



Foundation for Independent Media for Ethiopia

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PRESS RELEASE

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Subject: Negarit Radio, an Independent and Alternative Media for Ethiopia

Background:

The Foundation for Independent Media for Ethiopia (FIME) is a non-governmental organization based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It was founded in November 1995 by a group of committed Ethiopian Free Press Journalists who sought to dissemination of independent news and information to the general public in Ethiopia and to Ethiopians in the Diaspora. Until 21 March 2007, when the foundation decided to change its name to FIME, known as the Foundation for Ethiopian Information and Documentation in the Netherlands (FEIDIN).

FEIDIN's activities included organizing conferences, workshops, seminars, and the likes on media-related subjects. Since April 1999, FEIDIN was broadcasting a weekly one-hour television program, ETHIO-TV, in Amsterdam.

Following the recommendations of the Ethio-Dutch Journalists International Conference, which was organized in June 2006, a Task Force was established to realise the foundation of an Independent Radio Station as an alternative for restoring the services that were being provided by the fledgling Free Press in Ethiopia before it was stifled, almost completely, by the state 2 years ago. Pursuant to the Task Force's final report, the founding meeting of FIME approved that FIME shall be the only legitimate owner of Negarit Radio and its project.

In addition, the meeting decided that Negarit Radio would start by broadcasting a one-hour daily program from abroad to Ethiopia and other countries through short-wave transmission and the Internet, www.ethionegarit.com.

The main objective of Negarit Radio is to support democratic reform in Ethiopia by providing professional and pluralist information service for citizens, and highlight the needs, aspirations and opinions of the country's unheard majority. Negarit Radio aims to stimulate civic journalism and to pay attention to freedom of expression, human rights and the daily socio-political problems that confront the Ethiopian population. The Radio will promote the above aims through a programming that is objective, non-partisan and in accordance with a strong professional code of ethics.

In view of importance of founding such an alternative and independent media outlet, Negarit Radio project is highly supported by Ethiopians at home and abroad and by international media professionals. FIME is therefore, working on the project process closely with national and international media and human rights organisations and highly committed professionals.

Accordingly, FIME has planned to launch Negarit Radio with the cooperation of Ethiopian Diaspora communities worldwide, in particular the dozen exiled members of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association, EFJA and fellow journalists from other countries.



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Recent developments:

Over the past year, FIME has succeeded in raising funds and establishing contacts in preparation for the launching of the Negarit Radio broadcasting. Beginning with a one-hour weekly program, disseminated over short-wave and the Internet, Negarit Radio will gradually expand its broadcasts to a full daily program. Negarit Radio is gathering sympathy and professional and material support from a number of Dutch and International media organisations and journalist associations: such as the International Federation of Journalists, IFJ, Press Now, as well as, Unions of Journalists in The Netherlands, UK, Germany, and many others along the way. In order to realize the project, the members of FIME Board and the project coordinator are devoting their time and energy on a voluntary basis.

Very recently, the FIME Board has learnt that one of its own members, Mr. Kinfu Assefa has founded another organisation, -‘Task Force on Promoting Ethiopian Democracy & Human Rights’ (TEDH), and submitted to the European Commission a radio project proposal, which is very similar to FIME’s proposal for Negarit Radio, called ‘Voice of Ethiopia’.

Upon a thorough examination of the available evidence, the FIME Board found this action to be a copy of the Negarit Radio initiative, but with some retouches and different name. According to Mr. Kinfu’s explanation during the Board meeting held on 05 February 2008, the only difference between the two initiatives is that the Negarit Radio is an independent media outlet, while his new organization stands with an opposition political party. FIME board has obtained the full list of the individuals make up the executive committee of his newly founded organization from Public Records (Chamber of Commerce, the Netherlands), which confirms his assertion.

The Board has therefore; found that Mr. K. Assefa has abused his privilege and responsibilities as a board member to advance a conflicting interest by founding another organization and submitting similar project proposal to one of our potential funding organisations. It has advised Mr. Assefa that his conduct is unacceptable, unethical and illegal and asked him to remove himself from his Board Membership and prohibited him from any future activities in the name of FIME and Negarit Radio. Mr Kinfu Assefa has resigned as requested.

The FIME Board, therefore, wishes to emphatically distance itself from the so called “Voice of Ethiopia” initiative and make it clear to the public and to all concerned individuals and organisations that initiative is no way connected to Negarit Radio. The Board regrets, that Mr. K. Assefa -for reasons and motives only known to him, sought to use Negarit Radio’ project proposal in violation to the confidence and responsibility entrusted to him as a Board member.

FIME will pursue legal avenues to settle all outstanding issues that arise in connection with the illegitimate use its project proposal.

*[The board of FIME, founders of Radio Negarit,
Amsterdam, 13,February 2008]*