

**Lessons Learned from Elections in Ethiopia, 1992-1995
(and some thoughts on the planned 2000 elections)**

I Purpose

The intent of this memorandum is briefly to survey donor experience with post-transitional Ethiopian elections (1992, 1994 and 1995), with a view to identifying issues which should be considered by donors (individually and collectively) in defining an approach to the national and regional elections projected for the year 2000. The analysis and recommendations will focus primarily on three substantive areas: supporting the conduct of elections, alternative approaches to election observation, and measures designed to encourage the participation of parties, candidates and voters in the electoral process. Attention will also be devoted to a discussion of issues related to donor coordination, the timing and sequencing of assistance, and to alternative approaches to Government.

This analysis is intended to serve as a basis for discussion. It is by no means exhaustive, either in its analysis of past elections, or in its attempt to suggest lessons for the 2000 elections.

II Overview of significant aspects of 1992, 1994 and 1995 elections

Four cycles of elections have been held in Ethiopia since the Fall of the Derg in 1991. These were the so-called "snap elections" for kebele officials (mid-April through early June 1992), the June 21, 1992 regional and local elections, the June 5, 1994 Constituent Assembly elections, and the May 1995 national and regional elections. Only the last three will be discussed at any length in the present paper.

There were substantial differences between these electoral cycles on a number of different dimensions, including

- ◆ the defining characteristics of the political environment,
- ◆ the coherence of electoral administration,
- ◆ the nature and extent of institutional support from the donor community,
- ◆ the approach to election observation adopted by donors

A 1992 Regional and Local Elections

1 Political Context

The Transitional Charter which served as the basis for the formation of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) in July 1991 following the defeat of the Derg called for the election of local and regional councils within three months of its entry into force. In the unsettled conditions which prevailed immediately following the transition, the Transitional Government faced a variety of daunting tasks including the demobilization of the Derg Army, the reestablishment of economic activity, and the resolution of conflicts within the governing coalition between the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

From late 1991 until shortly before the June elections, discussions between the EPRDF and the OLF to diffuse armed conflict dominated political life in Ethiopia. Other initiatives, including drafting a new constitution, were placed on hold until after the regional and local elections were concluded. By early May 1992, sufficient progress appeared to have been made in encamping fighters. However, given the delays, little time remained before the outset of Ethiopia's rainy season to permit proper preparations for elections.¹

Many who have analyzed the transitional period conclude with the benefit of hindsight that the timetable established by the Charter was unrealistically short. There was, however, considerable pressure to hold early elections in part because the level of trust between elements of the governing coalition was low, in part to demonstrate to the international community the TGE's commitment to electoral democracy.

The first elections to be held were the so-called "snap elections" for kebele officials which took place between mid-April 1992 and early June of that year. These were more akin to open community meetings, and were intended to address the lack of local administrative structures and ostensibly to provide an administrative structure for the conduct of subsequent local and regional elections. These elections took place in a climate of increasing tension between the political parties represented in the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (most significantly the EPRDF and the OLF). The conduct of the "snap elections" will not be considered in the present analysis, but arguably had a major impact on the climate within the second set of elections took place on June 21, 1992. The outcome of the snap elections left the OLF feeling increasingly shut out of the political process in OPDO-controlled areas of Oromia, as "OPDO cadres in leading local administrative positions controlled the election process and gave OLF no chance to register their candidates or campaign."² At issue was not so much the existence of OPDO as an alternative to OLF, although this was deeply resented, but the OPDO's capacity to use its control of local administrative and security structures to determine the outcome of political competition. This has been a recurring theme in opposition complaints regarding the electoral environment for each subsequent election.

Against this background, OLF and 17 other parties petitioned the Council of Representatives to postpone the second set of elections, the crucial regional and local elections scheduled for June. When this petition was rejected, the OLF (along with a variety of smaller parties, including the All Amhara Peoples Organization, the Ethiopian Democratic Action Group, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia, and the Gurage Democratic People's Organization) withdrew from the electoral process and from the Transitional Government, stating that the forcible closure of party offices by local authorities, and the harassment and detention of supporters and candidates effectively precluded the possibility of meaningful electoral competition³- complaints which have also been repeated by opposition groups in successive elections. At the same time, OLF withdrew its fighters from the designated

¹ National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and African-American Institute *An Evaluation of the June 21 1992 Elections in Ethiopia* (1992), p 3. Hereafter referred to as NDI/AAI Report.

² Siegfried Pausewang, *The 1994 Election and Democracy in Ethiopia* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Human Rights, November 1994), p 33.

³ Oromo National Front "Statement Announcing Withdrawal from the Election Process June 17 1992" in NDI/AAI Report, p 31.

encampment sites and returned to a state of open warfare with the PRDF. From a military perspective this does not appear to have been a particularly effective strategy and within months roughly 20,000 OLF fighters, supporters and sympathisers had been captured and detained by the vastly superior EPRDF forces. From a political perspective as well this decision appears to have had serious long term consequences for OLF's ability to organize politically within Ethiopia.

The outbreak of renewed hostilities between parties had a profound impact on the climate in which the June regional and local elections took place, and on their outcome. Elections went ahead on 21 June 1992, but without the participation of key sections of the opposition. From a technical and logistical perspective their conduct was problematic and uneven, made difficult by an unrealistically short preparatory period. Perhaps more importantly, international observers were virtually unanimous in their conclusion that from a political perspective as well, the process was severely flawed. Although observer statements differed somewhat in wording, the general consensus reflected in the NDI/AAI report was that

The June 21 elections represented a sterile, surreal and wholly formalistic affair [which] did not contribute directly to Ethiopia's development as a democratic state. At best, the elections were premature, especially for the southern half of Ethiopia. Less kindly judged, the elections were ill-conceived, dubious and counterproductive in their contribution to the democratization of Ethiopia. The elections moreover exacerbated existing tensions, reinforced the hegemonic power of the EPRDF while marginalizing other fledgling parties, and were a central factor in the withdrawal of the OLF from the TGE and the return to war in the Oromo region. Finally, the elections created new 'political facts' - EPRDF-dominated regional and district assemblies - that will remain controversial in regions where elections are mired in doubt and suspicion.⁴

Whatever one's interpretation of the details, and however one chooses to assess responsibility, it is certain that the 1992 local and regional elections did not provide an opportunity for real electoral choice in much of Ethiopia, and created an enduring legacy of distrust and mutual suspicion which has coloured relations between EPRDF and opposition since, contributing substantially to difficulties in arriving at a negotiated settlement. The fact of EPRDF control of local councils and administrative structures after 1992, and the experience of the 1992 election process have, in fact, been dominant factors in determining opposition party perceptions of the possibility of meaningful electoral competition.

