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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION
OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

**REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER
ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION**

**Information provided by the Government of Ethiopia
on the implementation of the concluding observations
of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination^{*}**

[24 January 2008]

^{*} In accordance with the information transmitted to States parties regarding the processing of their reports, the present document was not formally edited before being sent to the United Nations translation services.

Response of the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to questions raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

January 2007

Introduction

1. The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is happy to respond to issues raised in the letter dated 3 September 2007 from the chairman of the Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The Committee requested information on measures taken by the Government to combat racial prejudice and intolerance between ethnic groups as well as on the measures to ensure the right to security for members of all ethnic groups. The Committee also sought information which will enable it to understand how the federal system in the country implements the Convention and prevents and addresses ethnic conflicts. It will be recalled that the Government participated in a discussion with members of the Committee on 13 August 2007 in which it responded to a number of questions they have raised. The Government reiterates its readiness and preparation to present its overdue report under the Convention as soon as possible. It wishes to recall that it had brought to the Committee's attention, through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, documents highlighting the steps it has been taking to finalise and present the overdue reports. This response thus does in no way substitute such commitment and is only intended to reply to the questions raised in the aforementioned letter.

2. The Government's response first discusses the salient constitutional and political reforms implemented with the view to addressing century old injustices mainly against marginalised groups and minorities, which were compounded by a cycle of political conflicts and civil wars. It also discusses how Ethiopia's federalism is geared primarily towards the protection of minorities thereby reducing or preventing their escalating to violent conflicts. The first section briefly casts Ethiopia's conflicts in a historical context where it will be shown that the fact that successive regimes were built on structures that were essentially repressive and discriminatory resulted in political tension and conflicts. Then follows a discussion into the new constitutional dispensation which joins the right to self-determination with a distinctive form of federalism based on communal identities. Ethiopia's federal constitution is premised on a historical analysis which brought home the fact that the country's past conflicts and wars were caused by blatant disregard to the rights of its diverse peoples. Thus the Constitution provides for constitutional safeguards and protection ensuring that the rights of the numerous nations, nationalities and peoples are respected. Various factors which still pose challenges for the prevention, resolution and management of conflicts are discussed. It is thus to say the least a gross misrepresentation of the Ethiopian situation today to suggest that Ethiopia's federalism created conditions for deepening conflicts and political tensions. It is the deeply held view of the Government that the federal system in Ethiopia not only reduced and averted conflicts, but has also created the necessary condition and environment for economic

growth and prosperity for all the peoples of the country. It is a widely shared view that minorities fared much better under a federal system than alternative political-institutional arrangements.

Addressing political conflicts and protection of the rights of minorities as justifications for Ethiopian Federalism

3. Ethiopia is one of the oldest states in the world. It is a diverse country with more than 80 nations, nationalities and peoples. There are also numerous religious groups with Christian, Islamic, Judaic and animist roots. Christianity and Islam were introduced into Ethiopia during 300 A.D and 700 A.D. respectively.

4. Despite its long history and cultural diversity, however, Ethiopia's past is profoundly rooted in dictatorial and totalitarian traditions. Minorities and non-Christians were excluded from power and were often neglected. During the 20th century particularly in the consecutive imperial rules of Emperor Menelik and Emperor Haile Selassie, the modern Ethiopian state was based political centralism and cultural assimilations. Its socio-political system was based on an archaic feudal system which entrenched ethnic and religious discrimination and inequality. These policies and practices continued unabated during the military dictatorship known as the Dergue which, through a long-drawn liberation struggle spearheaded by Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was removed in May 1991.

5. The 17 years of the *Dergue* regime saw the militarization of the country and the deterioration of the security situation. A secession movement in Eritrea and liberation struggle in Tigray, Oromia, Afar, Somali and other regions of the country erupted. The military junta, never inclined to offer a peaceful political solution to the country's problem, used its military muscle to stifle dissent. During the campaign which itself dubbed *red terror*, tens of thousands young people were killed in the capital and other major towns. Due to lack of democratic participation and repression, Ethiopia's long history was marked with a series of tensions and conflicts.

