

**An official response to Ms. Abigail’s unfounded allegations  
from the Law Faculty of the Mekelle University, Mekelle,  
Ethiopia.**

**1. Prelude**

As it is the practice of many public law schools in Ethiopia, the Faculty of Law of Mekelle University has also been interested to recruit foreign experts to assist our Faculty. In line to this idea, Professor Norman Singer from Alabama University in the United States of America in consultation with the Deans of the Ethiopian Public Law schools agreed to help recruiting well experienced expatriates from some American Universities.

Accordingly, Ms. Abigail Salisbury was strongly recommended and recruited by Prof.Norman Singer and Mr.Aron Muzinger both from the United States of America to be attached to Mekelle University, Faculty of Law.

In light of the above facts, our Faculty employed Ms. Abigail on 24 October 2007 for a term of two years as an Assistant Professor. We must confess that since we had confidence on Professor Norman Singer’s recommendation, because of our long-term partnership, we were convinced that she had all the necessary academic credentials and expected her to be well-experienced instructor. Because of Professor Singer’s recommendation, we accepted her in good faith and without any further scrutiny. The reason why we appointed her, as Assistant professor is that we were told it was the practice in some other Public Law Schools in Ethiopia. But to our surprise and dismay we found out later that she graduated in 2007 from the University Of Pittsburgh School Of Law and hence did not deserve the title. This was also substantiated by the proposal she wrote to our Faculty when she was suspended from teaching. Her exact words were *“It was not long after arriving in Mekelle that I realized I was not reaching my students. This past semester was my first opportunity to teach classes independently, as I had only done so in collaboration with other professors who were older and more experienced.”*

She further stated *“this past semester has truly been a disaster for me, and that I have made a number of mistakes here.”* she also admitted as follows *“I have become extremely discouraged and stressed over my failure as a professor here, I really had no orientation, training for this position.”*

## **2. Working at Mekelle University.**

Unfortunately, some time after she started teaching, students began complaining on her competence and method of teaching, though the Faculty Management tried to handle the situation in a smooth and civilized manner with the belief that things will be improved. To make things worse, very soon, students started to boycott her classes and the Management was compelled to deal with the issue squarely and brought the matter to the Academic Commission of the Faculty.

The Academic Commission then decided to establish an Independent Enquiry Committee to investigate the complaints and grievances of the students. Accordingly, a Committee composed of the Dean, Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, and An Assistant Professor who is teaching a similar course was formed and was instructed to discuss the issue with the students and with Ms. Abigail and report its findings to the Academic Commission.

The Committee made intensive talks and investigated the matter in depth by discussing the matter with all the three human right sections of the Faculty.

The students alleged in their discussion that:

- 1a) Ms. Abigail was not teaching them first the principles and then the practice as the other Ethiopian professor in the other two sections dealing with human right course does.
- 2b) Ms. Abigail was all the time talking about Kosovo and the United States without linking her subject to the Ethiopian laws and experiences.
- 3c) Although they have no objection to be taught about Kosovo and the United States, nonetheless, they had expected a much more in depth comparative analysis on the subject matter.

4d) They also said unlike other Ethiopian lecturers, she does not follow the course outline and also the materials she gave them as references were downloaded from the internet without contextualization and all of which were about the United States issues without any comparative study with other legal systems and laws, and

5e) They also alleged Ms. Abigail used unnecessary and vulgar words in class that annoys and creates irritation with the students.

After hearing and investigating what the students have to say, the Committee went further to collect the notebooks of sample students to check what the students have taken as a note from her lectures. It was found out that in most of the notebooks the Committee found nothing or very little on the subject matter of her lectures when compared with the other two sections. Much to the Committee's surprise the students whose notebooks were investigated were top-scoring students.

The Committee also administered an evaluation on how she organized her lectures using the University evaluation format for all academic staff. Accordingly, she scored 2.1 out of 5, which is very poor as per the University legislation and guidelines.

After a thorough investigation and administration of the evaluation, the Committee presented its findings to the Academic Commission. The Academic Commission after a further and thorough discussion and debate decided that the students did not get the knowledge they were expected to get from her course. Hence, it was decided on December 22, 2007 that the course should be taken over by other two fellow lecturers in our Faculty.

