

"We must learn to Live together as brothers or perish together as fools"

Dr Martin Luther King

## Peace To All Men- A Christmas Message

December 19, 2006

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Merry Christmas!

Our Lord Jesus (or Issa) is worshipped by Christians as the Son of the Living God and adored by Muslims as a Prophet. It was His birth two thousand years ago in Bethlehem that we commemorate and celebrate as Christmas or "ገና".

There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. According to the Gospel of Luke an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and told them the good news of great joy that will be for all the people. A great company of the heavenly host (angels) appeared praising God and saying: **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all men."**

The message of Christmas is a message of joy and peace. One of the heavenly declarations during that holy night is that peace be on Earth too all men. Our Lord Jesus Christ has come to the world to give us true peace that does not depend on external circumstances but springs out from our heart. The lack of peace and internal security severely affects many dimensions of our lives.

Suicides, addictions, alcoholism ... all are manifestations of the lack of internal peace within individuals. According to official statistics, about a million people commit suicide annually, more than those murdered or killed in war. As of 2001 in the USA, suicides outnumber homicides by 3 to 2 and deaths from AIDS by 2 to 1. Some suicides may be caused by a noble motive. For instance the suicide of Emperor Thewodros is one example that is celebrated by Ethiopians and has been symbolizing the refusal of Ethiopians to fall under the British Colony for more than a century. Setting aside those heroic suicides, depression is the common phenomenon amongst those who terminate their lives. Suicide is simply the lack of internal peace and internal security.

The message of Christmas is a message of peace. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all men." declared angels. All of us are important to God. There is something unique that we can accomplish that no-one can. We may lose what we have labored for years in one night. We may be told a bad news by our physician. We may have difficulty feeding our children. We may be lonely and betrayed by our dear friends. We may lose loved ones and be at the bottom of our society. We may not have hope in our life and feel very empty. We may be told by others that we are hopeless and are no good for nothing. Because of what we did sometime in the past, we may continuously be blaming ourselves and see or have no purpose in our life at all.

However, I declare the message of Christmas: **"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all men"**. This is a heavenly message to each one of us. It is a message of

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hope, peace and joy. There are always alternatives. The stormy season will surely pass and spring will come. We should give ourselves second chances. We should tell ourselves that we are human beings created in the image of God for a unique and a noble cause. We may not be needed by others but we are important to God. We should stop blaming ourselves for what we did years ago. Instead let us make use of the past mistakes to make our future a better one. Let us open our heart to a new beginning and a holy message of Christmas which is a message of joy, peace and reconciliation.

The peace between fellow human beings is another dimension of peace. The message of Christmas is the message that brings people together. Many couples who used to be lovers are no more dining on the same table. There may be some childhood friends who do not talk to each other anymore. We are so slow to love and forgive but so quick to hate and judge, slow to build but quick to destroy. What we have learned from our culture and our society may be hate towards certain group of our population. What we are filled in our heart may be bitterness and rage against other fellow Ethiopians. The message of Christmas is the message of peace, love and forgiveness that can provide fundamental changes in our perspectives and mentality. It is a message that gives us the opportunity to see life from a different angle and a divine perspective. The message of Christmas is a message that says: "LOVE and COMPASSION are more powerful than hate and MERCY and FORGIVENESS are more powerful than revenge."

Let there be an opportunity for divorcees to reconsider and restore back their marriages. Let us remember the good days we have spent together than those few days that led us to our divorce. The message of Christmas is a message that focuses on the positives. Let children go to sleep kissing their fathers and mothers every night. Let there be peace and joy in all families. Let the whole family sing "Joy to the World" sitting around the Christmas tree. Let the whole family go to church and praise God with "Tsenatsil" and "Kebero" saying "አማን በአማን አማን በአማን ተወለደ መድኃኔ ዓለም/ the Savior of the World is born "

The third dimension of peace is the lack of peace in our world. Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Chad, Gaza and the West Bank, Burma, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Ethiopia...human beings are dying in hundreds and thousands in man made wars and atrocities. The lack of peace is destroying cities, villages and countries. Ethiopia has some clear choices to make.