6. The overthrow of the military junta in 1991 created an opportunity to undertake political and constitutional reforms. These reforms were not only desirable but were also necessary if the country is to archive a break from its past, and enjoy peace and prosperity. The political movements and armed groups, which tenaciously fought the military dictatorship, participated in a national conference on peace and reconciliation held in July 1991. Over 27 political parties participated in this national conference which adopted the Transitional Charter. The conference participants also clinch an agreement that the Charter will serve as an interim constitution until a full-fledged constitutional document is adopted. The Charter, created 87 strong Council of Representatives composed of liberation movements, political parties and prominent individuals. This council, which acted as a parliament for two and half years, had also representatives from the different nations, nationalities and peoples in the country. Not only that the new

political organ presented the unprecedented opportunity for all communities to participate in the political process, it was based on a charter which enshrined the principle of self-determination as a foundational principle. Federalism's utility as a guarantor of broader participation of citizens in decision making was also underscored. Regional states were created based on national and linguistic identities. Government offices and authorities will be run by individual representatives from nations, nationalities and peoples.

7. Healing past wounds, and preserving peace and stability was the chief *raison d'être* of the transitional government. The Government, through the support of multilateral and bilateral donors, encouraged the adoption of a legislation establishing the Special Prosecutor Office, which investigated and prosecuted crimes against humanity and genocide. Former ministers and members of the military junta were tried for their direct involvement in mass killing and human rights violations. In December 2006, the federal high court found many of these senior officials including former leader Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam guilty and sentenced them to various terms of imprisonment. The Special Prosecutor has appealed the sentence as too lenient. By prosecuting past heinous crimes, Ethiopia has, therefore, demonstrated its commitment to its obligations under international law including under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

8. During the transitional period, a Constitutional Drafting Commission was established. After a painstaking and participatory process, a constitutional document was adopted on December 8, 1994. During this critical period, the government actively promoted Ethiopia's membership in international human rights instruments. Ethiopia signed and subsequently ratified some of the fundamental major human rights instruments during this period. The various provisions of the constitution also took inspiration from existing international human rights instruments and norms. The Constitution further entrenches the gains achieved during the transitional period. As clearly captured in the preamble of the constitution, one of the most important objectives of the constitution is to create one economic and political community based on good governance, respect for human rights and democracy. The right to self-determination is clearly provided for under article 39 and nine regional states were created based on cultural and linguistic categories. The nine regional states that were newly created are Harari, Benshangul Gumuz, Oromiya, Gambela, Somali, SNNP (Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples), Amhara, Afar and Tigray. Multiethnic cities and towns namely the capital Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa fall within the federal jurisdiction. Ethiopian federalism empowers the regions with extensive symmetrical autonomy and rights. By incorporating self-determination, in the federal constitution Ethiopia has demonstrated its readiness to implement the Convention and several recommendations of the Committee including General Recommendations No. 21 on self-determination.

9. The federal constitution has created a parliamentary system with a federal bicameral parliament, a constitutional president as Head of State and a federal government headed by a prime minister. The powers of the federal parliament and the

executive are set forth in the constitution. The powers of the national regional states are also enumerated. The House of Federation, the second chamber of the federal parliament is granted the power to interpret the constitution. Symmetrical federalism is instituted in the sense that all the nine constituent states enjoy equal rights and powers. Regional states are, inter alia, responsible for administering their own civil service and maintaining law and order. All powers not vested expressly in the Federal Government alone or concurrently in the Federal Government and the National Regional States are reserved to the states.

10. Nations, nationalities and peoples now exercise their unfettered right to use their own languages. The Constitution defines nations, nationalities and peoples as groups inhabiting a contiguous geographical area sharing similar linguistic, cultural, historical and psychological makeup. The constitutional jurisprudence which has grown through the functions of the House of Federation and other constitutional organs indicates that all categories of groupings enjoy identical entitlements. The constitution clearly provides that sovereignty resides in nations, nationalities and peoples. As previously noted, previous linguistic and cultural policy alienated various groups by denying them the use of their languages. Currently, every nation, nationality or people has the right to use its own language within its region. Federal public broadcasting services now have programs in some of the main languages in the country. Regional and community broadcasting services promote broadcasting in minority languages in various regions in the country. Each regional state is empowered to choose languages for instruction in primary schools. Municipalities, Zones, Weredas and districts are also empowered to be involved in such process. Due to lack of resources, absence of writing system and other factors, originally several communities continued to use Amharic as a medium of instruction. Based on the Federal Educational Sector Development program, both the federal and regional government are committing resources to help communities acquire sufficient capacity to use their own languages as a medium of instruction.

