

Ethiopia and Sudan Border Issue Committee
P.O. Box 656 Tucker, GA 30085; e-mail:leethiopia@yahoo.com

June 2, 2008

President Omar Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir
President of the Republic of the Sudan
Khartoum, Sudan

Your Excellency:

We, the representatives of Ethiopian political, professional, civic, social and cultural organizations, would like to bring to Your Excellency's attention worrisome developments concerning the demarcation of the common boundary between Ethiopia and the Sudan. We are gravely concerned that this important subject which affects the lives and welfare of millions of Ethiopians has been approached, at least on the part of the purported representatives of Ethiopia, in total secrecy and in complete disregard of relevant treaties and the historical rights of Ethiopia.

We wish to register our protest in the strongest possible terms that any attempted boundary settlement your government reaches with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), will neither bind the rest of the country, nor achieve a stable or durable settlement of whatever outstanding differences might exist between our countries regarding the location of our common boundary. On the contrary, any such settlement is bound to be a continuing source of friction and an unnecessary obstacle to furthering and deepening the economic cooperation and cultural exchanges that currently exist between our two countries.

Lest our concern about the cession of Ethiopian territory appear unfounded, we wish to refer your Excellency to the pages of The Sudan Tribune (May 9, 2008) wherein it is reported that highly placed officials of your government have stated, without contradiction from any other source, that farmers in Eastern Sudan have "got[ten] back disputed lands from Ethiopia." We have no reason to doubt the veracity of this statement. In fact, we have confirmed its truthfulness from the very farmers in the area who have been forcibly evicted from their farms as well as those who have been illegally taken across the border into the custody of your government. We have confirmed as well that these individuals are now languishing in Sudanese prisons under conditions that violate internationally accepted human rights norms. By what right can your government justify the abduction of the citizens of another country from their homes and farms?

The sole basis for this outrageous conduct and your government's tenuous assertion of jurisdiction over Ethiopian territory is the Prime Minister's collusion with your government to permanently alienate our ancestral land. If indeed this is your sole justification for seeking to exercise sovereignty over our territory, please be forewarned that any deal you make with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi concerning cession of Ethiopia's territory cannot stand. Simply stated, the territory ceded is not the Prime Minister's to give nor does Ethiopia recognize the validity of any claims Sudan may lay against Ethiopian territory. As your Excellency is well aware, the Prime Minister avowedly represents only the Tigray people (if, indeed, that).

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Your Excellency knows too that the ceded territory has always been an integral part of Ethiopia historically, culturally and economically until the Prime Minister decided to barter it away in exchange for certain sectarian and shortsighted advantages inuring to the sole benefit of the TPLF. Although these advantages have not yet been made public, they are not difficult to fathom.

The history of relations between Ethiopia and Sudan reveals that there has never been any serious border or territorial dispute between the two countries. We are, of course, keenly aware that Ethiopian and Sudanese governments have reached agreements in principle in the past to demarcate the common boundary between their two countries. But an agreement in principle to demarcate the boundary is a far cry from a decision to give away what is legitimately ours on the basis of a colonial-era and imaginary line that Ethiopia has never accepted as a legitimate basis for drawing the common boundary. We also find it surprising and disconcerting that the Republic of the Sudan, which after all is the biggest country in Africa, and which has a highly favorable land: man ratio, seeks territorial aggrandizement at Ethiopia's expense.

Your Excellency, we wish to reiterate to you that Meles has no power and authority to cede sovereign Ethiopian territory without the consent of the people of Ethiopia. Nowhere does even the tailor-made constitution imposed by the TPLF on the Ethiopian people give Meles the authority to cede sovereignty. Neither the national parliament nor the affected states of the federation have debated or ratified his decision to cede our lands. As a matter of fact, the whole process of territorial cession was guarded with the utmost secrecy by Meles until the inhabitants of the affected region were one day forcibly removed from their farms and their homes, and their farming equipment and their crops were vandalized by Sudanese troops. This is certainly no way to demarcate an international boundary. It is a process we have witnessed before in the context of the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary dispute. Both reveal the same flawed process at work, one that is so tainted with fraud and so devoid of legitimacy that it could never yield a valid, stable and durable settlement of a contested international boundary.

Equally egregious is the treatment of Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan. The Republic of the Sudan is party to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 U.N. Protocol Governing the Status of Refugees, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, and the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Yet, in violation of all these international instruments, Ethiopian refugees who were granted political asylum by the Sudanese Government, and who had lived in the Sudan for many years, were mistreated, imprisoned and tortured and eventually handed over to the Ethiopian regime, where they are now languishing in prison. We now can see that this was done as a prelude to and as part of the border deal. Apparently, the TPLF considered it expedient to secure the custody of those individuals whom it regarded as likely to raise a national hue and cry over the alienation of Ethiopia's territory. Some of these individuals hail from the disputed area, are very familiar with the historical boundary, and would not accept any unilateral modification without stiff resistance.

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We therefore urge the Government of the Sudan to:

- Withdraw its army, police and security forces from Ethiopian soil;
- Respect Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- Release all our citizens who have been forcefully abducted and taken to the Sudan;
- Pay reparation for all the loss and destruction suffered by our citizens as a consequence of its unlawful actions; and
- Offer a formal apology for its actions.

Sincerely,

1. Ethiopia and Sudan Border Issue Committee
2. Ethiopian Forum for Peace, Democracy & Development
3. Ethiopian National Congress (ENC)
4. Holy Synod of Ethiopia Orthodox Tewahdo Church
5. United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF)
6. Coalition for Unity and Democracy North America Support Committee (Kinijit)
7. Ethiopian Democratic Hibre Hizb Unity Movement (EDHUM)
8. Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP, Democratic)
9. All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (Meison)
10. Ethiopian Medhin Democratic Party (Medhin)
11. All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO)
12. Gambella People's United Democratic Front (GPUDF)
13. Tigrean Alliance for Democracy (TAND)
14. Oromo People's Liberation Organization (OPLO-IBSO)
15. Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front (EPPF)
16. Ethiopian National United Front (ENUF)
17. Ginbot 7 Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy
18. Anuak Justice Council (AJC)
19. Gasha For Ethiopians
20. Ethiopian Women for Peace and Development (EWPD)
21. Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association
22. Crown Council of Ethiopia
23. Tatek Ethiopian Democratic Unity Force (TEDUF)
24. Ethiopian People's Democratic Party (EPDP)
25. Mahdere Andinet Ethiopian Association
26. Ethiopian Air Force Association
27. Ethiopian Veterans Association
28. Ethiopian Council of Elders

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CC:

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US House of Representatives
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