

Full English Transcript of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's Inaugural Address

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April 3, 2018
by Hassen Hussein



Here is a word-for-word translation of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's acceptance speech by Dr. Hassan Hussein.

Esteemed Speaker

Esteemed members of the House of Representatives

Esteemed peoples of our country, invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

On this historical day, as our country, Ethiopia makes a peaceful transfer of power in accordance with its governance system, I would like to express the unique pride I feel to be standing before this august house and make this speech.

Before anything else, I would like to express my highest appreciation to His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegn, for his exemplary step in voluntarily stepping down and transferring his power to be part of the solution for the instability that has gripped the country in recent years; for believing that a new leadership is better suited to tackle these problems; for prioritizing the dignity of the country and the country's national interests in a manner that can set precedence for our continent.

Similarly, in the name of all our people, I would like to thank everyone who have been playing special roles to ensure that the transfer of state power takes place without any glitch.

It is a historical day for our country. In our long history, we have been given so many opportunities at different junctures to chart a new political beginning. Many of them passed without us taking advantage of them. This transfer of power is another historical opportunity to start a new chapter. Therefore, it is important that we make use of it appropriately with the spirit of utmost responsibility.

Ethiopia is a country of fertile wombs. It has produced many children that strive relentlessly out of a great spirit of love for the country. Its children strongly aspire and strive tirelessly to return the country to its past glory; and to ensure that the peace and security of its people is protected and that prosperity is extended to all of its citizens without any discrimination.

Be it in the country or outside of the country, they shout, debate and litigate for the national unity of the country and for its peace, for justice and equality, and also about its prosperity. This transfer of power is indicative of two main truths. On the one hand, it is indicative of the fact that we have laid the foundations for a durable and all-inclusive constitutional order; on the other hand, it is indicative of the fact that we are building a system that walks at part with the country's political, economic, and social conditions and which is governed by the will of the people, that which makes the people its master and serves them accordingly.

The occasion is one in which we learn from our mistakes and make up to our country. Our leading organization, EPRDF, by holding firmly on to its developmental path, has produced, during the years that it led our country for over two decades, fundamental changes in all sectors and has built a constitutional and federal system.

We are in a national transformation which is viewed around the world, on one hand, with great attention, admiration, and expectation; and on the other hand, with great concern.

As much there are many achievements that have been registered, we also believe there are deficiencies that need to be tackled expeditiously. While learning from our mistakes and forging ahead, our primary focus needs to be on building a better country for all of us. The crux of the matter is to catapult our country to a higher level of development and move forward while ensuring that its unity is secured on a sustainable basis.

The wisdom thought us by our Ethiopianess is not to be overcome by temporary obstacles but rather to change the trials we face into opportunities and desirable accidents and achieve victory. Yesterday, our forefathers, broke their bones in Metema, Adwa, Maichew, and Karraa Marra and shed their precious blood to preserve and bequeath to us a country that has been able to keep its independence and pride.

We are lucky; we have a beautiful country and a proud history. We know our beginnings. We are a great people that has a history that has traversed many centuries. Our unity can be an example to the world. It has vanquished our enemies; protected our sovereignty and brought us to this day becoming an example for other people struggling for their independence.

Our identity is built in such a way that it is inseparable; it is threaded in a manner that cannot be untangled. It is integrated out of love. The Amhara have sacrificed in Karra Marra for our country's sovereignty – becoming intermingled with its soil. The Tigrayans have sacrificed in Metema saying, take my neck before my country and becoming intermingled with its soil. The Oromo have given his chest on the mountains of Adwa to protect the country's sovereignty and have intermingled with the soils of Adwa.

The Somali, the Sidama, the Benishangul, the Walaita, the Gambella, the Gurage, the Afar, the Silte, the Kambata, the Hadiya, the Harari, and all other peoples of Ethiopia have fallen saying my death before Badme and intermingled with its soil. As one Ethiopian father said, "While alive, we are humans; upon passing, we become soil and hence become country." You will find the precious bodies of every Ethiopian from every corner of the country become soil in another part of the country. We Ethiopians, while alive, we are Ethiopians; when we die, we become Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is a country of all of us and it is our common house. In one country, there will inevitably be differences in opinion. Differences in opinion are not curses. When we are able to listen to each other despite our differences and engage in principled

discourse, our differences return dividends in the form of blessings. In a fight over ideas, are solutions. There is strength in cooperation. When we team up, we become stronger. There is no problem that unity cannot resolve. Because it builds nation. The sentiment that “I rather die than see my idea not win” destroys families, let alone nations. What we have is one Ethiopia. Above any political thought, national unity is supreme. We need to however underline that national unity doesn’t mean oneness. Our unity needs to be one that embraces our diversity and highlights our multinational identity.