2 Electoral assistance and election observation

Prior to the 1992 local and regional elections, the Transitional Government, the National Elections Commission, and various political parties appealed to the international community for financial and logistical assistance and to field election observers. The presence of international observers was seen both as a measure to boost the external and internal credibility of the election and, particularly by the opposition, as a factor which could dampen election related conflict and promote a level playing field.

⁴ NDI/AAI Report pp 6-7

The 1992 elections generated considerable interest within the international community leading to a relatively heavy investment in fielding external international observers. By mid-June, more than 200 observers representing 23 countries as well as several intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations were present in Ethiopia. An umbrella arrangement known as the Joint International Observer Group (JIOG) was formed to facilitate policy and logistical coordination. Policy decisions for the JIOG were made by a Contact Group which included the ambassadors of Canada, Sweden, the U.K., the U.S. charge d'affaires, and the UNDP Resident Representative. The Contact Group acted on behalf of a restricted donors group consisting of 12 countries with bilateral assistance programs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

The majority of observers arrived in Ethiopia only two to three weeks prior to election day and were widely dispersed, deployed to 15 hubs around the country in teams which usually included nationals of several countries. From these hubs they attempted to cover as much territory as possible, given difficult logistics.

The results of this exercise were in many ways mixed and it is worth considering at some length the analysis of the NDI/AAI Report which concluded, *inter alia* that

- ◆ “The JIOG observer operation represented a unique and innovative approach to coordinating an international monitoring effort. However, the short time-frame in which the JIOG operation was initiated precluded a reliable assessment of logistical and administrative needs, at times resulting in confusion and disorganization. The conceptualization, staffing and delivery of basic inputs for the operation relied overwhelmingly upon ad hoc initiatives involving several key embassies and non-governmental organizations.”
- ◆ “The effective deployment of observers proved difficult given the limited availability of vehicles, the National Election Commission’s failure to produce a complete list of kebeles, and security concerns, which ultimately required the withdrawal of observers from several regions in the days prior to the elections.”
- ◆ “In addition, the JIOG operation suffered from a failure to identify the precise role to be played by the observers and their sponsoring organizations. The JIOG was envisaged by its initiators as a civilian peacekeeping operation whereby observers would be dispatched throughout Ethiopia for extended intervals, chiefly to encourage a reduction in tensions during the period preceding the elections. Given this initial conception, the systematic gathering and analyzing of data was seen as a lesser priority and, consequently, little attention was directed, at the outset, to how information collected by the observers would be used by the organizers of the observer operation. Later, several observer groups within the JIOG preferred to play the more traditional role of election evaluators, issuing post-election statements that helped shape opinion regarding the efficacy and legitimacy of the overall process. Other groups, including several embassies that sponsored observer teams and the OAU, chose to communicate their findings in confidence to the TGE.”⁵

⁵ NDI/AAI Report p 5

In some respects, many of the problems identified were inevitable given the short time-frame which confronted donors (and the TGE), and the fact that many donors were in the early stages of building up local missions, which had been drawn down to a minimum or closed during the Derg. Logistical expertise, local knowledge and insight provided by staff of the UN-EPPG (Emergency Preparedness and Planning Group, the predecessor of UN-EUE) was probably instrumental in averting organizational disaster.

The entire exercise proved to be quite expensive -- upwards of US\$ 2.5 million -- even if one does not include the indirect costs (e.g. costs associated with observers recruited by donor country foreign ministries who participated in the JIOG but were not funded under its umbrella).

B 1994 Constituent Assembly Election

1 Political Context

The political context within which elections were organized in 1994 for a constituent Assembly which would ratify the draft prepared by the Constitutional Commission during late 1993 and 1994 was largely shaped by 3 factors:

- ◆ Continuation of armed conflict, albeit at much lower levels between the EPRDF (cum national defense force) and the OLF and several smaller armed opposition groups (IFLO, etc.)
- ◆ Progressive narrowing of the non-EPRDF presence in the Transitional Government as smaller centrist or regional parties (e.g. the parties of the SPEDC) either became disillusioned with their role in government (and Constitutional Commission) or came into conflict with the EPRDF.
- ◆ On-going efforts by the international community to broker at least a resumption of dialogue between the TGE and opposition parties, if not their return to Government.

By the time the constitutional drafting process was completed in the middle of 1994, much of the organized political opposition had taken the position that it was not interested in the outcome. Others more inclined to participate remained convinced that the conditions for meaningful participation did not exist in Ethiopia, given EPRDF dominance of administrative structures from the grass roots upwards. Although this argument could be supported by evidence of widespread harassment, it was of course also a convenient argument for parties that had evidently very little in the way of an organizational base at the grassroots level outside of Addis. Government efforts to reform electoral law and administrative structures to demonstrate official commitment to a transparent and impartial electoral process were largely dismissed by the opposition as formalism, and apparently inspired little confidence that electoral conditions would differ substantially from those encountered in 1992.

2 Administrative performance and electoral assistance

Reacting to the experience of the 1992 elections, the donor community stressed the need for

an independent and competent elections authority to administer subsequent elections the need for adequate administrative preparation and the establishment of realistic deadlines based on technical rather than political criteria, the desirability of transparency at all stages of the electoral process if the credibility of the electoral process was to be enhanced and the need for adequate civic education

Under UNDP auspices, two expatriate advisors with considerable election administration experience (Jan Hult of Sweden, who had provided assistance to the National Election Commission (NEC) prior to the 1992 elections, and Joe Baxter of the U S) were engaged to examine the existing electoral system (legal framework administrative structures logistics scheduling, materials and procedures design, etc) and to provide technical assistance to the Commission They commented on the legal framework provided a variety of detailed recommendations for improving electoral procedures, and examined the NEC's international organization and capacity

After working with the staff they were reasonably confident that it possessed adequate technical capacity to administer elections if provided adequate time It was clear however that the NEC did not feel itself in a position to influence the timing of the election Indeed its staff proved entirely unwilling to generate any schedule which would anticipate or foreclose a political decision on when the constituent assembly elections would be held (E.g according to Baxter, staff were in private willing to concede that voter registration would require 20-30 days, but would not put this on paper) While the Commission was quick to "adopt the Baxter/Hult report as the bible", particularly in discussions with donors it was loath to be tied to its recommendations in this area