Democratisation as a tool of addressing political conflicts

11. Ethiopia's federalism should be considered in light of the democratisation process the country has been consolidating. Ever since the adoption of the Transitional Charter, Ethiopia has held three federal and regional elections. The first elections were held in 1992 based on which the new central and local structures and offices were run by individuals who were elected by a popular vote. The 1992 elections ushered in the first free and fair electoral processes in the country's history. These elections have gradually shown remarkable improvement. Ethiopia pursues a parliamentary system where both the federal and regional states have legislative organs which elect federal and regional executive organs respectively.

12. The 2005 legislative elections for the House of Peoples' Representatives and regional council are by far the freest and most transparent elections Ethiopia ever had. There was a high level of competition among political parties and record number of

citizen participated in voting. Moreover, the actual voting was peaceful. Numerous political parties and independent candidates participated in election for regional seats. For example, in the national regional state of Oromia, eight political parties and independents candidates participated.

13. A question has been raised to what extent minority groups in new regional states participate in self-government and democratic governance. Given the fact that almost all regional states have minority groups within their jurisdiction, the participation of these groups in regional decision making processes is very relevant. The constitution guarantees protection from any discriminatory laws and practices restricting the participation of citizens in public affairs. Article 38 provides that every Ethiopian has a right to vote and to be elected without any discrimination based on colour, race, nation, nationality, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, or other status. The implementation of such constitutional guarantee in a federal arrangement that allows greater cultural autonomy has not been without challenges. For example, a constitutional case from Benishangul Gumuz, one of the nine regional states in Ethiopia, involving the right to be presented as a candidate, in regional election, by individuals who do not speak languages spoken by local groups not only demonstrates the challenges but also how institutions created by the constitution respond to these challenges. Individuals speaking Amharic, Oromiffa and Tigrina languages were barred from running for office in regional government during regional elections in Benishangul Gumuz held in 2000. The National Electoral Board, based on a federal proclamation which requires candidates for regional government to speak regional national languages, decided to exclude these individuals arguing that they do not speak the Berta national regional language, which is one among a number of languages spoken in the region. Appellants challenged the constitutionality of the proclamation and thus brought a constitutional challenge in the House of Federation. Based on recommendations by the Council of Constitutional Inquiry, decided that indeed the decision of the Election Board violates the constitution.

Federalism's Development Dividend

14. The Ethiopian Government has a strongly held position that low level of socio-economic development not only generates conflicts but also creates conditions in which they thrive and are protracted. In the Ethiopian lowlands where significant number of conflicts occurs, lack of development has been a contributing factor to intermittent tensions. The Government thus has ensured that its economic policies and programs are geared towards achieving a fast and sustainable economic development by giving a special focus to those underprivileged areas. The Government's economic policies and programs are premised on reducing and alleviating poverty as a matter of priority. As such agriculture assumes a central element of its development policies. Government expenditure on pro-poor sectors such as education, health, agriculture, food security etc has shown remarkable increase. Exports have also registered phenomenal growth. Constitutionally land belongs to 'nations, nationalities and peoples' and the Government administers it on their behalf. Lack of specific property regime has been a source of

disputes and localised conflicts for long. Currently regional states in Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) have introduced land proclamations which allow the issuance of property certificates thereby ensuring land tenure and reducing disputes.

15. Fiscal division of power underpins Ethiopia's federalism. All regional states enjoy greater and equal access to resources. The constitution delineates the area of competence for the federal government and the regional councils in revenue collection. The House of Federation is constitutionally granted the mandate to determine how the revenue collected through joint federal and regional taxes is to be shared among the various national regional states. It has recently adopted a scheme which guarantees fair distribution of budget to national regional states. Revenue derived from joint tax sources are clearly laid out in the Constitution according to which income from mining, oil exploration, and others is constitutionally provided for. The Constitution provides for schemes on how such natural resources, which have caused conflict in other countries, can be managed in a manner whereby economic benefits and profits are equitably shared.

