

What Next?

By Golto Aila

Two days ago the world saw the leaders of G-20 come together to find solutions to the world economic malady. By all accounts, the first African-American President of the United States, on his first international summit, at a time the world is in its worst economic crisis since the great depression, gave that pessimistic world a great leadership, in a hopeful program to lift the world out of the current turmoil. A guest at this august summit, representing the continent of Africa was none other than the Prime Minister of Ethiopia. He was there as a representative of the under developed countries of Africa, but in fact was just an effort on the part of the British Prime Minister to show the world how much the West cares for the continent of Africa!

At the summit venue were the brave Ethiopians, (many of them who had been driven out of their country by Meles Zenawi) who lined the route to summit venue, shouting protest, and displaying banners, revealing to the world the monstrosity that Meles is! They had a good day and we are proud of them. For the first time in recent times, Ethiopians from different ideological backgrounds put their differences aside, came together and stood together to tell the world their side of Ethiopia's sad story, and we are all grateful for that!

At the end of that historic day - the 2nd day of April, in the year of Our Lord, two thousand and nine, I asked myself "What next for Ethiopia?" What next was not clear to me at all! The day was full of paradoxes - to name just two: 1. there was a ruthless dictator who is deliberately destroying the country and the people he purports to represent, sharing this event with leaders of the civilized countries on this planet, instead of being somewhere in the custody of the ICC to answer for his crimes he has committed against humanity; and 2. the people who are true Ethiopians, and who represent the true feelings and sufferings of Ethiopia were barricaded away from the summit venue, and had to hold up placards and shout out their plights to the summit participants (including Meles Zenawi) as they were being whisked away in fast-moving, bullet-proofed cars, instead of being in the summit to present the case for their suffering people!

As we ask ourselves "What Next" we must first find the answers as to the paradoxes! How come that the leaders of the so called developed world seem to be completely oblivious or impervious to the suffering of the millions of Ethiopians and the rest of the Horn of Africa? Or, as a corollary – why do the leaders of the developed and "civilized world" think they are helping the down-trodden people of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, by stuffing the coffers of the repressive regimes like that of Ethiopia?

For a long time now I have come to accept that Ethiopia is under the misrule of an anti-Ethiopian regime! Is mine a minority view? If not, how come that Ethiopians have failed to articulate this firmly for the world to understand?

Let me cite a few facts and possible explanations of Meles' actions to date:

He was a leader of a liberation front whose objective was to separate the province of Tigray and the surrounding regions from Ethiopia.

18 years after taking power he is still the head of the same liberation front!

He fought alongside EPLF and allowed the secession of Eritrea and rendered Ethiopia landlocked

He made no effort to negotiate access to the sea when he agreed to the independence of Eritrea.

After leading a war against Eritrea in which thousands of Ethiopians lost their lives, he made no effort to demand access for Ethiopia to the sea. It is possible that he had other plans for the access of the Republic of Tigray to the sea.

He mobilized thousands of farmers and other rural dwellers from the rest of Ethiopia for a war against Eritrea, to reclaim a real estate of rocks in Badme! He used these untrained young men as cannon fodder to the entrenched Eritrean Army, while keeping "his loyal army" at the back to overrun Eritrean front lines! Tens of thousands of young Ethiopians perished in that war, and there is nothing to show for it, other than the fact that Meles has demonstrated to Issayas Afewerki, that he can whip him!

Many territories in the vicinity of Tigray proper have been subtly annexed to create greater Tigray.

He crafted a constitution in which a clause was provided for a region to obtain autonomy up to and including secession! This is unheard of in any constitution where a legitimate indigenous administration allows the territory of its country be torn away by any community wishing independence! It is interesting that only Eritrea has been allowed to exercise that right. All other wannabes have been decimated in a program that can only be described as genocide! He has so far diverted most of the nation's meager resources and built infrastructure in Tigray, which the rest of the country can only dream about!

