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## Rule of Law: The Epitome of State Continuity

Any society that aspires to ensure the security, liberty and prosperity of its members must lay down rules that govern the conduct of groups and individuals within the society. If and to the extent that any group or individual within the larger group could disregard these rules with impunity, there will be a risk that the society will be mired in conflict and chaos. In a society where “might is right” the powerful get to do whatever they want to do at the expense of others and they get away with it.

The aspiration of Ethiopians, as manifested in their unrelenting struggle for dignity and freedom, is to build a political society in which the same set of rules apply to everyone regardless of their political, economic or other defining status. A society governed by law; a society in which everyone is equal before and under the law; a society based on the rule of law. That is what Ethiopians aspire to build.

Given our history as well as the economic, social and political challenges we face, building a rule of law society is not going to be an easy undertaking. Building the rule of law has never been an easy endeavor in any country for that matter. The legacy of past autocratic and predatory mode of governance we are accustomed to, our political culture and deficit in institutional capacity makes the challenge of realizing the ideal of rule of law in Ethiopia particularly daunting. The dehumanizing ideology of ethnic hatred that some political groups preach, the structural impediments of poverty and weak institutions as well as the legacy of previous regimes has made the attempt to build a culture of rule of law an uphill battle.

Nevertheless, the government is resolved to persist with its reform efforts to build a democratic society anchored on the principle of rule of law because the alternative is unacceptable for Ethiopians. Ethiopia is a resilient country with a history of statehood spanning millennia. It is not for lack of adversaries and traitors who have tried to sow division and animosity that Ethiopia still stands as a symbol of independence, sovereignty and pride in Africa.

It is due to the strength of the bond among Ethiopians with different ethnic heritage and the patriotism of most Ethiopians that transcend ethnic identities that Ethiopia still stands. But the mere survival of the Ethiopian state is not the height of our ambition. Ethiopians are determined to show that they can build a democratic, peaceful and prosperous country. A while ago, not so many thought an African country could resist European colonial ambitions. Ethiopians had proved them wrong more than once. Ethiopia shall prevail, prosper and build a democratic society based on rule of law.

Hardliners and their affiliates who were advancing an agenda of ethnic division and enmity through violent means believe that the armament and money they have looted and amassed entitles them to operate above the law. The kind of society that we aspire to build can never be realized unless such illusions borne out of hubris are laid to rest. That is why the government is determined to make a stand for rule of law and show that, however powerful any entity or group might think they are, they will be held accountable for their deliberate and flagrant violations of the most fundamental and sacred rules and institutions of the society.

This effort to uphold rule of law against the illegal, militant and reckless adventurism of criminal elements and their acolytes in Ethiopia will be strengthened until such groups cease to pose any risk to the security and well-being of citizens. The government will also continue with and double down on its reform initiatives geared at building capable and robust institutions that would guarantee rule of law. These initiatives and efforts will take time and will face many setbacks but they will not be reversed. We have begun a course from which there shall be no turning back.

Ethiopians have had enough of kleptocratic oligarchs who operate above and beyond the law. Slowly but surely, an Ethiopia based on rule of law, where the mighty and the not so mighty will be equal before the law, shall come to pass.

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