

As you will be aware, in the last few months, A Week in the Horn has run a series of articles on 'Ensuring the Integrity of the Forthcoming Elections'. With voting taking place in two days time, we thought it might be apposite and of interest to provide a link to half a dozen of the most immediately relevant of these columns .

The whole series of 23 articles can also be found on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website under the title:

[http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press\\_Section/Ensuring\\_Election\\_Integrity.PDF](http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/Ensuring_Election_Integrity.PDF)

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010: ***Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: Sweden's unfounded allegations – is this the way to promote democracy?***

It has been a little over 15 years since the first ever press law was introduced in Ethiopia, a development which sparked off an unprecedented level of growth in the number of press and media outlets. These have, over the years, promoted a significant variety of views on a broad range of issues. They have provided full opportunities for people to exercise freedom of expression without fear of censorship or any form of government interference. They continue to provide the same opportunity today.

Certainly there were originally problems in the development of the private press. There was an all-too-frequent lack of professionalism, and some papers failed to play the role that might have been expected to advance the basic tenets of democracy and good governance, deliberately encouraging violence and illegal activity. Despite this, the Government's response towards these outlets was very careful. It made no effort to implement most of the legal measures it could have taken in these circumstances, and exercised considerable self-restraint towards even the most recalcitrant media outlets in order to encourage and support the concepts of freedom of speech and expression.

One of the newspapers to exercise its constitutional rights in connection with freedom of expression was Addis Neger, an Amharic weekly that first appeared on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, 2007. The paper was well known for its scathing criticisms of the Government, but it was not the only media outlet critical of the Government, nor even the most outspoken. Despite its critical political line, Addis Neger never faced anything in the way of an official government complaint, much less any sort of persecution, though some of its articles and editorials were criticized by other papers. In fact, the Government did not even take any action after Addis Neger illegally attempted to solicit funds from various Western Embassies for its own private fellowships without informing the Ministry of Education. There was never any suggestion that the editors might face criminal charges on account of their work. Indeed, the editors of Addis Neger actually said as much on TV only a few weeks before they left the country. In a TV documentary which included interviews with many other editors and journalists, from both government and independent media, Addis Neger's Managing Editor, Mesfin Negash, said specifically: *"We have never been subject to any form of censorship by the government nor has the government ever tried to interfere in our press activities; no government official has ever instructed us what the content of our paper should or should not be."*

Another member of Addis Neger's editorial board, Tamrat Negera, in the same documentary corroborated his managing editor's remarks and underlined the prevailing

atmosphere under which the press operated: *“Two of the greatest achievements of the new political order in the last 15 years [since 1993] are the freedom to form political parties and the press.”*

It is, therefore, surprising to find these same editors claiming, one month after their ‘flight’ out of the country, that they had been forced to close their paper down and flee from Ethiopia because they “feared persecution and intimidation” by the Government. Immediately after the Addis Neger editors made these claims public, the Government launched an enquiry into the circumstances of their departure and the reasons for it. The investigation rapidly confirmed that the three editors, namely, Abiy Teklemariam, Tamrat Negera and Mesfin Negash, had left Ethiopia quite openly and legally from Bole International Airport on September 29, October 4 and November 12 respectively, and without difficulty. It might be noted that Abiy Teklemariam the first to leave has now enrolled at Green Templeton College, Oxford, UK on a scholarship. If, in fact, as they claim, the Government had really devoted so much time and energy to threatening them, and was planning to arrest the trio, it is hard to understand why immigration officials at the airport, when it came to the point, allowed the three to leave without difficulty.

Indeed, the investigation revealed that Addis Neger, far from being an ordinary, if highly opinionated, private newspaper, devoted to accuracy and truth as it claimed, was rather more involved in opposition politics than it had pretended to be and it was anything but an impartial and balanced paper. It could indeed be identified as a paper for the opposition as it made clear in claiming recent prison sentences as “political” rather than legal in its editorial of August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009, indicating the nature of the campaign of which it was a part. This was underlined by the statements made during the recent media campaign launched by the editors after they left Ethiopia, in which they finally made clear their own political interests. The set of demands put forward as pre-conditions for a resumption of publication, including the release of “political prisoners”, the replacement of the electoral board and what amounted to a change of government, came straight from the more extreme elements in the opposition.

On December 16<sup>th</sup>, the story of Addis Neger’s self-closure took a new turn when Sweden’s Minister for International Cooperation, Gunilla Carlsson, issued a statement attacking the Government of Ethiopia, claiming that the closure of Addis Neger showed that freedom of expression was becoming increasingly limited in Ethiopia. She claimed it was a cause of great concern that journalists were being harassed, and one of the few independent newspapers in the country had been closed. Sweden went even further, using its position as the recent chair of the European Union presidency, to encourage the European Union to take up a similar position. Two days later, the European Union adopted a statement urging the Government of Ethiopia to ensure that allegations of harassment and intimidation were investigated and, if proven, those responsible should be held to account.

The Swedish statement is a serious indictment against the Government of Ethiopia, and one based, as already noted, on totally unfounded allegations. It’s no more than a smear campaign attacking the Government on fallacious grounds in connection with press

freedom and democracy. The Swedish Minister clearly raised no question over the veracity of the claim made by the editors of Addis Neger. That the claim was made at all was apparently all the evidence Minister Carlsson needed to make her unsupported and groundless allegations. Such a position can only be described as hypocritical, coming as it does from people who have been encouraging the likes of Addis Neger to deliberately stage the closure of their papers, facilitating their travels abroad and financing their media campaign in recent weeks by helping them propagate their story as a rallying cry for anti-government elements.

This statement by the Swedish Minister must be rejected and condemned. In addition to being inaccurate, it is seriously misguided. There is no doubt, for instance, that the claim made is, to say the least, certainly unhelpful for the development of democracy in Ethiopia. It is extremely intrusive and appears indicative of a desire to try to micro-manage Ethiopia's democratization process from Stockholm. It is, in fact, an extremely ill-advised attempt by Sweden to try to deny Ethiopia's ownership of its own democratic processes. It cannot succeed. It cannot be allowed to succeed. We have made it clear time and again that non-citizens and nationals of other states are in no position to ensure the growth of a viable press in Ethiopia. That is something that has to come from within, a natural growth from Ethiopia's own continuous process of press freedom and democratization.