Following the formation of the National Election Board (NEB) in late 1993 a variety of donors offered assistance intended to assist with the development of institutional capacity As the NEB prepared for the 1994 Constituent Assembly elections it received considerable assistance in the form of commodities (paper, indelible ink, etc) from Canada and several European donors (primarily, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway) USAID assistance was provided via the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) which fielded several missions to work with the NEB on election procedures and on the development of a system for assessing its own performance during the 1994 electoral cycle, as a basis for future improvements in electoral administration The NEB's self-assessment identified a variety of organizational and procedural problems which were extensively discussed at a three day workshop in Debre Zeit, but no clear strategy for follow-up was put in place Tension between the NEB executive secretary and NEB middle-management (and the weakness of the latter) became apparent during this period Following the 1994 election, middle management became progressively less visible in the NEB's operations

3 Election Observation

The approach to election observation adopted by the international community in 1994 was largely a function of three factors First, it was a reaction to perceived deficiencies of the 1992 JIOG experience which had been relatively expensive, logistically difficult and had produced mixed analytic results Second, it reflected the relatively lower competitive stakes of an election for a transient constituent assembly Third, it reflected a (latent if not fully articulated) feeling on the part of many donors that political space had further contracted

since June 1992, and that the presence of large scale observer delegations would serve primarily to legitimate a political process of uncertain transparency. This feeling was probably strongest in donor capitals (as opposed to local missions) and led to a sense that resources available for observation would be relatively limited.

As a consequence, relatively little emphasis was placed on fielding foreign observers and relatively more emphasis was placed on facilitating domestic election observation. Observer missions were fielded by several Ethiopian NGOs. ABUGIDA for instance fielded 69 monitors to observe 35 constituencies, largely in urban or peri-urban areas (Addis 22, Awassa 1, Dessie 2, Mojo 1, Debre Zeit 2, Bahir Dar 1, Dire Dawa 1, Northern Shoa 4, Jimma 1). It produced a report which drew attention to a variety of administrative problems and inconsistencies, largely attributed to insufficient training of polling officials and called for significantly greater attention to civic education prior to future elections. It also drew attention to reports of harassment of political parties, and suggested that these should be taken seriously. In organizing its 1994 election observation, and later as a principal partner in the E95/Ad-Net Consortium, ABUGIDA worked in close partnership with NDI.

With regard to international observers, the Donor Ambassador's Group decided that observation missions composed primarily of members of the local diplomatic community would be organized to provide as accurate a picture of the constituent assembly election as possible, but that relatively limited emphasis would be placed on fielding teams of external observers (although a variety of countries brought in small numbers of foreign ministry personnel or in some cases, observers from national NGOs).

Within the Donor Ambassadors Group it was agreed that mixed teams of observers from various missions would share transport on a "space-available" basis. A small donor elections working group was established to facilitate a limited degree of coordination and to ensure that information on the availability of space on particular missions circulated. This group met weekly throughout the election period, but remained informal. It conducted an inventory of resources that could be allocated to the observer effort, polled the donor community on areas of interest and staff availability, developed a notional timetable for observer missions and prepared a checklist for observers. Several members of the working group agreed to act as focal points for information, and to facilitate coordination.

It was largely left to individual diplomatic missions to determine the destination of observer missions, and to assure transport. When additional space was available in vehicles the coordinators attempted to identify observers interested in accompanying the mission. Observation began less than a month before 5 June 1994, with the majority of missions taking in the week immediately preceding the election, and on election day itself. There was no common reporting. Individual observers wrote reports for use within their own organizations and these were generally not circulated. There was no common final report on the conduct of the election, although various missions issued statements, as did the several external observer missions that were eventually fielded (OAU, etc).

This was certainly a cost effective approach to coordination, but a somewhat inconsistent one as well. There was no assurance that observers had covered enough of the country to draw conclusions regarding the overall process, nor was there much assurance that observation had covered those areas where the process may have been most problematic. Some of those who

ended up participating in observation missions were political officers or other seasoned observers of political processes, others had little or no relevant training. Although general observation guidelines were drawn up and circulated, it is not clear that they had much influence on reporting. Since observer reports were not compiled it was not possible to draw overall conclusions about the electoral process. The only forum for comparing perspectives was the Donor Ambassadors Group itself or informal exchanges between observers.

C 1995 National and Regional Elections

1 Political Context

Successive attempts by external actors to encourage discussions between opposition and Government during 1994 and early 1995 resulted in meager returns, with the parties remaining for the most part in entrenched positions. Talks conducted in Atlanta in February 1994 under Carter Center auspices stalled when the TGE rejected Carter's mediation. Subsequent talks, conducted during February 1995 in Washington under the auspices of a U.S. Congressional Task Force failed over the issue of the acceptance of the constitutional framework already in place as a precondition both for participation and for continued discussion. COEDF, AAPO and OLF, for somewhat different reasons, argued for negotiations without preconditions and "refused to accept a framework they had not participated in constructing"⁶

The fourth opposition participant in the Washington talks, the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC), agreed to continue discussions with the TGE in Addis Ababa. Talks between Bayene Petros and Dawit Yohannes continued into late April 1995 when they were suspended after reaching an impasse over a postponement of the May election requested by SEPDC. At the time, a variety of other specific issues relating to the leveling of the playing field (including the release of SEPDC detainees in the Southern Region) appeared close to being resolved, but with the suspension of the talks momentum disappeared.

Participation in the 1995 elections by non-EPRDF parties at the national level was thus relatively limited, although a number of independent candidates presented themselves. The Ethiopian National Democratic Party (ENDP) was perhaps the most visible non-EPRDF party at the national level. It fielded 85 candidates (for both the federal parliament and several of the regional assemblies), particularly in Addis Ababa, parts of Region 4 (such as Nazaret), parts of the Southern Region (such as Sodo and Durame), and Desie in the Amhara Region but managed to elect only a single member of the Federal House (Desie). A second small national party, the Ethiopian Peace and Democracy Party, which stood for the same issues as the ENDP and an increased voice for Moslems in government, fielded eight candidates in five constituencies in Welo (Region 3) but withdrew on the eve of the election.

