

CHRISTIAN RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION (CRDA)

Position Statement of the CRDA Executive Committee on the Current Situation in Ethiopia

We, members of the Executive Committee of CRDA, as a body elected by the over 250 members of the Association to deal with issues that will affect their work, have been closely observing the events that emerged following the recent National Elections of May 15, 2005. From the outset, we would like to underline that Ethiopia is today experiencing a unique situation in its long history of existence as a state. The Ethiopian people are at the threshold of building a democratic society, a phenomenon for the realisation of which many have sacrificed their dear lives.

We are equally convinced that the prevalence of good governance, democracy, peace and stability play a pivotal role in the overall development endeavours of people in general and poverty alleviation in particular, which is the primary concern of NGOs. And it goes without saying that ensuring a mechanism for free and fair elections is indispensable in the process of people's involvement in the democratisation process.

In light of this, the active and conscious participation of the Ethiopian people in the May 15 National Elections is testimony to the people's determination to take their fate into their own hands. What needs to be underscored at this juncture is, therefore, the need to respect the decision of the people and strive to realise the long-aspired desire of the people for peace, security, prosperity and human dignity. However, events that unfolded over the past few weeks since the Elections have raised serious concern among the Ethiopian people of all walks of life as well as the international community.

In this connection, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation to the opposition and the ruling parties for the agreement they signed recently to end their differences regarding the election results through peaceful means. Resolving differences through discussion, rather than resorting to conflicts, we believe, is the essence of democracy. We would also like to extend our gratitude to the international community in general and the EU representatives in particular, for taking the bold and responsible initiative to bring the parties to the discussion table; and to have them sign the agreement for peacefully resolving their differences in the finalization of the election process.

Cognizant of the prevailing overall situation of the country, as briefly stated above, and in sincere appreciation of the path traversed over the past years to reach at this historical moment in the democratisation process;

In full recognition of the irreplaceable role of the NGO community, as strong component of the Civil Society Sector, in the all-out endeavours towards the alleviation of poverty and ensuring respect for human rights and bringing about peace and democracy in the society at large;

Well aware of our unflinching commitment to uphold the lofty ideals of human dignity, peace and democracy, and to ensure the alleviation of poverty;

Prompted by the concern that there is no reason to believe that the regrettable negative developments over the past weeks would not recur in the future as well;

Appreciating the provisions stipulated in the Ethiopian Constitution, the Penal Code and all the international conventions, to which Ethiopia is a signatory; and

Fully convinced of the need to stand in unison to protect our long-aspired values and principles of safeguarding the interests of the marginalized;

We hereby issue this Position Statement and strongly request all pertinent bodies to give our concern due consideration in due time. Accordingly, we declare that:

- **We are seriously concerned about the unhealthy developments over the past weeks, which include the mass arrest and harassment of people from all walks of life, including human right activists and the killing of unarmed civilians, including minors, through an act, which we believe, is out of proportion and vivid fundamental human rights violation.**
- **We are deeply grieved by the death of citizens and we would like to express our condolences to the bereaved families. We strongly demand that an independent inquiry body be instituted to investigate the killings and bring the culprits to justice. This stems from the conviction that the measure would ensure the rule of law.**
- **As organised unit of the society at large, and as indispensable development partners, we strongly believe the participation of Civil Society Organizations will facilitate the success of the inquiry. We are of the conviction that the Sector, as an independent body, could assist by way of assessing the situation and submitting comprehensive reports.**
- **We would like to underline that all parties should consider NGOs/CSOs as development partners; and hence, refrain from marginalizing this Sector pertaining to national issues of common concern. At this juncture, we would like to note that participation of CSOs in election monitoring is a right, recognised by law, and it cannot be reduced or modified because of the liking or disliking of the contesting parties as noticed recently.**

- **We believe that access to information and freedom of expression are among fundamental human rights, as they enable citizens to be actively involved in the affairs of the country. Accordingly, we are vehemently against the stifling of the media. We would also like to note the lack of capacity on the part of the media, particularly the electronic media, which are totally state-owned and controlled, to handle social conflicts and initiating dialogue.**
- **Regarding His Excellency the Prime Minister's directive banning public rallies and demonstrations in and around Addis Ababa, we strongly question whether the measure has served the purpose it was meant for – ensuring peace and stability. It is worth noting that the measure has not ensured safe and protective environment. It has rather become a source of fear and confusion and brought about the prevalence of suspicion and insecurity, as people are on their toes in view of the unabated arrests and killings. On the other hand, it has jeopardised the use of the citizens' right to seeking solutions to the country's problems through the use of indigenous knowledge in conflict resolution and peace building. As a result, we are strongly against the measure, and its subsequent prolonging, as it is a violation of the people's fundamental rights.**
- **We would like to make it clear to all concerned parties that we, members of the Civil Society, are engaging in such undertakings as it is one of the universally accepted role of CSOs and in pursuit of our rights as concerned people. We, therefore, request all concerned, that our actions should not be considered as based on the goodwill or whim of one party or the other.**

In conclusion, we would like to express CRDA's firm conviction and readiness to engage in all efforts aimed at containing the prevailing trends of confrontation in an amicable manner. To this end, we are prepared to work with any and all concerned institutions or individuals who come forward with constructive intent and within the framework of the laws of the country. To this end, we would like to note that the CRDA would shortly call a meeting of religious leaders, community elders, prominent citizens, renowned personalities and professionals to jointly discuss the possibilities of bringing about peace and tranquility in Ethiopia and subsequently focus the people's attention towards fighting the common enemy – poverty.

**June 20, 2005
Addis Ababa**