The Faculty was even compelled to invite our former staff member who is currently working with UNMEE to take some topics to teach our students to compensate what they lost since our students pleaded to the Management of the Faculty to get something out of the course.

Our Faculty Management had intensive discussion with Ms. Abigail at different times about the situation. Accordingly, she admitted that there was a problem and that she also confessed she had personal and family problems that we think is not worse disclosing it here in detail at the moment.

In actual fact when she confessed about her problems, we were so sympathetic to her problems that we offered her our personal advice on several occasions.

In her proposal submitted to our Faculty on 18 January 2008 she submitted her problem by saying *“Although I have disappointed the Law Faculty-and indeed myself-this semester, I believe that had the situation been different I could have done higher-quality work. Now that I am better prepared for the job, I feel that I can be of use to the University in a way I have not done thus far. I am absolutely willing to take on more of a research-and writing role in order to fulfill the various needs of this institution. Therefore, I am requesting that I be permitted to remain at MULF in the coming semester. I thank you for your consideration of this letter and I pray that you will grant my request to prove myself to you in the months to come.”*

Concerning Ms. Abigail’s future relations with our Faculty, the Academic Commission (AC) decided to entertain the case at hand in its next AC meeting.

In the mean time, the Management requested her to submit a proposal which indicates how to rectify the existing problem and to find out in what ways and means she can be useful to our Faculty other than a teaching assignment such as engagement in legal research, journal preparation, and compilation of some teaching materials in collaboration with other staff members. Accordingly, she submitted her proposal and in her proposal she confessed and admitted all her problems and pleaded to be given a second chance instead of terminating the contract of employment forth with. However, the Academic Commission after a thorough discussion and debate of her case at its next meeting decided not to accept her proposal and decided to terminate her contract with immediate effect. This is done as per the University Legislation.

Apparently, Later on we found out that Ms.Abigail had the same problem in Kosovo. Professor Norman Singer in fact communicated this to the faculty staff members when we met him in Addis Ababa on 19 May 2008. He also revealed to us that there was another, most probably her former Boss/Professor who knew about Ms. Abigail's problems but who did not communicate it to Professor Norman Singer. Professor Norman Singer was very sorry that such inconveniences had happened and apologized on the matter.

### **3. Her behavior after termination of the contract.**

Unfortunately, despite our gracious and dignified treatment and disposition of her case, she started to engage in black mailing and discrediting our Faculty in different articles such as in the Jurist where she wrote under the title “linking rights and foreign aid for Ethiopia: The case of HR 2003 and by giving interviews to Ethiomedia and other websites.

### **4. Why we did not respond to the unfounded allegations until now?**

We felt that all her allegations were unfounded and vindictive regarding the termination of her contract of employment and we thought those who have read her article would not take it seriously.

We also earnestly felt that it was not worth responding to such fabrications and defamations intended to cover her academic weaknesses and failures. What is more, we felt that any responsible media that wanted to find out the truth would adhere to professional media ethics and codes of conduct and would contact our Faculty, interview our students and staff in order to get to the bottom of the truth before posting such unfounded allegations.

What is more, we felt she was acting like a person who has taken sides in a political game and who seems to have abandoned her academic and scholarly integrity. Thus we preferred not to respond. In short, she has used her dismissal as a political case and to appear innocent in order to get a job somewhere by those who do not know the truth

about her dismissal and about her personal problems and incompetence which we refrained to reveal until her provocation became too much to swallow. We also felt that Ms. Abigail also appeared to be manipulated by some members of the Ethiopian opposition websites who had an interest to politicize her dismissal without knowing the truth of her case and without knowing who she truly is? It is against this background that our Faculty have been compelled to respond to her outrageous and persistent allegations and to put the record straight so that all those who have been misled by her articles and interviews would make their own judgment about the competence, credibility and integrity of Ms. Abigail and her allegations that she has made against our Faculty and our University.

### **5. Her naked lies & allegations.**

Some of the outrageous, misleading and defamatory allegations are:

First, “All the instructors at Ethiopian Universities are made to sign a contract that we will never say anything against the government or ruling party.”

Second, “Our students are afraid to speak their minds and are unwilling to write academic papers that in any way criticize any alleged Human Right violations,”

Third, “the University Administrators forbid students to voice their complaint...”

