

**Speech by H.E. Dr Abiy Ahmed**  
**at the**  
**Rally for Forgiveness and Togetherness**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> June 2018**  
**Meskel Square, Addis Ababa**

**Check against delivery**

My fellow Ethiopians,

First, allow me to express the extraordinary optimism, honour and great pleasure I feel today seeing so many Ethiopian gather on this occasion to celebrate love, forgiveness, unity and harmony as our defining values.

With your consent, today I will open my speech with an aphorism which I usually say at the end of my speeches. May the Creator bless Ethiopia and its people abundantly!

We have not yet served for six months since we assumed responsibility; we have not yet lifted the shadow of overwhelming challenges before us; therefore, we have yet to earn your gratitude.

And yet, my fellow Ethiopians, filled with hope, you commenced today with a grand gesture of appreciation – believing that hatred has ruined us and reduced our standing, but love will offer dividend and create a bridge. There is no one who took on the first tread – armed with love and harmony – and has failed to realise his purpose. Today's extraordinary occasion lays the foundational brick in setting out our journey to the greater heights of where we aspire to land.

Today, it is imperative to express gratitude to our martyrs who could not live to witness this day, who dies so that we could live, who were dishonoured so that we could walk in dignity, who were incarcerated so that we could experience freedom, who sacrificed their lives so that we could live ours. They could have lived without us; but we would not be here without them.

Ethiopia – a nation of the Creator's cardinal wisdom; land of eighty exquisitely blended embroideries; cradle of mankind; symbol of black people's struggle for freedom – needs a statesman who can purge all her teething troubles, not one who tolls in office for two months and loudly seeks praise.

And yet, a leader could barely function as one – without the love of his people. A leader who does not have a united people is hollow. Yes, a leader without the backing of his people is ill-destined.

So I am here today to deliver my gratitude for all the love and support you have given us since the first day we assumed this heavy responsibility.

Today, I stand before you to tell you that this nation we inherited is gifted with immense wealth that could be spared for others – and yet famishes for love.

I am also standing here to announce that nothing shall stop us from rising to the great heights we aspire to reach – if, with love, we unshackle ourselves from hatred and resentment which previously impelled us to undervalue we possess, in search for what we don't have.

Therefore, on that day when you love each other unconditionally, I will say you have thanked me and my colleagues who toil day and night.

On that day when you avowedly reject theft and corruption, you can consider your gratitude received.

On that day when you stop saying *this region is mine, this boundary is mine, leave our lands* and state sweating for a better future for our country, you can consider your gratitude received.

We long for that day when you stand unified and in adoration from the eastern tip to the western peripheries, from the northern tip to the southern boundaries, and for that era when our Palace and Parliament is open to the public.

On that day when you teach your children patriotism and national pride as you teach them the alphabets and sheath them with *Ethiopianism*, then, we will have received your gratitude.

When you treat mothers, sisters and all women equally and with respect, then, the whole world would stand witness to your gratitude.

On that day when, without any ulterior motive – but just on account of true love for your country – you start to be concerned for the development of your areas and work in such spirit, then, your gratitude will indeed be earnest.

Our vision is far-reaching, and our goal is wide-ranging.

Never doubt for a single moment that Ethiopia will rise to its previous glory.

However, I would like to reiterate that the key pathway to prosperity is embracing forgiveness, love and unity.

Still, we should note that change does not come through the involvement of a few active players and the majority being spectators; it is a process which entails the participation of all. It is not a spectacle wherein onlookers heap in praises when points are scored and complain when losses are encountered. An all-out participation being indispensable, the only difference among players should be merely one of degree resulting from the level of authority, responsibility, capacity, place and role a player hold.

Intellectuals, bring us your rich ideas.

Professionals, indicate new ways of doing things.

Religious leaders, eradicate prejudice and corruption; speak for the poor who are wronged and when justice is miscarried.

Fellow Ethiopians living abroad, think of your homeland Ethiopia on every occasion in everything you do with your wealth and knowledge.

Competing political parties, forget yesterday's bitter experience; for unity's sake, strive for reconciliation in good faith.