It might be added that although the Swedish Minister was quick to echo unconfirmed and gratuitous claims by Addis Neger's editors, she didn't acknowledge the electoral Code of Conduct signed by ruling and opposition parties with the aim of making next May's national elections competitive, peaceful, free and fair. This was in fact a development characterized as 'historic' by the majority of the independent press in Ethiopia, and it was a great pity that Sweden was apparently not prepared even to notice such a development. Some 65 political parties agreed to the Code, developed after extensive discussions, before it was submitted to Parliament and passed into law last week. By any standard it is a major step forward in helping the parties build healthy democratic relationships and resolve political differences through peaceful dialogue.

The recent utterance of the Swedish minister must in fact be seen as both reckless and intemperate. It is an unfortunate example of paternalism, out of place in this post-colonial world. In all frankness, the position taken, and the attack on Ethiopia, has no justification. The claim that freedom of expression is becoming increasingly limited in Ethiopia is purely polemical. Ethiopia continues to enjoy the presence of dozens of private newspapers which operate freely. The quality of the press overall may still leave a lot to be desired, but it is baffling that Sweden should attack Ethiopia's record.

But this approach does not appear to be accidental. A brief perusal of a recent Swedish policy paper entitled "Government Communication on Swedish Democracy Support" certainly suggests something more. This policy paper is full of details on how to "support democracy" across the developing world, under what it calls a "Global Agenda for Freedom". Its suggestions including allowing Sweden the right to meddle in the internal affairs of other sovereign countries by supporting opposition parties, individuals, "social

movements” or exile groups, which might bring about changes in the governance of sovereign states. The idea of democracy, firmly founded on the free choice of people, or the concept of sustainable democracy as a home grown, organic structure, not something imposed from outside, seems in fact to be suspect as far as Sweden is concerned. The policy paper specifically states: “the assumption that democratic change will be initiated from within rather than from without should not serve as an argument for not supporting democratic forces outside the system” (p.50). This is both a condescending and a dangerous ambition. The policy paper also envisages using the EU as a vehicle to advance such an intrusive agenda: “the Government underlines the need for more effective communication by the EU of the content of its democracy support program which emphasizes support for local actors” (p. 69). This perhaps explains the EU Presidency statement issued only two days after the Swedish Minister’s comments.

The decision of the Government of Sweden to engage Ethiopia through media polemics can only be described as thoughtless and injudicious, threatening to jeopardize the growing levels of constructive engagement that Ethiopia enjoys with the European Union. Indeed, it appears designed to sidetrack Ethiopia into recriminations over the issue of press freedom, diluting the present emphasis on constructive dialogue. This is clearly detrimental to the mutual trust and understanding so essential for a healthy bilateral relationship between states. Sweden, and indeed other stakeholders, should recognize the danger of making such meddlesome and intrusive statements on the basis of fallacious and inaccurate information, particularly in the absence of any effort to investigate their reality. They should rather work to enhance relationships built upon the basis of mutual trust and interest. Positions taken without verification undermine the respect that states should have for each other, a respect normally based on the conviction that positions are taken up in good faith, even if they are not necessarily laudatory.

January 15<sup>th</sup> 2010: ***Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: The wider implications of the Proclamation on the Code of Conduct for Political Parties***

The House of People’s Representatives has adopted the Proclamation to Provide the Code of Conduct for the Political Parties. This is indeed a milestone in the democratization process in Ethiopia. For the first time in the history of Ethiopia, political parties negotiated, and agreed, a set of binding rules to govern their conduct, rules which are now codified as law of the land. It is a unique piece of legislation, and sets a far reaching precedent going well beyond the bounds of party politics in Ethiopia, and provides an example for the whole region. It is not just aimed at ensuring that the 2010 elections are free, fair, peaceful and credible. It also endows a legacy of a firmly and legally institutionalized system to govern all political parties in Ethiopia. It is particularly fitting that the ruling party and the three opposition parties, which jointly initiated, negotiated and agreed on the first draft of the Code of Conduct, have received much deserved accolades from Ethiopians from all walks of life and from members of the international community. To their credit, they strove to include all interested political parties to contribute to the further development of the code of conduct. They succeeded in attracting the support of over sixty political parties and it is fair to say that the final

codification of the Code of Conduct by the legislature stamps it as a one of the major pillars of democracy in Ethiopia. The inclusive processes of the adoption of the law, and its highly innovative contents, have far reaching implications for democracy in Ethiopia. It promises to be a standard bearer for democracy well beyond the borders of Ethiopia.

The process and content of the new law follows a model instrument prepared by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). International IDEA's concept allows for a code of conduct to be part of the electoral law, or to be provided for in legislation to prescribe the conduct of parties, or to be agreed to by political parties, as an outcome of negotiations either among themselves or, more commonly, as a result of negotiations moderated by a third party. It may be agreed to by the parties, and then embodied in law, or it could be determined by a third party, such as an election administration body. In Ethiopia's case, the four parties chose to negotiate among themselves, and once they had agreed on the text, it was open to further improvement by other parties. It was this revised text, endorsed by almost all the remaining political parties, that was adopted into law by the national legislature.

Following this same International IDEA's model, the Proclamation to Provide the Code of Conduct for the Political Parties provides clear guidance and an institutional set-up to govern the conduct of political parties. Importantly, it demonstrates that lessons were learnt from the 2005 elections and a determination not to repeat the mistakes committed then. In this regard, the law binds political parties, candidates, members and supporters of political parties to ensure that this and all subsequent elections are guided by ethical rules of conduct and that they are transparent, free, legitimate, fair, peaceful, democratic and acceptable to the people. A central point is that it demonstrates full respect to the people as a source of state authority. This, indeed, is a cardinal principle of any democratic process, and it is closely linked to another critical element of the Proclamation: human and democratic rights have to be fully respected to foster a culture of civilized and peaceful struggle. The Proclamation lays down the cornerstones of the rule of law: respect for constitutional organs such as the National Electoral Board, the mass media and the judiciary; their ability to function independently and impartially, free from any political party pressures; the enabling of the National Defence Forces to discharge its responsibilities based on the Constitution and outside the influence of any political party.

In a clear departure from the past traditions of mutual distrust, the law emphasizes the need to work together on matters of common interest and delimits a determination to abide by the process and outcome of a legally conducted election as an expression of the will of the people. It provides for the promotion of tolerance and the conduct of political campaigns free of hatred and suspicion. It makes it clear it rejects any attempt to stay in power against the will of the people and emphasizes that any activity aimed at taking political power, through any means other than those provided by the Constitution, is not acceptable.

