

# Unit 1

## Building a Democratic System

### Introduction

In this unit, you will learn how power and authority are practiced under a democratic system. You will learn how the government and its citizens work together to uphold democracy. Furthermore, you will learn the constitutional rights and obligations that citizens and their government have. You will further develop your knowledge on the distribution of state power in Ethiopia and how the federal systems of government work. Moreover, you will learn the instrumentality of foreign relations to accelerate development and enhance democracy in the country.

### Lessons

1. The Necessity of a Democratic System
2. Authority and Power
3. Constitutional Rights versus Constitutional Obligations
4. State Power Distribution in Ethiopia
5. Ethiopian Foreign Relations

### What you will learn

#### You will:

- recognize the necessity of a democratic system.
- realize the difference between authority and power.
- understand the relationship between constitutional rights and obligations.
- appreciate the importance of foreign relations.

### Key words and concepts

- Authority
- Constitutional democracy
- Constitutional obligations
- Constitutional rights
- Democratic system
- Direct democracy
- Federal government
- International relations
- Power
- Representative democracy
- Regional government

Voting in elections — One of the pillars of democracy



## LESSON

## 1

# The Necessity of a Democratic System

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- explain the principles of democracy.
- explain the features of a constitutional democratic system.
- identify between direct and representative democracy.
- state the differences between parliamentary and presidential democracy.

## Why is a democratic system necessary?

Today, many more countries in the world are marching on the road to democracy than ever before. This is also the case in Africa where many more countries are trying to exercise democratic systems. A democratic system creates the condition for political, economic and cultural equality. It upholds rule of law, human rights and freedom. These are necessary for individual and societal development. Above all, a democratic system upholds constitutionalism as a state ethos. This is so because constitutionalism is the lifeline of democracy.

Democracy is practiced in two ways: direct and indirect. Direct democracy is the ancient form which still works among communities of a small size. Today, it can be practiced when a referendum is requested by political groups or a community. Indirect democracy is the modern form which is widely practiced in today's world. It is also called representative democracy because

people are involved in the political process through representatives they elect.

A democratic system runs in three ways—Parliamentary, Presidential, and Combined Parliamentary and Presidential Democracy.

A Parliamentary Democracy is led by a Prime Minister. He/she is appointed from the winning party and has to be a Member of Parliament. The Prime Minister leads the Executive Branch of government and at the same time is the member of the Legislative Branch. For some, Parliamentary Democracy weakens effective checks and balances between the three branches of government. For others, enacting laws is much easier under a Parliamentary Democracy. Britain is a good example of Parliamentary Democracy.



Houses of Parliament in Britain

## The Necessity of a Democratic System

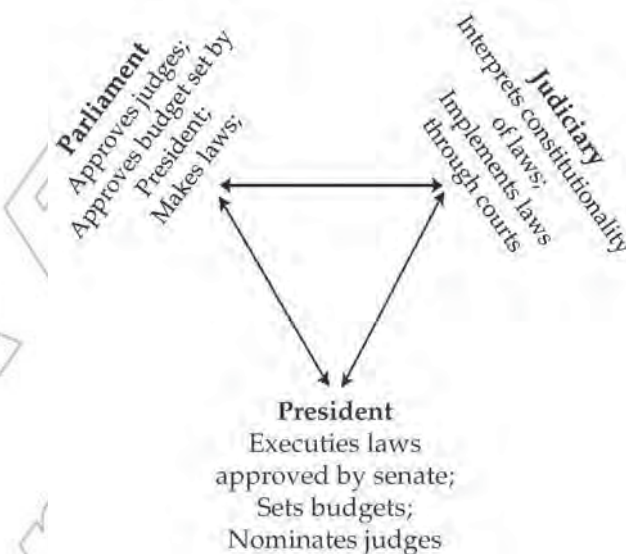
A Presidential Democracy is led by a President. Under Presidential Democracy, the people choose their representatives and the President separately. The President heads the Executive Branch and the representatives head the Legislative Branch of government. In this system, the branches of government function independently.

Under a Presidential Democracy, checks and balances are implemented more effectively than in a Parliamentary Democracy. The Legislative and the Executive branches have the power to veto bills forwarded by the other. However, this leads to negotiation and compromise to pass the vetoed bills between the branches of government. The United States of America is a good example of a Presidential Democracy. The President has the power to set the annual budget but this must be approved by the Parliament. He also has the right to nominate judges who need to be approved by Parliament. On the other hand, the Parliament has the right to formulate laws that must be implemented by the Executive, *i.e.*, the President. The Judiciary is entitled to interpret the constitutionality of these laws formulated by the Parliament and the acts of the Executive.