Fourth, Forty out of one hundred thirty students that I teach... had inserted a special section right after the cover page, warning me what might happen to them where their paper to leave my hands. A number of students wrote they would never give their real opinions to an Ethiopian professor because they fear being turned into the government and punished. Others begged me to take their work back to America with me so that people would know what was going on.”

Fifth, there is hatred against the Tigrians all over the country,

Sixth, “Spouses from Tigrai refuse to criticize the government while the suppose from elsewhere runt about corruption, censorship, the military, Eritrea secession, and so on”

Seventh, expatriates are hesitant to say anything negative about the country in their emails to friends and family at home, because everything goes through the central server and could be read, with possible negative repercussions...”

Eighth, I have heard very little public criticism of the actions taken by the government by the human right Center...”

## **6. Our humble response to the allegations.**

1a) There is nothing in the contract of employment that in any way mentions or limits the academic freedom of any one. This can even be verified from Ms. Abigail’s contract of employment. This is really an outrageous lie that is least expected from the so-called academician. Her contract is attached as annex to this document.

2b) All the alleged fears she mentioned regarding our students at our faculty and our university at large doesn’t exist in reality. They are just naked lies that cannot be substantiated by any concrete evidence. Even the so-called special warning she claims to have from students not to reveal their opinion for fear of punishment is not true. Because when Ms. Abigail left to the United States she left the student papers with the Faculty and nowhere have we being able to find that would substantiate her allegations. As regards to the fear she alleges to exist within our students the facts and reality are contrary to her allegations. Rather our students are one of the most vibrant, independent minded and critical thinkers that are often demonstrated not only in class but also in the various public debates and forums that our faculty organized. All those organizations and professors who know our students very well can also verify this. We must also stress that our law school graduates are the most competitive and whose all rounded-knowledge is very much appreciated and respected by those who employe them.

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4c) As regards the allegation made against our top management forbidding students to voice their complaint, this is really not true. Because in our university there is a vibrant and well-established student Council that promotes and protects the interest of

student community in all aspects. It is our strong belief that Ms. Abigail's pitiful allegations will not undermine the power, competence and integrity of our vibrant student community.

1d) As to her allegations of hatred against Tigrians by other Ethiopians, all we can say is that, it is an irresponsible divide and rule policy often advocated by those who do not want to see united and prosperous Ethiopia and by those who are ignorant about the facts and reality on the ground. She may think of pleasing the extremists and enemies of the Ethiopian people. However, this will be short-lived venture.

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e) As regards to her allegation that she heard very little public criticism of the actions taken by the government by our Center, we would like to bring to the attention of all concerned that our Center since its establishment in April 2004 has been involved in Multi dimensional Human Right activities. To mention some, the center is principally engaged in promotion of Human Right and thereby raising awareness of the public particularly on the rights of children, women, and the disabled. Thus, with the view to achieve its objective, the Center has given a series of trainings to members of the youth, women, Judges, Prosecutors, Police, student civic club associations and the community at large. We also like to add that it is conducting researches, Moot Court competitions and Human right Public Lecture series in collaboration with different stakeholders including United Nations Mission on Ethio-Ertrea (UNMEE). With UNMEE, The Center has so far conducted three seminars. We therefore believe our Center is being engaged in many constructive activities to promote Human Right and Rule of Law in Ethiopia. Ironically Ms. Abigail in her proposal after her suspension to teach the course wrote as follows: *"When I first arrived in Mekelle I was intrigued by the legal Aid Clinic and by the Human Right Center, and I would like to volunteer my time to those entities"*. We believe such a statement contradicts her allegations thereby making herself less credible and dishonest.

## **6. Conclusion**

All the allegations Ms. Abigail has made against our Faculty and University are totally baseless and unfounded. Moreover, her behavior is far below the standard expected from an academician. This is because of her inexperience and immaturity. We think she has been manipulated by those who have their own political agendas and who would like to undermine encouraging developments in Ethiopia. In view of the above, we hope that nobody will take her allegations seriously. Those who want to know the real truth are kindly invited to contact our Faculty Management, Staff members, our students and the University community at large.

As to Ms. Abigail we would like to warn her if she continues with her unfounded allegations we will be compelled to reveal all the confidential information that we have at our disposal which we believe is more devastating to her future career. Nevertheless, whatever people like Abigail would say, unity and development in Ethiopia are continuing unabated.