The Proclamation recognizes the imperative for political parties to work jointly for its implementation and thereby contribute to the freedom of the press, human rights, democracy, the rule of law and the over-all development of the peoples of Ethiopia. The

environment thus created will enable all parties to enjoy free and open competition. It is about sharing responsibility for the nurturing of democracy in the country, about the growth of a culture of democracy enhancing mutual respect and tolerance. The Proclamation recognizes the need to ensure fairness in terms of guaranteeing fair and impartial utilization by all parties of the resources, property and services of the organs of government for election purposes. It underlines the responsibility of the political parties to ensure that exercising the right of any Ethiopian to elect, or be elected, is not impeded by any influence or obstacle. The parties are also responsible for creating awareness of democratic processes and for the carrying out of education and training. The need to institute procedures to investigate and rectify grievances submitted by political parties on election matters is another critical aspect of the Proclamation, which has also established a Joint Council of Political Parties to ensure the implementation of the Proclamation.

There is no doubt that the Proclamation, and the process of its adoption, has broken the pattern of mistrust and acrimony that has characterized party politics in the past. Political parties are, of course, the essential linchpin of a multiparty democracy. They alone make an organized and functioning democracy possible. Political parties allow for different views and political options of governance to be channelled for debate for the electorate, empowering it to elect a government based on informed choice through peacefully conducted elections. And as political parties are central to a multiparty political system, it is imperative that their conduct is governed by a set of rules applicable to all. Such rules are designed to ensure a level playing field. The rules of conduct also comply with Ethiopia's international obligations. It is worth noting that Ethiopia is one of the only three African Union member states to have so far ratified the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. It did so on 30 January 2007. Some of the most relevant objectives of this Charter include the promotion and enhancement of adherence to the principle of the rule of law premised upon the respect for, and the supremacy of, the Constitution and constitutional order; promoting the holding of regular free and fair elections to institutionalize the legitimate authority of representative government as well as democratic change of government; and the prohibition, rejection and condemnation of unconstitutional change of government. The Proclamation to Provide the Code of Conduct for the Political Parties implements these and other objectives and stipulations of the Charter in the most relevant way.

In the long term, the proper implementation of the Proclamation in good faith will help guarantee stability. It will prevent street violence, incitement or recriminations. The new law is, in fact, another instrument for the further entrenchment of democracy in Ethiopia, providing necessary safeguards against undemocratic tendencies. Implementation of the Proclamation on the Conduct of Conduct for the Political Parties will ensure that the upcoming elections are free from intimidation, instigation of violence, corrupt practices, and inflammatory or defamatory speech. It will help preserve the elections at all levels, and the entire electoral process, as celebrations of democracy and establish the primacy of the electorate with the exclusive prerogative to decide on which party can be entrusted with the honour and responsibility of running the country for the next five years.

February 26<sup>th</sup> 2010: *Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: the regional context*

The Horn of Africa is widely seen as a region in crisis and as one of the most disturbed areas of the world today. This is certainly an exaggeration but almost all the regional states continue to face major political and socio-economic problems, including the threat of extremism and terrorism, as well as piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, and with the added danger of climate change looming over all and one of the regional states committing itself to regional destabilization as a central element of its foreign policy. This view of the region has been reinforced by the recent election problems in Kenya, the resonance of Sudan's upcoming Presidential election for the future of both north and south Sudan and for next year's referendum on the future of Southern Sudan, and the delays in holding Somaliland's overdue Presidential elections, now expected later this year. Eritrea, of course, has no plans to hold any national elections or presidential elections in the foreseeable future. Ethiopia is, of course, holding its national and federal state elections in May.

The establishment of democracy in any country in the region is all the harder in the face of widespread under-development, problems of unemployment and the lack of literacy. As important is the failure of politicians to demonstrate any clear or genuine commitment to democracy, to accept its values, its rules, procedures or ethics. This brings us back to something we have referred to before here in Ethiopia, the failure of members of the opposition to play their necessary role within any democratic system; that is the concept of the loyal opposition, opposition functioning within the democratic and constitutional framework. Opposition parties have as much responsibility as a government or a ruling party to make a democratic system work effectively. Multi-party democracy is difficult to root in societies which are largely rural, non-industrial, poor, under-developed or pastoral. Even producing an accurate voters' roll is in itself a problem. There can be difficulties in the provision of information, and here again responsibility is central to any understanding of the role of the press and the media. The need to educate party members, in or out of power, and the media, in their roles is central to the development of democracy. It is a lengthy process and one that requires hard work from all to encourage the embrace of democratic concepts, as well as democratic rules and procedures. Successful, non-violent elections are a vital part of this; they are the responsibility of all parties and of all politicians.

Ethiopia failed to achieve non-violent elections in 2005. Despite a successful election itself, a combination of circumstances including the failure of responsibility at all levels led to severe post-election problems. The result was that the 2005 national and federal state election was not the example for the region that the Government might have hoped for. This time around, the Government anticipates that it will go better. It has done its best to ensure this will be the case with the Code of Conduct to regulate party behaviour and the agreements on media balance and usage and on campaigning.

All in all this should provide an impressive example for other states in the region, and one that will have particular resonance in neighbouring Eritrea where the Government has consistently refused to allow any manifestations of multi-party democracy. Genuine democracy, even if flawed, is anathema to dictators, and democracy in a neighbour is particularly unwelcome. Eritreans will be able to hear and (partially) see a democratic multi-party electoral process which President Isaias has made it clear he will never allow the Eritrean people to aspire to. Control, and indeed personal control, remains central to the mechanics of government in Eritrea. This is one reason why the example of a genuine multi-party vote in Ethiopia is so important, providing a real, visible and alternative option for the most militarized state in Africa, if not the world. The economic costs of Eritrea's long-term mobilization have been crippling but the continued insistence of national service does allow for a critical mechanism of control reinforced by a refusal to implement the Constitution or allow any national elections.

Given Eritrea's past record of efforts to destabilize Ethiopia it is no surprise that it is continuing its attempts to upset Ethiopia's democratic process, trying to take advantage of the relaxation in security which necessarily accompanies the operation of democratic procedures. Eritrea has already attempted to infiltrate members of some unregistered political opposition groups committed to armed struggle into Ethiopia. It has put considerable effort into support for Al-Shabaab in Somalia in order to try and impact on Ethiopia's policies, and in backing ONLF and OLF military and terrorist operations in southern Ethiopia. More can be expected.

