

Ethiopia: National Politics and the Future

by Imru Zelleke

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The subject of this paper is the Ethiopian national politics and the future of the country. It is not directed against any ethnic group or society. We are stakeholders on matters that concern Ethiopia. For us, to strive for the well being and freedom of the Ethiopian people is a sacred mission to which we have dedicated our lives. We simply consider it our duty to the country of our birth, to be apprehensive of any development that impinges and negatively affects the welfare of the people, and the independence and sovereignty of the nation.

First of all we would like to state emphatically that we support any dialogue or setup without pre-conditions, amongst all Ethiopian political and civic factions, to discuss ways to solve peacefully the present crisis, and establish peace, freedom and democracy in Ethiopia. We object to the pre-conditions contained in the Memorandum of Understanding and the Statutes that establish the Alliance for Democracy within the framework of the present TPLF/OLF constitution.

Some people see in the ADF a new opening and a new hope for peace and freedom in Ethiopia. But unfortunately, hopes and good intentions are not marketable commodities in politics. Moreover, when terms and conditions are set in advance by a signed agreement, stage managed behind the scene, such as the Memorandum of Understanding and the Statutes of the ADF. In which instance Kinijit, with the overwhelming popular support in Ethiopia, has been reduced to a single minority voice, while the Liberation Fronts are the deciding majority.

We are talking here about the survival and political future of the seventy-seven million people of Ethiopia. To speculate and gamble on such serious matter, as dismantling and restructuring Ethiopia at the whim of Liberation Fronts is simply unthinkable. We believe that the people of Ethiopia will never accept the braking up of their country into ethnic morsels. We also believe that no political party or group has the right or the mandate to do so, without the free deliberation of the people of Ethiopia.

Furthermore, by asking the US and other foreign powers to sponsor the AFD, they have internationalized Ethiopia's internal affairs, putting into question the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Ethiopian nation. As in the case of the Algiers agreement regarding the border with Eritrea, the foreign powers might insist that the terms of reference of the conference to be those agreed upon in the Memorandum of Understanding and the Statutes of the AFD. Otherwise there are no justifiable reasons for them to sponsor the conference. They have already been advising the opposition to enter the parliament and work through the "so called democratic process" in place. Hence, since the framework under which the AFD will function is the present constitution, the notion that the signed agreements will be rectified radically at a later stage, is speculative at best.

We suggest humbly that the "new Kinjit" leadership re-read carefully the Memorandum of Understanding and Statutes that they have entered into on behalf of Kinijit, and the different opinions expressed over this issue. We also suggest to many individuals from the public, who take well-meant positions about the AFD, without proper knowledge of the issues at stake, to

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examine carefully the terms established in the signed agreements. It is said that "the way to Hell is paved with good intentions". We believe that the people who have joined the AFD at the invitation of the OLF, have jumped on the bandwagon without giving serious consideration about its implications. Apparently, even the OLF were surprised that their conditions were accepted.

It seems that the Kinijit group have underestimated the OLF, who have clearly set-up goals for which they have struggled for a long time. The fact is that, while the leadership of Kinijit were trying to sort out their own internal discords, the OLF and the Liberation Fronts had sought to affirm their established objectives, by setting up the AFD. They had carefully planned to gain the recognition of the largest pan-Ethiopian party, and to reduce it to a minority role, as well as making it a vehicle for secessionist propaganda. This is no mean feat. They should be congratulated for outwitting the opposite party.

From the Kinijit group, or from what can be called "new Kinijit" there has been no clear response, but for some equivocations and vague statement about the purpose of AFD and the proposed conference. The contents of the nine pages press release issued by the Kinijit, are more an eulogy of the OLF rather than clarifications of the Kinijit position. Neither their interpretation of article 39 holds water, since Kinijit in Ethiopia has no legal existence, and therefore, cannot claim its validity within the framework of that constitution, unless they are referring to the new "teletafy Kinijit". In their press release on 7/7/06, they declared that they are against the Ethnic based federation and yet they adopt the present constitution as a framework for the AFD. It would also have been honest and fair to the public to publish at an early stage the MOU and the Statutes they have signed, rather than making confusing and contradictory statements, telling us of secrets that cannot be divulged, and accusing us of being naive. In fact what they have achieved is:

- Compromised the Kinijit manifesto for a united Ethiopia.
- Reintroduced the ethnic division issue that the majority of the Ethiopian people have totally rejected by voting for Kinijit.
- Lent the Kinijit platform for secessionist propaganda.
- Misinformed and confused the Kinijit membership and the supporting public with half-truths about the real contents of the MOU and Statutes establishing the ADF.
- Although the Kinijit members who have signed the MOU and Statutes have no moral or legal legitimacy to enter into such agreement, they have short-circuited future negotiations by agreeing to the unacceptable parameters of the Woyane constitution, on behalf of Kinijit.
- Endangered the faith of Kinijit members in prison, and provoke more oppression on the rank and file of Kinijit and the people at large. Please refer to Meles's annual report

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to the Ethiopian parliament. He has been given the best excuse to keep the prisoners in jail, as terrorists allying themselves with groups that are conducting armed struggle.