The most competitive races were at the regional level in regions where EPRDF was not clearly represented by a single local party (i.e., Afar, Somali, Benishangul, Gambela). In

⁶ Terrence Lyons, "Closing the Transition: The May 1995 Elections in Ethiopia," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1996), p. 131.

these areas, in contrast to what was observed in the center, voters seemed interested in the election and believed they had an important decision to make. Competition was generally focused on control of regional administrations, with less interest in the election of federal-level representatives. Most of the regionally based parties generally supported the EPRDF program nationally, and to a degree were competing to see who would "represent" EPRDF locally.

As the final report of the Donor Election Unit (DEU) noted, the 1995 election was conducted in an atmosphere that was generally free of violence or armed conflict. In contrast for example with the June 1992 regional elections, instability did not prevent most Ethiopians from participating in the election. [In addition] the placement of military forces was observed to be non-threatening and the civilian police were observed to maintain the peace unobtrusively in most population centres." At the same time the playing field was by no means level, and even candidates of the ENDP, which defined its role explicitly as that of "loyal opposition", faced some degree of harassment. By far the major constraint however was the underdevelopment of opposition party organization coupled with the vastly disproportionate financial and material resources available to the EPRDF and its allied parties.

2 Administrative performance and electoral assistance

Following the 1994 Constituent Assembly election, USAID and the NIB began discussions of assistance directed to improving internal systems for processing results. With assistance from IFES, NEB data processing facilities were expanded and strengthened and computer-based systems for tracking party voter and candidate registration as well as for processing election returns were developed. These systems were not yet on line by the time of the 1995 elections, but are largely in place at present. 15 HF mobile radios were also provided to facilitate NEB communications with field personnel. In parallel with Norwegian and Dutch assistance, the NEB greatly expanded its printing capacity.

The main constraint encountered in providing assistance to the NEB during this period was the lack of effective middle-managers willing to take responsibility for the functioning of the systems being developed. Although the development of the computer systems progressed relatively rapidly, training of NEB systems personnel was considerably delayed by the NIB's slowness in hiring an appropriate counterpart for the expatriate advisor. Once recruited the systems manager was subject to considerable pressure from managers to function as a glorified secretary.

3 Electoral process observation (the DEU)

The approach to election observation adopted by donors in 1995 differed from previous initiatives in several critical respects. It differed from the approaches adopted in 1992 and 1994 in that emphasis was placed on observing the electoral process over a period of several months prior to the election, rather than solely on election day itself. Unlike 1992 but like 1994, the emphasis was placed on using local diplomatic personnel to carry out the bulk of observations. At the same time, however, an attempt was made to improve on the experience of 1994, not only by extending the duration of observation but by supplementing local observers drawn from diplomatic missions with a small core staff of election experts to

provide consistency to the observation exercise and to take responsibility for compiling a final technical report to the donor group on the conduct of the electoral process. This core, which came to be known as the Donor Election Unit (DEU) included staff with considerable logistical expertise in Ethiopia, who took responsibility for assuring that individual observer missions were supplied with timely information on security, maintaining communication with missions in the field, and managing the motor pool and drivers. The DEU staff remained small, but proved to be extremely efficient. Its multinational staff consisted of a chief technical advisor (U S), an assistant to the chief advisor (UNDP), three seasoned election observers (Italy, U K , Canada), a logistics coordinator (U K), an office manager (U K) and a secretary (Italy). Over fifty missions were conducted during the course of the two months prior to the 1995 elections, each accompanied by one of the four experts, each the subject of a detailed written report to the Donor Group Sub-Group on Elections (DGSCE) to which the DEU reported.

III Issues for consideration and suggestions regarding approach to the 2000 elections

A Support for NEB

According to the constitution, which fixed a five-year term for representatives elected to regional and federal councils, national and regional elections will have to be held in mid-2000. Conventional wisdom suggests that the elections will have to be conducted prior to the start of the rainy season, and the NEB is thus proceeding on the assumption that elections will be scheduled during the month of May 2000. A final decision on the date will be made in consultation with Parliament.

Asked what lessons had been learned from the experience of the 1992, 1994 and 1995 elections, Ato Assefa Biru, the NEB Executive Secretary (appointed in October 1993) suggested a need for more thorough training of election officials, and noted that the method of counting at the polling station had been revised to eliminate confusion and improve transparency to observers. He also noted that zonal election officials have been eliminated to streamline the transmission of information between constituency level and the NEB central office. (At times during 1994 and 1995, Ato Assefa had expressed the concern that this level was not entirely controlled by or loyal to the NEB.)

The NEB has begun logistical preparations, and is preparing those documents which can be printed prior to candidate registration. The NEB has also established a notional schedule for the electoral period, which suggests that voter registration should take place during November, with candidate registration the following month. The articulation of this timetable is a commendable improvement on the 1995 elections, and the NEB (and Parliament) should be encouraged at every juncture to keep to it.

A relatively extended schedule for election preparation is important, not only because it facilitates election logistics (i.e. getting supplies in place, printing ballots, etc.) but because it extends the period during which the NEB is likely to take a more aggressive role in policing the political terrain, and because it may afford independent and opposition candidates a more substantial period during which to campaign under more favorable conditions.

Speaking to donor ambassadors, Ato Assefa referred to a desire for a “partnership” between the NEB and donors, noting that “free and fair elections are elusive. A process which does not begin and end on election day. What is needed is a dialogue, a sharing of experience.”

1 Autonomy/Independence of the NEB

Since 1993 when it began operation, the NEB has faced an uphill struggle to establish its credentials as a neutral and independent institution. If it has not been entirely successful and if some among the opposition at times dismiss the NEB and its leadership as ‘pawns’ of Government, it has nonetheless made considerable progress in this direction. Elements of the opposition are willing to admit in private that the Board has been both neutral and supportive during the party registration process, and at times helpful in resolving disputes with local authorities. There is considerable skepticism however regarding the willingness of political authorities to allow the Board to play an aggressive role in assuring a level playing field. Still, confidence in the neutrality and capacity of the NEB will likely remain an important element in independent/opposition candidate/party decision making regarding electoral participation.