Moreover, although the President has the power to make treaties with other countries, if the Senate does not agree, then he has to change his action until it is approved. He can also refuse to sign a bill that has been passed by both houses (Senate and House of Representatives), but must explain why, before the bill is returned for a further vote in each house. A majority vote in both houses will ensure the bill becomes law, even if the President does not approve.



White House, USA — Presidential seat



US system of Presidential Democracy

The third system is called combined Parliamentary and Presidential Democracy. This is the hybrid of the first two. The people, through a separate process, elect the President in this system. The members of the legislature are elected by another process. The Prime Minister, being a Member of Parliament, is elected from the winning party. The President is head of state with defined power and authority. The Prime Minister is head of government and works under close supervision of the President. France exemplifies the hybrid system of democracy.

**?** Imagine that the whole class is a state; separate it into unitary or federal arrangements (*i.e.*, smaller sections). Illustrate how the three types of democratic system — Parliamentary, Presidential, and Combined Parliamentary and Presidential Democracy, elect their President and/or Prime Minister.

## The Necessity of a Democratic System

### CASE STUDY

#### Thomas Jefferson – The Author of Declaration of Independence

Thomas Jefferson was the second President of the USA. Apart from being President of the United States of America, he is known as one of the founding fathers of America's democracy. He wrote the famous 'Declaration of Independence', a portion of which reads as follows:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men*

*are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.... governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new Government...*

**?** Discuss how these rights, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, impacted on the future development of democracy.

### REMEMBER

- ❑ Today, many more countries in the world are exercising democracy.
- ❑ A democratic system creates the condition for political, economic, and cultural equality.
- ❑ A democratic system upholds constitutionalism.
- ❑ Under a Presidential Democracy, checks and balances are said to be implemented more effectively than in a Parliamentary Democracy.
- ❑ Enacting laws is easier under Parliamentary Democracy.



A section of the original Declaration of Independence

## LESSON

## 2

# Authority and Power

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- describe what is meant by authority.
- describe how authority should be exercised within the legal framework.

What do you understand by authority and power?

Authority and power are political concepts related to governance. The mode of the application of the two determines the type of government in power. Authority refers to the legal power vested in a public agency and its members to execute the functions for which it was organized. Power can be defined as the force or the ability to compel others to do what the power holder desires. Depending on how the government applies power and authority in its workings, it could be legitimate or illegitimate. Legitimate power and authority of government arises when that government functions within the limits given to it by the people. Such a type of government is certainly a democratic one.

A government can be said to have legitimate power and authority when it receives its mandate to govern from the people. Such a government functions within the confines of the constitution. The constitution, in this case, is the free expression of the will of the people. Therefore, the power of government that arises from a democratic constitution

gives rise to legitimate power and authority. When the power and authority of government rest on the foundation of democracy, it is said to have moral authority over the people.

Governments which are undemocratic can have power to rule but this rule is not legitimate and lacks moral authority. Such governments can have constitutions but not constitutional rule. Thus, the people are their subjects and are denied fundamental democratic rights and freedom. A government of this type is repressive and, what exists is not rule of law but rule of men. Therefore, legitimate power and authority arise only from governments, which are democratic.

A government which is legitimate respects the rights and freedom of citizens. It functions in a transparent manner and with a high sense of responsibility and accountability. The practice of transparency gives citizens the opportunity to know how their government is doing its job. Accountability is instrumental to empower people to check and control their officials. Thus, transparency and accountability are tools to check whether the practice of government officials is in line with, or conforms to, the limits of the power and authority given to them.

**?** In small groups, role play a situation where one person exerts power and another authority. Analyze the performances.

## Authority and Power

### CASE STUDY

#### Mobutu — Zaire's dictator

After the Belgian Congo moved to independence in 1960, Joseph Mobutu, as the army commander, helped set up a provisional government when the elected coalition government failed. By 1965, Mobutu had seized power himself and later changed the name of the country to Zaire.

For a while, the country's problems declined with funding from copper exports and international loans. Then the economy plunged again as world prices for copper fell and Mobutu misused the country's money. He accumulated enormous power and ruled by decrees, controlling appointments and staff promotion and the allocation of the government's revenues — all these powers were not legitimate.

He became a dictator and, as a result, was unpopular, not just in his own country, but throughout Africa for his brutal and corrupt regime. While the income made him one of the richest men in the world, the country

was plunged into debt and was unable to repay loans. His army and police were not paid and thus turned



Mobutu — Zaire's dictator

to crime. Riots were rampant and were violently suppressed, inflation soared and crisis prevailed. Mobutu's experience shows the exercise of power without authority.

