

The 3rd EAF-EARO & WMU-CADPR International Symposium on Ethiopian Development Studies, June 18-19, 2005, The Ghion Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Welcoming Remarks and Reflections

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Welcome to the 3rd International Symposium on Ethiopian Development Studies. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the participants of this 3rd bi annual conference. In particular, I thank those who have taken the time to write papers and came to the Symposium. I also want to thank those who have agreed to participate in other capacities such as session chairpersons or moderators.

Please look at the summary program on page 3 for a quick glance followed by details in the plenary sessions. There will be adjustments that will be announced in some of the sessions. As you can see there are eight sessions (4 sessions each day and two invited lectures). There are two major general themes-one each day, namely: *I. Agriculture, Natural Resources and Technology Issues*, and *II. Economics, Civil Society, Conflict and Globalization Issues*, that are, in turn, subdivided into eight plenary sessions reflecting the sub-themes that are driven by the topics of the papers received through an open International Call for Papers. I believe the sessions and many of the papers capture some of the key development issues and problems in Ethiopia. This conference continues the tradition of bringing scholars and professionals from Ethiopia and overseas, including from the Ethiopian Diaspora. About 34 papers and presentations are listed in the program, of which 20 are from overseas and the rest from Ethiopia. Of the 20 presenters at least four have informed us that they are unable to attend due to unfortunate post-election incidents and the associated travel international warnings. Having said this, I am pleased to report we have the critical mass of papers for presentation and discussion over two days at this conference.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank those co-sponsors who have made this conference possible. My first thanks go to EARO, and in particular to the Director General, Dr. Tsedeke Abate for his willingness to co-sponsor the Conference. I never met Dr. Tsedeke before I contacted him by e-mail, but when I asked him for co-sponsorship almost one year ago, he agreed with enthusiasm. My thanks also go to the Deputy Director General of EARO, Dr. Aberra Deressa and Ato Tesfaye Zegeye, Head of Socio-Economics Department at EARO. My thanks also goes to the EAF, a Michigan based non-profit organization of professionals. EAF is a membership association of academics and professionals interested in the causes of higher education and development in Ethiopia. EAF contributed about half of the expenses to this conference as it has done in July 2003, when the conference was last co-sponsored by Institute of Development Research (IDR), Addis Ababa University. Allow me to recognize three members of EAF who are in the audience: the Board Chairperson, Professor Teshome Wagaw of the University of Michigan, Dr. Alem Habtu, and Mr. Paul Henze. If you are interested in becoming a member or interested in activities of EAF, please check its website: www.ethiopianamericanfoundation.com for further information. EAF is engaged in academic activities that include supporting graduate students, faculty and supporting this

international conference. So, I invite and encourage you to become a member or engage in partnership with EAF to help shape its future direction.

EAF is non-partisan organization that promotes the causes of higher education and development in Ethiopia. It is a non-partisan organization that leaves politics, like religion, to the individual members but tries to be fair and objective in its collective pronouncements and activities. I also thank the staff of CADPR at WMU who have been helpful in this process. In particular, thanks to Blen Solomon, a doctoral Candidate in Applied Economics at WMU who is here, and Ms. Rena Lynema Administrative Assistant at that Office, who is not here. Finally, I would to ask who have agreed to serve as session chairs listed in the program in a short notice, and extend a warm welcome to other guests

I came to Ethiopia on a short-term Fulbright Senior Specialist program and hosted by the Institute of Development Research (IDR), who was also my host in my previous visit in 2002 when I came under a different Fulbright Program under. IDR also hosted me in 2002 when I came under a different Fulbright Program under the Department of Education. I thank IDR and Office of Vice President for Research and Post Graduate Programs at AAU. I arrived on May 8 for a period of six weeks or 42 days, in time to witness the historic May 15 elections in Ethiopia. I had planned to travel outside Addis Ababa to the regional universities such as Alemaya, Debu, Gondar and Bahir Dar Universities etc. However, these plans did not materialize due to the travel restrictions related to the unfortunate post election violence. I hope to come back to follow up some of the academic initiatives that I have began during this visit.

I would like to end my brief welcoming remarks by reflecting on significant political events that occurred during my short visit. I feel I came at a historic time in the political history of Ethiopia. I had an opportunity to silently observe the overwhelming turn out of Ethiopians at the grass root levels to engage in the first free exercise of political choice. The May 15 elections opened the opportunity that Ethiopians for the first time can freely choose between a ruling party and opposition party(s), and that the Country has a potential to make a peaceful democratic transition in governance. In spite of the post-election events that led to the senseless violence and loss of innocent lives, the opportunity toward democratic governance has begun, and it is critical that for it to be sustained by all political parties and all stakeholders under enlightened leadership at all levels.

In my view, the best that can happen for Ethiopia is to maximize pluralism in the next and future parliaments with significance presence of the opposition, regardless of the outcome of this election, expected to be announced on July 8, 2005. This will enable politicians to engage in key constitutional and policy debates aimed at significant political and economic reforms along democratic lines. If is process is kept peaceful and credible, it is likely to raise the quality of political, economic and social programs and policies, and thereby provide clear alternative platforms for two or three viable loyal political parties for the next and future elections that differ on social and economic policy matters, but with a shared vision of national unity within diversity and democracy. If this happens, Ethiopia may then be in a position to solve the political and institutional problems from which many African states suffer, and quickly move on toward a peaceful

and sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation. This may also lead to what can be termed as the Ethiopian Renaissance.

In my view, Ethiopian political problem can only be solved through a process of credible constitutional and policy reform where the institutions or pillars democratic governance are allowed to evolve and mature and extremist partisan power politics is minimized. These reforms include building the basic institutions and rules of democratic governance around the world such as for term limits, periodic open and free elections, the free press, an independent judiciary, and improved land policy, and related political and economic reforms. These can only be enabled through a process of an open, inclusive and peaceful dialogue that will provide the free exercise of political choices for Ethiopians. But, the challenge of reaching that point is formidable as you all know.

This process has already begun, and there is no reason to believe that Ethiopia cannot be democratized peacefully just like other developing nations that have succeeded in this regard, with enlightened leadership, good will, and trust from all stakeholders. The exercise of free political choice has begun with May 15, 2005 elections and needs to be sustained. The reversal of this process will lead to a zero-sum or even a negative sum outcome for all stakeholders in the Ethiopian society. In my view, the solution of the political problem which is the primary constraint to economic development and poverty alleviation is possible with hard work, enlightened leadership, trust, and good will by all concerned.

With these personal reflections, let us engage in productive, research based, and friendly dialogue on the various dimensions and issues of development issues ranging from agriculture, natural resource management, technology, socio-economic, education and gender issues in Ethiopia, over the next two days.

Thank you for coming and for your attention.
