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Vision Ethiopia Ninth Conference

Rethinking the Ethiopian Transition

Second and Final Call for Papers

December 30, 2019

Following eight successful conferences, of which the last two were held in Ethiopia, the Board of Directors of Vision Ethiopia, an independent and nonpartisan network of Ethiopian academics and professionals, is pleased to issue this second and final call for papers for the conference that will be held in **Washington, D.C.**, on **March 21 and 22, 2020**. As in our previous conferences, the Board calls upon scholars, professionals, civil servants and political and social actors to *independently* explore a wide range of issues that are relevant to transition the country to democracy. Topics of interest include the challenges of conducting free and fair election, controlling election related violence, reversing internal displacement; rebuilding the institutions of governance, and the prevention of sectarian attacks and disruption of teaching and learning at universities. Also of interest are studies on government accountability, and analysis of the roles of such factors as culture, education, State and non-State actors, and foreign powers, in attenuating (accentuating) conflict and instability.

The last eighteen months have witnessed breathtaking developments in Ethiopia, both positive and negative. On the positive side, there initially appeared to be exceedingly encouraging signs of democratic reforms, which included the lifting of a draconian State of Emergency, the reduction of tension with Eritrea, the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, the re-integration of armed groups into society, and the desire by the Government to accommodate and engage opposition groups in the political process to advance democracy and rebuild national unity. Unsurprisingly, these overtures and steps earned the new leaders of the ruling party unqualified support and acclamation from genuinely peace-loving Ethiopians, both at home and in the diaspora.

On the other hand, several questions and uncertainties have emerged in the course of time that dampened the hopes and aspirations of the people of the country to live in peace, freedom and fraternity. Many have started to question whether Ethiopia is actually moving in the right direction. [Analysts](#) have



been documenting a more [pessimistic outlook](#) of the country. Ethnicity and the absence of cohesion within the ruling party have exacerbated the problems, as there are now multiple centers of power, each threatening the territorial integrity of the country. The dominance of the political space by ethnonationalists and extremists has made political choice impossible. The fear of election outcome and power struggle within the ruling ethnic coalition have led to the repackaging and rebranding of the once neo-Marxist party that claimed to have created a successful “developmental-ethnically federated” country.

On the economic side, supply constraints, rapid population growth, land scarcity, rampant inflation, severe foreign exchange shortage, debt distress, austerity measures, unemployment, forced outmigration, internal displacement, dysfunctional local governments, and rural- urban influx have obliged the Government to undertake, under the cover of “homegrown” economics, the familiar IMF and World Bank driven structural adjustment program. The rising misery, increased access to (social) media, sectarian politics and the demographic structure of the country have heightened the propensity of the Ethiopian youth to be receptive of malevolently crafted propaganda. Added to the instability and economic woes is the fact that the country has been facing immense diplomatic and security pressures on matters related to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the global and regional competition for the control of the international maritime route on the Red Sea. How the Government addresses the double-edged sword of economic recovery, instability, election and the geopolitics of the region, will determine not just the success and failure of the transition but also the peace, unity and territorial integrity of the country.

Many also question the feasibility of conducting a free and fair election under these circumstances. Whether election should precede peace and reconciliation and constitutional reform, or vice versa, has continued to be a contentious issue. Ethnic-based parties espouse the former in the name of defending “the federal” system, while others put blame on the constitution as the primary source of the problems facing the country. By and large, there appears to be no evidence of consensus on issues of vertical accountability (elections and parties), horizontal accountability (separation of powers) and diagonal accountability (independent and accountable media).

It is, thus, against these backdrops that the Ninth Conference of Vision Ethiopia will be held in Washington, D.C, with a view to providing an independent forum for all to discuss the challenges facing Ethiopia’s transition, and to generate ideas that will help thwart the [fragility](#) of the country. The theme of the conference is appropriately chosen to be: “Rethinking the Ethiopian Transition”. It is hoped



that authors would fairly and independently assess the path taken to date by the incumbent Government, the more than 100 political parties that contest for political power, as well as the requisites that enable free, fair and unfettered election. Studies on targeted and vulnerable population groups (minorities, women, children, social groups with mixed heritages) are also welcome.

Papers must be supported by reliable evidence. Authors must show that their manuscript is grounded on pertinent literature, and contextualized to the country's situation. The integrity of the data should be tested and the research should meet ethical standards. Materials must be geared towards benefiting all Ethiopians, and avoid sectarianism. Authors and panelists must be dispassionate, forward-looking and objective, and avoid bias and parochialism. The manuscript must be focused, and identify which transition problem it is trying to resolve. The conference is not a platform for canvassing and electioneering. It is a forum for reflecting on the thorny issues that the country is facing irrespective of who is in government.

Manuscripts and proposals for panel discussions will go through a normal review process. The decision about the format, venue or date of presentation of an accepted paper or panel proposal is at the discretion of Vision Ethiopia. Papers may be written in either Amharic or in English. However, speakers are encouraged to consider reaching a wider Ethiopian audience, as the primary mission of Vision Ethiopia's conferences is the creation of public awareness of important issues of national significance. Completed papers not exceeding 5000 words in length along with an abstract and a conclusion must reach Visionethiopia18@gmail.com on or before **February 15, 2020**. Our reviewers strive to provide review feedback within two weeks. For more information about vision Ethiopia please visit <http://visionethiopia.org>