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ETHIOPIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (EDP)

Head Office

Branch Office

Support Group

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Date

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Ref.

August 5, 2020

- Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
- Ethiopian Human Rights Council
- The National Electoral Board of Ethiopian
- African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights
- African Union
- European Union
- Liberal International Network
- Africa Liberal Network

Subject: Arresting Lidetu Can't Stifle EDP's Superiority on Setting Political Agendas

Press release from Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP)

For the last 20 years, against the intolerant, uncompromising, outdated, hatred and mistrust- filled Ethiopian political culture, EDP has been playing a significant role for the establishment of a democratic culture premised on civilized political dialogue, concessions and negotiations.

Because of EDP's unwavering principled stand on civilized political discourse and peaceful struggle, EDP has been a victim of a witch hunt and concerted hate propaganda not only from the ruling EPRDF but also from extremist opposition parties based both in Ethiopia and in the diaspora.

As always, EDP still firmly believes, peaceful struggle coupled with civilized political dialogue among all stakeholders, but not political violence, it paves the way for the establishment of a vibrant and dynamic democratic government. This is a benchmark and principled stand on which EDP stands firm.

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Even on those very dark days, for the last three years before PM Abiy came to power, where EDP's very legal existence was kept hanging by a thread by the ruling regime, the peaceful struggle was the only option EDP was pursuing religiously. EDP has survived all these previous insurmountable challenges. Our party has shown resilience all along and bounced back from those setbacks. EDP has never kneeled and buckled under various pressures before & will certainly never do in the future too.

Unfortunately, unlike before, there is currently a persistent and co-ordinated overt fresh campaign to weaken and destroy EDP by the government, opposition parties affiliated with the ruling regime and some extreme social media activists.

It became even worse after EDP recently formed a coalition called Abronet with two other legal, political parties. And the fact that Abronet started gaining great public support within a short time, the government tacitly started working to weaken EDP.

To establish lasting peace and democracy, in the last two years, notably in connection with the now-cancelled August 2020 election, EDP has been critically assessing the political changes on the ground and has come up with appropriate alternative policies.

EDP on its alternative policy document warned, unless the election is postponed for two years & an all-inclusive transitional government is established, the election may not lead to a permanent peaceful transition to a democratic government. Rather it stressed the election might not be any better than the last five sham and rigged elections. It may even lead to further chaos, deterioration of law & order and disintegration of the country; effectively risking the election as a last historic election in present Ethiopia's context.

Government's response was that postponing the election even by a day contravenes the constitution. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemics, the Election Board and the government changed their previous position and announced the postponement of the election.

This created an unforeseen constitutional crisis. Getting out of this constitutional crisis and deciding how the country should be governed until the next national



election became the immediate crucial political agenda. With this in mind, in line with the constitution and the Ethiopian current political reality, EDP prepared and disseminated a document on the establishment of a transitional government. Nevertheless, the government, in the name of "constitutional interpretation", started prolonging its parliamentary life span unconstitutionally. EDP advised the government to refrain from this unconstitutional act and created public awareness on the matter.

Lidetu Ayalew, one of EDP's higher leadership, was mandated by EDP to present our party's view on the matter to the media and the public. Lidetu executed his mandate superbly and efficiently.

Simply because EDP came up with a detailed alternative document for the establishment of a transitional government and exposed the government's unconstitutional move, higher gov officials including the Prime Minister EDP was deliberately labelled EDP as stirring chaos, violence and breakup of our country. They warned the government would take severe action on EDP's leadership. Some government-affiliated opposition parties, private media and elders joined the government to accuse EDP and also encouraged the gov to execute its threat on EDP leadership.

Rather than the government making its case to win the argument, Lidetu was singled out by the security for intimidation. Exactly like the old days, even during PM Abiy's era, Lidetu was being followed by the security agents where ever he drove. It is inescapable to conclude that state violence is still at large in Ethiopia.