To the extent that the NEB is consultative, proactive and responds to emerging issues in a timely and aggressive manner, its credibility will continue to increase. There are a variety of measures (falling well short of including parties in a revised commission) that could be contemplated to increase transparency and promote greater participation in solving problems as they emerge. The development of a code of conduct for political parties and for the campaign might provide an opportunity for bringing opposition parties into closer contact with the NEB and in the process increase their level of confidence in its neutrality and willingness to intervene to police the playing field. Donors should encourage the Board to engage all political parties in its deliberations on key issues (media access, grievance procedures, remedial powers, and party agent training and poll access, as well as constituency delimitation for regional elections, etc.). Parties should be involved (at least consulted) in developing structures and procedures for resolving these issues.

2 Institutional consolidation and capacity building

The major task facing the NEB is that of institutionalization. For a variety of reasons, the functioning of the Board has to this point depended on the creation and maintenance of direct relationships between the Executive Secretary and implementation level staff, both at the center and in the regions, bypassing what in most organizations would be termed “middle management.” This strategy has proven capable of assuring a progressive improvement in election administration in each successive election. Over the longer term however, these improvements may not be sustained if they are not rooted in organizational structures.

The strategy adopted thus far is to a certain extent a reflection of the Executive Secretary’s management style. It is also a function of Ato Assefa’s inability to replace middle managers inherited from the National Election Commission⁷, in whom he has limited confidence.

⁷ It is worth noting that at the November 1993 meeting at which the newly appointed NEB was first presented to the donor community, the deputy Secretary Ato Tesfaye Goite was formally introduced as a former rnk

Parliamentary approval for a revised organizational structure has been repeatedly delayed and Ato Assefa's interim strategy has been to simply work around the problem -- leaving people in place, but delegating few tasks to them. If the capacity of the NEB to perform effectively is to survive Ato Assefa's eventual departure, viable mid-level managers must be recruited and trained. To the extent that the donor community can encourage such an evolution (e.g., in discussions with parliament), it should do so.

A second major challenge facing the NEB is to assure that it has sufficient time in order to prepare and manage the electoral process. Time is of the essence. The NEB has demonstrated that it can manage many of the administrative and logistical aspects of its mandate relatively well, even when confronted with short deadlines. At the same time, however, time constraints have in the past forced administrative and procedural choices which produced confusion among voters, and had a profound impact on the nature of the campaign environment.

For example, in 1995 the NEB had insufficient time to include candidate names (or individual symbols, much less photos) on the ballot, with the result that voters faced a confusing array of generic symbols from which to choose. Similarly, because the Board was unable to demarcate constituencies for the regional elections, candidates for regional positions were effectively forced to run as "at large" candidates within the much larger areas demarcated for the Federal election. This arguably favored established parties. Since ballots were prepared for the larger federal constituencies, voters were required to select candidate symbols valid for their particular area from a list of twelve or eighteen. Considerable confusion resulted in high rates of ballot spoilage.

The NEB has since developed a more extended timetable for the electoral process which allows more time between candidate registration and the election. If it can hold to this time line, ballots reflecting candidate names can be prepared and distributed to each constituency and there will be more time for candidates to campaign.

Other, equally critical, aspects of the NEB's mandate cannot be compressed if there is to be meaningful competition. Independent and opposition candidates (and parties) must have sufficient time to organize, and in preparing for elections must enjoy effective protections of their political rights. If these candidates are to be encouraged to participate, the NEB must take a proactive approach, and must be seen to do so as early as possible.

A third major task for the NEB will be to progress beyond the tendency to define its mandate in relatively narrow (and administrative) terms, and to develop mechanisms and the confidence to aggressively defend political space. The NEB has a number of mechanisms at its disposal in seeking to avoid problems and in resolving problems if they occur. Sustained training of regional and local NEB officials will be essential if the Board is to be effective in adopting a wider definition of its mandate. It is unlikely that radio-based training will suffice in this area. To the extent that training modules can be developed and delivered to local and zonal officials on the role of the Board in enforcing the electoral law, and on candidate and voter rights, certain problems may also be avoided. Similarly, the proposed training of lower

and file member of the WPE who had experience with previous Dergue-era elections and is thus conversant with the details of election logistics. A Gurage, he is a graduate of Addis Ababa University.

level members of the regional judiciary on handling election-related disputes may bring some benefit. However, given the existing case load facing the judiciary at all levels, the NEB should be encouraged to use administrative rather than judicial mechanisms to resolve disputes when these are available. The NEB Executive Secretary's decision to eliminate NEB structures at the zonal level may also make it easier for the Board to identify and address regional disputes in a timely manner.

3 Commodities (expendable and non-expendable)

Effective communications are essential. HF radios provided by donors prior to the 1995 elections facilitated both electoral administration/logistics and the NEB's ability to play a more aggressive role in addressing complaints during the campaign period. Transport has been a perennial problem as well.

Investments in additional printing facilities should be carefully considered. A relatively substantial permanent printing capacity is justified by the need to produce distinct ballots for individual constituencies during the period between the close of candidate registration and the election, and during slack periods by the need to produce more general election materials, training manuals for election workers, and materials for civic education. At the same time, however, there is likely to be excess capacity during non-peak periods, and the NEB might be encouraged to consider offering its services on a cost-recovery basis to NGOs. Such a relationship might form the core of a collaborative arrangement between the NEB and various NGOs to expand civic education.

4 Civic Education

The Ethiopian electorate obviously reflects the characteristics of the population at large. It is predominantly rural, literacy is limited, and experience with the functioning of a democratic system even more so. Since the start of the transitional period, Ethiopian and external observers of the political process have pointed to the need for extensive civic and voter education. Experience with past elections reinforces this message. For instance, observers noted considerable confusion in 1994 over what was to be elected (i.e. a legislature or a constituent assembly), and little or no understanding of the constitution which was to be approved, despite kebele-level discussions organized to discuss it. Similarly in 1995, observers noted considerable confusion regarding understandings of constitutional rights to say nothing of complicated electoral procedures (particularly with regard to the regional election).

Since the 1992 elections, several proposals soliciting major donor investment in civic education have been forwarded, first by the NEC then by the NEB. To date, donor contributions to promoting civic education via the NEB have been minimal. In general, this has reflected a donor preference for working through NGOs in this area; it has also reflected the relatively poor quality of the proposals received (particularly from the NEC).

In considering how to address these issues, it is useful to differentiate between broad civic education relating to the nature of democratic and electoral processes, and constitutional

rights and responsibilities, and more narrowly defined voter education focusing on the electoral cycle and the mechanics of voting. Both are essential and deserve attention. To this point, the NEB has been more effective in designing, producing and distributing materials intended to increase public awareness of election mechanics than as a promoter of broader civic education. But even in this area much remains to be done.

