

The 3rd EAF-EARO & WMU-CADPR International Symposium on Ethiopian Development Studies, June 18-19, 2005, The Ghion Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Welcoming Remarks and Reflections

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Welcome to the 3rd International Symposium on Ethiopian Development Studies. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the participants of this 3rd bi annual conference. In particular, I thank those who have taken the time to write papers and came to the Symposium. I also want to thank those who have agreed to participate in other capacities such as session chairpersons or moderators.

Please look at the summary program on page 3 for a quick glance followed by details in the plenary sessions. There will be adjustments that will be announced at each session. As you can see there are eight sessions (4 sessions each day and two invited lectures). There are two major general themes in each of the two days: *Day I. Agriculture, Natural Resources and Technology Issues*, and *Day II. Economics, Civil Society, Conflict and Globalization Issues*. These are, in turn, subdivided into eight plenary sessions driven by the topics of the papers received through an open International Call for Papers posted about one year ago. I believe these sessions and many of the papers capture some of the key development issues and problems in Ethiopia. This conference continues the tradition of bringing scholars and professionals from Ethiopia and overseas, including from the Ethiopian Diaspora. About 34 papers and presentations are listed in the program, of which 20 are from overseas and the rest from Ethiopia. Of the 20 presenters at least 4 presenters have informed us at the last minute, they are unable to attend due to the unfortunate post-election incident and the associated travel international warnings. Having said this, I am pleased to report we have the critical mass of papers for presentation and discussion over two days at this conference.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank those who have made this conference possible. My first thanks go to EARO, and in particular to the Director General, Dr. Tsedeke Abate for his willingness to co-sponsor the Conference. I never met Dr. Tsedeke before I contacted him by e-mail, but when I asked him for co-sponsorship almost one year ago, he agreed with enthusiasm. My thanks also go to the Deputy Director General of EARO, Dr. Aberra Deressa and Ato Tesfaye Zegeye, Head of Socio-Economics Department at EARO. My thanks also goes to the EAF, a Michigan based non-profit organization of academics and professionals, for which I am a founding board member and a recently elected Executive Director. EAF is a membership association of academics interested in the causes of higher education and development in Ethiopia. EAF contributed about half of the expenses to this conference as it has done in July 2003 when the conference was last co-sponsored by Institute of Development Research (IDR), Addis Ababa University.

Please allow me to recognize three members of EAF in the audience which include: the Board Chairperson, Professor Teshome Wagaw of the University of Michigan, Dr. Alem Habtu of New York, and Mr. Paul Henze of Bethesda Maryland. If you are interested in becoming a member and/or interested in activities of EAF, please check its website www.ethiopianamericanfoundation.com for further information.

EAF is engaged in activities that include supporting graduate student and faculty research, and supporting this international symposia series. So, I invite and encourage you to become a member and shape its future direction.

EAF is non-partisan organization that promotes the causes of higher education and development in Ethiopia. It leaves politics, like religion, to the individual members but tries to be non-partisan and fair in its collective or organizational pronouncements.

I must also thank the staff of CADPR at WMU who have been helpful in this process. In particular, thanks to Blen Solomon, A doctoral Candidate in Applied Economics who has come to present a paper and to help with the conference, and Ms. Rena Lynema Administrative Assistant at that Office. Finally, I would to ask who have agreed to serve as session chairs listed in the program in a short notice, and extend a warm welcome to other guests

I was selected by the Fulbright Senior Specialist program and hosted by the Institute of Development Research (IDR). IDR also hosted me in 2002 when I came under a different Fulbright Program under the Department of Education. I thank IDR and Office of Vice President for Research and Post Graduate Programs at AAU for hosting my visit. I arrived on May 8 for a period of six weeks or 42 days, in time to witness the historic elections in Ethiopia. I was able to complete the tasks I proposed under the Fulbright Program. I had planned to travel outside Addis Ababa to the regional universities such as Alemaya, Dehub, Gondar and Bahir Dar Universities. However, these plans did not materialize due to the travel restrictions related to the unfortunate post election violence. I hope to come back to follow up some of the initiatives that related to academic initiatives that I have began during this visit.

I would like to end my brief remarks by reflecting on significant political events that occurred during my short visit. I feel I came at a historic time in the political history of Ethiopia. I was fortunate to silently observe the overwhelming turn out of Ethiopians at the grass root levels to engage in the first free exercise of political choice. The May 15 elections opened the opportunity that Ethiopia for the first time in its long and distinguished history, can choose between a ruling party and significant opposition party(s) and that the Country has a potential to make a peaceful democratic transition in governance. In spite of the post-election events that led to the senseless violence and loss of innocent lives, the opportunity toward democratic governance has began and needs to be sustained by all political parties and all stakeholders under enlightened leadership.

In my view, the best that can happen for Ethiopia is to maximize pluralism of political views at the next parliament with significance presence of the opposition, regardless of the outcome of July 8, 2005. If this happened it will enable engagement in serious dialogue in key constitutional and policy issues that may lead to significant political and economic reforms along democratic lines. If this process is kept peaceful, credible, and guided with maturity and honesty by all political groups, both ruling and in opposition, it is likely to raise the quality of the political, economic and social programs or policies of Ethiopia for the next election in 2010 and beyond, and thereby provide clear alternative political programs or choices guided by two or three viable loyal political parties that may differ on social and economic policy matters, but with a shared unity within diversity and democracy.

This outcome will also give real economic and political freedom and choice for Ethiopia to be governed by a freely elected representative government. Ethiopia may then be in a position to solve the political and institutional problem from which many African states suffer, with a potential to quickly move toward peaceful and sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation, and combating recurrent famines. This may also lead to what can be termed as the Ethiopian Renaissance. The Ethiopian political problem can only be solved through a process of credible constitutional and policy reform where the basic institutions and pillars democratic governance are allowed to evolve and mature before extremist partisan power politics can be played. These pillars include building the development of basic institutions and rules of democratic governance around the world such as for example term limits key holders of power, periodic open and free elections, the rule of law, the free press, an independent judiciary, and improved land policy, educational policy and other related political and economic reforms that can only be enabled through a process of an open, inclusive and peaceful dialogue that will provide the political choices for Ethiopians. But, the challenge of reaching that point is formidable as you all know. But, there is no reasons why Ethiopia cannot achieve that democratic outcome peacefully just like other developing nations that have achieved provided there is enlightened leadership, good will, and trust from all stakeholders.

The solution to the political or the problem of governance in Ethiopia is possible with hard work, enlightened leadership, trust, and good by all concerned. For this to happen politicians both in power and those aspiring for power should learn to change their thinking from a culture of zero-sum thinking to positive sum or enlightened thinking. The alternative to this failure in learning will be elite driven senseless conflicts, wars, and humanitarian disasters that other societies in Africa and the Middle East find themselves. With these personal reflections, let us engage in productive and engaging research based dialogue on the various dimensions and issues of development issues in Ethiopia over the next two days. Thank you for your attention.
