighboring regions and the subjugation of the inhabitants of these places. What is the due process for addressing the grievances of Amharas and other minority ethnic groups whose ancestral lands have been forcibly annexed by the TPLF and the inhabitants subjected to untold suffering and persecution because of their identity?

- Since the current government came to power, extremist forces, including the TPLF and OLF, have caused incalculable damage to the economy and perpetrated heinous crimes against humanity. To date, the government is reluctant to identify by name and denounce some of these elements. How can extremist elements and terrorist organizations be purged and outlawed to ensure lasting law and order in the country?
- While the postponement of the planned elections due to the disruption caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic is understandable, there are misgivings about the feasibility of conducting free and fair elections under the current environment in Ethiopia. What are the available options to ensure a genuine transition to democracy and build robust democratic institutions in the country?

Vision Ethiopia, an independent and non-partisan association of Ethiopian scholars and professionals, has invited Ethiopian intellectuals, community leaders, and practitioners to present or participate in these timely and important issues with a view to formulating actionable policy alternatives to policymakers.

The Conference will be conducted in two separate segments on the following dates and themes:

- **Theme 1** (Saturday, January 8, 2021). Constitutional Reform, Ethnic Federalism, Border Disputes and Transition to Democracy
- **Theme 2** (Saturday, January 15, 2021). Extremism, Terrorism and Genocidal Violence: Challenges of Transition to Democracy

## Conference Agenda

January 8, 2021, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

### Session 1

#### Constitutional Reform, Ethnic Federalism and Border Disputes

10:00 am – 10:30 am Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Dr. Getachew Begashaw, Harper College, Chicago, IL

10:30 am – 12:30 pm

#### Panel Discussion

##### Moderator:

- Dr. Demissie Alemayehu, Columbia University, New York, NY

##### Panelists:

- His Excellency Ato Tekalign Gedamu, Former Minister and Bank Executive, Philadelphia, PA
- Dr. Assefa Mehretu, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
- Dr. Alemante Gebre-Selassie, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA

12:30 pm – 12:45 pm **Break**

12:45 pm – 1:45 pm **Questions and Answers**

1:45 pm – 2:00 pm

#### Closing Remarks:

- Dr. Senait Senay, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN

## Conference Agenda (Cont.)

January 15, 2021, 10 am – 2:00 pm

### Session 2

#### Extremism, Terrorism and Genocidal Violence: Challenges of Transition to Democracy

10:00 am – 10:30 am

#### Welcome and Opening Remarks

- Dr. Berhanu Alemayehu, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

10:30 am – 12:30 pm

#### Panel Discussion

##### Moderator:

- Dr. Data D. Barata, California State University, Sacramento, CA

##### Panelists:

- Dr. Yohannes Gedamu, Georgia Gwinnett College, Lawrenceville, GA
- Dr. Semahagn Gashu, Endicott College, Beverly, MA
- Dr. Messay Kebede, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH
- Dr. Getachew Metaferia, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD

12:30 pm – 12:45 pm

Break

12:45 pm – 1:45 pm

#### Questions and Answers

1:45 pm – 2:00 pm

#### Closing Remarks

- Dr. Getachew Begashaw, Harper College, Chicago, IL