Given the present organizational situation of the NEB, it would appear relatively unlikely that the Board will on its own be capable of mounting an effective large scale civic education campaign in advance of the 2000 elections. At the same time however the Board could greatly facilitate efforts by Ethiopian NGOs to carry out civic (or voter) education campaigns by assisting with the production of materials, facilitating access to government media and perhaps by making materials available at polling places during the voter and candidate registration processes. The NEB and NGOs interested in civic/voter education should be encouraged to explore the possibility of cooperative ventures in this area and to do so now rather than later. The formation of an NGO coalition similar to AdNet/Elections95 would make such cooperation easier.

B Encouragement for participation by independent and opposition candidates?

Three inter-related factors appear likely to influence opposition party decision-making on the issue of whether or not to contest the 2000 elections. Grossly simplified, these are coalition politics, organizational capacity, and perceptions of the playing field.

Four years after the end of the Transitional Period, the opposition appears to face more or less the same dilemmas it failed to overcome in 1995. It does not appear to have used the intervening period to particularly good advantage. Even in Addis Ababa, which would appear fertile ground for organization (serious administrative deficiencies, relatively developed communications infrastructure, availability of private media, middle class capable of making at least modest contributions, visibility to the international community, etc.) there appears to be little evidence of consistent organization.

Parties that might wish to contest elections at least on a limited scale in particular regions (and who might achieve at least limited success in doing so) appear constrained from doing so by alliances with external parties that have historically opposed participation in the electoral process in the most vehement of terms (EPRP, COEDF, Medhin, etc.). There has been some evolution in the public positions taken by these parties, notably the "renunciation of violence", acceptance of the existing constitutional framework as a basis for political competition, and nationalistic support for the Ethiopian position vis a vis Eritrea. At the same time, however, the trade-off for broadening the coalition was the acceptance of Negede Gobeze (of Meison) and Aregawi Berhe (ex-TPLF) among its collective leadership. It is difficult to imagine that this will facilitate the entry of the "Coalition of Ethiopian Opposition Political Parties" (formed in Paris in late 1997) into Ethiopian domestic politics, since the former is among those sought for prosecution by the SPO and the latter is a sworn enemy of Meles. This is roughly the same problem Bayene Petros faced in 1995 when the Council of Alternative Forces proved unable to distance itself from parties that had not yet renounced violence (e.g., EPRP).

Although this problem has been recognized at one level, there have been no moves to resolve it, and it would appear that Addis-based opposition leaders are loath to pay the price in status (and perhaps financial) terms of distancing themselves from the diaspora. The longer such a dilemma persists, the more limited the time that will be available for organizing to contest the elections, and the more convenient it will be to argue that the "decision" not to contest the 2000 elections is a function of limited political space.

The organizational capacity of the opposition parties presently registered and visible in Ethiopia is difficult to assess. Past electoral performance cannot be used as a benchmark. The extent of the popular support enjoyed by these parties is equally difficult to assess. It is sometimes tempting to triangulate using secondary measures -- for example the size of the crowd at Prof. Asrat's funeral as a proxy for support for AAPO -- yet in a context where traffic accidents draw crowds in the hundreds, this can be misleading. Although it is evident that there exists considerable latent dissatisfaction with elements of the EPRDF's political program and with aspects of its administrative performance, it is less clear that this translates directly into support for one or another of the existing opposition parties. These have been loath to publish clearly articulated political programs or to make specific commitments on important issues of public policy. The ONC, for instance, addresses the issue of land by noting that its policy would be that rural land shall be put into use based on economic rationality without causing a fundamental change in the basic provisions of the rural land proclamation." What this means in specific terms is anyone's guess.

One indicator of organizational capacity might be the existence of party offices, particularly outside of Addis, another would be the ability to organize public meetings. Failed attempts to open office or to hold meetings, if verifiable, may also be useful as indicators of at least an organizational presence. Opposition parties made credible allegations, clustered in the wake of the 1992 elections, following the expulsion of the Southern Coalition from the Transitional Government, and in the months leading up to the 1995 regional and national elections, that they were subject to harassment, intimidation and arbitrary arrest by local and regional authorities. Party offices were at times closed and public meetings either prohibited or disrupted. Whether these factors in fact presented insurmountable barriers to political activity cannot be determined. It is clear, however, that little timely action was taken to correct them, despite international pressure in certain cases. In general, the level of interference was lower in 1995 than in 1992. In 1995 it was at times difficult to determine whether opposition claims that the political environment precluded meaningful participation were the result of the experience of the 1992 election, or of more recent attempts to engage in political activity.

The international community unfortunately appears to be in more or less the same position it was in 1995 when it comes to assessing the degree to which political space is available for proponents of alternative political programs or candidacies (either political parties or individual candidates). Government spokesmen suggest that ongoing efforts to educate administrative, police and ruling-party cadres, particularly at the regional level, and the strengthening of the NEB have produced a greatly improved enabling environment. There should thus be fewer problems with electoral administration, fewer transgressions by local authorities, and more effective responses when problems occur. Such claims will be very difficult to verify if elections are uncontested, and if there is no consistent and systematic effort on the part of the donor community to monitor the political terrain over the next year.

As in 1995, the donor community will be placed in the position of judging whether the absence of contestation is the result of restrictions on political space or a function of the organizational underdevelopment of opposition parties. In the absence of a capacity to systematically observe and assess the performance of political parties, the administrative authorities and the NEB in the field during the course of the six or eight months prior to the 2000 elections, it will be difficult for the donor community to reach independent conclusions.

