



UDJ/Andnet Officials Public Meeting in Washington DC

June 7, 2008

KNAASO Press Release

The “Unity for Democracy & Justice Party (UDJ)”, held a historic meeting on July 6, 2008 at the Marriott Hotel in Washington DC. The meeting, organized by Kinijit North America Association of Support Organizations, (KNAASO), in collaboration with Kinijit DC Metro Support Chapter was attended to full capacity.

When a name like Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, an internationally renowned Human Rights leader, democracy activist, author and arguably the most celebrated Ethiopian academic, appears on the roster of panelists, it is bound to generate enormous interest. The second panelist, Ato Asrat Tasse, is Secretary General of UDJ and a respected academician in his own right. Their visit to the US and particularly to the DC-Metro area, which houses the largest Ethiopian community outside of Ethiopia, is significant in more ways than one.

The panelists made an elaborate analysis of the pre and post 2005 election environment in Ethiopia. They made no attempt at covering up mistakes made by Kinijit’s leadership, which is the predecessor of UDJ.

Ato Asrat Tasse, Secretary General of UDJ, presented a candid portrayal of Kinijit’s shortcomings that led to its fracture soon after the leadership was released from prison. He highlighted lack of political integration and the tendency of some leaders who brought their personal ambitions before the interest of the party.

Professor Mesfin, in his trademark forthright way, pointed out that the fight within our own persons must be guided by fact and reason rather than by emotion. He said that politics which is fueled by hatred, grudge, and the desire for revenge will feed the cycle tyranny and deny our people their right for democracy and stable life. “This ugly state of mind”, he warned, “is not an exclusive domain of the ruling party but regrettably present even in some quarters of the opposition.” He reminded the audience that no matter how stark their political differences, Ethiopian parties shall refrain from looking at each other as “enemies” but rather as political contenders with differing viewpoints. “The opposition”, he added, “should guard itself from demagogues who never hesitate to exploit the tender emotion of the human mind to rally support and propel to power. Typically, they do it a good distance away from the bullet and the hardship”, he added.

Peaceful struggle covered a good part of the panelists’ speech and an equally good part of the question and answer session. Both panelists stated that peaceful struggle was, is and will remain the Kinijit/Andnet way. UDJ will intensify its struggle knowing fully well that the political space opened during the 2005 election was never courtesy of EPRDF but one induced by the combined pressure of our people, political parties, the press and the international community. “We are confident the political conditions that prevailed then and forced EPRDF to open up are still around albeit in a more pronounced manner”.

“On the other hand”, they concluded, “contemporary history, the prevailing geo-political landscape, the objective and subjective realities in our country do not point to armed struggle as being a viable option let alone guaranteeing transfer of power to the people”.

Both Professor Mesfin and Ato Asrat Tasse reiterated their own commitments and the commitment of the entire UDJ leadership to bring systemic change to the country. They reaffirmed that despite repeated natural and man-made hardships our people were subjected to and despite the repressive practices of EPRDF, the future for Ethiopia and Ethiopians is indeed bright if we choose to work with resolve, warm hearts and minds.

The delegation is scheduled to make several stops within the USA before it heads back home.