

STATEMENT

BY

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to extend my warmest congratulations to you on your election to preside over this 64th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Permit me also to express my appreciation to the outgoing President for his effective leadership during the course of the last Session of the General Assembly.

We are grateful to our Secretary – General Mr. Ban Ki-Moon for the tireless efforts that he has been exerting to ensure that the UN fulfills its purpose during this complex and crucial period in our collective history. I wish to thank him in particular for the initiative he took to convene the special Summit on Climate Change this past week.

Mr. President,

It is now eighteen years since we in Ethiopia managed to remove a military dictatorship of unprecedented cruelty. The consequences of lack of democracy within the context of great diversity are all too apparent. Ethiopia's diversity leaves no room for autocracy; dictatorship, military or of whatever variety, cannot mix with the sociological make-up of the country. That was the explanation why Ethiopia was at the edge of the cliff during the last years of the military government.

The last eighteen years have not been easy for Ethiopians. We began from a bottom base in every aspect of our lives, without exception. There was hardly any economic development throughout the entire seventeen years of military dictatorship. Even prior to the military rule, the fate of Ethiopia has been not just lack of democracy, but also stagnant economy and lack of development. The challenges of the last eighteen years have not been limited to the weight of the past, to our legacy, in both the political and economic areas.

We also had to face others which have not been inconsequential in terms of affecting the tempo of our democratization and development. These challenges, however daunting they are, did not undermine our achievements, over the last eighteen years to democratize our country and to lay the basis for rapid economic development. In both areas, the historic

trajectory of the country has shifted. No matter what detractors might say, Ethiopia is now a country with a future and great hope. Double-digit economic growth has never been witnessed during the entire long history of the country. We are slated to register that rate of growth this year. This would make the six consecutive such achievement, attained largely overcoming pressures coming from the global economic crisis.

In democratic governance, the new Ethiopia has irrevocably split from old Ethiopia, in terms of both individual and group rights. With respect to the latter category of rights, Ethiopia, as has so categorically been asserted in our Constitution, is no longer a prison of nations and nationalities. In terms of respect for individual political and human rights, if hard facts are the judge ... not extraneous political agenda ... all being considered, Ethiopia is now, not at the tail end, but in the vanguard, for its commitment, and in practice, to this value.

Mr. President,

We have had, however, many challenges over the last eighteen years whose negative effects cannot be overlooked. I would like to say a few words on each of these challenges we have had, and continue, to face.

The first challenge is in the area of peace and security. Obviously, Ethiopia is part of the Horn of Africa. As a neighbor sharing the longest border and the largest population of Ethiopian-Somalis of any neighboring country to Somalia, it would be a miracle if we had not been affected by what goes on in that sisterly country. Now, talking about Somalia, it is time that we abandon the fiction that this is a war just among Somalis. It is not. Somalia is being hijacked by foreign fighters who have no inhibition in proclaiming that their agenda has nothing to do with Somalia. Theirs is an ambition that goes well beyond Somalia. And they say it out loud and clear. Those who advise them not to be so blunt have not succeeded.

The Somali crisis has been with us as long as the new government has been around in Ethiopia. It is not just we lost a partner because of the absence of a functioning government in Mogadishu. We have also been directly affected by the crisis ... a crisis, let us not forget, is assisted and abetted, including by states, whose authorities move with

ease and rub shoulders, in civilized circles. It is not only the rogue ones, but it is also states that are ostensibly decent that continue to fuel extremism in Somalia, and fund their activities.

Let us call a spade a spade. Today in Somalia, there is greater co-ordination and co-operation among those who assist the extremists than among those who profess support for the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia. The consequences are obvious. As the latest horrific suicide attack on AMISOM has shown, those destroying Somalia are being emboldened, and their supporters rewarded. Conversely, the TFG authorities continue to lose confidence, with pledged support continuing to dwindle in practice. The international community is being stingy even with symbolic steps to show resolve against extremists and spoilers in Somalia. The IGAD countries spoke in one voice and appealed to the UN Security Council. African Heads of State and Government endorsed unanimously the IGAD call for the Security Council to stand up and be counted in support of the fight against extremism in Somalia. However, it appears, the Council does not consider Somalia is a priority. In the meantime, those supporting extremism have made Somalia a priority. It is critical that the international Community wakes up before the hijacking of Somalia by extremism is fully consummated.