16. The House of Federation also determines the nature and extent to which federal subsidy is provided to regional states. Such subsidy is of a particular importance particularly to those regional states with relatively undeveloped infrastructure and service providers. Proclamation 251/2001 entrusts the House of Federation with specific mandate to undertake studies in order to monitor the impact of subsidies in helping disadvantaged regions achieving an even and balanced development. The House undertakes this mandate through its Budget Subsidy and Revenue Affairs Committee which provides recommendations on the division of revenues derived from joint federal and state tax sources as proposed by the executive branch and the subsidies that the federal government may provide to the states. Since May 18, 2007, the House of Federation has devised a new budget and grant formula. In the past, a number of variables such as level of development, population size, and capacity of collecting revenues were considered as determinants of federal budget and grant transfer scheme.

17. Federalism and decentralisation have encouraged Ethiopia's development endeavour and encouraged efficient delivery of services. The Ethiopian government took measures such as further devolution of power to Woredas in 2002 and 2003.

Institutional response to conflicts

18. Ethiopian federalism provides for numerous institutional frameworks for addressing potential conflicts arising between regional states and conflicts generated within them. The contention that federalism itself generates conflict is indeed without any scientific foundation at least in the Ethiopian context. The history of federal political systems clearly establishes that the relationship between federal arrangements and political conflict is that federalism reduces or averts conflicts. The history of Ethiopia's constitutional development and the constitutional provisions clearly indicate the prominent position the prevention of conflicts assumed during the drafting of the

constitution. The argument that federalism has caused ethnic tension and conflict is also oblivious of the counter-factual argument. What would be the nature of conflict and inter-communal interrelationships without the federal arrangement? When considering the different typologies of conflicts in Ethiopia, it becomes evident no single variable explain them. Often there are numerous social, economical and ecological factors underpinning these conflicts. For example competition over scarce resources particularly over grazing land is one of the most common causes of conflicts. Along the international boundary Ethiopia shares with Kenya, the Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia, ethnic groups on each sides of the border occasionally engage in localised and minor conflicts. Such conflicts are not peculiar to countries in the Horn of Africa. On the contrary in several African countries, artificial colonial boundaries have led to border demarcations which negatively affected communities. Border security and protection of these communities is a regular theme of Ethiopia's consultation with neighbouring countries. These consultations and agreed frameworks prioritise the protection of the rights of these communities as a vital aspect of the cross-border initiatives and arrangements. Ethiopia has also actively supported sub-regional collaborative platforms to address these challenges. Currently the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has developed an early-warning system to identify these types of conflicts and ensure effective response.

19. Illegal cross-border trafficking of small arms and their proliferation contributed negatively to local tensions. Increased availability of smaller arms has fuelled local conflicts among the various ethnic groups. In Southern Omo, numerous individuals have access to small arms from Southern Sudanese rebel groups. When the military junta was overthrown in 1991, its soldiers left countless small arms to peasants and pastoralists. The Government continues to work to regulate small arms and minimise their impact on community relationships.

20. The Constitution establishes layers of institutions whose role in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts is profound. The House of Federation constitutes the second important legislative body at the federal level in which all nations, nationalities and peoples are proportionally and directly represented. It has 112 members and is composed of one representative from each groups, and additional representative for one million extra million people. It is the institutional reflection of the country's immense diversity. The House of Federation does not have a mandate to adopt draft legislations. It is, however, granted with a constitutional mandate of interpreting the provisions of the constitution, settling regional disputes and decides on issues relating to the exercise of the right of self-determination including up to secession. The Constitution grants the House of Federation the power to resolve conflicts. It is correct to say that resolving conflicts is perhaps the most significant mandate of the constitution. The Constitution unequivocally stipulates the normative basis for inter-state relations. Accordingly, articles 51 and 52 stipulate the power and mandate of the federal and regional states respectively. Under article 50, the federal and regional government are also required to respect the authority and jurisdiction of each other. The power and mandate of the House is also further elaborated under Proclamation 251/2001. Both the

Constitution and the proclamation mandate the House of Federation to devise the appropriate mechanism in responding to conflicts. It is important to note that legislative reference to both modern and traditional mechanisms of conflict resolutions. Articles 32 and 33 of the Proclamation states:

“The House shall study the traditional as well as modern ways of conflict prevention and resolving mechanisms, to resolve misunderstanding, and devise working procedure and institutionalize same.”