**?** Research and report on other countries where power has been seized without authority.

### REMEMBER

- ❑ Authority and power are political concepts which are related.
- ❑ Power can be defined as the force or ability to compel others to do what the power holder desires.
- ❑ Legitimate power arises from the consent of the people.
- ❑ Authority refers to that power vested in a public agency and its members to execute its functions.
- ❑ Transparency and accountability are tools to check whether the practice of government officials is in line with, or conforms to, the limits of the power and authority given to them.
- ❑ Depending on its exercise of rule, the power and authority of government could be legitimate or illegitimate.

## LESSON

## 3

# Constitutional Rights versus Constitutional Obligations

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- list constitutional rights and constitutional obligations.

What are your constitutional rights and obligations? State some of them.

A constitution is the fundamental law of a country. It defines social and state organizations, the principles of the electoral system, the structure of government bodies and the basic rights and duties of citizens. Citizens have constitutional rights to enjoy. For example, citizens' right to education, health care and freedom of expressions are stated in a democratic constitution. In a democracy, the government upholds and defends the constitutional rights of the people.

Constitutional obligations are duties citizens have to respect for their own well-being and that of society. Paying tax, responding to national emergency calls positively and other duties expected of citizens are part of their obligations. In democratic societies, the rights and obligations that citizens have for the most part are kept in balance. As a citizen of this country, you have rights to enjoy and obligations to observe. Obviously, interdependency exists between these two seemingly opposite concepts. The life of every human being involves rights on the one hand and obligations on the other. So, you have to regard your obligations as good as your rights. To better

understand how rights and obligations go together, you can think of your own classroom situation. In your class, or in the school at large, you have certain rights to enjoy such as using the school facilities. You have also certain obligations to undertake such as to protect the school facilities from damage. In the wider society, you have the right to work and earn an income for a living. However, your right to work is related to your obligation to pay tax proportional to the income you earn.

A democratic system is not possible without a democratic constitution which is an expression of the will of the people. A democratic constitution paves the way for constitutionalism. Constitutionalism may be defined as an ideology, which advocates that everything in a state and every action of the government should be in accordance with the constitution. It does not allow unconstitutional practices and extra-constitutional authorities. Constitutionalism limits the powers of the government. In doing so, it restricts the rights and duties of government and other organs of the state and its citizens. A democratic constitution clearly stipulates the rights and obligations that citizens and their government have. It is the foundation for democratic governance.

One example is the right to freedom of thought, opinion and expression as stated in the FDRE Constitution, Article 29. This right also comes with an obligation to use it in a legal manner. Accordingly,

## Constitutional Rights versus Constitutional Obligations

in terms of the right of freedom, the Constitution in sub-article 2 states:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice.*

As an obligation the Constitution stipulates in sub-articles 6 and 7:

6. *These rights can be limited only through laws*

*which are guided by the principle that freedom of expression and information cannot be limited on account of the content or effect of the point of view expressed. Legal limitations can be laid down in order to protect the well-being of the youth, and the honour and reputation of individuals. Any propaganda for war as well as the public expression of opinion intended to injure human dignity shall be prohibited by law.*

7. *Any citizen who violates any legal limitations on the exercise of these rights may be held liable under the law.*

### CASE STUDY

#### The dilemma of rights versus obligations

Freedom of speech is one of the fundamental rights enshrined in our democratic Constitution. Mr. X believed in that right when he made a speech in public accusing a colleague, Mr. Y of being corrupt.

Mr. Y protested and brought his case to court where Mr. X was made aware of the obligations he had relating to his rights.

**?** In small groups consider how far you can take your right to freedom of thought, opinion and expression before you risk prohibition by the law. Can a work of art, drama or music be interpreted as unlawful?

### REMEMBER

- A constitution is the fundamental law of a country.
- Constitutional obligations are duties citizens have to respect for their own well-being and that of society.
- Constitutionalism does not allow unconstitutional practices and extra-constitutional authorities.
- In democratic societies, the rights and obligations that citizens have are kept in balance.
- A democratic system is not possible without a democratic constitution.
- A democratic constitution clearly states the rights and obligations that citizens and their government have.



## L E S S O N

## 4

# State Power Distribution in Ethiopia

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- explain the structure of the state and political power distribution in federal Ethiopia.

Describe an aspect of state power distribution under one of the Ethiopian systems of government. Share your ideas with others in class.

Until 1995, Ethiopia was a unitary state. Today, the country has a federal system of government. Most unitary governments in the world monopolize power in the hands of the executives at the center. However, there are a few unitary governments which are democratic. The UK is one example. Where there is a homogenous society, it is believed that a unitary democratic system of government fits. When a society is composed of culturally heterogenous groups, due to the desire to address the cultural differences and promote their development, a federal system of government may be preferred.