Young people, tighten your belt and ready yourselves for work and progress.

Fathers, counsel your children; mothers, guide your youngsters.

Adults, lead. Teachers, sow the seeds of knowledge. Students, study hard and march forward in hope.

If we love our nation, let's fulfil our responsibilities and demand our rights.

If we love our nation, let's treat power as the responsibility that is not an imposition on the people. Let's use public office to serve the public and not one self.

Theft should be an object of humiliation, and not a ground for pride.

If we care enough for our nation, let's stand in defense of each Ethiopian citizen suffering from mistreatment.

If we love our country, let's look upon each of our pennies as Ethiopia's assets and avoid wastefulness.

If we love our nation, let's decry the waste of any work-hour as a waste of Ethiopia's time.

If we love our nation, let's cry for each squandered asset, for it belongs to mother Ethiopia.

If we love our nation, let's stand in defense of any Ethiopian citizen whose rights has been violated in any corner of the country – without regard to his ethnicity, religion or other social status. Let's stand in unison saying it's an injustice to Ethiopia and every Ethiopian.

Let's build Ethiopia together; we are all indispensable to Ethiopia. Ethiopia is indispensable to all of us. We have no other substitute to our Ethiopia.

If Ethiopia is to free itself from the cloak of poverty, it should marshal the sturdy hands of its children – which can move mountains – but must be united, come out from the hazes of lethargy, and toil day in and day out.

If Ethiopia shall remain as Africa's bastion for peace, its relations with neighbouring countries must be founded on love, shared concern and benefits.

Our motherland is a great and historic country. From stone to paper inscriptions, it has more than 2000 years-old history in writing, sings its own hymn, moves to its own rhythm, proudly maintains its sovereignty, and has forever defended itself.

However, if such an elaborate heritage and cherished history could not bring about freedom, justice, democracy and economic renaissance, it becomes a hollow pride that cannot put bread on the table.

Building an independent nation is not the same as building a free society. What good is a free country, if we don't enjoy freedom; if we are not free from fear; if we build dividing walls rather than bridges? If sub national demarcation becomes national boundaries; if instead of building unifying bridges we build a wall, then what is the meaning and value of our three thousand years of freedom?

If we are afraid to express ourselves, if we are restrained to write, if we are anxious to organise, move or if we are forced to hide, then, where is the value and meaning of thousands of years of freedom?

If one ethnic group contends that other groups are coming uninvited, if pushing out is the order of the day, if an ethnic group claims that a particular geographical area in Ethiopia belongs to it alone, then, what have colonialists done that is worse?

Finally, my fellow citizens, there is one important point which I need to you to bear in mind. Recognise the distinction between individuals and groups. Let's distinguish the thorns from the roses. Let's not direct our wrath on easy targets for the faults of others. Let's not destroy the forest just because of one bent tree.

Remember on each day that no other weapon could be more effective than forgiveness.

On this occasion, I wish to state that this boundless love offered to us today is in fact offered to all our colleagues in public service who labour day and night. From the bottom of my heart, I assure you that we shall not rest proud taking the great affection you showed us for granted; instead, what we received today will only prompt more commitment and hard work on our part.

Further, I assure you that we shall utilize each minute and each hour to serve you faithfully and with love and utmost humility, free from dishonesty and ethnic bias, in a direction that eventually ensures justice and democracy.

Before I close, I wish to highlight to my brothers and sisters, that in the past one hundred years, hatred has reigned over us; has spread its veil over us; self-absorption, greed and conceit have harmed us a great deal.

My beloved fellow Ethiopians, only forgiveness and love could help us transcend such grief, suffering and all this history.

Revenge is only for the weak. We Ethiopians are not weak and hence, we shall not exact vengeance on others. With love, we shall triumph.

Now I request each of you, brothers and sisters, to turn to the person next to you on this occasion of "Day of Love and Forgiveness" and hold them and tell them that you love and forgive them; I ask you to do so in love.

May Ethiopia live forever honoured and its dignity safeguarded through strength of its children.

May the Creator bless Ethiopia and its People.

Thank you!