Ethiopia has been divided along ethnic lines and the current regime has been sowing the seeds of discord between the neighboring regions and communities in a process to facilitate their debilitating system of divide and rule! Consequently inter-ethnic clashes are rampant and all indications are that the regime either encourages or even facilitates these clashes.

Currently there is a growing concern about Muslim fundamentalism in Ethiopia. This is a flame that has been fanned by Meles' invasion to eliminate Muslim fundamentalists from Somalia.

The billions of foreign aid pouring into Ethiopia and the meager national Ethiopian resources have mostly been diverted to Tigray where most of the developments have been directed at the expense of the other regions of Ethiopia.

A regime which boasts to be democratic has done everything possible to stifle the democratic aspirations of Ethiopians. Many opponents have been murdered, incarcerated or forced to flee their country!

This list can go on and on and on! There is documentary evidence for most of the points raised above! Yet the international community who sustain this regime in Ethiopia seems to be oblivious of these atrocities! Why?

Ethiopians who make so much noise about their opposition against Meles have so far failed to remove his regime because of the following reasons and the list is not exhaustive!

There are groups who are fighting to liberate their territories from Ethiopia! My family hails from southern Ethiopia, a region not known for any favorable treatment from any administration in the recent memory! But I wonder, in today's Ethiopia, in the 21st Century, given the sorry state of poverty and deprivation in the entire Horn of Africa, and knowing what "independence" has brought to Eritrea - liberation from what and who is liberating whom? Can one take the "liberation" of Eritrea as an example? Because of their desire to be considered different entities than being Ethiopians, many of these so called "liberation" movements have, over the years resisted the idea of talking to those who consider themselves Ethiopians, even though their troubles in Ethiopia have been this alien regime!

National opposition groups are plenty - there are almost as many opposition groups as there are opinions! They all claim to represent the best ideas for Ethiopia. While condemning Meles and witnessing the destruction this monster is causing to their motherland, these organizations and their great ideas for Ethiopia have failed to see the need for a united front to save their country! Their differences are almost invariably personal, and their true goals for Ethiopia must, therefore, be considered personal!

Many ethnic entities have bought into the idea of ethnocentric autonomy, without fully understanding Meles' grand scheme, and are currently keeping themselves busy fighting each other, while Meles, seeing this reality, is telling himself and the rest of the world just why Ethiopia will not stand on its own if he departs! Knowing just how pathetic Ethiopian opposition is today, which among the donor countries would argue with that assessment?

There are many in the Diaspora who, while condemning everything Meles, is working hand-in-glove with Meles' regime, and sharing the loot of Ethiopia! They are expanding investment in Ethiopia; they are getting chunks of Ethiopian real estate for a song; they get loans from Ethiopian Banks to establish their business, etc, etc. And they are among those who are vocal in condemning Meles while at the same time praying that he hangs on for a little longer! So, is it any wonder that Meles seems so confident wherever he goes!

The ordinary Ethiopians, in and out of the country, have failed to come together - partly because of the above reasons - to present a credible force to oppose Meles. Given that Meles' regime is busy keeping them fighting for their survival - whether by denying them means of subsistence; turning ethnic groups

against each other; or permitting/facilitating religious tension among the population - the life of the ordinary people, whether in Ogaden, Oromia, Afar, Tigray, etc, will not get better!

Recently there has been an outbreak of a new phenomenon - Unity! Unity this, United that...! Everybody who has been instrumental to the endemics of opposition parties has, or in the process of forming a "Unity" organization! The behavior of these people, and therefore, their individual goals has not changed - only the names of their organizations have changed! It is fashionable to call one's organization Unity this, or United that....! In this frantic search for the new "Unity" label, the victim now is the definition of the word "unity"! It doesn't take a professor of political science or sociology to figure out the consequence of the current outbreak of unity – we shall be "united" in our disunity! Hence, we shall continue extending the life of Meles' regime in Ethiopia!

