

IT IS TIME TO STAND UP!  
January 15, 2007

***"The Only real prison is fear, and the only real freedom is freedom from fear"***

Aung San Sun Kyi.

***"Repression is not the way to virtue. When people restrain themselves out of fear, their lives are by necessity diminished."***

Mihaly Csizsentmihalyi

It has been 626 days since the People of Ethiopia have spoken loud and clear for peace, unity and economic growth; and said "No" to ethnic politics and racial bigotry. It has been 441 days since our courageous and selfless Leaders have been incarcerated.

I remember a PalTalk discussion forum with Dr. Yacob Hailemariam and Judge Birtukan Mideksa, during which attendees of the forum promised their strong support to the cause of Kinijit. I remember the standing ovation Engineer Hailu Shawel got from the audience in Washington DC. "We will stand by you ... You are our heroes... Please do not take your seats in the parliament," Diaspora Ethiopians loudly declared.

Kinijit Leaders listened to the people and stood for Democracy and Ethiopiawinet. They stood against dictatorship, ethnic politics and the sham democracy. They did their homework. Had they joined the EPRDF controlled Parliament and easily given up, they could have easily spared themselves from prison life. They could have compromised Kinijit's principle and made deals with the government. They could have been given ministerial positions. They could easily have been like us. Ethiopia is not more mother to them than to us.

However, Kinijit leaders went to prison because they are visionaries and have faith in the people. They believed the people, with the help of the Almighty God, will soon deliver them from Kaliti Prison. Though emotionally and physically painful their incarceration has been (to them and their families), they are filled with hope and are seeing a prosperous, unique and democratic Ethiopia beyond the walls of Kaliti prison. **The hope of a better Ethiopia has given them the strength to endure their pain.**

When Kinijit leaders fulfilled their historic and patriotic duty with courage and determination, it was up to us to take the torch and intensify the non-violent peaceful struggle. From Kaliti prison the Leaders proclaimed:

***"We the leaders, members and supporters of CUDP both inside and outside of prison will continue our peaceful struggle. Therefore, we respectfully call on you to stand with us and continue mobilizing for the peaceful, legal struggle both within and outside of the country until the ruling party comes to the table in search of a negotiated resolution of all outstanding issues that led up to the current crisis."*** [1]

Kinijit leaders in Kaliti did their homework. They were courageous, heroic and selfless. Let us do ours. It all starts from each one of us. Ethiopia is equal for all Ethiopians. There is no reason one would pay more sacrifice than others. It is time to speak out and assert our freedom in our country. We are all created in the image and likeness of God. God has given

us a country called Ethiopia. He has given us the right to live in peace and dignity in Ethiopia. The EPRDF must not be allowed to continue taking away from us our right and our dignity that God gave us and is only ours.

Let our silence end. We may not have supported the EPRDF. We may not have directly contributed to the incarceration of our Leaders. However, our silence is the reason Kinijit Leaders, journalists and human right activists are still in jail. Our silence is providing bullets for the EPRDF forces.

In every struggle there are ups and downs. Some may say, "It is impossible to force change in the Meles administration". Our effort may be seen as meaningless. On the surface Kinijit may seem "vanished". The situation in Ethiopia may be "calm" with Prime Minister Meles at the helm of power. **HOWEVER, WE SHOULD NEVER GIVE UP.** It may take years. We might not see a free Ethiopia in our time. But our children will one day rejoice in a free, prosperous and democratic Ethiopia.

It is in this context that I call for a renewal of spirit. Instead of being filled with fear and despair we should learn to believe in ourselves. "What is man without freedom" [2] said Judge Birtukan Mideksa. A life lived in fear and despair is no better than death. A life lived without a purpose is a tragedy. A man who only thinks of himself and forgets where he came from, is a man who is spiritually weak and sick.

It is my hope that the prisoners of conscience in Kaliti would be unconditionally released on February 19, 2007. However, should the Ethiopian government refuses to listen to the people and says no to peace and reconciliation, Ethiopians must be ready to showing what **PEOPLE'S POWER** is all about.

In the mean time I call on:

- Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to give peace and hope a chance. Professor Mesfin Woldemariam said :

***" I plead with you, in the name of your children, your compatriots who have sacrificed their lives, and all Ethiopian parents, please do not block off this opportunity that you have opened up to Ethiopians to become free" [3]***

Mr. Meles listen to the plea of this great man of peace and father of all Ethiopians.

- On all TPLF members to play a major role in pressuring their leadership to accept dialogue and peace. The current leaders of TPLF have divided and polarized Ethiopians all over the country. They have even created chaos and mistrust among Ethiopians from Tigray. Is this what tens of thousands of TPLF fighters from Oukuro, Tenben, Enderta, Aksum, Adwa .. sacrificed their lives for?

Kinijit leaders appreciate the sacrifices paid by TPL F members. They believe that TPLF members are part of the struggle for democracy. They totally disassociate the party members from the leaders. From Kaliti prison they said:

***"We extend our call to all peace loving members of the EPRDF who do not choose to sell out the sense of purpose and the sacrifice you and your***

***compatriots have made in return for a short lived power. As we believe that you are a part of the struggle for democracy, we implore you to have the courage and step forward so that you may demonstrate that you are not party to the effort of the leaders of your organization to throw the country into total chaos. This crisis being pushed by your leaders is anathema to both the ideals of democracy we all pursue as good citizens as well as the country we leave for our children.” [1]***

- On opposition members in the Ethiopian parliament to introduce a bill demanding for the unconditional release of political prisoners. This will be an opportunity for them to show that they are real oppositions, not there to warm the parliament’s chairs and receive a 3000 Birr monthly salary. Should they fail to take clear and concrete steps, they can be assured that the political consequences will be grave and serious. Their inaction will surely be translated as standing against the will of the people.
- On all opposition parties headquartered abroad (OLF, UEDF) and civic groups (Tegbar League, Ethiopian Teachers Association...) to show their solidarity with prisoners in Kaliti and work together with Kinijit in its **peaceful and non-violent struggle**.
- On Ethiopians at home and abroad to remember their national duty and responsibility to do all that they can to secure the release of the prisoners in Kaliti.

A fellow Ethiopian so discouraged by events in Ethiopia recently said to me that Ethiopia is cursed. Yes on the surface it may look like we are cursed. However, Ethiopia is not cursed. **Ethiopia has “US”**. If we stop being selfish and prepare ourselves to pay a little sacrifice we can turn around the fate of our country. With the help of the Almighty God we shall overcome.

President George W. Bush, when referring to when the Americans will leave Iraq said: “As the Iraqi forces stand up we will stand down”. Fellow Ethiopians, as we stand up, the undemocratic forces in Ethiopia will stand down.

It is time to stand up!

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[1] <http://www.kinijit.org/content.asp?contentid=1138>

[2] <http://www.kinijit.org/content.asp?contentid=1168>

[3] [http://www.mesfinwoldemariam.org/docs/MWM\\_OpenLetter\\_PM\\_2005.pdf](http://www.mesfinwoldemariam.org/docs/MWM_OpenLetter_PM_2005.pdf)