None of this provides any excuse for not having a free and fair election (nothing can excuse that), but it does mean that President Isaias will continue to "fish in troubled waters". The combination of encouraging regional instability and Islamic radicalism in Somalia is a highly dangerous strategy with significant international implications; it resonates dangerously in the region even if it provides no serious threat to Ethiopia's stability. As Sally Healy notes the Eritrean Government may not have a stated policy to try to overthrow the Ethiopia Government, but "the main thrust of its regional action is building alliances with non-state rebel groups working against Ethiopia". There is no indication that Eritrea has any intention of suspending such activities during Ethiopia's elections.

Even the functioning of a mature consolidated democracy requires vigilance; how much more so in the case of an ongoing democratic process which is still fragile. Establishing a democracy in the absence of developed technology, socio-economic development, industrialism, universal education and other factors prevailing in Western Europe or North America will always be difficult. It requires knowledge and commitment – and responsibility – from all those involved, government and opposition alike. The result, however, should be an example that will reverberate beyond the confines of Ethiopia and provide a model and a precedent for the whole region.

With its aim of regional destabilization, and its own negation of democracy, Eritrea is currently the antithesis of Ethiopia, even if the latter's democratization process is still a matter in progress. The forthcoming elections among 80 million people, in the Horn of

Africa's largest state, can and should provide a real and valuable alternative scenario and an example for the whole region. This didn't happen in 2005 when events conspired against it and a significant element of the opposition refused to accept the role of 'loyal opposition'. This time round the omens are more propitious; and the potential rewards, within a more advanced democratic process, considerable.

March 12<sup>th</sup> 2010: ***Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: media roles and responsibilities***

It has been a while since Ethiopia embarked on a process of democratization that has achieved remarkable results over the years. Considerable progress has so far been made in putting in place the institutional mechanisms that help anchor the process on a firm basis. Ethiopia's democratization process, young though it is, has come a long way in ensuring the participation of the peoples of Ethiopia at all levels of self-governance.

Despite the significant progress made, the process has also faced a number of challenges both from within and without. On one hand, the lack of democratic culture and civilized discourse has certainly contributed to the often rancorous and chaotic relations between stakeholders which have further complicated the process. On the other, the reaction of the rest of the world towards the democratization process in Ethiopia has not always been constructive either. Detractors have never been in short supply. It is not uncommon to hear outrageous allegations by non-nationals in different capacities in the name of supporting democracy. Far from being helpful, such meddling has in fact contributed to the polarization of politics in the country by instilling a false hope among many in the opposition that change can be imposed from outside.

Among other institutions pivotal to ensuring the sustainability of the democratic process, the contribution of a free press and that of holding periodic, free and fair elections is all too palpable. It should not thus be surprising that freedom of the press and whether or not elections are free and fair have often been the centrepieces of most of the commentaries and criticisms in relation to the democratization process in Ethiopia. Both are instrumental in enabling citizens to express or make their choices of ideas or of leaders. Both are also instrumental in shaping the behaviour of political leaders by subjecting them to a periodic review of their actions. That much is true.

While the overall outcome of the elections and the manner in which they are conducted ultimately depends on the extent to which citizens take the process seriously, the press's role can also be decidedly unhelpful if its behaviour falls short of the standard of fairness required of any responsible media. Ethiopia's experience in this regard has been a sobering one, indeed. Our recent history is replete with incidents of press being used in stoking crises of all sorts by disseminating unfounded allegations. Whipped up time and again, an allegation often takes on a life of its own, irrespective of its being inaccurate and can be readily used by detractors of the process, from within and without, as a positive proof for de-legitimizing it.

Ethiopia has carried out a series of successful multi-democratic elections at all levels, though not without dispute (what elections ever are). But the role that the private press has played throughout the last three elections has been far from reassuring. More often than not, the private press has operated on a strictly partisan basis with the government invariably being at the receiving end of lopsided criticisms. It has for the most part behaved in a manner far from responsible. Much energy and space has been expended to discredit and de-legitimize the democratic process rather than to help strengthen it. Allegations by the private media about electoral irregularities have all too often found their way into the assessments by external commentators about the state of democracy in the country. The disturbances in the previous elections were in some measure the result of the press's proclivities to stoke up violence.

Now that preparations for the next elections are well underway, the media has been covering election-related issues. It is worthwhile to ask how much of what we saw during the previous elections has improved and to what extent is the media involved in the process this time around. As far as the public media goes, the allocation of air time and space in the public media has been agreed upon by the council of parties and this is being implemented accordingly. There have also been indications that private broadcast media is gearing up to play a part in this. These surely are encouraging signs. With the private press how much of its coverage is fair and balanced? The answer is mixed. There have been improvements. Some private papers appear to be taking care to cut back on the sort of allegations they used to toss around all too liberally. Nevertheless some papers still try to try to discredit the entire process as illegitimate. Instances of irregularity are spun out of all proportion. Allegations of harassment by opposition parties are given incessant coverage while government efforts to address these allegations count for little. A single incident of violence is given ten times more coverage than any positive developments however important and relevant. In some papers the proclivity to highlight the negative over the positive, or street violence over peaceful demonstrations, so commonplace in the past, remain alive. The similarity of content and tone with some of the vocal Diaspora-based opposition is unmistakable.

Unfortunately, foreign media have also developed a penchant for this type of sensational reporting. Attempts at external interference in the elections have not been confined to US Senators, or international advocacy organizations. It really does begin to look as if the international media is determined to try and impact the results of the election with both the timing and content of its stories. The BBC has even dragged up something dating back 25 years, quoting claims by two former colleagues who broke with members of the current government while they were all involved in a guerrilla struggle in the mid 1980s, and who have been trying to bring down the present leadership of Ethiopia ever since. Recently, they found a gullible enough BBC reporter to publicize their story just in time to try to influence the election, despite the fact that all those involved in cross-border food aid in 1984/85, without exception, have insisted there is no truth in the extraordinary claim that 95% of aid funds were being diverted to buy arms for the struggle against the Mengistu military dictatorship. Prime Minister Meles described the accusation as a complete lie, pointing out there would have been no military logic in selling food to buy guns. "We captured large amounts of guns and tanks. We did not need to buy arms...It

would have been completely suicidal to starve our own people. We would have had no movement if we had no people”.