We all set goals for ourselves in life and we all get satisfaction out of achieving the goals we set for ourselves. Meles and his fellow rebels planned the strategy of carving out the Republic of Greater Tigray out of the nation of Ethiopia, somewhere in the bush in mid-nineteen seventies! They have religiously stuck to that plan, and have used every means possible to stay on track! Family, friends, and ethnic groups have been used against each other; the country has been split against itself; the country has been dismembered and parceled out to enemies of Ethiopia in pursuit of this objective; the gullible foreign donors and supporters have been hoodwinked into believing that democracy is taking root in Ethiopia, and that the monies they give Ethiopia are being used for infrastructure development to make Ethiopia self-sufficient, when in fact any democratic efforts by the citizenry is violently suppressed and most of the foreign aid goes into the individual pockets, or into the coffers of the myriad TPLF affiliated enterprises! Meles has used deceit, lies, graft, theft and downright brutality against Ethiopia and its people with the sole aim of destroying the nation as he constructs the Republic of Greater Tigray out of the ashes of what used to be Ethiopia! Ethiopians have stood on the sidelines and watched all these, and the whole world is just too happy to have partnership with Meles as long as he is fighting the "war on terror"!

It appears Ethiopians, up to this point, have surrendered their rights to affect anything in Ethiopia to one man whose sole purpose in life is, quite clearly, to destroy Ethiopia once and for all. He has been permitted to implement that objective, uninterrupted, for 18 years and still going strong!

The world is changing – an improbable event occurred last fall and unleashed the kind of optimism and hope, the kind of which nobody in his or her right mind could dream of, as recently as last summer, and in spite of a very difficult global financial condition, everyday seems to bring new hope for most people around the world! Well, the natural climate may change for the better – you may have rain instead of draught; global political and economic climate may change for the better, but unless one puts in action processes that will take advantage of these opportunities, the favorable condition may pass and one finds oneself in the same or worse situation! Worse still, one's enemies may take advantage of the opportunity of the favorable climate, to the detriment of idlers!

Joining hands for the purpose of accomplishing something for common good is a noble and a universal human characteristic! We Ethiopians have failed to defend our Motherland and our people (and I mean all Ethiopians, including our Tigrean and Eritrean brothers and sisters), against a megalomaniac, who now believes he has the legitimacy to do what he likes to the entire Horn of Africa.

The reason for this failure is because of lack of the appreciation that we all need each other to protect our people's common home! The reason for this failure is because of the pervasive fear by those who have been down-trodden throughout recent history that those who talk opposition to Meles are most likely not any different from him! There is severe lack of trust, and for good reason!

Where do we go from here! As I said many times in the past, it is important to have strong allies in a fight of this magnitude! But we have to win allies over, and then keep them! We have to show that we can perform better than Meles in persuading the world community that we are democratic - that we truly represent the aspiration ALL ETHIOPIANS! We have to win the trust of all Ethiopians to be relevant in the war against injustice! As many of you know last year a number of dedicated Ethiopian colleagues and I tried to launch a non-political solidarity movement to bring us all together to build the credentials necessary to embrace all our peoples, and win the trust of the international community, to win this very crucial war against injustice and destruction.

Unfortunately, like most things Ethiopian, we failed to get that mandate which would have allowed us the profile we needed to make a significant impression on the Obama campaign which would have allowed us an early acceptance to influence and help direct policy in the Horn of Africa! Thankfully, all is not lost!

Mr. Obang Metho, a true son of Ethiopia has persisted in that path and to has built up the Solidarity Movement of New Ethiopia, which has already embraced Ethiopians from all corners of our Motherland – North, South, East, and West and everywhere in between! This organization is clean, all embracing and is driven purely by the noble principles of search for Peace, Security, Prosperity, and Pursuit of Happiness for all our peoples.

I urge all the “unity” movements, and ordinary Ethiopians to join up with SMNE so that we can make the maximum impact taking advantage of this prevailing window of opportunity. Let us not look for excuses not to come together. Let us, for sake of Ethiopia and self-respect stand together and fight for this worthy cause!

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