

**March 29, 1989**  
**Letter, Koenig to Cdes. Dohlus, Sieber, and  
Rabenhorst**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

During a meeting with Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam, Mikhail Gorbachev underlined the importance of a political solution to the conflict. After an immediate ceasefire, negotiations without preconditions should start, based on the territorial integrity of Ethiopia.

**Credits:**

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[handwritten] Comrade Egon Krenz, for your information.

With Greetings, [Oskar] Fischer, 29 March 1989

Comrade [Horst] Dohlus

Comrade [Günter] Sieber, Central Committee, International Relations

Comrade [Ernst-Peter] Rabenhorst, Central Committee, International Relations

To forward to [the East German Embassy in] Addis Ababa

The Head of the Division for African States in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the USSR informed Comrade Gerd König about the Mengistu's visit:

Confidential talks with Soviet leadership were agreed short-term on Mengistu's request. The multi-hour exchange of opinions with Comrade M. S. Gorbachev was joined, upon Soviet request, by Mengistu's entire entourage (among else Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior, Foreign Minister) in order to limit Mengistu's maneuvering room regarding the implementation of his peculiar positions (military solution).

At the beginning of the talks, Mengistu explained his assessment of the complicated situation. He advocated for a peaceful resolution of the Eritrea conflict by way of negotiations without any preconditions. He asked for the good services of the USSR to win Eritrea's oppositional forces for negotiations. He characterized the military situation as difficult. Though he conceded defeats of the government forces, he did call, however, the situation as not catastrophic. He emphasized insistently the existence of a military balance.

Following up on Mengistu's statements, Comrade Gorbachev explained the Soviet position. The USSR does consider a military resolution of the Eritrea question as impossible. Required are a realistic policy and practical steps towards the introduction of a political solution. Referring to Mengistu's assessment with regard to a balance of forces, Comrade Gorbachev derived the opportunity to launch a political solution. For such, a political platform is required, of which essential elements had been outlined in Mengistu's statement. Comrade Gorbachev defined them as follows:

1. Exploring the possibility of compromises while preserving the principle of territorial integrity.
2. Launching negotiations without preconditions.
3. Immediate mutual ceasefire.

The publication of such a platform would be beneficial to the Ethiopian leadership, because, in case of rejecting it, the oppositional forces could expect few understanding within the country as well as with the international public. At the same time the opportunity would be established to provide effective international support to the Ethiopian government.

During the course of the conversation, Mengistu declared his willingness to publicly propose, after discussion within [the Ethiopian] leadership, a concept for negotiations. At the same time, however, he expressed his apprehension that such a platform could also be viewed as a sign of weakness and met with a lack of understanding, especially by the [Ethiopian] army.

Comrade Gorbachev was making efforts to alleviate Mengistu's fears. Realistic positions would not be a sign of weakness. Extensive public relations work would be necessary in order to explain the government's position. The USSR stated its willingness to provide according support on the international level.

At the end of the exchange of opinions, Comrade Gorbachev noted an agreement regarding the need for a political solution. He emphasized that the USSR would be willing to use contacts with the Eritrean Liberation Front to achieve a political solution. Precondition for such, however, would be the publication of the negotiation

platform by the Ethiopian leadership. Mengistu expressed satisfaction about the talks and promised the implementation of the jointly discussed conclusions.

Koenig

28 March [1989], 15:00 Hours

No further distribution

[The information was forwarded to Addis Abeba to Comrade Horst Dohlus.]