Even without the plethora of evidence to the contrary, it is impossible to believe in any such diversion of aid, given the fact that the cross-border food aid program actually did save the lives of the hundreds of thousands in need in the guerrilla-held areas in those years. Given the paucity of the evidence produced by the BBC, and its origins, it is difficult to see this story, despite the denials of the journalists involved, as anything other than a deliberate attempt to affect the results of the forthcoming election. Certainly, we can be sure that those who supplied the alleged information, well-known and long-term critics of the EPRDF, did so in an attempt to affect the electoral support given to it. It is worth underlining that the suggestion that professional aid workers, even so long ago, allowed so much aid money to be misdirected into funding a rebel war is not only mischievous and unsubstantiated; it is also extremely threatening for those who work in the aid industry today.

Similarly, the timing of a recent story on VOA about the alleged jamming of the Amharic Services of Voice of America and of Germany’s Deutsche Welle, appears equally deliberate. To be fair the story does quote a denial from the spokesperson of the Government Communications Office, and it does also make clear that the VOA transmissions in Afan Oromo and Tigrinya which are broadcast on the same frequencies before and after the Amharic transmissions are heard normally. Nevertheless, the timing of the story, and the fact that VOA chose to raise the issue publicly rather than with the Government Communications Office directly, does suggest the intention was to have a political effect.

A recent statement by British Minister for Africa, Baroness Kinnock, given to the local media here in Addis Ababa shortly after she paid a visit here earlier in the year, also falls into the category of a deliberate effort to influence the election. Her comments make it clear that Baroness Kinnock apparently understood little of what she heard and saw on her visit concerning the Code of Conduct, the case against Ms. Birtukan Mideksa, or the independence of the National Electoral Board and other issues. Certainly, most of what she had to say appears to have been provided by rejectionist politicians in the Diaspora who have been recently flaunting their links to the Government of Eritrea. In her youth, Baroness Kinnock was an ardent support of the EPLF, and she still seems prepared to see the Government of Ethiopia through the prism of her past, as some sort of enemy!

It might be an exaggeration to see all this, and Senator Feingold’s remarks, as part of a concerted campaign against Ethiopia’s current electoral process, but the effect of these stories and of the way in which they have been reported in the media does suggest deliberation and intent, amounting to an attempt to interfere.

The media provides an invaluable channel of information between candidates and the public. A free media is one of the basic conditions for a pluralistic and democratic society. Freedom of expression, including the right of the media to collect, report, and disseminate information, news, and opinions, is a fundamental human right. It also

involves responsibilities to report accurately, and avoid abuse of what is in effect a privileged position in society. The media has a heavy responsibility. It does not always live up to it. That is why all stakeholders, candidates as well as voters, must realize the magnitude of the challenge and the need to protect the integrity of the process.

March 26<sup>th</sup> 2010: ***Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: the anti-government campaign in full swing***

Ethiopia embarked upon the process of democratization nearly two decades ago in the firm conviction that this was the only path to provide for the survival of the Ethiopian state and achieve the betterment of peoples' lives. The process was undertaken not because this is what the developed world preaches but as a result of the Government's commitment to upholding the fundamental principles of democracy and its understanding that this is the only way to extricate people from the trap of poverty and its attendant violence. Aside from giving full credit to the universal values of political freedom, equality and social liberty, the Government has been equally vigorous in investing in the promotion of social justice and good governance without which these freedoms would mean little. Much has been achieved through the Government's pro-poor policies, but there have also been many hurdles to overcome. As we have seen repeatedly, the democratization process in Ethiopia has had to endure a whole series of challenges, mostly from without. Some policies have not always earned plaudits for the Government despite their success. Criticism has often come in the form of concern for human rights and democracy, particularly at the time of elections, orchestrated by the media but often originating various self-styled pundits, so-called human rights watchdogs, a very few US congressmen, one or two brazen European parliamentarians, and others.

For these self-appointed experts, whatever has been achieved is automatically discredited. No amount of progress in governance can be genuine. It is always no more than window dressing to offer a semblance of commitment to democratic ideals to donors, but is in reality geared to maintaining one-party domination. The destructive nature of this sort of campaign has been particularly apparent since the 2005 elections. No other recent development has drawn more media interest, and it still gets widespread coverage. The pattern is unmistakable. Every positive development in Ethiopia is drowned out by media's noise about 'post-election clampdown'. Media outlets and human rights' groups have been consistent in their support for this caricature of political developments in Ethiopia. Today, with the fourth elections around the corner, the campaign of vilification is back in full swing. HRW has come up with yet another report recycling its usual litany of allegations and the timing indicates it has made a conscious decision to take the opportunity to try to muddy the electoral waters. With HRW setting the tone, the Economist and other publications have been following suit. Not to be outdone, US Congressman Donald Payne not only seized the opportunity of a recent hearing on democracy in Africa to emphasize his membership of the anti-Ethiopian government bandwagon, he went out of his way to openly support the Government of Eritrea, despite being widely seen today as a rogue state, as part of his campaign to vilify the Government of Ethiopia. Frankly speaking, this particular Congressman has almost

become a laughing stock because of his emotional outbursts against the Ethiopian Government

Again and again, the line is that what promised to be a watershed in Ethiopia's history, the 2005 elections, was reversed by a Government clampdown. Details sometimes vary, but it is this so-called 'squandered opportunity' which provides the basis on which these groups, in defiance of actual facts, argue. While it is difficult to understand what exactly these disparate individuals and groups are really after, one or two points about this frenzy of concocting negative stories do spring to mind.

The first is that this has little if anything to do with democracy and human rights. If at all these critics are even remotely interested in democracy, their concern is less about the strength of democratic institutions in the country, or their lack, and more about the extent to which certain groups should have carte blanche to do what they want in Ethiopia. The opportunity that was squandered was that of victory for the opposition. The kind of democracy they are preaching has little to do with reality. Rather than being an expression of genuine concern for democratic ideals, it has been symptomatic of a dangerously arrogant tendency among these to try to lord it over poor countries however significant their progress might be. The obsession with the 'squandered opportunity' is consistently repeated; the claim is that there is no chance of an opposition victory because the EPRDF has put in place since 2005 a structural framework to make any opposition victory impossible no matter how strong the opposition might be. Human Rights Watch version is: "consolidating control of the local government structures was the EPRDF's first step to controlling the environment in which the 2010 elections would take place". It claims the EPRDF has pursued a vigorous strategy of shutting down opposition parties, purging dissent and used all possible means to recruit the population at large into the EPRDF. The way HRW interprets government actions, the lower levels of administration, kebeles and sub-kebeles, have no other purpose than to make life difficult for the opposition and ensure government/EPRDF control. For HRW kebeles "constitute the Ethiopian government's structural weapons in suppressing dissent."

