

## **In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful**

### **Badr Communiqué**

The Ethiopian Muslims were alarmed by the publication of a communiqué issued in September , 2011 at the Haromaya University located in the Eastern Hararghe Zone about 510 Kilometers from Addis Ababa. This meeting was allegedly organized by the Majlis (the Supreme Council of Ethiopian Islamic Affairs) and facilitated by the officials of the Ethiopian Ministry of Federal Affairs. The invited guests and speakers were the Al-Ahbash group from Lebanon. The week-long conference / workshop culminated with a written public declaration to pursue a campaign of re-education of the Muslims in Ethiopia using a distorted version of Islam propagated by their leaders and followers. It was evident that an officially sanctioned campaign was underway by the Al-Ahbash group to dismantle the time-honored Ethiopian Muslims' mainstream Islamic belief and practice system and replace it with a misguided doctrine and deviant creed imported from Lebanon. In Washington, DC, Badr leadership immediately called for an emergency meeting with Ethiopian Embassy officials who met on September the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011 with a core group of Ethiopian Muslims representing various organizations, scholars and civic leaders to communicate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the urgent crisis created by Al-Ahbash's interference in the religious affairs of Ethiopia, and in particular the Muslim citizens. Badr also expressed in this meeting its adamant opposition to the divisive intent and spirit of the Haromaya declaration.

In response to this concern, the Ethiopian government invited the Badr representatives (i.e. Badr leaders and the Ethiopian Muslim Diaspora representatives) back to the Embassy where they met the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Government of Ethiopia, H.E Ato Haile Mariam Desalegn on October the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. The Badr representatives reiterated the threats and consequences of the current destructive campaign by a foreign group from Lebanon.

Present at this meeting were Badr leaders and the rank and file of Ethiopian Muslims representing significant worldwide membership that consists of Ethiopian Muslim organizations and individuals located in Diaspora and Ethiopia. Badr's constituencies have expressed their outrage, frustration and apprehension as well as their adamant rejection of the self-appointed foreign organizers that disregarded the ways of life and belief system of the majority of the Ethiopian Muslims. The Badr leadership also expressed their vigorous opposition to this externally imposed indoctrination efforts and illegitimate campaign directed towards the Ethiopian Muslims in a manner that is anti-democratic and in contravention of the Ethiopian Constitution, which provides inalienable rights to freedom of religion in a secured and peaceful environment.

Furthermore, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs heard the utter dismay of the Badr representatives over the superimposition of the Al-Ahbash doctrine on already organized Islamic educational system and indigenous religious and civic leaderships. By all measures, the coercive nature of teaching and learning of the Al-Ahbash or any other foreign elements interferes with the freedom of religion and rights of the mainstream Muslims to take charge of their destiny as free people who value security, peace and harmony in their communities.

The Al-Ahbash communiqué at Haromaya University and successive workshops held in other parts of the country have aggravated the situation and created confusion about their sudden appearance and domination of the Islamic agenda in Ethiopia, a country that had championed independence and sovereignty for centuries. The approaches employed by the Al-Ahbash in their workshops and teaching methods are not only undemocratic, but also involved public intimidation of the dissenters of their doctrine. Their actions are also reprehensible and unacceptable by the Ethiopian Constitution and rule of law which protects the individual from harassment and fear of religious persecution.

The Badr representatives stated that the Al-Ahbash indoctrination to forcibly impose upon the Ethiopian Muslims a foreign concept of Islam that is diametrically opposed to the basic Islamic belief and practices is an ultimate affront to Ethiopian Muslims and should be stopped immediately as that will impinge on the national sovereignty and dignity of Ethiopian Muslims in general.

The Badr leaders in their presentation to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed their deep concern and warned every one of an impending risk if Al-Ahbash are allowed to pursue their foreign agenda to disrupt the harmonious and peaceful practices among the Muslims of various opinions and those of other faiths who have co-existed with the mainstream Ethiopian Muslims for many centuries. Their presence and vicious public proclamations will spiral out of control and will eventually adversely affect the harmony and the national security of a country that is an example of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa.

The Badr representatives also expressed the importance of maintaining constructive dialogue and harmonious co-existence among and between all faiths and the necessity for protection of the long-lasting reputation of Ethiopia as a beacon of religious tolerance because of the steadfast steps taken by the Ethiopians as united people against foreign interventions in their internal affairs. The Constitution of Ethiopia also guarantees the separation of religion and state and the role of government will always be to insure that all religions are treated equally and fairly at all times. Furthermore Badr and its affiliates consistently emphasized the importance of neutrality and secularity as legal obligations expected of the Ethiopian government and its Federal and State officials. These include safeguarding Constitutional freedom for its citizens as well as the legal and appropriate handling of highly sensitive matters, which have the potential to create a

sudden derailment and unmanageable mass protests and chaos inside and outside of Ethiopia that will reverse the venerable and exemplary peaceful co-existence and tranquility in the country.