The federal system of government can be organized based on geographical features, such as rivers, mountain chains etc., or on ethno-cultural backgrounds. The former gives rise to a territorial based federation and the latter to an ethnic based federation. A country with a culturally homogenous population can have territorial based federation like in Germany. Moreover, the objective of federal administration is to bring people and regions closer together to promote development and create a political community which is unitary in spirit.

The 1995 Constitution of the country declared Ethiopia a federal democratic republic with nine Regional States. The federal system of government devolves power to the regions to avoid a monopoly at the center. This shows that a federal system of government has elements of checks and balances of power between the federal and regional states.

The devolution of power from the centre to the regions gives the people the right to exercise power and authority on the one hand and undertake responsibility on the other. The federal system of government allows cultural and economic development by way of empowering the people at the local level.

The Regional States have certain constitutional rights in which the federal government does not intervene. Their rights include having their own constitutions together with the FDRE Constitution. They have the power to run and control First Instance Courts, High Courts and the Supreme Court. They also manage schools and work in accordance with the national program set by the federal government. The Regional States recruit and manage their own police force to maintain internal security. They are responsible to create enabling conditions for investment.

**?** How do you evaluate your Regional Government's empowerment to administer schools? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this distribution of power?

## State Power Distribution in Ethiopia

### CASE STUDY

#### The ratification of the first constitution of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region

Following the fall of Derg, the first transitional council of the southern nations, nationalities and peoples' was founded by different political parties operating in the region in December 1991. The drafting of the constitution of the region was made by the legislature commission, delegated under the transitional charter, taking the unique nature of the region into consideration.

The winners of the regional legislatures for SNNPR held their first parliamentary meeting on 19 June 1995 and ratified the Regional Constitution, which came into effect as of 23 June 2005. The Constitution of SNNPRS has fulfilled the necessary principles of a Constitution. The Constitution has 102 articles.

*Source: Tamsalet, special Edition Ginbot 20/1999 EC.*

**?** What are the responsibilities of the citizens in the formulation and ratification of their constitution? Discuss in groups.



Arbore settlement in SNNPR

### REMEMBER

- ❑ The 1995 Constitution of the country declared Ethiopia a federal democratic republic.
- ❑ The Regional States have certain constitutional rights in which the federal government does not intervene.
- ❑ The federal system of government devolves power to the regions to avoid monopoly of power at the centre.
- ❑ The federal system of government has elements of checks and balances of power between the federal and regional states.

## L E S S O N

## 5

# Ethiopian Foreign Relations

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- explain the principles of the Ethiopian foreign relations.

Identify one of the roles of Ethiopia's foreign relations.

Foreign relations mainly refer to the external relations of countries. When such relations involve countries, it gives rise to what is called international relations. This general complex relation involves countries on the one hand and non-governmental organizations on the other. Non-governmental organizations include establishments like World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and even the UN, EU, and AU. Foreign relations between countries started ever since states came into existence. Ethiopia has been involved in such a type of relations for thousands of years. However, the modern foreign relations of Ethiopia began as late as the end of the nineteenth century.

In today's world, the actors in foreign relations are states, international and regional organizations and other non-government organizations. International and regional organizations could play a role to strengthen international relations. There are rules that guide and give shape to international relations. These rules are expressed through agreements, conventions and protocols.

Foreign relations of a country are carried out through foreign policy and diplomacy. Foreign policy refers to a policy regulating a particular

country's relations with other states and peoples in the international arena. Foreign policy is based on the domestic policy of a country. When a change of government occurs in a country, its foreign policy may change. Diplomacy is the instrument to execute foreign policy. It refers to the practiced art of official representation abroad of sovereign states by persons and organizations specialized in such conduct. The basic functions of diplomacy have been to convey and gather information relevant to a country.

Those working in diplomatic missions assist in the formulation of foreign policies made by governments in matters of war and peace. Thus, foreign relations of countries need to be guided by well thought-out and formulated foreign policy and carried out through effective diplomacy.

The 1995 Constitution of Ethiopia has clearly stated the country's foreign policy objectives and principles. Its foreign policy promotes cordial relationships with countries for mutual benefits. It has economic, political and a cultural relationship with many countries. Ethiopia has geographically determined relations with some countries. It has a number of rivers that flow into other countries that benefit from this resource. Such rivers can determine a special type of relation between the countries that these rivers cross. The Blue Nile, Tekeze, Aqobo and Baro flow to the Sudan and Egypt. Wabishebelle, Genale and Dawa rivers flow to Somalia. These countries will have to come together to make agreements in how to use these resources equitably.

