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## **Ceding Ethiopian Land to the Sudan is a Gross Violation of our Country's Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity**

**Press release from KIAB**

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A distinctive feature of Ethiopia has been and will continue to be the determination of its people to defend and preserve its identity, sovereignty and territorial integrity routinely affirmed at huge costs in life and property. Contrary to what the Ethiopian people have been forced to 'believe and accept' over the last 17 years, Ethiopia is not a figment of any one's imagination. It is a historical, geopolitical, social and economic reality that does not require proof except for those who wish to see it fragmented, divided, weak, socially, politically and economically underdeveloped and dependent.

As a result of the sacrifices of all of the country's people who closed ranks at times of need, Ethiopia preserved its national independence from colonialism and **became a beacon of independence and freedom for black people** throughout Africa, North America and the Caribbean. Until the emergence to power of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), which dominates the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), all previous regimes showed an **unwavering commitment** to the country's **national interest**, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Many of the country's leaders and patriots sacrificed their lives fighting to preserve the integrity of this land that has a history of more than 3,000 years. We have little doubt that, regardless of politically and narrow self interest driven dealings by the current ruling group, the country's vital interests will be restored by the Ethiopian people. The massive and world wide outcry against the Ethiopia-Sudan land deal orchestrated by the leadership of TPLF/EPRDF attests to this statement.

It is against this back drop that the Kinijit International Advisory Board (KIAB) is obliged to reject totally the cession of 1,600 km of Ethiopian territory, stretching from Northern Gondar to Gambella, by the TPLF/EPRDF to the Sudanese government. The decision by the leadership of the ruling party to transfer

Ethiopian territory to the Sudanese has no legal validity. The leadership of the TPLF/EPRDF has no legal authority to transfer Ethiopian land to any foreign government. Making the illegitimate transfer, the leadership of the ruling party kept the Ethiopian people and, even the tamed legislative body or Parliament in the dark. Their voices were never accounted for or heard. This is unprecedented in modern African history.

As shown in numerous scholarly and expert reports on the subject and, as validated by Ethiopian legal experts, there is nothing defensible that the ruling party has been able to produce in support of its incredible and unacceptable position. The ceded land has been a legitimate part of Ethiopia. Clearly, the facts show that the story line taken by the ruling party, at one time denying what occurred and at another---when confronted by statements given to foreign media by those directly affected by the land giveaway---admitting that the decision to cede is consistent with agreements reached by previous regimes in Ethiopia, has been proven to be totally unfounded. Unfortunately for the Ethiopian people, such denials and story telling have become part of the political culture of a ruling group that is accountable only to it-self and, not to the Ethiopian people. Seen in isolation, the denial on the land deal may seem insignificant, however such denials have become a frequent pattern in the behavior of the ruling party toward the Ethiopian people. In our view, it represents a fundamental flaw in political leadership that has become totally immune to public scrutiny.

### **The Bigger Picture**

The behaviors and actions of the leadership of the ruling party should not and cannot be seen in isolation from an established pattern, namely, denial of fundamental freedoms and legitimate rights of the Ethiopian people. Let us share some examples to illustrate the point.

During the 1998-1999 Ethiopian-Eritrean war that cost the lives of more than **70,000 innocent lives and**, cost billions of dollars that the country could ill afford, the ruling party informed the Ethiopian people that the war was fought to defend their national interest. In doing this, the regime lost its credibility. During the May 15, 2005 general elections, the regime condoned the massacre of hundreds of innocent lives, and the jailing of close to 100,000 Ethiopians, especially the youth, throughout the country. We can cite numerous examples of denial that show a pattern of human rights violations that has been well documented. At the heart of this continuum in denial and repression is the lack of good governance, the rule of law, independent institutions, political pluralisms and participation and public voice by the governed.

The absence of **public voice and participation** has given the regime total freedom to compromise our country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The unintended consequence of this political act is that it has galvanized Ethiopians across the globe. In our view, Ethiopian land is not a commodity that can be sold

or traded to the highest bidder as and when the leadership of the ruling party wishes. This is also not the first time Ethiopian land has been ceded by the regime. In our view too, the **Ethiopian ruling group is solely responsible and accountable** for the cession of land to the Sudanese Government. A government that stands for its people does not compromise national interest regardless of short term benefits. The irreversible damage that this action has brought to the people of Ethiopia and to the relations of the peoples of both countries will be remembered in the annals of Ethiopian history as one of the grossest assaults of a regime on its own people and on their social, political and economic future. It is also an assault on their honor and dignity that cannot be forgotten for generations to come.

Further, the act underscores the vested interests of Ethiopia's traditional adversaries that keep a close eye on the fertile lands, rivers and waters that could potentially change Ethiopia's social, economic and political future for the better. Ceding land inch by inch is tantamount to 'dismantling' the geopolitical make up of Ethiopia under the pretext of stabilizing the region. We ask, at whose expense and for whose advantage?

### **Our Position:**

Despite the onslaught on its organizational integrity and its leadership, Kinijit has **stood and will continue to stand with the Ethiopian people and their long term interests. We stand firmly in defense of Ethiopia's national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. Accordingly, we believe that:**

- i) Regardless of political differences, all Ethiopian political, religious, civic and professional, academic and media groups and individuals must reject the ceding of Ethiopian land and the further disintegration of our country. They must continue to be vigilant and guard against any and all future 'secret' or public dealings that compromise the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- ii) Ethiopians must defend the proud and well established identity and history of their country regardless of the ruling party's onslaught on civil society.
- iii) All of us have a moral obligation both as groups and as individuals to protest the persecution, displacement and imprisonment of Ethiopian citizens in the affected and other regions of the country where civil rights are being violated daily and routinely.
- iv) We must close ranks and vigorously campaign and protest the ruling party's scheme of divide and rule and, its sinister plan to promote animosity among nations and nationalities in order to preserve its political and economic monopoly.
- v) We call on all Ethiopian opposition groups and civic organizations to begin dialogue and constructive discussions on fundamental questions of national

independence, national interest, territorial integrity, sovereignty, governance, the rule of law, human rights, public voice and participation before the country is irreversibly damaged.

- vi) We call on the Sudanese Government to recognize that the long term interests of the Ethiopian and Sudanese people who share the waters of the Blue Nile will be better served by respecting the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the two countries.
- vii) We agree with groups and individuals that have begun the hard task of mobilizing international public opinion and the modalities to make the current political leadership accountable for violations of human rights and for compromising the territorial integrity of our country.

Reference: <http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-06-05-voa43.cfm>

EthioLion.Com

### Ethiopia Map 1952-1993

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/ethiopia.gif>

