



Will Ethiopians Join in the People's Movement for Change as it Blows from North Africa?

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All eyes are on Tunisia right now following the startling news of the peoples' uprising that ousted their iron-fisted president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, after being in power for twenty-three years. It has sent shockwaves of fear to other strongmen throughout Africa, the Middle East and the world; all who are rightfully worried that their own subjugated people will similarly rise up against them.

In Africa, these winds of change that started blowing from Tunisia in North Africa will now blow to the South to countries like Zimbabwe and from countries like Mauritania in the West to Ethiopia in the East. Tragically, this is a continent where the majority of its people are held hostage by dictators, like Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, and their cronies, both domestic and foreign, who rob them of their lives, well being and futures while ravishing their resources. Yet, once the wind starts it is hard to stop. It has already started stirring up the seeds of discontent in places like Albania, Egypt, Algeria and Mauritania. It is only a matter of time before it reaches to Ethiopia.

Meles Zenawi, the strongman of Ethiopia, already is reacting to this ominous message—that despite his tight grip on the people, as well as “having friends” in important places, that *even he and his apartheid regime could be overthrown by the power of the people—as almost already happened in 2005! That must be why he is so desperately trying to block the “wind” of information about Tunisia from blowing into the cities, towns and villages of Ethiopia for it could inspire Ethiopians to head for Meskel Square! It is only a matter of time*, but before that happens, we in the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE)** believe *we Ethiopians must take charge of the sails of our boat; carefully using the wind to propel us forward in the direction we want to go.*

In other words, *we Ethiopians should not simply wait for an unpredictable explosion of desperation in the country, but if we want peaceful and sustainable change, we should be carefully preparing and equipping ourselves now so as to prevent chaos, violence or destruction in Ethiopia that could sabotage our future hopes.* Part of that is supporting those in key positions who are developing necessary tools of change. These key change-agents need our support now—like **Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT)**—who is bringing TV coverage to Ethiopians. *News of how Ben Ali was driven out of office through the grassroots uprising of the people could be a great source of inspiration and renewed determination were Ethiopians given access to it.*

Tunisians and Ethiopians have much in common; both living under long-standing dictatorships known for brutality and corruption. Far before the people took to the streets in Tunis, anger had been seething right under the surface of this repressed society. To their credit, violence was minimal and Tunisians want the world to know they are a civil society. Hardening conditions of daily life set off the response, but the foundation of discontent was already in place and the people had been working together.

In Ethiopia right now, similar conditions also exist that could explode unpredictably as Ethiopians are becoming more desperate than ever due to soaring food prices—increasing 60% in the last six months according to the BBC. Inflation has risen nearly 15% and certain commodities are becoming harder to find in the market. Meles has started a “war” with businesses and small market sellers; blaming them for the rising prices and forcing artificial caps on certain food goods regardless of the costs. Some businesses have closed their doors in response. *Should something unexpected trigger an explosion—and should Ethiopians not be ready for it—the resulting chaos could put all hopes for a better future at risk. We must be prepared!*

Although every situation is unique, there are some lessons we Ethiopians might learn from these recent events in Tunisia. *If Ethiopians want to mobilize a grassroots movement, capable of bringing sustainable freedom, justice, respect for civil and human rights, civility, reconciliation and prosperity to our mother-country, we in the SMNE believe there are some basic components for success that we must first put into place. One is communication, a second is organization and a third is cooperation; all undergirded with firmly-held principles that uphold the worth, rights and well being of all our citizens.*

1. Communication:

Communication; including access to truthful information, is of extreme importance. Rising dissatisfaction with lack of opportunity and high unemployment created fertile ground in Tunisia, but it was the use of the media and new technologies like **Facebook** and **Twitter**—despite efforts to block it—that helped spread information, organize the movement and mobilize the people to come out in protest. Meles is succeeding in many ways now because of a forced news blackout. There is no alternative to the government-controlled media, which blocks information, communication and instead promotes propaganda. This makes it all the more important for Ethiopians to support the development of the media and technology essential to facilitate communication.

- **Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT):**

ESAT, which in English means fire—could be a source of light, energy and warmth to Ethiopians purposely kept cold and in the dark by this regime; instead exposing what is actually going on, not only in the world, but even in other parts of the country. For that reason, we in the SMNE have endorsed their recent appeal for financial support, as we have also done in the past. *We hope Ethiopians will give generously because a free and independent news media—not politically-controlled and not used as a propaganda machine—is an essential stepping stone to building a new Ethiopia.* We have personally talked to some of the executive leaders involved at ESAT and know the sacrifices, personal financing they have committed and the long hours of work they have put into this. **ESAT** could potentially reach all over Ethiopia to those who now have TV access or who, if they could afford it, would get it if there was a fair, truthful and balanced source of information available. *It would be a shame to the millions of us in the Diaspora if it failed only for lack of money.*

- **Radio, Newspapers, Facebook, Twitter, Paltalk, Websites and other media:**

For the same reason, we also encourage Ethiopians to support the development and continuation of communication tools like radio, newspapers, Internet websites, the use of new Internet technologies like Facebook, Twitter, Skype, E-mails, Paltalk and other new and expanding ways to communicate.

