

ADDRESS

BY

H.E. ATO SEYOUM MESFIN

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA

AT

**THE 120TH ASSEMBLY OF THE INTER-PARLIAMENTARY
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ADDIS ABABA

**Mr. President,
Honourable Parliamentarians,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my great honour, following other Ethiopian Government officials, most particularly our president and our Prime Minister, to welcome you all to Addis Ababa for the 120th Session of the General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I would like to thank the organizers of the conference for this opportunity to speak to you on the theme of the Assembly as it relates to our continent, and most particularly, to our region, the Horn of Africa. Of course, it is a great pleasure for me to see in the chair my good friend and a former colleague, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the IPU.

Mr. President,

I like to start out by expressing my deep conviction about how the IPU is in a position to play an exceedingly critical role at this point in the political and economic history of the world. It requires little emphasis that at present we are indeed passing through a very decisive phase in the modern history of the world. The ongoing world-wide economic downturn has made

it abundantly clear that countries have no alternative to co-operation and coordination to be able to address the challenges we all face. As Prime Minister Meles has said the day before yesterday as he declared this Assembly open, what the ongoing economic crisis has underlined is how much we are interconnected and how much in this globalizing world we live literally in a global village, with no capacity, particularly in the case of us Africans, to remain unaffected by developments we have no role in the creation of.

When it comes to the developing world, particularly Africa, the implications of the present world-wide economic crisis could indeed be disastrous. The damaging consequences, unless the necessary steps are taken to avert them, could undermine whatever progress has been made in building peace and in the process of democratization. Though there might be some backsliding lately, there is no doubt that over the last few years, Africa has been making real progress in the economic area as well as in building peace and in democratization.

There is no gainsaying that development, peace and democratization are interrelated. Obviously, it is not without reason that all three together have been made the major theme of the 120th IPU Assembly.

The experience we have had in Africa, in the Horn of Africa, and, in fact, here in Ethiopia, makes it evident that peace

cannot be achieved amidst hopelessness that poverty engenders, all the more so when there are no indications that life situations could change for the better. Though democratization cannot wait until poverty is overcome, there is no doubt empty stomachs are not strong foundation for democracy. I say again,--- empty stomachs are not strong foundation for democracy, though democratization cannot wait until poverty is overcome.

It is also indisputable that the relative improvement in the security situation in Africa over the last few years, is partly the result of the progressively improving economic situation in the continent which could in turn provide the basis for making these gains in development, sustainable.

What we have done in Ethiopia over the last five years or so can serve as an example. The double digit economic growth we have registered over these five years would never have been possible without the peace and security we have managed to create in our country, which no doubt needs to be consolidated and made more sustainable. This indeed requires the further deepening of our democratic transformation which has also provided the foundation both for our peace and for the very meaningful gains we have made in the economic area. The issue of building institutions of good governance, the promotion of political, civil and human

rights in our country are not and cannot be mere choices but a guaranty for national security and survival.

**Honourable President
Hounourable Parliamentarians,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is in light of all this that one becomes seriously concerned about the implications for the peace and security of Africa, our sub-region, and each of our respective countries, of the ongoing world-wide economic crisis.

No matter how much progress we might have made in establishing relative peace and security in our continent, the fact remains that much of the gains are not beyond being reversible. No more evidence is required for this than the spate of unconstitutional changes of government we have witnessed in Africa in recent months. This is worrying development which needs to be arrested as speedily as possible. The reversal of the democratization process, that has been under way in our continent during the last few years, would have incalculable consequences for the peace and Security of the continent whose impact would not be confined to the continent.

It is seen against this backdrop that the effects of the ongoing world-wide economic crisis on Africa could become extremely

serious for the peace and security of our continent and for the possibility of sustaining the process of democratization.

For obvious reasons, no region of Africa is more vulnerable to the possible adverse consequences of the world economic downturn than our region, the Horn of Africa. Ours is a region which has for long been bedeviled by a number of conflict situations. Some of these have remained intractable. But with respect to some, including Somalia, we have started to see some hope for making real progress towards a resolution which could be sustainable. This is being done despite numerous obstacles many of which are, in fact, not of African in origin, or in complexity.

But the chance we have to make the peace process in Somalia sustainable is inextricably linked to the possibility of ensuring that the momentum that the region has created in recent years in economic development, is maintained.

We in Ethiopia are fully aware that peace and security in our region are indivisible. We are convinced that our region can rise and fall only together. At the minimum, the image of the region in terms of it being a difficult one, is bound to have a major impact on all countries of the region from the point of view of encouraging investment inflows. But the impact of a deteriorating economic situation goes beyond concerns with image and has the ability to lead to increased violence,

lawlessness and the loss of opportunity for continuing to stabilize an area long affected by lack of security. This, in short, is to say that the ongoing world-wide economic downturn should not be allowed to lead to the undermining of the momentum that has been created for strengthening the peace and security of our region and Africa as a whole.

Mr. President ,
Honourable Parliamentarians,

I should reiterate that what the current economic crisis has underlined is how much the destiny of the people of the world is linked and how much globalization has ensured that we would not succeed, even if we tried, to avoid one another. There is no alternative to co-operation and coordination, all the more so during difficult times when the consequences of failure to do so, are grave.

This is also why it is time that all that needs to be done is carried out to ensure that the developing world, and Africa in particular, is treated fairly and its interests are taken into account when decisions are taken internationally with the view to addressing common challenges. As prime Minister Meles said the day before yesterday, "we are far from establishing an inclusive and fair system of globalization." It is precisely for this reason, as he also said, while we have no role "in the genesis of" the current crisis, we are nonetheless

"victims of its global reach." But this cannot be allowed to continue. The globalizing world needs to treat Africa fairly, and it needs to be inclusive.

**Honourable President,
Dear Parliamentarians**

By coincidence or otherwise, this important IPU Assembly is taking place in Addis Ababa, the seat of the African Union and also of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, at a critical period for Africa and the world. Given your influence in your respective countries and that of the IPU in general, your pronouncements do carry weight and will have a lot of meaning. The theme of the Assembly also makes it possible for you to throw your weight behind the call for a fair and equitable global system from which all benefit and on the basis of which the security of all, including our environment, is protected. It is for all these reasons that we all look forward with a great deal of anticipation to the conclusions of your deliberations.

I wish you success in this endeavour and a pleasant brief stay in Addis Ababa.

I Thank you