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Rejecting the TPLF/EPRDF's Game-playing with Our Lives

Ethiopian strongman, Meles Zenawi, is going wild. His "security forces" are rounding up everyone and putting them in jail, using politically-driven anti-terrorism laws to absurdly justify arresting some of the country's finest citizens, like Woubishet Taye, Reyot Alemu, Bekele Gerba, Olbana Lelisa, Debebe Eshetu, Eskinder Nega and Andualem Aragie, the two Swedish journalists, Johan Persson and Martin Schibbye, people who have nothing to do with terrorism. This is not new, but what is different now is how the veil of deception and cover-up has abruptly fallen, revealing a hard-core dictator who can tolerate no challenge to his authority.

It is an indication that the regime is worried about their increasing vulnerability and a sign that the people are winning. The TPLF/EPRDF is losing its grip on the country; particularly following the inspiring accomplishments of the Arab Spring among their North African neighbors and they know it. Their fear that most of the 80 million people in Ethiopia would end this regime if they find a way to pass on information to each other. This is not merely propaganda from the opposition in the Diaspora, but is to them, it is based on a terrifying reality. In response, the TPLF/EPRDF could avert disaster or ending up like Gaddafi or Mubarak by seeking reforms; but instead, they are tightening their grip all the more.

For years, this autocratic regime has been playing games with the Ethiopian people through politically-motivated arrests of independent thinkers, politicians, leaders of all sorts, journalists, educators and activists, most always accompanied by false allegations and lofty democratic rhetoric meant to cover up their draconian actions in the eyes of others; particularly outsiders. The overall goal was certainly to deal harshly with any who would challenge their authoritarian control; hoping to create such an atmosphere of fear that the people would lose their courage; however, they also wanted to prevent the formation of a unified resistance and did so in two ways.

1. Advanced division, alienation and isolation through factional arrests

As long as arrests were made of key figures within a single ethnicity, religion, political group or other such sub-group, those who rallied for their release, were from the same groups. Other Ethiopians did not join them. As factionalized groups, they had little power to change anything and because those outside their groups did not seem to care, it often created more resentment and alienation against these other groups. For example, the Meles regime loved to target Oromos; arresting their leaders and accusing every Oromo of being a terrorist from the OLF. Lack of support from other groups simply drove them further into themselves as no one else seemed to care. This was part of Meles' plan to isolate Oromos from the others and it has worked for too long because it fed into existing prejudices.

Within the Oromo population, the same thing has been promoted along religious lines to divide Christians and Muslims so the Oromos as a whole did not become more powerful. *In the case of the marginalized people of Ethiopia, little notice was taken by anyone if arrests were made in Gambella, the Ogaden, in Afar, the South or Benishangul-Gumuz. If those in the mainstream called for the release of their own well-known political figures, those from the minority groups were rarely mentioned and remained unknown. This only increased the isolation of the minorities and the feeling they were on their own. In the case of the mainstream groups, arrests within their ranks received more attention from the media and again reinforced the lines of division.* As long as all of these factions rallied independently, their efforts created almost no challenge to this regime.

2. Manipulation on the timing of arrests and releases are made to suit the regime's political purposes; including for the purpose of diversion.

What this regime wants is to always give people an assignment to divert their attention from anything that might unite and empower them. Arrests fuel an atmosphere of fear—which is always to the regime's advantage—but another advantage is that these arrests also create a time-limited surge of emotion and activity that ends when the person or persons are released. Until release, those in the Diaspora will join to advocate for that specific person or persons, like they have done for the Kinijit leaders, Teddy Afro and Birtukan Mideksa. Their release time is well-calculated politically and always occurs before the rallying cry becomes strong enough to actually threaten the regime. Once released, the fervor that united the public subsides and people quietly go back to their daily lives. This is the regime's pattern and the people's reaction to it has been almost automatic.

What is it that needs to be done to stop this game-playing?