We Ethiopians need and also deserve democracy. Democracy is not for us an alien idea. When it was foreign to many peoples and countries, we lived under and governed by our democratic Gadaa system becoming an example on to the world. Today, for us building democracy is an existential matter—than it is to any other country.

Democracy is unthinkable without freedom. Freedom is not a gift doled out to people by a government. Rather a gift of nature to everyone that emanates from our human dignity. We need to respect all human and democratic rights, especially to free expression, assembly and organization, by upholding the constitution that emerged from this understanding of freedom. The rights of all our citizens to take part in all structures and at all levels in a democratic manner need to be fully realized.

What we all need to understand is that building democratic system demands listening to each other. The people have the full right to criticize its servants, to elect them, and to interrogate them. Government is a servant of the people. This is because our governing principle is popular sovereignty. In a democratic system, the first and last principle ought to be that of entertaining differences of opinion by listening to each other. By realizing that Ethiopia belongs to us all, that it is our common property, we will strongly and steadfastly continue with our efforts to build a democratic system in which the voices of all Ethiopians is heard and everyone is allowed equal participation.

In a democratic system, the government allow citizens to express their ideas freely without any fear. The right of citizens for free movement cannot be built without the leadership, support, and open-heartedness of government. Therefore, the government will work with great resolve so that the free and peaceful movement of citizens is respected (not obstructed).

In the same vein, when citizens express their ideas, it has to be in a peaceful manner. Because asking for one’s own democratic rights and violating the rights of another are self-contradictory. It also stunts the growth of democracy. The government needs to respect the law. It is also its obligation to ensure that the law is respected. Being patient and reserved is also its obligation. When the patience of the government is missing, it harms democracy.

In both ways, the democracy that we yearn for cannot become a reality. In democratic governance, the supremacy of the law needs to be established. One wisdom that we need not forget while trying to ensure the supremacy of the law is that our people are not looking simply for the presence laws but also the realization of justice. The enforcement of the law need not be divorced from justice. What our people are striving for isn't a dry law but rather a system of laws conceived within justice, that stands for justice. What the people are looking for are neutral and non-partisan law enforcement officers that are loyal to the law and those that jealously guard the rights of citizens.

The law must rule us all equitably. When it does, the law protects for all of us the dignity that emanates from our humanity. By comprehending this truth, we shall fill the gap in the administration of justice by making the necessary reforms (improvements) so that democracy will flourish in our country; so that freedom and justice shall reign; so that the supremacy of the law becomes a reality.

For peace, the foundation is justice. Peace is not the absence of conflict. Peace is an inviolable unity built on our common understandings. Peace is our confidence in each other. Peace is our common journey that continued to this day through our coming together in unity. Peace is our path and our goal that allows us to solve disagreements and conflicts in a civilized manner.

Esteemed Speaker

Esteemed members of the House of Representatives

Ladies and gentlemen,

We find ourselves in a time when the Horn of Africa is gripped by lots of crisis and where many forces with different interests and objectives are scrambling and where there are many complex entanglements. At the same time, it is a region where there are many peoples interconnected with culture, language and long history.

Regarding our foreign relations: Our country is the foundation of Pan-Africanism, the founder and seat of the African Union, the founder of many leading international organizations, and a country that plays a notable role in regional, continental, and global matters. This policy of ours built on common interest and common benefit, we will strengthen and continue with it. With our African brothers in generally and with our neighbours in particular, we will stand together in times of hardship as well as in times of happiness.

With the government of Eritrea, we want from the bottom of our hearts that the disagreement that has reigned for years to comes to an end. We would also discharge our responsibility. While expressing our readiness resolve our differences through dialogue, I take this opportunity to call on the Eritrean government to take a similar stand not only for the sake of our common interest but also for the common blood relations between the peoples of the two countries.