The argument is ridiculous in more ways than one. In the first place these structures provide not a mechanism of control but a means for the fullest possible participation of the population in the political process. They also provide for co-ordination of development activities while taking account of local concerns. They may not exactly be congruent with the experiences of western academics but this does not mean they are any less democratic than similar structures elsewhere. They do serve to provide a forum for meetings; they also provide an important, even pivotal medium of communication, and a basis as functional units of administration and development closely linked to the realities of day to day existence.

Similarly, mass associations of youth or women, in which millions participate, are cited as further evidence that the EPRDF is consolidating its monopoly on power. That these are voluntary associations is something HRW and others refuse to accept. They claim these are part of EPRDF's "brave new world of human robots" who cannot speak out for themselves during elections! The consistent attack on the Charities and Societies

Proclamation gives the game away here. Democracy cannot be realized unless NGOs are given more freedom to contribute to enhancing democracy. The more NGOs there are, the more freely they are able to operate regardless of their composition or their aims, the more democratic the Government. NGOs, we are told, are the hallmark of democracy, the guardians of freedom, par excellence. Mass associations, however, are not. The belief embedded in this assumption is that NGOs are inherently democratic no matter what they do, how they do it or who organizes them. Mass associations, however, which depend for finances upon their members, not on donors, that have a large-scale local base, and which are deeply involved in policies of poverty reduction, cannot be trusted. NGOs, a designation that includes HRW, must be the central part of any democratic process.

This campaign is clearly now in full swing. The ‘recommendations’ of HRW are outspoken. Forget any interest in democracy. Use humanitarian aid to squeeze concessions for the opposition. Peddle the politics and forget about human rights. “Encouraging democracy” is after all no more than the quest by some interest groups for the space from which they can launch whatever projects they may have, to influence the direction and momentum of Ethiopia’s political process. This is the space for which HRW and its partners appear to be recruiting and organizing, to try to create an alternative political reality that would lend itself to intervention. It is this that explains the timing of the latest HRW report and the attached media fanfare. And this exactly expresses some of the challenges we face in ensuring the integrity of the upcoming elections.

April 16<sup>th</sup> 2010: *Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: party loyalty to rules of the game*

Strengthening of democracy in any country must largely depend upon the extent to which citizens take the process, and the institutions underpinning it, seriously. In a word, the success of a democracy building project depends on whether or not the citizens own the process. In the absence of a sense of ownership among various stakeholders, whether government or opposition parties, civic associations, individual citizens, achieving a meaningful level of democratization with no more than a declared embrace of lofty ideals can only be wishful thinking. In order to succeed in the process of building democracy, it is more than anything else necessary for stakeholders to be willing to remain true to their avowed beliefs, but even more to give their all to the further strengthening of the various institutions pivotal for democracy to take deeper root. At the very minimum, all stakeholders should be willing to abide by the fundamental rules of the game, ensuring the reliability and predictability of their own actions in a manner to help sustain a healthy regulation of the relations between and among each other. In fact, any regression to authoritarianism, as sometimes witnessed in Africa as elsewhere, can be attributed less to a lack of commitment to the ideals of democracy than to the reluctance by some stakeholders to properly observe the rules of the game in their efforts to achieve their intended alternative outcome to the process.

This particular challenge to the process of building democracy is nowhere more pronounced than the manner in which these stakeholders conduct themselves before,

during and after elections. Otherwise latent but undemocratic proclivities often start to rear their head just as electoral processes begin in earnest. This challenge can be particularly troubling as the gains made in building democratic institutions between elections are often suspect after election-related recriminations and counter-recriminations. The integrity of the entire process is rendered doubtful. In a context where some stakeholders place a higher premium on the outcome of elections rather than the integrity of the process, and third parties are all-too-ready to denigrate the conduct of the election, elections can fall short of engendering democratic ideals. Indeed, they can degenerate into circuses putting the sustainability of the process into question. As circumstances in May 2005 made very clear, the propensity of some stakeholders to try to short-circuit the way to power, the failure to show loyalty to the rules of the game, can certainly cause major challenges that can outlive their original context.

The campaign for the elections is now gathering pace by the day. It is, therefore, worthwhile to reiterate the need for a hard and serious look at the way various stakeholders in the Ethiopian body politic are behaving. Political parties are putting forward their political platforms in various media. The allocation of air time in the public media has clearly helped parties to access supporters and potential supporters across the country. The six televised debates among political parties have attracted a huge audience (the seventh debate is being held this evening). They have produced a significantly heightened interest in the content of the debates. Inter-party councils, as envisaged in the code of conduct, have been operating both at Federal and regional levels. Allegations of misconduct are therefore being handled in accordance with agreed procedures. There is a widespread sense of anticipation that the conduct of the election and the results will be as flawless as both government and opposition parties who are genuinely interested in the fairness of the whole procedure hope it will be. There does appear to be a much clearer understanding that the integrity of the elections are really crucial in ensuring the democratization process in the country can survive the gloomy predictions of its detractors abroad and the drab mimicry of their rejectionist elements within Ethiopia. As much as there is room for optimism, there are also indications that a lot more is still required both from government and opposition alike to hold undemocratic proclivities that might potentially stand in the way of conducting free and fair elections, in check.

Here, the idea of the loyalty of parties to the constitutional order cannot be overstressed. In fact, this is the centre-piece of any viable multi-party democracy. The most minimal knowledge of how democracy operates underlines the fact that the presence or absence of a loyal opposition, loyal that is to the constitutional order, is the difference between a functioning democracy and virtual anarchy. All parties should refrain from activities that undermine the rule of law or other democratic institutions for these are what will ultimately determine the viability of the entire democratization process. In the past, a major political undercurrent of the opposition in Ethiopia has been rejection of the concept of a loyal opposition. Opposition politics were often exemplified by debates full of sloganeering with a refusal to offer any hostages to fortune. Even today, the effect of this can be seen by a tendency of some in the opposition to consider anyone who expresses loyalty to the constitution as mere stooges of the government, however critical they may also be of government policies. The destructive effect of this mentality was

very clear in the missed opportunities of May 2005. It is still far from clear whether all opposition learnt sufficient lessons from that episode. Some members of the opposition have been recently publicly declaring they are ‘the rightful successors of the CUD of 2005’, implying that problems of 2005 have not entirely disappeared. Ironically, proponents of this rejectionist tendency actually draw their main support from actors hailing from political systems that thrive on the existence of loyal opposition.