4 Proactive measures

Both independent candidates and those affiliated with opposition parties have generally faced constraints of a similar nature. Organizational capacity, funding access to media relations with administrative authorities, an absence of confidence in the impartiality of the system and the weakness (or absence) of mechanisms for timely redress of grievances are among the most important. If they are committed to doing so, Government, the NFB and the international community can contribute to varying degrees to reducing the severity of these constraints. Among the measures (and this by no means an exhaustive list) that could be taken are the following:

- ◆ Strong positive statements from the highest levels of Government indicating a commitment to guaranteeing an enabling environment permissive of free competition and indicating that the harassment of candidates and supporters will not be tolerated should be encouraged at the earliest possible date. Such statements might include reference to prohibitions on the use of administrative position (and vehicles) for political ends.
- ◆ Clear commitment from Government to make available on a sufficient and equitable basis, access to state-controlled radio for all parties and independent candidates contesting the election. This is an area where the Government could reasonably be expected to make a contribution to the process, despite past protestations that the media are run on a self-financing basis.
- ◆ NEB might create a forum for regular consultation with registered parties on any issues related to the election or campaign, such a forum could be involved in decisions regarding mechanisms for equitably allocating air time on state media for distributing public campaign funds (should these be available) and for resolving election-related disputes.
- ◆ NEB should be encouraged to be more proactive in publicizing its preparations for the 2000 elections, and in making clear to the general public (and parties) its role both in administering the electoral process and its role in policing the playing field. Grievance procedures and mechanisms for dispute resolution should be broadly known, and the NEB's power to order a recount, and/or to annul results for particular constituencies and order a new election should be made clear. That it has exercised these powers in several instances should also be made clear.
- ◆ The development of a code of conduct for political parties and for the campaign might

provide an opportunity for bringing opposition parties into closer contact with the NEB and in the process increasing their level of confidence in its neutrality and willingness to intervene to police the playing field. It is likely that opposition parties will continue to question the NEB's capacity to do so, however

C Observation

1 Why observation?

Election observation has at least three basic functions. The most commonly emphasized (but arguably least important) role of observation is to certify the accuracy and legitimacy of results by determining whether the election took place in accordance with international standards -- i.e. was it free and fair? The greatest potential for conflict with Government is associated with this function. A second function of election observation, particularly in situations where the capacity of election authorities to carry out their technical and political functions is not yet fully developed, is to assist these authorities in identifying and dealing with constraints and problems -- i.e. essentially part of support for improvements in electoral administration. A third function of election observation is to build or reinforce the confidence of participating parties or candidates in the transparency of the electoral system, and in so doing provide encouragement for their participation in the electoral process. How one approaches the organization of election observation depends on which objectives are adopted.

2 Domestic Observers

Domestic monitoring capacity has several dimensions: a) neutral observers, b) party poll watchers, and c) election officials.

The development and strengthening of local monitoring capacity should be given high priority, but would appear a lesser priority than supporting the development and/or strengthening of local capacity to conduct meaningful civic education campaigns and to organize and promote public debate on issues of public policy. The capacity to mount effective election observation programs should flow relatively easily from an effective program of civic education. At the same time, assistance aimed at developing NGO capacity to organize election observation efforts will contribute to broader institutional development.

It is possible to build on the experience of the Ethiopian Free Election Observers Group which observed the 1992 local and regional elections, and more importantly on the experience of the consortium of Ethiopian NGOs (Ad-Net/Elections95) that organized a fairly large-scale observer presence for the 1995 national and regional Elections. Ad-Net/95 was a consortium of 5 (?) Addis-based NGOs, including IAG, ABUGIDA, APAP, AIDWO and the Ad Hoc Committee for Peace and Development (now the Peace and Development Committee). The experience of 1995 suggests on the one hand that it is much easier to field relatively large numbers of monitors and to ensure that they are effectively coordinated if NGOs work together within a consortium. On the other hand, the process of drafting and agreeing on a final assessment of the 1995 elections proved difficult (and relatively time-consuming), since different organizations adopted different standards. One lesson that

emerges from donor experience supporting the Ad-Net consortium is that it is probably preferable to have one organization responsible for financial and logistical management

An effort should be made relatively soon to assess the degree of interest that exists within the NGO community in election observation. The experience of 1995 suggests a tendency to underestimate the complexity of organizing collective undertakings, the time it takes to secure funding, the difficulty of organizing and training observers and the complexity of logistics. Thus far, domestic observers have been organized solely for the purpose of election-day observation. It is perhaps also worth exploring the degree of interest in a longer-term observational role, focused on the conduct of the campaign.

Little attention has been devoted thus far to exploring the concept of election day observation by poll watchers recruited by candidates or political parties. There would appear to be considerable work to be done in this area to clarify the concept for local administration election officials and to those participating in the election.

3 **The Rationale for DEU-like approach to observing the electoral process**

The DEU approach was

- ◆ Proactive, in the sense that it was intended to feed accurate and timely information on emerging issues into dialogue between donors and Government (in first instance NEB, but in future perhaps the House of Peoples' Representatives, etc) throughout the election period,
- ◆ Adaptive, in the sense that the approach was sufficiently flexible to respond to emerging needs or concerns (issues or regions) and consistent with a wider donor interest of encouraging broad participation,
- ◆ Consistent, in the sense that reports produced by the DEU remained comparable though they reflected observations undertaken in different areas at different times by different groups of observers. A DEU advisor accompanied each mission and was responsible for reporting. Considerable emphasis was placed within the DEU on exchanges of information between advisors.
- ◆ Cost-Effective. The cost of the JIOG in 1992 came to roughly \$2.5 million. The entire 4 month DEU exercise came in at \$325,000.

Even if it is presently not much in evidence, there will be considerable interest in donor capitals in the 2000 elections, which will likely be viewed as the first 'objective' test of the political order established by the 1995 constitution. As a consequence, observation of the elections at some level, is an inevitability. If, however, the local diplomatic community waits to begin planning an observation strategy until there are strong expressions of interest from home, there is a considerable risk that there will remain insufficient time to develop an effective and coherent approach.

A late start to planning will likely mean that the focus of observation is more on the events of

election day itself, and less on the nature of the enabling environment for political participation during the critical six to eight month period preceding elections -- the period during which decisions are made concerning participation, candidacies decided, signatures collected, voters registered, and the campaign conducted

Donors must carefully consider the manner in which they approach the issue of observation with Government. How the issue is presented to Government will be of critical importance in determining Government reactions. Government reactions to the analytical report prepared by the Donor Election Unit, and submitted to Government in confidence by the DGSCE, were largely negative and led Meles to suggest that never again would Government be willing to deal with donors collectively on issues closely related to sovereignty. The leadership of the DGSCE came in for considerable criticism from the highest levels of Government. In approaching observation, the donor community should avoid being perceived as a "final court of appeal for the opposition." Similarly the donor community should in no way be seen to imply that if the 2000 elections are not widely contested by parties of the opposition the election is undemocratic. This was a message which the Government read into the DEU report, and one which it bitterly resented.

It is perhaps a tempting strategy for a variety of reasons to back into observation through work, at a more technical level with the NEB would be a mistake since it will very quickly be obvious that donors are interested in observing the electoral process. By failing to address the issue directly, the international community will leave itself open to charges of deceptiveness. This can only complicate relations with Government.

