

Honorable participants of the 8th congress,

Honorable fraternal organizations & government representatives,

Ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the General Council of the EPRDF, I would like to welcome you all to the 8th organizational congress of our movement. Wishing the assembly a sterling success, I am confident that you will have a pleasant stay in Adama.

As it will be recalled, ten years ago, we waged a protracted struggle to overcome ideological and political confusion along with the danger of sliding into rent-seeking within our party. Because our renewal movement was crowned with resounding successes at our 4th party congress, we have been able to chart a path that enables us to build a development and democratic order centered on and led by a democratic development state. It has taken us two years of struggle to fulfill the organizational prerequisites and raise greater awareness among our implementing and oversight bodies on our party's developmental and democratic line. Ever since then, by registering an annual 11% average growth for seven consecutive years, we have ascertained that ours is a rapid development line. Beyond ensuring sustainable rapid growth, our line has proven to be beneficial to all sectors of the society as it is based on equitable distribution of wealth. Ethiopia today can be cited among countries of the world with impressive income distribution and is one of the leading African countries in this area. This further underscores that our party line does not only spur rapid and consecutive growth, but also demonstrates that we follow a line that ensures equitable development.

Our development strategy does not only envision democracy as one desirable goal that accommodates our plurality and diversity. Rather, on the one hand, it conceives democracy as the source of our peace and foundation of our very polity. And, on the other, as an effective instrument of mobilizing the entire population around a developmental path that equally benefits every segment of the population. Thus, we have been able to firmly inculcate an implementation direction that combines democracy and development. Side by side with the rapid development, a situation has been created where our democratic constitution and its institutional expressions are taking deep roots, and where our peoples' democratic culture is steadily growing. Hence, we can dare say that our Renewal movement has ensured us great victories.

Honorable Delegates

Invited Guests

It is well known that our countrymen are founders of one of the world's ancient civilizations and have distinguished themselves by preserving the freedom of our country. Impressive as the manifestations of our ancient civilizations are, in the course of history, however, Ethiopia has failed to march with the times. In fact, by the 20th century it had become a virtual symbol of backwardness. No doubt, this has something to do with the constantly changing external factors, but the root cause of our country's regression was internal.

As our country is constituted of several nationalities with diverse religious beliefs, Ethiopia requires a constitution that accommodates the diversity of its peoples. Nevertheless, unable to found a political order that accommodates diversity, Ethiopians have been subjected to continuous conflict over the diversity of their identity. Hence, deprived of peace that could have allowed it to surge forward, Ethiopia has been marching backwards for a thousand years, compounding its abject poverty.

The first and chief obstacle has been our inability to create a political order that accommodates our diversity and afford us the opportunity to focus on development. The second obstacle has been our failure to pave a path that accelerates the pace of our country's economic development.

As it is known our economy which for long had been entangled by feudal production relations had abruptly swung to a command economy which, together with the protracted war had a detrimental effect on the country. Our failure to formulate a correct development policy and direction and particularly, our failure to found a political order that accommodates our diversity and ensures peace and stability were the reasons why our people who, once had been the shining symbol of black civilization, had become symbol of appalling wretchedness and backwardness of black people.

Our developmental and democratic line that emerged from our Renewal movement has proved that it is capable of removing the two major obstacles responsible for our poverty and backwardness. Thus, by avoiding the danger of swinging from command economy to neoliberal market fundamentalism and with a clear commitment to create a developmental state that is suitable to our unique situation, we have registered a consecutive rapid and equable development for unprecedented seven continuous years in a row. Fighting poverty successfully, we have re-embarked on the path of civilization.

We have successfully framed and have begun to implement a federal democratic constitution that reflects and accommodates our diversity. In consequence, we have established a

voluntary unity based on equality. This in turn has for the first time afforded us an opportunity to turn our focus of attention towards the task of development. And as we have begun to forge the unity of our people based on the principle of equality and freewill for the first time in its long history our country has enjoyed an enduring peace and stability which brought us relief good enough to focus on developmental priorities.