All genuine Ethiopian political parties, of whatever political persuasions, must repudiate this rejectionist tendency and the insulting stance of its foreign benefactors. Temptations to relapse into old habits of incessant allegations at every opportunity should be avoided as much as possible. Whatever complaints there may be, real or perceived, are better left to the inter-party councils. This will progressively encourage a sense of confidence in the institutions among all the parties which should also bear in mind that only strict adherence to the rule of law and continued tolerance and mutual respect towards each other can bring the desired benefits to the peoples of Ethiopia. The responsibility for the integrity of the electoral process carries a lot more weight than merely the specific outcome of the voting. As a party contending for power, the ruling party is, of course, duty bound to abide by the rules governing all parties. On a more fundamental level, its sense of ownership of the entire process should, as always, inform its relations with other parties. Its willingness to accommodate the demands of opposition parties during the series of negotiations on the code of conduct was exemplary. But negotiations among parties must always enhance the rule of law and never erode it. The ruling party should continue to hold itself as much accountable to the rules of the game as all other parties. It is commendable that it is continuing the training of its cadres on the code of conduct and other relevant laws. No one is above the law, and as Prime Minister Meles reiterated in his address to parliament this week, the ruling party is more than willing to co-operate with all parties loyal to the constitution irrespective of their political differences. The Prime Minister made it clear the EPRDF would have no qualms whatsoever about removing from its ranks members that display any undemocratic proclivities or any found interfering in the activities of opposition parties. His party, he said, would rather get rid of any recalcitrant members in order to ensure the integrity of elections than ignore any unbecoming behaviour. Reassuring to those who are able to back up allegations with evidence but they will also need to demonstrate any element of reciprocity, and stick to the rules of the game throughout.

The government is under no illusion that there is room for complacency. It will continue to do its level best to encourage all parties to come to terms with the need to respect the rule of law. It will also continue to insist that the integrity of the elections cannot be held hostage by rejectionist elements with a penchant for the dramatic. It must continue to insist that anything that falls short of affirming the rules of the game is out. The democratization process can never be allowed to degenerate into an exercise in cynicism. The election cannot be allowed to serve as the forum for rejectionist politicians with divided loyalty and external sponsors dictating alien demands. The peoples of Ethiopia deserve, and will get, better.

May 7<sup>th</sup> 2010: *Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: a constructive role for the Diaspora*

With only two weeks to go before polling day, election day, 2010, promises to be historic in more ways than one. The campaign of the contending parties is getting warmer by the day, and there are clear indications that the momentum will continue. Citizens are gearing up for polling day to cast their ballots for favoured candidates. Observer missions, both from abroad and within, are either fully deployed or in the process of being deployed to various parts of the country. The preparations made so far and the feeling in the air seems to suggest that this is indeed going to be an election to remember. In contrast to the last national election, the conduct of most of the contending parties is encouraging. The role of other stakeholders is equally promising. The Electoral Board appears to be a lot more organized in terms of human resource and logistics than previously.

This positive assessment of the electoral process is not shared by everyone. In what has become an almost obsessive campaign to sabotage the elections, the Eritrean government has more than doubled its subversive activities by deploying terrorists to try to scuttle the process by any means. The who's who of 'Ethiopian' terrorist groups have been busy trying to carry out Asmara's cross-border attacks. The rejectionist elements among the Ethiopian Diaspora have also been trying to rally behind the Government of Eritrea as part of the effort to undermine the credibility of the election. They seem prepared to stop at nothing to create a semblance of chaos in the country. They won't succeed. The vigilance of the people and the security forces have already nipped many of these plots in the bud. There is even less likelihood that the noisy campaign by the rejectionist elements of the Diaspora-based opposition will have any impact. These particular elements have been in even more disarray than ever. In fact, it appears, at long last, that the silent majority in the Diaspora has begun to prevail over the prophets of doom who have so long dominated opposition Diaspora politics.

We have again and again reiterated that the building of democracy is a domestic affair, the success or failure of which largely depends upon the commitment of the peoples of the country and the extent to which they take the process seriously. The democratization process in Ethiopia is no exception. This doesn't mean that others cannot play a role. Ethiopians in the Diaspora and foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin are among those who can, and should, be involved. Under normal circumstances, the participation of any Diaspora-based groups will be largely economic, whether in the form of investing in their home country or helping to create networks that facilitate trade between their host country and their country of origin. Ethiopia's experience in this regard has been somewhat mixed. On the positive side, the number of Ethiopians residing abroad who have been willing to play a constructive role in the economic endeavours of the country has been steadily increasing. Equally, a lot more remains to be done both by the Government and by Ethiopians in the Diaspora. All-too-often for the wrong reasons, the political activities of a minority have proved more prominent than the economic role of Ethiopians in the Diaspora. The last eighteen years have seen an unhealthy plethora of

Diaspora-based opposition groups with undemocratic proclivities which have steadily tried to undermine the democratization process in the country. These groups have been characterized largely by a rejectionist tendency long on rhetoric and short on substance. They have done everything they can to nip the democratization process in the bud. Campaigns have been waged to lobby development partners to deny development aid to Ethiopia. Demonstrations have been staged to demand cuts in humanitarian aid for the needy or even the starving in Ethiopia. Western politicians and parliamentarians have been lobbied to enact bills that aim to punish the Government and peoples of Ethiopia for not submitting to the irrational demands of rejectionists and their benefactors and supporters. Even worse, these groups have often sought support and partnership with sworn enemies of the country, to synchronize their destructive campaigns against democratization in Ethiopia. The numerous alliances and fronts concocted together with the Government of Eritrea, and the terrorist campaigns they have financed, indicate just how sinister these elements have become.