- It can either be like Iraq and Somalia where one group of the population is going after the other, where its citizens are fleeing all over the places, attacks and counterattacks are basically destroying the social fabrics of the society or it can be like South Africa where mercy and reconciliation has brought the country from its ugly past.
- It can either continue being a country at the peripheries of the peripheries, the poorest of the poor who is entirely dependent on outsiders to feed its people or it can be a country which is self-sufficient and a basket of breads.
- It can either be a country where its government continues ruling its people with an iron fist and by the power of the gun or it can be a country where a forward looking and civilized system by the people, for the people and of the people is established.

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- It can either choose to be divided by ethnic groups and immerse itself into ethnic tensions and ethnic cleansings like Bosnia Herzegovina and Darfur or it can live together as a multi-ethnic country where all Ethiopians are respected regardless of their age, gender, religion and ethnic affiliations.
- It can either allow itself to be disintegrated and vanish from the face of the Earth as a proud and historic Nation or it can emerge as a major power of the black continent of Africa.
- It can either allow full political freedoms, the release of all political prisoners (Kinijit leaders, reporters, human right activists, ex-TPLF leaders ...) and the unfettered individuals' rights or it can decide to be a backward and a medieval country.
- It can either be a country where its children are not able to solve their differences in a dialog or it can be a country where its children come together, forgive one another and give a chance to peace and reconciliation.

Let the Spirit of Christmas help Ethiopia make the right choices. Let peace, wisdom and knowledge fill the heart and mind of authorities in Arat Kilo. Peace is not something that can be imposed and exported from the outside. Peace is not a gift from the Americans and Europeans. Peace is not a product of the United Nations. Peace is something that comes from within. Unless we Ethiopians solve our problems ourselves it is naïve to expect peace from outsiders. The outsiders may not want us to have peace. They may have hidden agenda. They might be seen to us as our allies when deep down they are not. They may not want us to have peace and use our natural resources like the waters of the Blue Nile. They may not want to see a stable, democratic, prosperous, unique and united Ethiopia. They may systematically be holding our neck to drag us down. We are the only solution for our problems. Only we can turn around the fate our country if we want to. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said nothing can bring us peace but ourselves.

Peace is not stability. It is not the lack of gun fires. Peace is freedom and joy and a life lived without fear and torment. There is no peace where there is fear. "You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom" said Malcolm-X. There is no peace where there is no freedom. There is no peace where there is no joy.

It is in this context that I call for the good conscious of the EPRDF officials to do the right think and give true peace a chance. The ball is in their court. The EPRDF controls the economy, the army, the judiciary and the parliament. It controls everything in Ethiopia. If it chooses to it can bring peace and hope to that country and its 77 millions inhabitants in a matter of weeks. If only the EPRDF takes courageous and bold reconciliatory moves now, though it might be considered as a defeat at the beginning, it would surely be the ultimate winner in the history book.

The courage of the EPRDF to introduce democracy and free speech in Ethiopia was historic. Their willingness to open up the country for democracy and a truly free election in May 2000 was commendable. However they must not let bad elements in their party undo their great accomplishments. Victory is not measured only by loosing an election. Victory is also measured by being humble and accepting the verdict of the People. There will always be a second round. It is always possible to come back.

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Some among the EPRDF circles may think it is too late. I say: "it is not". They might say: "there is no partner to talk to". I say again: "There is." I am sure the Kinijit leadership in the Kaliti will be open for a dialog, understand that the EPRDF has to also be part of the solution and be accommodating to the need of the EPRDF as long as basic democratic principles are not violated. It may be difficult to deal with armed groups whose leaders are most of the time racists and inflexible. Armed group leaders, most of the time tend to solve their problems with their gun. That is not the case with Kinijit leaders. Let the Spirit of Christmas fill the palaces at Arat Kilo and the prison cells of Kaliti.

**It is my hope and prayer that the leadership of the EPRDF will look beyond the horizon and above their individual prides, and take historic steps at this historic moment in this historic country of ours.** It is my hope and prayer that Kaliti prisoners will dine together with their families and share the Joy of Christmas. It is my hope armed groups will renounce violence, lay down their arms and come to the peaceful table. It is my hope that all parties will come to the recognition that the culture of violence does not work in Ethiopia anymore. We are tired of an Ethiopian killing another Ethiopian. We are tired of seeing the blood of our brothers and sisters shed in vain. We are tired of hearing gun fires. We are tired of smelling powders from explosives. We are tired of spending billions of dollars on weapons.

What we want is bread, water, peace and the chance to live in the great country of ours which is called 'ETHIOPIA' with dignity.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is born for all of us!  
Merry Christmas to All of You!

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