Esteemed Speaker

Esteemed members of the House of Representatives

Ladies and gentlemen,

Corruption is one of the main reasons that have galvanized the grievances of our people in recent years. We have come to learn that it is impossible to combat corruption by merely establishing anti-corruption institutions. I politely ask all of us to do all we can to ensure that Ethiopia won't become a country where one works hard and the other simply snatches it away.

It is impossible for a people and a country that is busy taking away a wealth that was created yesterday from another and settling scores to move forward. In situation where there is a bigger pie where everyone can work and become prosperous, Ethiopia will not become one in which one thinks, let alone be obliged, to steal from another. Rather, let us busy ourselves with utilizing the unique opportunities presented to us by the circumstances, coordinating our national capacity, and overcoming our scarcity and shortage mindset. The famous Indian freedom movement leader, Mahatma Gandhi, once said, "the world has enough resources for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed." In the new path that we just charted, we shall work tirelessly day in and day out to combat robbery, wastage of wealth, and fight organized corruption in a manner that will enable all our people to participate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Due to the fast growth that our country has achieved over the past years, our successes in poverty alleviation; in building basic infrastructure; in human resource development and the like are visible for everyone. In this regard, the government has taken policy and practical actions to contain price inflation; to stabilize the foreign exchange market; to keep the health of the financial sector; to expand the reach and access of financial services needed for the economy; to generate foreign currency; to encourage savings and investment; to create employment opportunities; to increase the per capita income of the people as well as to reduce abject poverty.

At the same time, during the last few years, there has been events and challenges that try our economic growth and the stability of macro economy. Among these problems, the main ones are the fact that our foreign trade has not grown as much as we would like and following from this the mismatch between the demand and supply of foreign exchange; price inflation; rising living expenses; the weight of foreign debt and the growing the gap domestic saving and investment.

Even though the progress being made in the agricultural sector are encouraging, we have failed to sufficiently support this sector with the necessary technology and as a result failed to collect the dividends that we were supposed to get from it as a country.

As a big country and people, to reach the peak of the successes that we desire and also solve the problems that we have, we believe that the key solution is to be found in education and only in education.

Even though the government is paying attention to the educational sector and working hard, particularly with regard to ensuring the quality of education, we notice that we have many homework to do and many activities will be carried out.

While the expansion of education is among the commendable achievements of our government, as long as that educational coverage and reach is not supported with quality, our relentless efforts won't bear the fruits that we desire. Accordingly, starting from primary school all the way to the institutions of higher education, the government will redouble its efforts with absolute determination to make all our centers of knowledge to focus on quality. Maximum effort will be made to ensure that especially graduates from our higher education institutions and technical and vocational colleges harvest knowledge that is comparable to their endowment of abilities.

To deal with these problems and many others, after an evaluation of the two-year performance of our Growth and Transformation Plan, we shall take the necessary policy decisions and produce fast economic growth.

Dear youth of our country

Ethiopia is yours. The future is above all else yours. Even now, you have to also take the vanguard role in building the country. The questions of the youth are not solely one of economy and equitable benefit, we believe they are also about justice and democracy. With respect to guaranteeing equitable benefits to all members of society, their social justice, and political involvement, there have been gaps. Even though our country has been producing good economic growth outcomes, it was not sufficient to meet the demands of the youth that shifts both in form and content.

We realize that this led to the grievances felt by our people. We also realize that without benefiting the youth and without their active participation, the country cannot go anywhere. We will do all we can to ensure that Ethiopia becomes a country that gives its youth hope rather than one that sucks up their hope. In the forthcoming periods, we will work not only to create job opportunities for the youth but also to create numerous youth entrepreneurs. The mindsets and the elaborate and discriminatory bureaucratic hurdles which stand as obstacles to this objective will be removed and the government shall create conducive environment for a just social and economic order. A truth that we should never forget though is that it is the youth itself, through its efforts and creativity, that can create a better future for itself and for the country.

Dear women of Ethiopia,

Under numerous difficulty and trying conditions, you have built Ethiopia; you have made history; shaped generations; and brought us to this day. In your struggles, you have huge sacrifices so that we have a better country. Your struggle is a just struggle. Your struggle is a dignified and respectable struggle. Your struggle is our struggle. Even though the government has taken steps to ensure that benefits are accruing to women and recognize their all-rounded contribution to the progress of our country, we believe what we have done falls far short in comparison to that which have not been done.