It is therefore unlikely that the Horn of Africa will rid itself of the crisis in Somalia pretty soon, with all the consequences of this for the work we have in our country in development and fighting poverty and in speeding up the democratization process.

That is why, indeed, the peace process in the Sudan, most particularly, the effective implementation of the CPA, is so critical for us. The Horn of Africa cannot afford the consequence of failure in the Sudan peace process. We are very close to both parties in the Sudan--- an asset which we want to use wisely.

It would be naive to believe that the conditions of peace and stability in our region have no influence over our domestic agenda. They do. Open societies are manifestly vulnerable to the kind of situation prevailing in the Horn of Africa. The mix of extremist forces and rogue states is not conducive for the growth of democracy in close proximity.

We have had, Mr. President, other challenges as well. One such challenge has to do with climate change. It is gratifying to us Ethiopians that this challenge is drawing the attention of the world more than ever before. I wish to reiterate our appreciation of the effort deployed by our Secretary-General in this regard. We look forward to Copenhagen for a resolute move by the international community on the basis of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

We in Ethiopia have been affected by climate change in the most difficult and complex manner. The effect on our agriculture and on our plan for food security has been huge. It is no longer every decade or so that we face drought, but rather every three or four years. If not drought, then it is flood. All the same, the consequences have been enormously damaging our plan to ensure food security. Let me take this opportunity to thank all those partners who have stood with us to address and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on our agricultural activities. I wish to thank, in particular, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for organizing a meeting on Partnering for Food Security on this very day.

As for the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit, it is indeed gratifying that we in Africa have decided to be innovative with respect to our representation and in connection with our approach to negotiation. Africa has decided to be represented by one negotiating team delegated to negotiate on the basis of a common African position. It is an honour for Ethiopia, in the person of its Prime Minister, to lead the African negotiating team. We expect much from Copenhagen.

We have had Mr. President, yet another challenge to our development and to the effort we have been making to deepen the process of democratization in our country over the last eighteen years. This has to do with the less than conducive international economic, and, I might add, political environment that we have to operate within. What we have faced, on both scores, economic and political, has been lack of tolerance to diversity, to policy-space experimentation and to independent thinking. Unjustified conditionalities abounded, both for economic and political reasons, either because of objectives growing out of market fundamentalism or because we dared defend ourselves against unjustified aggression.

Ethiopia's first real attempt at economic development coincided with the period when market orthodoxy made the role of the state anathema. Perhaps times have changed.

Mr. President,

We could have achieved more over the last eighteen years. But what we have indeed achieved in the democratization of our society and in economic and social development, are not insignificant. In fact, as already stated, what we have witnessed in Ethiopia over the last decade and half is no less than a change in trajectory of the country's development. Moreover, we have also continued to discharge our responsibility in the multilateral areas ... in our own sub-region, in our continent within the AU, and beyond in connection with our obligation to the United Nations.

In our own region, within IGAD, we have, together with other members of the organization, done whatever is necessary and within the limit of our capacity, to help Somalia achieve peace and to shield it from the onslaught of extremist forces. Within the AU, we continue to discharge our responsibilities to maintain the Pan-Africanist tradition to contribute to the Peace and Security of the continent and to accelerate the integration process of the continent brick by brick.

Mr. President,

The UN is for us an organization which we cannot live without. We benefit from the organization in more ways than one. We also take our obligation to it, very seriously. It is in that spirit that we continue to strengthen our contribution to UN peacekeeping effort. In this, we shall continue without fail.

It is therefore on this note that I wish to conclude ... by reiterating Ethiopia's commitment to the UN and by affirming our commitment to all efforts at reforming the organization, including the Security Council.

I Thank You, Mr. President.