4 Necessary conditions

◆ Effective donor coordination

Close and easy coordination among donors appears essential to the effective functioning of a structure similar to the DEU. Donors must be able to adopt and maintain common positions in dealing with Government and the NEB. It is also important that one or another member of the donor group be willing and able to assure high level contact with Government when needed.

The relationship between the DEU and the DGSCE and the larger Donor Group was critical. The DEU derived its authority, legitimacy, and purpose from the close connections between the unit and the over-arching group of ambassadors. The Senior Advisor met regularly with officials from the Donor Group to evaluate reports, discuss future itineraries and exchange ideas on the type of information that was most important. Embassy officials who took part in DEU missions played an integral role in shaping the trip reports. The regular exchanges allowed the DEU to adjust its missions and tailor its reporting to be as effective as possible in delivering useful information to the Donors Group. The participation of many embassies in election day monitoring and the post-election day debriefing meeting provided a more comprehensive perspective on the voting. A group with the same objectives as the Donors Group prepared to put their time and resources behind a DEU-type operation is essential.

◆ Clear division of labor between monitoring unit and donor group

The donor group was responsible for the use of DEU products in dialogue with Government. The DEU did not release the findings of observation missions. The only exception to this general rule was a weekly oral briefing of NEB by the DEU Chief Technical Advisor during the course of the weekly donor meeting with the Board.

The DEU was created to coordinate and facilitate mission-based observations and supplement embassy reporting on political conditions, not to act as an independent monitoring organization. It had one set of clients, the DGSCE, and the unit's value should be judged by the usefulness of the information provided.

The DEU was responsible for identifying key issues to be investigated for deciding on the areas to be covered, and for the conclusions drawn. Individual diplomatic observers obviously did their own reporting, and were not responsible for DEU analytic conclusions. The DEU technical advisors had considerable flexibility to alter their itineraries to follow up on observations, or to respond to unforeseen circumstances.

DEU reports were treated as internal embassy documents. The DEU issued no public reports and did not share its written mission reports with other non-DGSCE embassies or Ethiopian Government officials. (The Senior Advisor, however, orally briefed the National Election Board weekly on the basis of DEU trip reports.)

The DEU approach to electoral environment observation provides for a more controlled monitoring exercise than an operation organized by a non-governmental organization. Because they reported their findings confidentially and exclusively to the relevant embassies, DEU advisors wrote freely and without constraint, striving to provide the most accurate and detailed accounts possible. Diplomatic personnel had the opportunity to determine what information gathered by such a unit should be made public or shared with Government or election officials. This may, in some instances, limit critical public statements or conclusions but should not restrict the ability to share constructively critical information with Government and election officials, confidentially if necessary.

It is likely that decisions regarding whether or not to make public information gathered through such a monitoring exercise will hinge on the degree to which there is a significant degree of electoral competition. In 1995, the DEU approach was initially developed as an element of a broader strategy intended to encourage (if not facilitate) opposition participation in the elections. By the time the DEU was up and running, it had become evident that participation by organized political opposition would be minimal. Had the opposition chosen to contest the election, it appears likely that the DGSCE would have been more inclined to release summaries of observer reports during the course of the campaign period.

Particularly where the government holding the election does not invite non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the United Nations (UN) to observe, an operation such as the DEU may be the most effective way for embassies to monitor. Even in cases where NGOs and the UN participate in the observation, an organization such as the DEU will be valuable as the core to coordinate missions and draw together information and analysis.

◆ Good working relationship with NEB

To the extent that the donor group is able to maintain a strong relationship with the NEB DEU-like observation of the election process can serve to strengthen the Board's ability to respond to problems quickly and, in so doing, may help to enhance its credibility. The donor community should avoid giving the impression that the function of observation is primarily to form judgements -- either regarding NEB administrative capacity, or regarding the Government's commitment to democratic processes.

D Strategic considerations Whether, when and how to approach Government?

Any observation/analysis of domestic political processes by the international community is viewed with considerable scepticism by the present Government. Collective donor approaches to issues of this sort are viewed with even greater hostility. To a degree this may be a function of the manner in which the donor community has approached the issue but it also reflects an innate defensiveness which can be expected to persist. Donor proposals accepted (with considerable hesitation) by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia which could not claim a mandate as an elected government are likely to elicit different reactions from the present Federal Government which was elected.

The Government reacted harshly to the report of the DEU chief technical advisor when it was forwarded by the DGSCE, and the DGSCE chairman (at the time the British Ambassador) found himself in something of a political wilderness for some months afterwards. On the other hand, arguments based on realism and couched in the language of Ethiopian self-interest may have some impact. To the extent that observation is presented as a constructive contribution to the development of the democratic experiment and as a component of assistance to the NEB, rather than solely as external monitoring to ensure that Government keeps to its commitments, Government may react more positively.

Prime Minister Meles indicated in late May 1999 that in the context of the present conflict elections are "not a priority". This is not terribly surprising. At the same time the present conflict also provides opportunities to capitalize on broad public support for the Government position vis a vis Eritrea. Particularly in light of Ethiopian perceptions that Eritrea has received better press in the West, it may be useful to suggest that the 2000 election may provide Ethiopia with a low-cost opportunity for demonstrate the openness of the present political order and its commitment to democratic principles, at a time then there is little or no organized domestic opposition, and at a time when Ethiopia could use positive press substantially to its advantage in negotiations with the International Financial Institutions. In domestic political terms, the EPRDF has never been stronger nor its opponents weaker. There is virtually no chance that, even in the freest of elections the opposition could seriously challenge the ruling party.

There have been consistent statements by Government officials (P.M. Meles and Speaker Dawit Yohannes included) to suggest that the Government would generally welcome a stronger opposition within parliament since this would force the ruling coalition to better hone its arguments, and would assist it in identifying problems. In arguing for a more

favorable Government attitude toward early attention to the electoral process donors should build on these points, and appeal to the EPRDF's enlightened self-interest

In approaching preparations for elections at an early date the donor community should take considerable pains to ensure that it is clearly perceived as attempting to be constructive and to make sure that it is in a position to offer meaningful support to Ethiopia in attaining the standards set by the 1995 Constitution and in frequent Government commitments to democratic principles. Credible elections in the year 2000 are not only in the interests of the Ethiopian Government, but in the interests of the donor community as well

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