As our Federal democratic order has increasingly gained the acceptance and the support of the people, and as we have succeeded in mobilizing the entire population around the issues of development and building a democratic order, a favorable situation has been created for a lasting peace. By galvanizing our people and coordinating the works of our government and our revolutionary democratic organization, we have ensured that our implementation strategy is a key instrument in achieving equitable and rapid development.

As our democratic and developmental line that emerged from our Renewal movement has concretely shown that it is possible to overcome the main impediments to our country's progress. It has also signaled that the new Ethiopian millennium that we celebrated three years ago has ushered Ethiopia's Renaissance. Reversing our thousand-year backward march, we have started to travel along the path of development. It has become increasingly clear that if the present pace of development continues, we will be freed from abject poverty and be listed among the world's middle-income countries in 10 years time.

We have now reached a stage where we can envision the possibility of regaining our status among civilized countries after a thousand-year of slumber. In short, our line has become the key to our Renaissance. Likewise, our organization has in the last seven years demonstrated that it is the originator and vanguard of our Renaissance. The fact that almost the entire population gave its mandate to our organization in the recent 4th general election signaled that the idea of the Ethiopian Renaissance is no more the monopoly of our party, on the contrary it has become an agenda that has started to mobilize the whole population and generate a broad national consensus.

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The 8th congress of our organization is entrusted with the herculean task of sustaining the rapid economic development that we have initiated for the last seven years as well as ensuring a structural change in the overall economic setting. Thus it is expected that the congress will endorse a plan that will ensure a higher growth rate which in the coming five years will enable us to double our country's GDP. To this effect our congress is also expected to design an effective mechanism that enables us to mobilize all the capacities of the state, the party and the broad masses in a synergistic fashion.

It is also entrusted with the task of formulating an economic plan that enable us to ensure food security, accelerate the development of inter dependant and integrated manufacturing industry which will gradually assume leadership in the overall economy, and develop an adequate economic and social infrastructure broad enough to support the realization of structural changes in the overall process of ensuring rapid development. In general the congress will undertake the huge task of creating the necessary prerequisites for a rapid transformational process that aims to develop Ethiopia in to the middle income world.

In the political sphere our congress is expected to set important policy directions that will ensure the realization of structural transformations in furtherance of our activities pertaining to the task of building a democratic order. Further more it is entrusted with the task of broadening and deepening the national consensus on our federal democratic system and thereby building a robust and stable democratic political order. Taking in to account the fact that the overwhelming majority have given their endorsement to our party that made it the dominant party, the congress shall , strive to the further strengthening of the multi -party system within the peculiar context of a dominant party rule . It also carries the task of formulating a plan of action for realizing the process of succession within the party leadership as well as the development of organized popular participation in to a higher level. I have firm belief that our congress shall successfully discharge these herculean and complex responsibilities.

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invited guests.

On behalf of the congress and all our members, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our people for the support it has given us in the recent fourth national election and the decisive role it has played in realizing the shining victories of the last seven years. We in the EPRDF renew our commitment to work diligently for the realization of the new five years' plan for growth and transformation of Ethiopia.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the fraternal parties which supported us in all our endeavors and have graced our congress through the presence of their representatives. To those countries of the developed world, I salute you on behalf of our 8th congress for giving us a helping hand in our difficult times and rendering your support for our development. Once again

we pledge to enhance our effort and make efficient use of your assistance for a rapid development of Ethiopia that will extricate our country from food aid dependency.

On behalf of the people and our organization, I would like to express our gratitude to the Communist party of China and Indian Congress party who bequeathed us great assistance before consummating their effort to lift their own people from poverty. In this they have proven to be dependable allies. I would like to assure you that we will never forget your generosity as you have given us much from your people that are not yet fully freed from poverty.

Finally, wishing the assembly success, I declare the opening of the deliberations.