



Finote Ethio-Canadian Information Centre In Toronto

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Women's Rights and Democracy

"Without us, the world stops working." – This was the slogan under which millions of Spanish women launched a general strike on March 8th of 2018.

Without women's participation in unified social transformation praxis in Ethiopia, the country will sink in catastrophic civil disobedience (Miriam Ethiopia).

Preamble

Change refers to any deviation from accepted way of life or established lives, and social change is the change in society (a web of social relationships) at large. The dialectical law of nature and society informs us that society is changeful and dynamic, it can never remain static-it spirals upward from quantity to quality, negating the old to pave the path for the new one. Women are not only the beneficiaries of change, they are the key agents for change. Throughout Ethiopia's struggle for independence against colonialism (partition/scrambles for Africa and neoliberal/neocolonialism for Ethiopia), women stood shoulder to shoulder with men, often invisible, with determination and revolutionary zeal. While these women worked hard, fought and died for freedom, few have been able to share the fruits of that freedom: they remain subjugated, marginalized and disenfranchised, as they have been throughout history.

Women are the Driving Impetus of All-inclusive Provisional People's Democratic Government

Social change is nothing but variations on and modifications of any aspect of social process, social patterns, social interaction, or social organization. Participation in the politics of the social transformative praxis and national movement, which had been an act of patriotism and political life, became a respectable natural niche for all Ethiopian women. Moreover, the EPRP's principles/visions of emancipation of all women from layers of oppressions (inequalities such as gender, socio-economics, socio-political, etc.) remained rooted in its commitment to substantive equality, truly universal human rights and participatory democracy.

There cannot be real democracy if the voices and issues of women that constitute half the population of the country are ignored or sidelined. It is the need of the hour in a country like Ethiopia to have equal participation of women in mainstream political activity. Citizens need to deconstruct the stereotype of women as limited to household activities only. The nature of society has a crucial impact on the extent and effectiveness of women's political participation. Their low representation in decision making institutions signifies deep flaws in the political structure of Ethiopia. Historical, social and cultural factors have restricted rural/peasantry women from enjoying their rights of participation in political processes. In Ethiopia now, despite Abiy's overzealous boast of empowering them, women's rights cannot be achieved

by granting decrees of equality but through a socialization process, whereby legal rights will be recognized and entrenched in order to promote their interests and heighten their participation in a democratic processes: women are overwhelmed by problems of daily survival and in addition to their economic marginalization, their role is further constrained by cultural, religious, and ideological orientation. Moreover, because of their proximity to the oppressive power of the state and as a primary socializing agent, their role is crucial to any society aspiring to democracy.

African women are Africa's greatest resource, as they have been the backbone of the continents socioeconomic progression. 24% of parliamentary and ministerial seats across sub-Saharan Africa are held by women, with countries like Rwanda (61%) and South Africa (40%) leading the way. In light of all this, Ethiopia still struggles with gender equality. One wonders how this can be, when we boast the first head of an internationally recognized state in Africa, Empress Zewditu and Empress Taytu Betul who bravely lead the Ethiopian army, alongside her husband Emperor II Minilik, against the heavily armed Italian army during partition for Africa.

There is so much that can be said about the disenfranchisement of women in Ethiopia, but what can those of us not residing within the confines of the countries unevolved political and social agenda do to help our sisters and the country as a whole? We must take action on all fronts, not just provide lip service as we sit comfortably within the walls of our homes. Residing within Western countries is not always easy, as it can sometimes be made to appear. However, let us reflect on the luxuries that are afforded to us, such as the ability to free ourselves from the ideology of 'a woman's place', a working mother, with no autonomy, little education and tied to the opinions of her husband. Imagine, 80% of the Ethiopian population resides in rural areas for which women provide the majority of agricultural support, but a women's access to these resources and community participation is managed by the men in their lives – fathers, brothers and then husbands. This prohibits the recognition of the women in these communities and the opportunity for them to reinvest in their communities, as women are much more likely to do. Women in Ethiopia are often restrained from continuing their education, and not to mention the rampancy of FGM (female genital mutilation). However, you can not the beat the spirit of a woman, if not for themselves, then for their children, they are pushing forward, but we must be of greater service to expedite equality on all levels. Among these theoretical parts on gendered barriers are:

- **Structural barriers:** include women's general positions within different social systems as they pertain to issues of women's levels of educational achievement, rate of participations in the workforce, the percentage of women in poverty and the division of childcare and household responsibilities
- **Institutional barrier:** which political (electoral) system favors women the most, what is the role of parties as gatekeepers, number of women party activists and the strength of women's organization within the party
- **Cultural barrier:** gendered beliefs about politics, "while specific gender stereotypes vary across cultures, most societies view politics as a man's world"

As the saying goes, "to whom much is given, much will be required". For those of us gifted with the freedom to make decisions for ourselves and enjoy the liberties of democracy, we must remember those

who are still struggling and standing on the front lines and join them. Our mission is to restore the dignity of Ethiopia and its people, but this cannot be done without the full and free participation of Ethiopian women. We must follow in the foot-steps of Ms. Aberash Berta, a democracy activist and EPRP member that disappeared over 20 years ago, and Mrs. Genet Girma - lead EPRP member, who remains active in the establishment of the democratic process in Ethiopia.

In light of the present gross human right violation, particularly of women (young and old), citizens of Ethiopia, internally displaced or otherwise, all concerned citizens call for all Ethiopian Women whether those who are in Ethiopia or abroad to support the formation of provisional people's democratic government in struggle for democracy. One can argue that an all-inclusive transitional people's democratic government has a legitimate mandate to change social institutions to establish economic and political liberty for the whole population. Introducing changes of socio-political institution in favor of women seems most complex in lower middle-income countries, like Ethiopia, where the shares of rural populations remain important along with the percentages of illiterate women. Overcoming such long-lasting discriminatory cultural practices depends heavily on the authority of countries' type of regimes. The influence of women in the society increases under a generally democratic, not ethnic authoritarian, regime allowing their access to information about different lifestyles and grass root women participation in popular election processes.



"We can't protest so we pray!"
saves us from the Queerro bandits!"

"Are we human or talking animals?"

"God/Allah

In order for revolutionary social transformation of socio-political change for institutions to occur, as well as to ensure their sustainability, women must obtain empowerment and become their own agents in handling their lives. Today, in Ethiopia, all socio-political platforms are dominated by typical male chauvinists who divided the country in archaic/primitive framework of ethnic identities. Women have no voice as far as the bullheaded, parochially wired, and "Kenga" obsessed, mono-ethnic OLF and barbaric Queerro-Abiy ruling system is in power.

Freedom and liberty are half-baked ideologies, unless it encompasses all human beings!

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