Accordingly, in the future, I have great hope that the women of our country will utilize the talents nature have blessed you with to continue to play a positive role in our country's growth and its prosperity and for the success of our politics. Our national identity is meaningless without the participation of Ethiopian women. By denying due recognition to women who built our country, served our country, and helped it to stand on its feet, it is impossible to establish national renaissance. Our government's stand on the rights of women and their equality is not out of favor to them but rather for our common good. The government duly realizes that a nation that neglects and marginalizes half of its population absolutely cannot have a full and complete body and cannot move forward. Accordingly, our government shall endeavour with resolute dedication to speed up its efforts to improve women's all-rounded participation and their benefit.

Esteemed Speaker

Esteemed members of the House of Representatives

Esteemed peoples of our country

Esteemed invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our problems are many and don't allow us any respite. Lack of a developed democratic culture, deep-rooted poverty, organized corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency, and lack of good governance have been compounding. It has created a complex and trying challenge for us. It is regrettable that over the last few years many members of our society have been uprooted from their places of residence. They were exposed to displacement and grave loss of life and property. The rights of citizens to freely move throughout the country and make a living needs to be respected. Accordingly, we will strive to stop these unbecoming practices and ensure that such actions are never repeated again. Let alone facing them divided, our problems demand years of work even working together in love and unison.

Accordingly, to make up for lost times and be able to move forward, we will strive forward with a new spirit. All our problems cannot be solved in a single day. However, we can speed up the work we have begun to build a better country for all. There is a strong initiative on the part of the government to build a better country. But we all have responsibilities. Rather than seeing each other as strangers and seeing each other with indifference as members of different countries, we must hold

each other's hands and strive together as actual owners of the country. If we did so, both our failures and triumphs will be shared. In the remaining years of the second Growth and Transformation Plan, we will strive to implement ongoing development programs with expeditious speed. I call upon all with great responsibility to help make up for the adverse economic and social impact caused due to the political instability of the last few years.

Esteemed Speaker

Esteemed members of the House of Representatives

Ladies and gentlemen,

My Ethiopian compatriots living abroad

Every Ethiopian who goes abroad, be it for work or studies, travels around carrying Ethiopia with them. That is why it is said, "you can take an Ethiopian out of Ethiopia but you cannot take Ethiopia out of the heart of an Ethiopian." Because of your hard work, your excellence, and your country's deeply-ingrained sense of decency that would follow you wherever you go, you are ambassadors of Ethiopia and its core values. Sometimes, while living in a country that is less endowed with natural and historical resources than Ethiopia but which is very developed, it is inevitable that you feel regret about your country. That regret is in all of us. It is inevitable for you to be regretful seeing our efforts to utilize the country's resources to the maximum coming up too short. And you should be regretful. To change this condition, because we have a country that is not only sufficient for all of us but one that demands the contributions of all of us, for those you who want to bring your knowledge and experiences and return to your country and develop your country, we will welcome you with open arms. For those of you who have made your home in other countries, our government will continue with unreserved efforts to facilitate your active participation in your country's affairs and its transformation in any way you can.

Dear our development partners

Those of you who have been assisting our efforts thus far in the areas of peace and development, we realize that you are close friends of our country. I am hopeful that you will continue to stand with us in the renewed efforts we are making to ensure the peace and development of our country.

The coming time in Ethiopia will be a time of love and forgiveness. We desire our country to be one of justice, peace and freedom and where its citizens are interconnected with the unbreakable chord of humanity and brotherhood. This dream of ours will be a reality only if we wake up from our slumber and work diligently. It is good to have great hopes and wishes. However, our hopes and wishes are not enough on their own. It is incumbent upon us to work hard, to be diligent and to wage a relentless struggle.

What we need to make our first and primary task is and where our struggle ought to concentrate on is upon ourselves. We have to cleanse our thoughts from hatred;

different political views and religion are our blessings; we have to conduct them with love. Even if there are disagreements arising from our differences, we should side with justice rather than injustice and correct our moral lenses. Justice should be our main principle; love and respect for all human beings ought to be our moral compass. This is our eternal job that cannot be completed and a work that needs to be always performed. It is our lifelong assignment. To bring our country to the current stage, several past generations have paid sacrifices.

