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Vision Ethiopia and ESAT Fourth Conference

Second call for papers, July 3, 2017

Conference Theme

Building Democratic Institutions in Ethiopia

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Vision Ethiopia, an independent network of Ethiopian scholars and professionals, in collaboration with the Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT), is pleased to announce that the Fourth Conference will be held in Washington D.C. on **September 16 and 17, 2017**. We thank those who responded to our first call for papers which was issued on March 4, 20117. The second call is intended to provide a reminder to potential contributors, and a more focused list of transition issues that the conference aims to address. Abstract, and preferably the entire paper should be sent to visionethiopia2016@gmail.com on or before, **August 20 2017**. The theme of the conference is *Building Democratic Institutions in Ethiopia.*

Authors are reminded that the theme of the Fourth Conference builds upon the deliberations of the Third Conference that was held from October 23 to 24, 2016. At the Third Conference where more than 20 panelists and moderators and hundreds of participants were engaged, and conference resolved that there is an urgent need to build a road map for *transition from*

conflict to a post-conflict constitution making order in Ethiopia. The *communique* of the conference highlighted the contemporary issues, assessed the challenges, and identified the actionable areas to realize the road map. Since October 2016 there have been a number of conferences and town hall meetings held by Ethiopians in various parts of the world. Alliances and counter alliances are being formed. As expected the ruling regime has had its own panel discussion to fight back the pressure and manage public and international opinion by defying, manipulating, and trying to capture the call for transition, while others perhaps inadvertently mimic the call for positioning themselves and remaining relevant. Vision Ethiopia notes these developments and encourages the engagement of the wider public in these important deliberations. Most conferences share the view that transition in Ethiopia is unavoidable.

The discourse has turned into the type of transition, how to make the transition inclusive, effective, relevant and capable to manage the various issues in Ethiopia while strengthening national unity and maintaining the territorial integrity of the country. It has also become important to take lessons from the 1975, 1991/92, and 2005 failed transitions. The question now is how to make the vehicles of transition and agents of change stronger. The myriad of political, economic, social, and security problems, coupled with the unrest, state of emergency, conflicts, tensions, drought, outmigration, internal displacement and the paralysis and tensions within the ruling regime, all indicate the need for a carefully planned change, that controls chaos.

The Fourth Conference aims at providing a forum for consolidating the discussion about the type of transition that is needed in Ethiopia. It addresses two critical issues that are the cornerstones of successful transitions: maintaining and strengthening national unity and creating, enabling and maintaining effective institutions. The continuity of the Ethiopian state, with its territorial integrity, the unity of its diverse population, and their

democratic aspirations are critically dependent on the quality and strength of institutions that exist during and after the period of transition.

The protection and cultivation of an enduring and evolving national unity and sovereignty, through effective institutions, is the central tenet of a meaningful national discourse on transition. History, nostalgia and normative analysis of social and political orders must be separated from contemporary (real) politics. Self-determination becomes an empty idealization of a utopian state unless it is contextualized. Transition thus must not be defined as change of government or another meaningless election or a ritual copied from others. Formal and national institutions should have a number of attributes which should include, consistent with theory: shared national values, sets of functioning rules, ethical standards, procedures and norms designed to constrain offenders and those in authority, prevent cheating, system of entry to and exit from political office, defining the role of traditional authority/leadership, releasing the institutions of the modern state from their captured status, separation of powers, and mechanism for fending the tyranny of the state. Hence it is important to examine and understand what can go wrong in the transitioning processes. The process of transition is an important determinant of the outcome.

Authors are expected to use research and experience while analyzing a specific problem or series of problems. They need to contextualize their theories, and attempt to present the problem and solution dispassionately. With respect to specific topics, Vision Ethiopia would like speakers to focus on the following interconnected problems, and identify types of tried and tested transitions, and state why a specific type of transition is appropriate for today's Ethiopia. Speakers can select sub topics of transition from the following. The list is indicative and by no means restrictive.