## Ethiopian Foreign Relations

At present, the principle of Ethiopian foreign policy is based on coexistence and cooperation between states and peoples.

Ethiopia's foreign relations are geared towards promoting economic development. The country has a strong resolve to undo poverty. Through economic diplomacy, attempts are being made to attract foreign investments to the country. The successful accomplishment of economic diplomacy promotes public diplomacy which promotes people-to-people relations. This in turn helps to maintain durable peace and stability in the country — a condition necessary for the realization of a quantum leap in the development of Ethiopia.



The Abay (Nile) gorge

**?** How should foreign policy and diplomacy benefit Ethiopia in the future? Discuss in small groups.

### Principles for External Relations Article 86

1. To promote policies of foreign relations based on the protection of national interests and respect for the sovereignty of the country.
2. To promote mutual respect for national sovereignty and equality of states and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.
3. To ensure that the foreign relation policies of the country are based on mutual interests and equality of states as well as that international agreements promote the interests of Ethiopia.
4. To observe international agreements which ensure respect for Ethiopia's sovereignty and are not contrary to the interests of its Peoples.
5. To forge and promote ever growing economic union and fraternal relations of Peoples with Ethiopia's neighbours and other African countries.
6. To seek and support peaceful solutions to international disputes.

**?** How can good relations between countries promote peace and, in turn, further development?

### REMEMBER

- ❑ Foreign relations are the external relations of a country.
- ❑ The actors in foreign relations are states, international and regional organizations and other non-governmental organizations.
- ❑ Foreign policy refers to a policy regulating a particular country's relations with other states and peoples in the international arena.
- ❑ Foreign policy reflects the domestic policy of a country.
- ❑ Diplomacy is the instrument to execute foreign policy.
- ❑ Ethiopia's foreign policy promotes cordial relationships with countries for its own quick development as well as mutual benefits.

## UNIT SUMMARY

In this unit, you have enriched your knowledge on democracy while exploring why a democratic system is necessary. You have examined what authority and power mean in a democratic system and the role transparency and accountability play to ensure constitutionalism. Your understanding about rights and obligations have shown them to be essential for the workings of democracy. You have seen the distribution of state power in Ethiopia between the federal and regional governments. Finally, you examined Ethiopia's foreign relations; its foreign policy and diplomacy, used as tools to promote relations with other countries for mutual benefits.

## GLOSSARY

<b>Authority:</b>	The legal power vested in a public agency and its members to execute the functions to which it was organized.
<b>Democratic system:</b>	A political system functioning on the basis of the consent of the people.
<b>Constitutional democracy:</b>	A governance which is based on democratic rights and obligations.
<b>Direct democracy:</b>	An exercise of democracy where people vote to elect representatives directly.
<b>International relations:</b>	The relations existing between sovereign nations.
<b>Power:</b>	The force or the ability to compel others to do the will of the power holder.
<b>Representative democracy:</b>	An exercise of democracy where people elect their representatives for local councils or parliament.

## UNIT REVIEW EXERCISES

Do these review exercises in your exercise book.

### Part I – Multiple choice

- Which one of the following statements is correct?
  - Constitutionalism has existed ever since states came into existence.
  - Rule of men and rule of law are concepts that express similar things.
  - A democratic system makes every citizen equal.
  - A democratic system creates equal opportunities for citizens.
- Which one of the following countries has combined Parliamentary and Presidential democracy?
  - USA
  - France
  - UK
  - South Africa
- In which of the following systems do checks and balances work better?
  - Parliamentary Democracy
  - Presidential Democracy

- (c) The hybrid of the two  
 (d) All
4. When the President of a democratic country has the power to veto bills from Parliament, the system refers to:  
 (a) Presidential Democracy  
 (b) Combined Presidential and Parliamentary Democracy  
 (c) Parliamentary Democracy  
 (d) All
5. Which one of the following is not true of democracy?  
 (a) Rule of law  
 (b) Legitimate power and authority  
 (c) Rule of men  
 (d) Free and fair election

**Part II – Matching**

Column A	Column B
1. Authority and Power	A. Citizens' obligations
2. Presidential Democracy	B. Federal administration
3. Paying tax	C. Government responsibilities
4. Protecting the country and its people	D. USA
5. Ethiopia	E. Legitimate or illegitimate

**Part III – Short answers**

1. Explain Parliamentary Democracy.
2. What are the conditions for a government to have legitimate power and authority?
3. What do you understand by economic diplomacy?
4. What differences do you observe between Parliamentary and Presidential Democracy?