What the Meles regime does not know is that there is work going on behind the scenes to counteract all of this, which at some point will be revealed to the public and may catch them by surprise. At that time they will be put to a test and will not have the luxury of inducing Ethiopians to play these games anymore. *Our job now requires that we not focus all our attention or all our resources on an individual person and their individual release, but instead we Ethiopians must focus on unlocking the bars holding the entire country as prisoner.* This includes people of every background and particularly those whose courage has made them a threat to this crumbling regime. *We cannot be naïve anymore. We cannot fall for their games; for in doing so, we jeopardize the bigger struggle for freedom, justice and rights for all of us.*

Fekade Semanie, one of the SMNE team leaders recently shared the following insight with me. *What the TPLF have done has made Ethiopia into a huge slaughter house where among many cattle, the appointed butcher comes daily to pick out a choice cow for slaughter and as he does, the other cattle remain passive, not reacting. The next day, the butcher in charge will again pick out the strongest cow for slaughter; again, with no reaction from the other cattle. This act will be repeated day after day; however, there will be a time when the people of Ethiopia will no longer be like these cattle. No longer will they tolerate this. That time may be near, or even, already here.*

Think of someone creative and popular among the people, like Teddy Afro, whose songs spoke to the yearning hearts of many Ethiopians. The TPLF/EPRDF locked him up and when it became advantageous to them to release him, they did. As long as he did not speak out, they would leave him alone. They did the same to the Kinijit leaders and to Birtukan. Their goal is also to silence them in any way they can through division, driving them into exile or who knows what devious tactics! *The TPLF may have been doing this for twenty years, but like Fekade inferred, the time is near or already here where it will all backfire as the people say, "THIS IS ENOUGH!" "WE WILL TOLERATE NO MORE!"*

To be accomplished, it may not require bringing all opposition groups together to confront it; but instead, it may be accomplished by bringing together a group of committed people of conscience; working strategically together to rid themselves not of one dictator named Meles, but of a well-entrenched system of serial dictators that have tried to steal Ethiopia from the people and will continue to do so in the future unless the people demand change grounded on principles of justice for all. Like was done in Tunisia, Egypt and now in Libya, Ethiopians at some point will come out against the tyranny, corruption and ethnic hatred that infects our country.

In 2005, nearly two million people came out in Addis Ababa, a remarkable feat. It can be done again, but this time we must refuse to play the TPLF/EPRDF game that separates us as people. *What made Ethiopians come out last time was a moment of great inspiration. That same inspiration must be found again that is grounded on putting humanity before ethnicity or any other differences or we will not be any better off than under those repressive regimes of the past and present.*

People like Eskinder Nega, Andualem Agarie, Woubishet Taye, Reyot Alemu, Bekele Gerba, Olbana Lelisa, Debebe Eshetu, are great Ethiopians, real warriors of justice and humanity; but there are also other unsung heroes of Ethiopia whose names we do not know. In fact, Ethiopia has become a prison where there are over 80 million prisoners who have no freedom. They come from the four corners of Ethiopia—from the north, the east, the south and the west. They come from every ethnic group, from every religious group and from every walk of life. Until all of them are free; none of us in the Diaspora are free.

We can no longer be content to rally for these few highly esteemed names we know and only until they are released; instead we must rally for the whole country and not stop until we all are freed. During the last twenty years, Meles has given us our assignment where we are to concentrate on one or a few persons at a time and only from within our own groups. Anyone can name the progression of many of these different people: Professor Asrat Weldeyes, Dr. Taye Weldesemayat, Ethiopian journalist assn; Professor Mesfin, the CUD leaders and Ms. Lalise Wodojo, Mr. Bashir Makhtal, Mr. Bekele Jirata, Mr. Jumma Rufaai, Mr. Sabeel Albakheet; Mr. Abera Yemaneab; Ms Aberash Berta; Major Adugna so on. *It is time for a paradigm shift. We must refuse to play by the TPLF rules. We must think more strategically rather than to emotionally react in a predictable way; all in line with the TPLF agenda. We must resist becoming diverted by the particulars when we must focus on what will bring real and lasting change; for once that comes, the rest will be resolved.*

The work being done behind the scenes is not only to rally to free these few brave people but our work is to free the whole country. We will not settle for anything less. Our future and that of our descendents and nation will not be decided on Washington time, London time or by anyone other than Ethiopians, working in sync with Almighty's time.

May Almighty give us the inspiration to accomplish this task before us! May these courageous known and unknown heroes be freed! May God open the eyes of those blinded by lust for the perishable and strengthen those who eyes are fixed on Him until the words "ሰላም ላይኛ!" © "behig amlak©" are heard throughout Ethiopia!

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