



HARARI ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE & EQUALITY

(H.A.J.E)

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Harari Alliance for Justice and Equality (HAJE): **Press release**

05-July 2020

Law-and-Order and The Transition to Democracy- *You Can't Have One without the Other*

The road to Democracy has never been an easy one. Since Abiy Ahmed came to power, encouraging political reforms have been achieved, releasing of political prisoners, opening the political space to opposition parties, to mention a few. In a fortnight, Ethiopia was preparing to begin filling the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and celebrate the birth of a new era in hydro-electric energy generation. On the other hand, the Government was struggling to contain common- criminal elements from looting, harassing and killing innocent citizens. By allowing such low-grade crimes to go unchecked, lawlessness has now spread across every region of the Federation.

The government, through its cavalier position towards law-and-order and through its inaction in the face of gross miscarriages of justice has reached to the point that if continues this path risks forfeiting its leadership role. This dysfunctional rule of law has now evolved to the point where the killing of prominent political and influential public figures by unknown bad actors is a common event!! In broad daylight these killings are carried out! Is it possible that the government itself is purposefully allowing this state-of-affairs to continue in efforts to destabilize the country so they can step-in under the guise of martial law?

Mark Twain once said, "Politicians are like diapers, they need to be changed often, and for the same reasons". Competent politicians, a government that enforces the rule of law, and is accountable and transparent at every level is imperative to the success of Ethiopia's Federal political system. It is unthinkable to envision a fruitful Democratic transition without enforcing the rule of law. They both must, simultaneously, go hand in hand or otherwise the country will surrender to chaos and lawlessness. This is evident when we look back at incidents from the last few years where the rule of law was, as it appears in retrospect, intentionally put on the back burner.

The turf has been left for criminals to plot, organize and carry out high profile killings in broad day light. These incidents have the potential not only to jeopardize the Democratic transitional process but also have the potential to destabilize the entire country. Cases in point are the assassination attempt on PM Abiy himself, and the killing of the chief Engineer of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Simegnew Bekele. In the case of Engineer Simegnew's assassination on the morning of July 26, 2018, to date (over 2 years later) no arrests have been made and no plausible information has been provided to the people of Ethiopia! Justice delayed is Justice denied. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed reacted to the news at the time by expressing how saddened and utterly shocked he was by the incident.



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Looking at the current crises, the case of Hachalu Hundessa, a proud Oromo artist and activist has been executed in the prime of his youth by criminal elements. The entire nation is shocked and appalled that this ever happened. Prominent politicians have been arrested in the aftermath! What is going on? Rumors and speculations abound, and the Government finds itself at a moment of reckoning. Will the ideals of justice, accountability and transparency be upheld? Again, prime minister Abiy Ahmed expressed his sadness and shock over the death. The same way he did following the murder of Engineer Simegnaw.

So far, the mishandling of the events surrounding the burial of Hachalu Hundessa do not bode well for the Government. The Security Establishments made a grave mistake in rushing his burial without paying any consideration to the dignity of Hachalu and his family as well as the millions of his fans. Hachalu is a champion to the Oromo people's cause and by extension to the cause of all aggrieved people in Ethiopia. It is not even clear whether proper forensic investigation processes were performed following his execution. The wiser move would have been to afford sufficient time to conduct an exhaustive inquiry and investigation, agree on a dignified burial protocol with consultation from his family and representatives of his supporters while simultaneously updating the public on the progress of the investigation.

It is abundantly clear that the Ethiopian criminal investigation process is not serving its purpose. It is either led by incompetent parties or it underestimates the negative impact of not performing its duties swiftly and professionally. The Ethiopian Democratic transition should not come at the expense and dismissal of the rule of law. Case in point; well over 161 individuals have lost their lives following the bungled handling of the events following Hachalu's murder.

Having a strong and healthy opposition from political parties and private figures and leaders is paramount to a sustainable Ethiopian Democratic transition as long as the rule of law is respected. Government, as the ultimate public institution must be held accountable at every step of the way and must be criticized and opposed on every policy issue, Prime Minister Abiy and his Government cannot hold themselves immune to this process. If they ignore these facts, they will rot and become complacent to crime, corruption, human rights violation and ultimately devolve to an absolute Dictatorship, the last thing Ethiopia needs at this moment. That is why Democratic transitional process cannot be exchanged for the rule of law.

HAJE believes in fair, impartial, transparent, and independent investigation, and judicial process. Inclusive democratic transition that will allow the participation of all stakeholders. Allowing independent and open media and platforms that will inform the populace. Stop the killing of innocent and unarmed civilians. Lift the internet shutdown and free unjustly jailed politicians and activists.

As noted earlier, "Politicians are like diapers, they need to be changed often, and for the same reasons."

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