The Badr representatives expressed their concerns on behalf of individuals and collective Muslim citizens of Ethiopia who believe in the primacy of rule of law and the Constitution of Ethiopia in the land. Badr membership also believe in their civic responsibility to conduct dialogue with their government and the right to ask their leadership in government and non-governmental organizations that are acting on their behalf to be accountable and responsible in the execution of the will of their constituencies and respect the rule of law in all of their transactions in words and deeds.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs acknowledged the importance of sustaining religious rights in accordance with the Ethiopian Constitution and emphasized that the government has not violated nor has the intention to violate the democratic principles or the freedom of religion enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution. He assured Badr representatives that the government and its agencies will observe and protect the principles of equality and freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution in words and deeds. He also emphasized the concern of the Ethiopian government about some groups who have had the unambiguous desire to establish an Islamic government in Ethiopia. This negative and dangerous sentiment may also be shared by groups of other faiths, which might believe in imposing the idea of one religion and one country to the exclusion of other faiths. He said that the government's priority is to protect the country from internal or external strife, which might seem benign to those outside the country. However, he stated that the practice of a fringe group encroaching on others' rights and freedom of worship will not be acceptable as it might degenerate into lawlessness and chaos. For this reason, the government will not hesitate to crack down on any group engaged in the disruption of peace and stability of the country regardless of ethnic or religious nature. Meanwhile, he appealed to Badr and all Ethiopian Muslims everywhere to be vigilant about such groups as well. In so doing, he said the government will stand firm to protect the rights of its citizens to practice their religion freely.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that he believed in full consultation with the Ethiopian Ulema and elders before taking actions, but the government's role is restricted by the Constitution which separates the state and religion. Yet, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs was impressed by Badr's presentation that supported the essential role of consultation and consensus of local Ethiopian scholars and jurists as the primary source of knowledge and decisions making on matters affecting Islamic religious teaching, doctrine and right interpretations of the Qur'an and the sayings and practices of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Nevertheless, as a government official he stated that he has limited role to play in taking a side or commenting on these issues at present time. Anyway, he promised to evaluate the current Al-Ahbash activities including repression of those Muslims who disagreed with the Al-Ahbash doctrine in Ethiopia and to work harder to allay the fears and

concerns of the Ethiopian Muslims in general. He also promised to transmit the alarm felt by Ethiopian Muslims nationally and internationally to the Prime Minister.

Badr leadership promised to address the concern of the government and launch a fact-finding mission to go to Ethiopia to explore the underlying reasons of the current crisis and seek appropriate means to continue constructive dialogue between Ethiopian Muslims nationally and internationally. In hind sight, Badr reminded the participants in the meeting that the government should have consulted the Ethiopian Ulema (religious leaders) and genuine scholars and not follow the recommendations and the wishes of few Majlis's administrators who undermined the role of religious leaders who were professionally capable to examine the merits of inviting a foreign group to teach Ethiopian Muslims about Islam, especially when it features the Al-Ahbash version, which is considered controversial and deviant from the beliefs of the mainstream Muslim teachings and thus has been rejected by the majority of Muslims world-wide. Badr reminded the government representatives in the meeting that Ethiopian Muslims have sufficient number of moderate Islamic scholars in their own rights who have always acted as the authentic source of Islamic education for Africa and numerous Arab countries. The Ethiopian Muslims scholars, jurists, lawyers and muftis are well trained and graduated from famous religious institutions nationally and internationally and are in charge of Islamic and civic education curricula and schools which operate in conformity with the indigenous mainstream and universal Islamic beliefs and practices. Furthermore, Ethiopian Muslims have been known for their complete adherence to the Qur'an and the sayings and practices of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) since the inception of Islam in Ethiopia fourteen centuries ago. These are the cornerstones that make Ethiopian Muslims peaceful and harmonious people living side by side with all other faiths in the country.

Badr made it very clear to the Deputy Prime Minister that it believes in the importance of a secular government in Ethiopia, which respects religious freedom and the rights of the people to exercise their religion without any interference by the government either directly or by proxy. H.E Ato Haile Mariam Deslegn, on his part, assured the Badr representatives that he will communicate the Ethiopian Muslims' concerns to the Prime Minister as soon as he gets back to Ethiopia. He will also forward Badr's formal request to have an urgent meeting with the PM and all concerned Ethiopian Muslim leadership including religious and legal scholars in Ethiopia.

Finally, H.E Ato Haile Mariam Desalegn assured the Badr representatives his understanding of the gravity of the current crisis in Ethiopia and the risky situation facing Ethiopian Muslims at home. He also stated the need to prevent further deterioration of the peaceful relationships between and among various religious groups as a result of the present crisis. He earnestly appealed to Badr to continue to meet officials in the Ethiopian Embassy in the United States in order to resolve this problem through dialogue and mutual respect for the rule of law and the constitution of the land.

He further urged Badr to exercise its valuable role as a peacemaker and legitimate representative of Ethiopian Muslims in Diaspora and continue its dialogue and perseverance to resolve difficult issues such as the crisis caused by the controversial presence of Al-Ahbash. He stated that he is not at liberty to judge the current predicament as he first heard it in the meeting until he returns to Ethiopia and then urgently discuss the matter with all concerned parties. His findings and the responses to Badr's requests will be relayed to Badr as soon as possible through the Embassy of Ethiopia in Washington DC.

Meanwhile, Badr as a result of its initiative to conduct constructive dialogue with the government representatives in the United States and its aim to prevent Al-Ahbash from taking over the Muslim communities through their devious and dictatorial approaches and by manufacturing non-existent threats that pander to the government's sensitive side with regards to fringe groups, urges its worldwide membership and constituencies to be patient and steadfast to pursue peaceful means to resolve all issues to the satisfaction of all Muslims who believe in unity of purpose, peace, human and spiritual development that benefits all mankind. The Ethiopian Muslims are known for their patience and steadfastness up to a limit in facing external threats that disrupt their peaceful ways of life, co-existence and tolerance. In the final analysis, we shall succeed to fulfill our peaceful obligations to satisfy the demands of our Muslim constituencies nationally and internationally.

In the meantime, Badr advises restraint on all sides until this burning issue is resolved amicably to the satisfaction of the Ethiopian Muslims.

Badr Ethiopia  
Washington DC