Apart from these directly subversive activities, rejectionist elements in the Diaspora have also contributed to stirring up politics in a number of more insidious ways. They frequently prey on financial needs of domestic opposition elements trying to use legally registered groups as Trojan horses. Far from recognizing the independence of such organizations, they insist on dictating terms as to what they should do or not do in respect of domestic political activities. The role that these groups played during the last election vividly illustrated the extent to which such deals between Diaspora-based rejectionists and their internal contacts could threaten the political foundations. Unable to carry out their mission last time round, these groups have continued to dream up scheme after scheme to try and discredit the Government of Ethiopia by any means. They have become even more determined now the election is just around the corner, but there is little they can do to derail the process now. The failure of recent efforts to drum up support for their cause clearly shows that the previously silent majority in the Diaspora has said enough is enough. The turn-out for their latest series of meetings has been so low as to suggest that even their once hardcore supporters have given up. Their dalliance with the Eritrean government can hardly go further. Opposition calls to previously generous supporters for financial support has been falling on deaf ears.

By contrast, the level of participation by Ethiopians in the Diaspora in meetings with government officials in recent weeks has demonstrated that the great majority are not interested in the kind of violence preached by rejectionists and are even less inclined to offer to bank-roll their destructive activities. There is a growing readiness on the part of many Ethiopians abroad to organize themselves and work in cooperation with the government on projects covering various areas. There's a real understanding that greater dialogue and more constructive engagement is the way that Ethiopians in the Diaspora can play a meaningful role in the ongoing democratization process and growing economic development in the country. It all suggests that the upcoming election is indeed going to see the triumph of reason and moderation over that of rejection and violence, and that it will indeed provide a demonstration that the 'silent majority' have prevailed over the 'rowdy elements'.

May 14<sup>th</sup> 2010: *Ensuring the Integrity of the Upcoming Elections: the case for continuing vigilance*

Election Day is only a week away and electoral campaigns of the parties are already drawing to a close. The electoral process has generated a level of enthusiasm among various stakeholders and the process so far has proved its versatility and a level of maturity that has become a source of confidence for the people. The experience has for the most part been a rewarding one. Even some parties that were recently involved in the zero-sum politics of violence now appear to have come to terms with the changing times. The decision by the UWSLF to lay down its arms and join the peaceful democratic process at this time is a case in point and very welcome news, testifying to the growing level of confidence among parties that were previously opposed to the political system. There are clear indications that the politics of rejectionism are waning, giving way to tolerance and moderation.

However, there still remain lingering issues of concern. There have recently been several reports of incidents of electoral malpractice, and actual as well as attempted terrorist activities in different parts of the country. In addition to a fatal bomb attack in the northern area of the country, a number of terrorist plots orchestrated by the agents of the government of Eritrea have also been foiled by the Ethiopian security forces, largely thanks to the people's vigilance. Some sections of the legally registered opposition also seem to have been engaged in an apparent campaign to discredit the legitimacy of the elections by way of incessantly making unverifiable allegations, in a manner reminiscent of the deplorable developments of 2005. In another more alarming development, security officials have recently reported a bombing incident involving members of one opposition party targeting members of another party. The result was the death of a few civilians and one police officer. The brazenness of these attacks has left little doubt as to how murky the electoral process can get and the extent to which undemocratic proclivities of the past can materialize even when least expected.

It all demonstrates that however widespread the sense of optimism may be, the successful completion of the election can never be taken for granted. There are a host of reasons that make holding elections in this part of the world a very tricky business. Certainly, the regional context has hardly been amenable to the successful and smooth holding of elections. The existence of actors in the region, state and non-state alike, who are disinclined to embrace the ideals of democracy or the peaceful settlement of differences, has all too often proved problematic in the face of attempts to build viable democratic culture and effective good governance. The government of Eritrea may be a text book personification of this trend, and it's certainly the most vigorous of such actors, but it is hardly alone. The region does actually have more than its fair share of rejectionist elements. Equally, despite these long odds, Ethiopia has managed to register impressive results even though it has continued to be taunted by rejectionist forces. The results often go unnoticed or are even denigrated. This emboldens these elements led by the Eritrean regime in its campaign to try to bring about the collapse of Ethiopia's democratization process.

This brings us to the other challenge that continues to be posed against the successful completion of the electoral process, and against the democratization process and development endeavours. Ethiopia has, in fact, achieved numerous positive developments fostering confidence in the democratic process. The government has been doing a lot to bolster institutions entrusted with promoting and developing democratic culture. There are, however, those to whom no amount of goodwill is likely to persuade giving the ruling party the benefit of the doubt. Leaders of some opposition parties have left little doubt as to how small is the regard they have for the rules of the game. The pattern of behaviour of these parties has been consistent to a fault. They have flaunted in public their contempt for the constitution and institutions established under it, particularly the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. They have repeatedly shunned the overtures of the ruling and other opposition parties for negotiation and constructive engagement. They leave no doubt they have little use for the precepts of civilized discourse. They have made no secret of their disdain for the electoral process. They have repeatedly used whatever media access they have been given, courtesy of the law, to pile up allegation after allegation against the very institutions that made the process possible. They are all but certain the ruling party will rig the next elections; they claim the ruling party has never been genuine about anything related to democracy or elections. They have even openly declared their opposition to the deployment of AU observers and their distrust of the efficacy of the EU's observer mission.

It all indicates that rejectionism, despite its growing marginalization by the peoples of Ethiopia, is still near enough to rear its head whenever an opportunity presents itself. This becomes even more dangerous in the context of the feverish efforts of the government of Eritrea to unleash every kind of violence to try to scuttle the process by whatever means. These are challenges that need close attention and vigilance by the public.

The bottom line is that the success or otherwise of the democratic process depends upon the commitment of the peoples of Ethiopia. Developments so far have shown unequivocally that the process is indeed taking deeper root by the day. No amount of cynicism is going to set the clock back. Equally, with only a week to go before polling day, none of the negative developments of the past few weeks should be allowed to stand in the way of the success of the elections. People should continue to remain vigilant against destructive tendencies whether within Ethiopia or from threats from outside. As Prime Minister Meles emphatically stated last weekend, Ethiopia's patience towards regional spoilers has its limits. It is good to remind the likes of Eritrea not to be oblivious to this. More importantly, it is incumbent upon the peoples and government of Ethiopia to redouble their efforts to see that the country's progress along the path of democratization and rapid economic development are unhindered by the duplicitous campaigns of the sworn enemies of the process. Doing this will help to ensure that Election Day will successfully frustrate the forces of rejection and usher in the next chapter of Ethiopia's Renaissance.