- **Phone Calls and Emails:**

Do not underestimate the power of thousands of phone calls going out to family members and friends throughout the country; providing news, ideas, direction and encouragement to those in Ethiopia.

2. Organization:

Secondly, *organization of this movement must go beyond simply getting the public to protest in the streets.* In Tunisia, within days, Ben Ali was gone, but a vacuum of leadership was left. The challenge now before the people of Tunisia is how to ensure a safe transition is made to a more democratic and well-functioning government; capable of continuing services and ensuring security and order.

In Ethiopia, *there are many issues to think through if we are to see an authoritarian, one-party, one-ethnic group dominated government replaced by a more genuinely democratic government; representative of the broad diversity of Ethiopians. It will likely require transitional leadership. Without careful preparation and planning, we will not have such a transitional government ready to assume such leadership. Such planning is an important strategic goal;* however, in addition to being prepared, we also know that there are many resources among Ethiopians, even in the EPRDF, within the country.

We have personally heard from many of these from a variety of different areas of responsibility within the EPRDF system—from government offices to the security forces to the military to the courts. These individuals are trying to live in a repressive society, but they are not true supporters of the EPRDF; instead just waiting for the right time to join with a viable movement of the people for freedom and justice. They can be of help. Just like in Tunisia, first the military and now the security forces have joined the people in saying they have had **ENOUGH** of dictatorship and corruption!

3. Cooperation:

Those nations which have freedom now did not do it alone, but cooperated with other individuals and groups, around shared values and goals, in bringing about a movement of, for and by the people. Many of us in the Diaspora are blessed to be living in freedom; paid for by those who came before us. Freedom in Ethiopia will not be free, but will only come with a price. We cannot expect others to “pay more” or care about it more than we do ourselves; nor should we expect all the sacrifice and work to be done by a few.

Ethiopians have learned a dysfunctional dependency on others—leading to a victim mentality. This is not who God made us Ethiopians to be. He has blessed us with all the abilities we need and given us a beautiful and resource-rich land. We were not always so passive; and therefore, *we do not have to continue seeing ourselves as helpless. We cannot simply complain or blame others while doing little ourselves. Gaining our freedom will require much from us and not only from one group, working alone.*

Everyone within the map of Ethiopia should see themselves as Ethiopian; not as a tribe. It should not be a movement for the benefit of one ethnic group; but instead, a cooperative effort for the benefit of all groups. One-tribe domination or one-family domination, like we have now, or as we have had in the past, is a threat to the survival of our nation. Even our nationality should not make us forget the humanity of our neighbors across our borders; but *should instead, help us develop greater regional, continental and global respect, harmony and cooperation. What we seek in Ethiopia must be started within the hearts and minds of each of us.*

For us within the SMNE, *we will continue to work on a strategy to strengthen the movement, to mobilize the people and to prepare for the future; in cooperation with others. We will do whatever we can with the resources we have available; realizing we could move more quickly or more effectively with more resources.* We in the SMNE have received much encouragement from Ethiopians; for example, people say to us, “I’m standing behind you,” or “Keep doing what you are doing,” or “Never give up;” but then, sometimes forget that we could “do better” or “stand stronger” through tangible action or support. *Encouragement is wonderful, but if you are capable of helping as well, please do both!*

Right now, *will you make a commitment to support ESAT <http://www.ethsat.com/> on a monthly basis of even \$20 a month as well as consider supporting those other media groups or organizations that you believe are making a difference?*

We know that it is a matter of time before there is a “**revolution**” for the “**liberation**” of humanity in Ethiopia; replacing a sordid history of “**liberation of ethnicity**” for *one’s own family, village or tribe*. As we revere God and follow His ways of living rightly among each other, *it will bring a new Ethiopia where we recognize how each of us is created by a Holy God.* Only then *will we come out of our small, self-serving ethnic boxes into a freer, more civil, more compassionate, more peaceful and more well-functioning Ethiopia; for “no one ethnic group or tribe will be free until we are all free!”* These are principles worth fighting for!

Do you feel the breeze of change yet? =====

Please do not hesitate to e-mail your comments to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE, at: obang@solidaritymovement.org . You can click at the following link <http://www.solidaritymovement.net/index.cfm> and filling out the required fields to be added on our mailing lists or to subscribe or to suggest material for inclusion. For a full archive and other resources, see <http://www.solidaritymovement.org/>. You can also join us on the Facebook page.