Many have also been martyred to give birth to our new democratic order. To develop our fledgling democracy, it is not necessary for us to pay any additional life and bodily sacrifices. In the past years, both as a nation of citizens and as a state, we have suffered great harm due to the shortcomings that are compounded because of the lack of a mature democratic system. The lives of many of our citizens have been cut short and many private and public properties have been destroyed. This, all of us should have averted and must have stopped.

I ask a forgiveness from the bottom of my heart for the many advocates of freedom and justice and politicians and the many change-seeking youth whose lives were cut short before they were able to enjoy and have fun during the primes of their lives and for the many individuals and families who were exposed to both psychological and bodily trauma during the past many years. Likewise, I would like to express my highest admiration and respect for the members of the security forces whose lives were lost to keep peace and in the line of duty in the service of their constitutional responsibility. I would like to take this opportunity to promise our people that we will devise solutions for the problems that led to these crises and make up to our people.

For all Ethiopians and those of Ethiopian descent living inside and outside of the country living as refugees/exiles,

I call on us all to forgive each other from our hearts; to close the chapters from yesterday, and to the forge ahead to next bright future through national consensus.

Dear leaders opposition parties,

From this day forward, we will look at political parties outside of EPRDF as competitors rather than enemies (opponents); their supporters as brothers and sisters who have alternative ideas and who love their country, and as a collection of citizens. Therefore, because there is an absolute desire on the part of the government to allow opposition parties to operate freely and create a conducive and fair and level playing field, we call on those of you who are struggling for peace and justice in various ways, to eschew, out of political foresightedness, out of love for country, and out of the principle of give and take, political thoughts and lines that undermine our unity and put our common good on danger and forfeit our national interests and benefits, and to assist our efforts to create a better political culture.

To our farmers, those living off animal husbandry, those engaged in various occupations, to our country's security forces, intellectuals, business people, residents of urban areas as well as those residing in the countryside, people of all trades, elders of the country, Muslims, Christians, Waaqefattas and all other compatriots, to nations, nationalities, and peoples living from north to south and from east to west, Let us all strive to develop a mature democracy. Let us diligently work to lift our country from the depth of poverty. Let us eliminate racism and discord from our country. Let us create an educated citizen that debates ideas based on reason.

This day marks the 7th year of the inauguration of our Grand Renaissance Dam, our national pride. The unity and coming together that was observed in the building of this dam has showed us that we can overcome the many problems that are facing our country. Let us hold on to this spirit past the completion of the dam and persevere until we establish a new height for our country's prosperity.

Finally, in a manner that is not accustomed to by this house, I would like to thank a few organs. First of all, I would like to thank with special honor and love my organization and the people of my country that elected me to this high office and entrusted me with this responsibility. Second, I politely ask you to thank one Ethiopian mother who, while I was still a 7-year-old boy, knew that I would someday stand before you and who planted this distant and deep and elaborately sophisticated vision in me, who raised me, and brought me to fruition.

My mother is counted among the many kind, innocent, and hardworking Ethiopian mothers. She did not have a lot of material wealth and worldly knowledge. In thanking my mother, I consider it equivalent to extending thanks to all Ethiopian mothers. Even though my beloved mother is not with us today, may my thanks and love reach her place of eternal rest. I want to honor her with many thanks. By recognizing the role of other Ethiopian mothers in shaping their children's vision for tomorrow, for the good fruits that they will harvest tomorrow, I want to emphasize that the seed they plant today is the main investment. I extend my heartfelt love, admiration and thanks as well as honor and dignity for their sacrifices. Since our children are the main protagonists to ensure that the renaissance of this country is secured, I ask you to continue to play your motherly role with great responsibility. Third, for a man's success, the spouse's contribution goes for the two-thirds. One is for theirs, the other for their husbands. The third includes their children. Sometimes, their achievements and successes transcend this. My beloved wife, Zenash Tayachew, have supported me mightily by inheriting my mother's vision and becoming a replacement for my mother. I would like to greatly thank her.

Finally, had it been not for my close comrades in the struggle, who became a source of energy during times of weakness and power during good times, without these friends and brothers, I would not have stood before you today. To all my dear comrades and friends, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

May Ethiopia gain greatness from her children's efforts, be respected in the world, become prosperous, and live forever. May God bless Ethiopia and its peoples!