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Somalia Desperately Needs a Genuine Political Reconciliation

Fairfax, Virginia, U.S.A, 26 June 2007 – The solution to Somalia's protracted civil strife requires a new and innovative approach of national political dialogue and power-sharing arrangements in which all Somalia stakeholders could fairly participate. Somalia does not need another flawed reconciliation process; another costly marathon of artificial dialogue that ends with symbolic hugs, only to continue business as usual.

The Somali people are yearning for a lasting peace and stability. However, the overwhelming majority is not ready to credulously accept what is currently being packaged as “reconciliation” knowing that their country is under occupation, and the process is being dictated, indeed micro-managed by the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) who is a party to the conflict.

The upcoming “national reconciliation conference”, under the auspices of the National Reconciliation Congress (NRC) has serious and fundamental flaws and is destined to fail because of the following reasons:

- **Ethiopian Control and Manipulation:** The occupation and presence of Ethiopian forces in Somalia is a significant factor in the current instability. Ethiopian role has not been limited to a military occupation, which includes the indiscriminate killing of innocent Somalis; but it also includes a well-planned, strategic policy designed to systematically weaken and ultimately dissolve Somalia as a sovereign nation.
- **Clan Focused:** The upcoming conference is primarily focused on clan reconciliation without a power-sharing arrangement and establishing a unity government that is acceptable to the majority of the Somali people. Clan reconciliation is meaningless and irrelevant at this point because clan conflicts have already ended. Again, the Ethiopian regime is using the clan card skillfully to perpetuate the Somali mayhem and impede the reconstitution of the Somali people.
- **TFG Domination of the Process:** The TFG which lost both legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the overwhelming majority of Somali people (as it's seen as a puppet of the Ethiopian regime) has a total control of the upcoming conference. The TFG has appointed the chairman and other members of the committee; is setting the agenda and selecting the conference venue; is hosting the conference and will ultimately control the final outcome.

- **Unsuitable Venue:** After several delays, the conference is now re-scheduled to be held on July 15, 2007, in Mogadishu. However, Mogadishu has become increasingly volatile and dangerous. Roadside bombings, assassinations, abductions, detention of innocent civilians, and coercion are widespread and common occurrences in the city. It is both unsafe and unwise to hold a reconciliation conference in Mogadishu at this time and under the grip of the Ethiopian occupation. Participants from all segments of the Somali society must feel safe and free to express their views without fear of arrest, abduction, torture, and intimidation.
- **Absence of Cease-fire or Confidence-building Actions:** The current plan for “reconciliation” ignores the importance of first negotiating a cease-fire agreement and implementing confidence-building measures to indicate goodwill intention [usually by those who have the upper hand]

The people of Somalia have endured tremendous suffering as a result of this protracted political instability. In order to achieve a meaningful political settlement, the following prerequisite ought to be considered:

- All Ethiopian forces must withdraw from Somalia immediately, without condition or delay, before a genuine reconciliation can take place.
- Neutral peace keeping forces excluding the “the frontline countries” must be deployed immediately. Such forces should protect the population and must never be used as an oppressive tool to harm civilians as is currently occurring under the partnership of TFG and the Ethiopian occupation.
- TFG should not be involved in the selection of conference participants. Further, the TFG should not dictate the agenda; nor host the conference; nor control the final outcome.
- The primary focus of the conference should be to establish a legitimate unity government that upholds the Transitional Federal Charter (TFC) and respects the system of checks and balances that the charter mandates. This unity government’s primary goal is to sustain peace and pave the way for a genuine national election.
- Members of the unity government (not the Transitional Federal Parliament- TFP) must be banned from holding any future government position and from seeking public office for 5 years.
- The conference must be managed and owned by Somalis without foreign control, interference, influence, or manipulation and held in a neutral venue in which all concerned Somalis can participate and feel safe to express their views without fear.
- The international community can and should play a major role in these negotiations by providing financial and logistical support to ensure that the process is fair and transparent.

So, we call upon the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and the Arab League to encourage and facilitate a genuine political settlement that will lead to the establishment of an inclusive power sharing arrangement that will bring about lasting peace and stability.

ABOUT SOMALI DIASPORA NETWORK (SDN) – SDN is a grass-roots organization committed to advocate and lobby on critical policy matters pertaining to Somali-American interest and issues of concerns through communication and information sharing, raising public awareness, and educating the public and government officials.

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