

## **International Women's Day Ethiopian women: heroines and victims.**

**Good afternoon,**

Thank you for accepting our invitation and participating in this meeting, organised by Dildiy. I would like to say a few words about Dildiy. Dildiy is an Amharic word, which means bridge. As its name indicates a bridge connects different places, different communities, ideas, experiences, culture. It also allows common understanding, mutual interests, building solidarity and complementarity among people and communities. Therefore, Dildiy's ambition is to promote human values, which are described as universal and shared by all human beings, whatever their religion, their nationality, their culture, and their personal history may be.

They are universal because all are born with and possess the same rights, regardless of where they live, their gender or race, or their religious, cultural or ethnic background. Inalienable because peoples' rights can never be taken away.

Dildiy is a small non-profit organisation, founded in 2015. Its vision is based on respect for human rights, democracy, and rule of law. In this respect, Dildiy's activities are articulated in bringing people together by promoting respect for human rights, democratic dialogue, and rule based democratic political system in Ethiopia by organising conferences to bring sustainable peace, economic development, and justice.

In relation to the International Women's Day, Today's conference will focus on women's human rights situation in Ethiopia from two perspectives.

**First it will highlight the role played by heroine** women and the legacy they left in the country's history. In this respect, our first speaker will make a presentation.

From my side, I would like to pay tribute to a lot of women heroines who are fighting daily to change women's life in today's Ethiopia in different ways. In addition, I want to pay tribute particularly to two women who recently passed-away.

*One of them is Dr. Bogalech Gebre, a founder of KMG Ethiopia NGO in Kambatta to end female genital mutilation. KMG stands for Kembatti Mentti-Gezimma-Topee, a phrase in the local language of Kambatta that reflects the power women generate when working together. Dr Bogalech used community conversations to enhance communities' capacities as the primary vehicles for change. She was very innovative. Through her efforts, the rate of female genital mutilation dropped from 100% to 3% between 1999 and 2008, according to a UNICEF study.*

***Abebech Gobena:** created one of Ethiopia's largest orphanages in the 1980s. Her organization not only provides shelter, but also education to children without parental support; organises workshops for young people to learn job skill; supports people living with HIV and provides training for health workers. She has changed the life of more than 100 000 children. "She is a humanitarian icon and will be an example for generations to come"*

**Second, as the recent armed conflict** in Amhara, Afar and Tigray regions has plunged women into unprecedented violence. The conference will examine the long-lasting consequences of violence against women, including gang rape and physical assault.

Let me quote Dr Denis Mukwege:

"Every one of us has to understand that rape is not about a sexual act against someone's will. In a conflict environment, rape is used as a

weapon of humiliation, a weapon that dehumanises women. Raping a woman or a child in front of everybody is nothing sexual. It's a humiliation, a vicious destruction.”

In 2008, United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1820. It condemns the use of [sexual violence](#) as a tool of war, and declares that “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute [war crimes](#), [crimes against humanity](#) or a constitutive act with respect to genocide”.

The adoption of the resolution marked the first time that the UN explicitly linked sexual violence as a tactic of war with women, peace, and security issues.

The impact of widespread and systematic sexual violence is multifold:

- It hampers sustainable post-conflict recovery.
- It undermines social stability by destroying families and communities.
- The fear of sexual violence restrains women's mobility, leading them to retreat from economic activity, and causing girls to stay home from school.
- When perpetrators of sexual violence go unpunished, efforts to establish faith in the State's ability to protect its citizens and establish the rule of law, are seriously undermined.
- Therefore, survivors of this violence need psychosocial, economical, social support and need access to specialist services.
- Everything must be done to bring to justice those perpetrators of sexual violence. It is the only to do justice to women victims of unprecedented violence.

Now, I pass the floor to Ato Abera Yemane Ab to introduce the speakers and moderate the debate.

Thank you