The recent arrest of Ato Lidetu on the pretext of enforcing law and order is a watershed that heralds the government's intention to transform itself into an absolute dictatorship. It is proof that the EPRDF is going back to its comfort zone; the monopoly of state violence.

The regime knows very well that our party religiously pursues peaceful struggle and abhors violence in any form or shape to further any political interest. Thus, the arrest of Ato Lidetu, EDP's National Council member, the pioneer and staunch supporter of peaceful struggle, on the pretext of conspiring to cause chaos and disturbance, is a very unwise and dangerous move by the government, which would make the already fragile political situation even worse.



It is mind-boggling to note that the government arrested Ato Lidetu on suspicion of instigating disorder and chaos: shortly after the very security approached and escorted Ato Lidetu to Addis Ababa citing their security concern for his life during the heat of the chaos and disorder. This makes the arrest even more absurd and shameful.

On the 27th of July/20, Lidetu appeared before a woreda court in Bishoftu city. He explained to the court, while he was preparing to go to the US for a follow-up hospital appointment for his last year's heart operation, the government arrested him on suspicion of inciting disorder after the death of the singer Hachalu. Lidetu submitted to the court that he has nothing to do with the alleged offence, that police was unable to produce sufficient evidence, that he suffers from asthma and heart problem and that the lawlessness and disorder were committed all over the country. In light of all these, Lidetu submitted to the court, as he is one of the leaders of a national party whose permanent home address is in Addis Ababa, he asked the court to release him on bail and transfer his case to a court in Addis Ababa. The court refused to release him on bail and transfer his case to Addis Ababa.

On his PM appointment inaugural speech, Dr Abiy promised to depart from the old, bad practice by only arresting anyone on the grounds of sufficient evidence. Despite this promise from the PM, Lidetu was arrested without evidence. It was after the arrest that police requested the court for 14 days extension to gather evidence against Ato Lidetu. The court granted the extension, and he was remanded to custody.

Ato Lidetu, who is locked up in a tiny room along with 35 other detainees, is susceptible to catch COVID-19. Apart from himself and one other detainee, all the others don't wear a face mask. No hand sanitizer and handwashing facility are available. Bearing in mind Lidetu suffers from asthma and heart condition, the party is very much concerned about Lidetu's life. There is also a news report that five members of the detention center including one policeman who handled Lidetu's case are contracted with the Coronavirus.

Therefore,

1. It is a fact that both Ato Lidetu and his party, apart from producing alternative policies peacefully, has no member who endangers any one's life, cause criminal



damage and instigate lawlessness. As the accusation is totally unfounded and fabricated, we call upon the government the immediate release of Ato Lidetu.

2. We advise PM Abiy's Prosperity Party to keep its promise of safeguarding plurality and freedom of thought. Hence the Prosperity Party should refrain from locking up innocent opposition party leaders on flimsy and trumped-up charges on the pretext of keeping law and order.

3. We urge both the private and the government media to stop either blanketly supporting or opposing which they were practicing for the last 27 years. We urge them to execute their duty sensitively, wisely and professionally.

4. We believe we can only get out of this political and constitutional crisis by taking bold and unprecedented institutional reforms. Thus we call upon the public, elders, religious leaders, prominent individuals, rational social media activists and the diplomatic community to pressure the government to stop taking the country to the cliff edge and facilitate for an all-inclusive dialogue to find a lasting politician solution for the current constitutional crisis.

5. Lastly, EDP would like to thank Dr. Daniel Bekele, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Commissioner. True to his word, Dr. visited Ato Lidetu at Bishoftu Police Station. Dr. Daneil and Ato Lidetu discussed about Ato Lidetu's overall conditions in detention. Ato Lidetu singled out to Dr. Daniel his susceptibility to Covid 19 is his most serious concern in detention. Ato Lidetu also briefed Dr. Daniel the regime moved out those detainees who were believed to have contracted with Covid 19 to a different venue once the regime learned about the visit by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

EDP Executive Committee,

The 4th of August 2020,

Addis Ababa



CC: Local and International Press