1. *Comparative Constitutional Analysis*: Constitutions & National Charters provide the broad framework of the political, legal, social, economic, and policy aspirations of a country and its transition

framework. Setting and analyzing the constitutional/charter issues, provisions, priorities, challenges, and comparative context are important issues in drawing the road map and the transition to a post-conflict political order.

2. *National Unity & Institutions*: Outlining the mechanisms for maintaining and strengthening national unity through effective institutions. Which institutions (laws and organizations) have worked/failed in post-conflict countries? What are the lessons (if any) for Ethiopia?

3. *Institutional Framework*: Identifying existing formal and informal institutions that can be used for mediation, reconciliation, conflict management and resolution. How to connect truth and reconciliation with the various dimensions of justice?

4. *The duration of the transition*: How long/short should the transition period be? What are the determinants of shorter transition periods in militarized societies? What effective instruments can be put in place to prevent transitional/provisional governments from making themselves "permanent"? How does one minimize factors that make transitions periods unstable?

5. *Policy and capacity Issues*: What should be the economic, social, land and foreign policy of a transitional administration? How should it deal with priority issues of land, territorial disputes, drought, outbreak of diseases, and national crisis of outmigration and deportations of Ethiopians from various parts of the world?

6. *Economic Policy Issues*: Mechanisms for establishing fair, just and largely market-based economic institutions. Addressing mechanism for resolving property rights issues including ownership by political party affiliated economic entities and individuals and entities that serve as fronts; examination of the credibility of macro-economic and demographic statistics, the management and sustainability of sovereign debt.

7. *Management of conflicts and Conflict Prevention*: Establishing the mechanism to prevent and control the escalation of conflict, including controlling irresponsible targeting of communities, as well as upholding values, customs, and traditional practices that

can be reflected in national identity/symbols and legal instruments so that conflict is controlled.

8. *Corruption and state and regulation capture*: Releasing the institutions of the state and the economy from capture and preventing future captures is critical for successful transition. What is the situation of corruption in Ethiopia and what are its manifestations? Using case methods speakers can identify political and economic corruption, economic crime, illicit financial flows, and the alleged widespread market rigging in the country? Corruption, state capture, contract awards and mega projects (e.g. dams, railway lines, sugar plantations, industrial parks, etc.), donor and tender "preneurship" are examples. How to complete strategic national projects (dams, railway lines, etc.) which are showing cost overruns and delays during the period of transition while controlling corruption? Using an institutional perspective, speakers can explain why the corruption watch dog became toothless and the Prime Minister's statements ended up in thin air.

9. *Freedom of Information and the Press*: Establishing a dynamic system that ensures the legal and constitutional rights of citizens' access to information and eliminating of censorship; ensuring pluralistic and responsible media that helps keep citizens informed; and empowering citizens to the freedom of information while at the same time controlling disinformation and "fake news". Should Ethiopians (inside the country and out of the country) establish an independent media monitoring organization?

10. *Civil Society Organizations*: How to guarantee the emergence and protection of independent and vibrant civil societies that protect national and ethnic heritages, places of worships, civil and political rights, including the rights of labor, peasants, land lords and tenants, women, children, youth, minorities, the disabled, war veterans and victims of conflicts? How does one stop the penetration and capture of faith and other social organizations by the ruling regime and political parties?

11. *Managing and Preventing Extremism*: Establishing mechanisms that fend off against the spread of religious and cultural fundamentalism and extremism, and legally restrain those that

attempt to fuse ethnicity and faith for advancing separatist agenda. What can be done to prevent extremist tendencies and behavior and to address the underlying factors in the country?