21. The most important role of the House of Federation in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict is reflected in its mandate of determining the right to self-determination. The Constitution grants the House of Federation with the responsibility of determining the right of each nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determinations. The Constitution provides that the House of Federation should promote and ensure equality among nations, nationalities and peoples. It also requires the House to promote the equal rights of these groups through a democratic framework. The House has so far undertaken several measures with the view to implementing the aforementioned constitutional provisions. It has encouraged educational institutions at all levels to develop curriculum with the view to promoting equality among the various ethnic groups. Not only has it established institutions to study the history and culture of nations, nationalities and peoples, but has also encouraged existing academic and research institutions to undertake similar programs.

22. So far there has not been any violent or even open confrontation among regional states. Article 48 provides that regional states should address their boundary disputes first through bilateral consultations. In the absence of any resolution of the conflict through bilateral consultations, the House of Federation will be seized with the matter. Various inter-state platforms for experience sharing and consultation among regional states have been established.

23. Guaranteeing law and order at the regional level is the responsibility of regional states. This has a profound implication for the management and resolution of conflict. Regional state authorities are the first to respond to events requiring measures to ensure law and order. Unlike in the past, central law enforcement organs are not used as instruments of repression.

24. Another significant feature of Ethiopia's federalism for conflict prevention and resolution lies in the way it has granted official recognition to traditional and customary institutions of conflict management and resolution. Unlike in the past when traditional laws and institutions were denied official recognition, the Federal Constitution places traditional and customary laws as components of Ethiopia's hierarchy of laws. Article 38 states that groups and individuals can use their customary and traditional laws as far as such their usage is consistent with the human rights provisions of the Constitution. Under article 78, regional councils can promulgate legislation establishing and providing rules of procedure for the work of traditional or customary laws. Traditional laws and

institutions play a pivotal role in conflict management and resolution among a significant number of local communities in Ethiopia.

25. The House of Peoples' Representatives, the Office of the Ombudsman and the National Human Rights Commission also play an important role in the protection of rights of minorities including during period of conflict. For example, the House responded to the conflict in the Gambella region in 2003 by establishing an inquiry commission to investigate the circumstances which led to crisis and the response by the federal and regional government. Based on the finding of the inquiry commission, several individuals including a number of military personnel were tried by the federal circuit court for their role in the conflict. The Office of the Ombudsman and the National Human Rights Commission have various programs that promote human rights including the rights of minorities.

The role of the media and education in promoting cultural tolerance and preventing conflicts

26. Article 29 of the Constitution provides for the right to freedom of expression. It is broadly defined to include freedom to seek, receive and transmit information. This has encouraged the proliferation of private media. Currently more than 100 print media are being circulated and since recently, the country, based on a new federal broadcasting proclamation, stated issuing licensees for private broadcasting agencies.

27. Freedom of expression is an important embodiment of the right to equality. It is critical for all individuals and groups, without any discrimination, to express their opinion, culture, belief etc. More than ever, a great number of media outlets are published and broadcast in the country without any prior censorship. The Constitution provides that public financed broadcasting programs should be administered in such a way that greater diversity of opinion is ensured. This has resulted in a series of press and broadcasting reforms. Currently not only are the public broadcasting services open to different views and opinions, but there is also diversity in the format of presentations. It is now common to see several radio, television, and newspaper programs broadcast and published in various languages. Due to lack of resources, the number of languages which are being used for public and broadcast programs in publicly financed media outlets has been quite limited. Nevertheless, this state of affairs is gradually changing as the number of media outlets in regions and community radios are proliferating.

28. With regard to limitations on freedom of expression they are commonly stipulated in constitutions in any democratic society. The Ethiopian Federal Constitution also provides for possible limitations on freedom of expression. In this connection, Article 29 states that some of these elements are incorporated in the revised federal criminal code which came into force in 2005. This is consistent with article 19(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

29. Ethiopia's centralist tradition did not encourage cultural pluralism, and hence the culture and tradition of several groups including minority groups were denigrated. The institutionalisation of culturally informed federalism requires that the numerous cultural traditions and assets of communities be promoted and studied. To this end, the Government adopted Ethiopia's first cultural policy which aims, among others; recognition and promotion of the cultural heritages of all groups in the country, promotion of cultural study and research, promotion of cultural tolerance and understanding, enhancing the capacity of the country's cultural sector, establishment of cultural centres, augmenting the role of culture in peacemaking and peace building, etc.

