

CHRISTIAN RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the CRDA Consultative Meeting on Draft Charities and Societies Proclamation

- Date:** May 20, 2008
- Venues:** CRDA Hall
- Time:** 9:00a.m to 12:00a.m.
- Participants:** List of Participants is attached herewith
- Chair Person:** W/ro. Tsige Haile, Vice Chairperson of the CRDA Board of Directors
- Speaker:** Dr. Meshesha Shewarega: Director of CRDA

Agenda

- 1) Progress report on the process of developing and submitting the comments of CRDA Members and the wider Civil Society on the Draft Charities and Societies proclamation
- 2) Discussion and consensus on the way forward especially in view the intended discussion with the Prime Minister
- 3) Others

Agenda I

W/ro. Tsige Haile, Vice Chairperson of the CRDA Board of Directors and Chair of the meeting welcomed all the participants and explained the purpose of the meeting as follows:

It is to be recalled that the past consecutive meetings have discussed several policy, procedural and content matters on the draft proclamation. Afterwards the meeting had given lofty responsibility to the CRDA representative and the task force to look into general and particular matters of the draft proclamation, document them and submit to the Minister of Justice in person by explaining the comments point by point. The meeting had also been requesting to lobby through the Minister of Justice to organize a policy dialogue and consultation meeting with the Prime Minister like any other sectors do. The purpose of this meeting of the day is then to present the progress report on the activities carried out so far and discuss on the possible approach, content selection, manner of presentation

and fruitful engagement for the intended meeting with the Prime Minister tentatively scheduled for Saturday May 24, 2008 afternoon. In this regard the chairperson acknowledged the splendid achievement of the task force in general and the personal contribution of Dr. Meshesha Shewarega in particular both for trying to create a sound consensus with the Minister of Justice and for being able to arrange a consultative meeting with the Prime Minister on the proclamation and other Civil society and Government relation issues. The chairperson then gave the floor to the Director for presentation.

Dr Meshesha Shewarega, the Director, presented the brief recount of the activities over the past ten days and presented a four track approach for the way forward as follows;

CRDA, as part of the task force and representative of its constituents has been discharging its effort with utmost commitment. Based on the comments forwarded by the meeting of membership conducted in May 12, 2008 and the general civil society meeting organized at the Kokeb Hall on May 13, 2008 a 40 pages document was developed and submitted on May 14, 2008 to the Minister of Justice with due point by point explanation on general and particular issues . The first 25 pages of the document presents a general comment on policy matters, international treaties and other general legal frameworks. The rest are article by article analyses and comments on the draft proclamation. As per the recommendation of the meetings, a series of lobby has been carried out through the Minister of Justice and this endeavor has born fruits. The Prime Minister has expressed his willingness to discuss with the civil society and possibly this meeting will be organized on May 17, 2008.

In order to exploit the best of this opportunity and yield the required change while brining basic attitudinal changes, the task force has suggested the following points for consideration these are:-

1. The preamble should start with the appreciating positive qualities which the government created in fostering civil society and emphasizing the role of the civil society in the country's development endeavor. We should never externalize, deny our shortcomings and be pessimist but diplomatic. Rather this presentation should emphasize the role of civil society in Ethiopia in the past life saving activities and current development endeavors. This approach could be substantiated with facts and figures so that it help government recognize the role of the Civil society in Ethiopia in reducing poverty, number of beneficiaries of development projects, creating jobs, etc.
2. We then need to move to the need of a National Policy for the CSO Sector and justify the same by raising policy issues in a way that helps government bodies recognize this third sector as development partners at all echelons of the government i.e . Federal, regional, zonal and woreda level and incite them for partnership.

3. The third approach is to move to the need to create a more enabling environment, design compatible legal and institutional framework and others. This should include examining congruency of the proclamation with international treaties and national initiatives such as Global Fund, PASDEP, Cottonou Agreements, EU, P and other agreements signed by NGOs.
4. The last approach should focus on technical details such as the 10 – 90 funding sources, lifting and easing harsh sanctions, minimizing the power given to the agency, prolonging the transition period, tax exemption, incentives etc... Participants, then, were invited to comment.

Most of the participants solemnly expressed their gratitude to the task force in general and Dr. Meshesha Shewarega in particular for their relentless effort and fruitful engagement in submitting the summarized comments of the civil society on the draft proclamation as well as for being able to arrange consultative meeting with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Participants said, with a view to effectively utilize this opportunity comments and questions should be structured, presenters should be selected to avoid unfavorable eventualities, possible questions should be anticipated and pre thought, contradictions and repetitions should be avoided to make the best impression. For this, CRDA, in consultation with task force should workout a premeditated and uniform approach. Besides, the following issues were raised for consideration by the task force:-

- ⇒ religious institutions and their independent nature should be recognized by the proclamation
- ⇒ the right of disabled and vulnerable are mixed, and over sighted
- ⇒ our presentations should effectively articulate why we exist, our accountability
- ⇒ we need to sound quite domestic, concerned citizens but never marginalizing international NGOs
- ⇒ creating friendly atmosphere is the basis of understating and sharing ideas
- ⇒ The contribution of the sector in the previous relief, rehabilitation and current development endeavor should be resonated by substantiating with latest, correct figures.
- ⇒ The appropriateness of administering civil society under Ministry of Justice, rather than other related sector offices like Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs should be reminded.
- ⇒ Our diplomacy and humble approach should never be at the expense of critical evaluation of issues.
- ⇒ Reexamining and cross examining of the relevance of the social, cultural, economic and political background of Ethiopia against the model countries should still be reminded.
- ⇒ We need be prepared to respond to questions pertaining to curious enquiries informed by popular misconceptions like abuse of funds, our accountability and transparency.

- ⇒ Our representatives should be people who have positive or neutral acceptance, including from religious domain, etc.
- ⇒ NGOs shouldn't necessarily be associated with relief and poverty as they are part of every developed society such as France 750,000 NGOs, South Africa 50,000.
- ⇒ Our questions should include right-based approach such as freedom of Association and self-governance
- ⇒ This opportunity should be utilized to establish long and continuous relation with government bodies
- ⇒ As it is done in other developing countries, the Government should consider the Third Sector as its development arm and provide technical and budgetary support
- ⇒ Parliamentarians and higher level authorities should visit the programmes and projects of the Sector as it is done for other sectors

The Meeting delegated CRDA and the task force to designate two individuals who should present the summarized view of the consultative meeting, other four individuals who would add explanation on sectoral and specific issues, plus four other persons who would attempt the anticipated and unanticipated questions.

The podium, which is to be chaired by Minister of Justice, should be informed to moderate the meeting in this approach to avoid irregularities while ensuring freedom of speech.

This meeting was adjourned on 12:00 PM