12. *Human Resource Management and Equity*: Promoting equal opportunities and inclusiveness in the national defense, security, police force establishments, including in their top brass, as well as other public institutions to reflect judicious participation by wide spectrum of the Ethiopian population. Reforming economic organizations, including party and state owned enterprises that provide employment shelters to specific ethnic or other social groups. Reforming exclusive regional "charity/development organizations" that serve as fronts, shadow government network and long arms of the ruling party. How to make the national defense, security, and police forces apolitical (loyal to the country and its people and not to a ruling party or the ruler), professional and free from corruption and prejudice? Identifying ways and means of integrating armed combatants to the national army; demilitarizing the country, mechanisms for handling victims of conflict, including former combatants, solders and war veterans;

13. *Political Parties*: Establishing a system of party politics based on political pluralism; a representative and effective electoral system that encourages regional parties (ethno-nationalist and faith based political organizations) to transform themselves into national parties, where factionalism and regionalism does not become a cause of instability. Analysis of existing legal and clandestine political parties and movements, by shapes, sizes, political programs and their membership and funding characteristics, and identifying where duplication and waste exists, and mechanism for reduction of their number by aligning and tweaking their programs so that personalities are not causes of conflict. How to minimize the incentive to create a party while respecting the civil and political rights of individuals and groups? Should there be a threshold of the number of political parties? If so what should be the criteria or would they simply vanish as time progresses?

14. *Justice System Reforms and Independence*: Establishing an independent, accountable and transparent national and regional

governance and justice system that fuses the *trias politika* doctrine (separation of powers) with local institutions (cultures, beliefs and cognitive systems), with role for traditional authority/polity (See also item #1 above). Who should interpret the constitution? The House or an independent constitutional court? How does one ensure the independence of the judiciary, the constitutional court and how does one make justice affordable and free from corruption?

15. Electoral System: Institutional frameworks that guarantee an unfettered free and fair electoral processes and popular participation in political issues and processes both at federal, regional and local levels; which type of electoral system is preferable for Ethiopia? Should voting be mandatory?

16. *Diaspora Issues and Policy*: Institutionalizing the role of the diaspora and its active engagement in the national economic, political, and social issues of the country. What is the size and capacity of the Ethiopian diaspora? What can the diaspora do to accelerate and support the transition and ending the state of emergency? What is the role of the diaspora in exacerbating illicit financial flows and black markets, land grab, the eviction of farmers from their ancestral lands? Why is the Ethiopian diaspora restricted from participating in the national voting for so long?

17. *Territorial Dispute Management*: Land shortage and administrative structures have brought territorial disputes. How should these disputes be resolved?

18. *Population and Environmental Matters*: Establishing the connections between political power, conflict, population policy /, economic growth and control of resources is important. Conflicts often start with grievances in poorer regions where population groups feel deprived while richer regions feel that their resources are unfairly being taken away from them by "others". How should fiscal decentralization, environmental degradations, vulnerability of regions to climate change be managed in an environment of resurgent regional or ethno-nationalisms?

The main purpose of the Fourth Conference is to bring together researchers, professionals, political and rights activists, former civil servants

and experts from different background and disciplines to deliberate, without fear or favor, on these and interrelated issues, and explore ways and approaches to make the transition successful. It requires redefining our isms and rethinking our collective future. The focus is on strengthening national unity through the creation, reform and strengthening of national institutions in Ethiopia. The Conference will facilitate discussion and debate on different ideas and approaches to be considered on the basis of their merit and analytical foundations and practicality. It is with this understanding that speakers and participants are encouraged to address the issues documented above, and present their thoughts to the Ethiopian public so that the direction and content of the transition towards post-conflict, stable and democratic political order is clearer and made understandable to the masses.

Papers may be written in either Amharic or English, follow acceptable reasoning and decorum. For the presentation, speakers are encouraged to communicate using language(s) that most of the audience at the conference venue and in Ethiopia comprehend. Speakers who want to use other languages must provide their own interpretation services. Papers must be short and to the point, and the message must be deliverable within 20 minutes. Please avoid jargon, foul and inflammatory language, and untested and anecdotal evidence.