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## The Democratization Process in Ethiopia and Hallmark of Leadership Kinijit International Advisory Board, June 12, 2008

Principled leadership, namely, genuine commitment to the causes of peace, national reconciliation, mutual respect, inclusion, recognition of public voice, the rule of law and multiparty democracy is the **hallmark of statesmanship**. The Ethiopian people have demonstrated their commitment to a peaceful transition to liberal democracy during the 2005 elections. Many sacrificed their lives; thousands languished in jail; thousands were forced to flee their homes and families. The entire leadership of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP) was incarcerated for the sole reason of defending the causes of democracy and the verdict of the Ethiopian people.

The leadership of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) dominated by the ethnic based Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) jailed the entire leadership of the CUDP for a strategic and well calculated reason: to root out the organization and to make it leaderless. The ruling party seemed to have succeeded in its machination. During the two years the CUDP leaders languished in jail, the ruling party was able to sow seeds of division, discord and mistrust. One consequence was to demoralize the Ethiopian people and especially youth both within and outside the country.

Despite the onslaught against the CUDP and despite the division within CUDP, the Ethiopian people never lost hope for a better and brighter democratic future. The “Spirit of Kinijit” persisted in the hearts and minds of the vast majority of the Ethiopian people. This “Spirit” is in essence what some Ethiopians have come to describe as a “hidden flame” (yetedafene esat). Those of us who believe in the capacity and commitment of the Ethiopian people to pluralist democracy, freedom and the rule of law believe that what is embedded in the minds and hearts of Ethiopians cannot be wiped out that easily.

This belief in the Ethiopian people and their just cause distinguishes principled leaders from others. In this regard, the return of Engineer Hailu Shawl, Chairman of the CUDP to Ethiopia after months of medical treatment and rehabilitation in the United States is a testimony to his commitment, moral courage and faith in the Ethiopian people and to the vision and programs of the organization which he was elected to lead. In his bold and remarkable decision, Chairman Hailu Shawl showed this and the coming generation of Ethiopians that, what is important in life is to leave a **lasting legacy** to build durable institutions in support of peace, national reconciliation, dialogue, peaceful resolution of conflicts, the rule of law, multiparty democracy and policies and programs that will nurture inclusive economic and social transformation.

In this connection, Engineer Hailu Shawl’s well covered press conference on Ginbot 28, 2000 EC in Addis Ababa was a testimony to his statesmanship and astute political leadership. He underscored myriad social, economic and political problems facing the country; highlighted the ‘economic and financial hardships’ Ethiopians were facing at present. He identified ‘lack of good governance—human and democratic rights, equal and fair treatment under the law, etc’—as the central bottleneck in transforming the country for the better. He called on Ethiopians to recognize the fact that the ruling party’s claim to democracy was shallow and self-serving. For example, weakening and emasculating non governmental associations, teachers and other professional associations, labor unions, youth and women groups; emasculating independent and free media, refusal to allow the establishment of an ‘Independent Election Board, independent and free media, freedom of speech, assembly, peaceful protest, Independent Judiciary’ etc were as quintessential today as they were during the aftermath of the May Elections.

Engineer Hailu Shawl pointed out that social and economic development to improve the well being of the Ethiopian people will be impossible as long as those who wield the reign of state power are alienated or are not accountable to the governed.

He reminded listeners that what happened in Kenya should be a lesson to avoid and not to repeat. In his view, the only responsible alternative for the Ethiopian people is to move in the direction of peaceful transformation through the ballot and not the bullet. He said, "I claim preference for free elections not with luxury of sleeping on a comfortable mattress but with the patience that" it is the only route that the Ethiopian people deserve.

One of the most significant and hopeful messages in Engineer Hailu Shawl's press conference that should move our spirits and help us to provide sustainable support is his belief in the Ethiopian people and their just cause. "As long as a party stands for the wishes, aspirations and hopes of the people (Ethiopia), the interests of citizens cannot be left buried under the carpet." He commended Ethiopians who continued to believe in the Kinijit spirit; admired his admirations for leaders and supporters who continued to believe in the organization and its vision. He expressed optimism in the possibility of resurrecting and reenergizing the millions of Ethiopians at home and abroad who believe in peace, national reconciliation, the rule of law, free elections and pluralist democracy.

This exemplary model of modern political leadership in Ethiopian politics shown by Engineer Hailu Shawl should be a source of inspiration for all of us who believe in the possibility of peaceful transition to pluralist democracy in Ethiopia.

Long live the "Spirit of Kinijit."

**Kinijit International Advisory Board**