30. Education remains perhaps the most significant tool of addressing conflicts which are partly triggered by discrimination and prejudice. It can promote principles of cultural tolerance and diversity. The Government's Education Sector Development Plan I and II were implemented with the view to expanding access to education for all sectors of the Ethiopian society. The number of primary schools is increasing at an impressive rate. For example, primary schools have increased from 11,780 in 2000/01 to 16,513 in 2004/05. More than 80 percent of these new schools are built in rural areas. The enrolment rate has also increased substantially. Given the relatively low level of enrolment in pastoral areas in Afar, Somali, Benishangul Gumuz, special educational programs through mobile schools were initiated to respond to these specific needs. The Government is further encouraging local districts to play an active role in the administration and running of educational institutions.

31. The FDRE Constitution provides for extensive right to Ethiopia's nations, nationalities and people to promote and develop their own culture. In a remarkable break from the past, this has led to the protection of a broader entitlement to education and the adoption of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction. Every primary school child in Ethiopia now enjoys the right to learn in his or her own mother tongue. In this regard Ethiopia's experience is indeed pioneering.

32. Civic and ethics education is incorporated as a critical component of Ethiopia's education policy. At present, the subject is given in all three grade levels including in tertiary educational institutions. It is overseen by the Civic and Ethical Education Department within the Ministry of Education at the federal level. Regional education bureaus are responsible for activities at the local level. Through this program, citizens are given orientation on human rights, cultural diversity and tolerance. Protection of the rights of minority groups is also incorporated in these texts.

Conclusion

33. The Government hopes that it has given the response to the extent possible requested by the Committee in the communication of the Chairman on the question of ethnic federalism there may be individuals and groups who entertain the view that federalism should not have been considered for Ethiopia in the first place. However, it is

the considered view of the Government that such views are based on political orientations closely associated with Ethiopia's undemocratic, centrist and totalitarian past. The tension between unitarist and federalist world views had manifested itself during the drafting of the federal constitution. Criticisms against Ethiopia's federal arrangement come either from foreigners who do not have sufficient understanding of Ethiopia's current political and constitutional paradigm or a few Ethiopian elites who have a strongly held political agenda of their own. Unitarists will not accept the federal arrangement under any conditions whereas there are few individuals and groups with separatist's agenda. What is common for both camps is that their political perspective is not principled and that their principal objective has nothing to do with peace, peaceful coexistence and human rights. With the purpose of impeaching the reputation of Ethiopia's new political system, they often attack the federal arrangement based on events that are unrelated. For these groups or individuals, even local conflicts caused by cattle rustling are caused by the federal arrangement. But what is remarkable is the fact that the Ethiopian political culture is gradually maturing to proffer a platform even for these categories of individuals to express these views.

34. Those who fear that Ethiopia's federal system will potentially encourage conflict often cite article 39 of the Constitution which provides for the right of each nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination including up to secession. For them, this constitutional guarantee for territorial autonomy encourages independence and potential conflict. Ethiopia's experience with federalism provides no evidence to substantiate such a claim. What has happened since the establishment of the federal system is that the regions are interlinked and integrated more than ever before. Regions which were neglected during previous regimes are benefiting from the current fiscal arrangements and economic policies which provide special focus on local communities.

35. The federal system has inbuilt structures shielding minorities from discrimination and prejudice. All nations, nationalities and peoples in Ethiopia now fully enjoy the right to self-determinations. They are free to develop their culture and heritage, and continue to benefit from fiscal federalism which grants them greater autonomy to benefit from and exploit their own resources. Continued reform programs on decentralisation encourages self-government and good governance at the district level.

36. In the Ethiopian context conducive political programs and reforms joined with encouraging economic growth significantly reduce the risk of conflicts. At the same time institutions and structures are put in place to address conflicts that may occur. In this regard, the House of Federation has a constitutional mandate to resolve conflicts that may occur between regional states. The Constitution also formally recognises the role of traditional laws and institutions in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. These traditional mechanisms are often important for the various nations, nationalities and peoples in the country as they forge ahead in strengthening the Ethiopian federal system which is indeed a unique experiment in the long history of the country. It is the earnest hope of the peoples of Ethiopia that they can count on the

support and encouragement of the international community in general and bodies like the Committee in particular in this historic endeavour.