- The so-called Liberation Fronts including the OLF may not be a threat to Kinijit, neither their input is crucial for the downfall of the TPLF regime. . If they were properly mobilized, Kinijit has millions of followers supporting its goals. Therefore, the first priority for the Kinijit in Diaspora should have been focused on the liberation of the imprisoned leaders and party members, and the strengthening of the organization at home. Presently there is no valid reason nor urgency to enter into political willy-dally deals with the liberation fronts, neither there are on-going conflicts between ethnic groups to precipitate such action. It is not the OLF who has imprisoned the Kinijit leaders and terrorizes the country.

Questions that need to be answered:

- If the members of the AFD see eye to eye with the TPLF regime in questions related to language, the right for ethnic group to succeed from Ethiopia, to the Kilile ethnic enclaves imposed by the regime, what differentiates them from the regime is a pertinent question.
- While the OLF and the other liberation fronts claim their own identity and national territory, what nation or people does the "new Kinijit" leadership represents? Or are we to assume that eventually the OLF is to replace the TPLF as a central power in the governance of the country, and will allocate some "undefined ethnic" territory to the new Kinijit?.
- In his speech on Les Nouvelles d'Addis in Paris on June 17, 2006, after the formation of the Alliance, the OLF representative in Europe Dr. Shigut Geleta has given some clarifications as to the purposes of the Alliance. After a lengthy statement he concluded by saying the following:

Finally, one basic reality is that Oromos and Oromia are no more abstract to the World. They are part of the global world with name and location . No one should tamper with individual and group rights of the Oromos and other nationalities in Ethiopia except themselves. I also believe no one should forcefully separate nations that want to unite and live together, and at the same time no one should force any nations to live together if they freely express their will not to do so. Ethiopia is not the only multi-nation state in the World. Oromos have been in contact with different nations and nationalities in Ethiopia, if the root cause of contradictions and conflict that prevail in Ethiopia is sequentially and properly solved through free, fair and democratic deliberations, rather than the barrel of gun, I have no doubt that Oromo visionaries and the OLF leadership will play a key role to bring peace in the Horn of Africa by placing the hierarchy of Oromo identity in the world of multiple identities. To learn more we shouldn't have to go very far; one of the neighboring countries

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adjacent to this meeting place (France), Belgium, is divided in to three ethnic based regional zones: Flandern (Dutch speaking), Wallon (French speaking) and Brussels (multicultural center) each zone is enjoying its multiple right and multiple identity in EU. We can also look at the recent vote in Montenegro where the populace expressed to try a solo journey than unity with Serbia. The future is doomed only for those who fear equality, democracy and freedom, and for those who uphold and condone injustice, inequality and dictatorship. I say freedom now, equality now, democracy now for all peoples of Ethiopia, and Freedom and Democracy for all !!! "

- A baffling matter is also Dr.Geleta's delimitation of Oromia territory,

"Oromia state is the largest among the Regional States, and stretches from North West Sudan border to South East to Somalia, from North Tigray border to South up to Kenya, and in the West from Sudan border to the East up to Djibouti."

Under these delimitations of territories, it seems that there is not much space left for the rest of the Ethiopian people. One also wonders in which locality the other people, such as the Amharas, have being living up to now? We recommend the reading the History of Oromo expansion from the 16th to the 19th Centuries, to learn how it occurred and at what cost to the displaced original inhabitant of the area. A lot has happened since then and people have adjusted and merged with each other, and have lived in peace and harmony with each other. The Oromo being the largest ethnic group in the country, have nothing to fear from a democratic system of government in Ethiopia.

- Are we to assume that the "new Kinijit" leadership will allocate some space for them in the newly reconstructed Ethiopia?
- Nobody in Ethiopia fears equality, democracy and freedom. Thousands of people have made the ultimate sacrifice for these ideals and millions have voted for them. Therefore, why insist on secession? What the OLF spokesman is saying is, that we dissolve the existing Ethiopia first, then unite later as laid out by the TPLF constitution, and according to their own vision and personal ambitions.
- Also to be noted is that the language of the AFD is English not the official language of Ethiopia, Amharic. We suppose that the "new Kinijit" leadership will instruct the Ethiopian people about the future language they must speak. In the mean time, in what language Ethiopians who do not speak English, should address the Alliance and its members?
- Why is it that no consultation was made with the Kinijit support groups and the general public, when such grave national questions are decided upon? Moreover it is

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troubling to observe funds collected from hard working Ethiopians to help those in great jeopardy at home, are spent to support activities of Liberation Fronts.

- Anyway, by what mandate the "Kinijit-NA" and "new Kinijit International", who are one and the same people, have negotiated such vital national issues is also in question? So far the people in the Diaspora and the Kinijit support groups had accepted their leadership in good faith. Although the bickering amongst themselves over the doubtful delegation of power, that was allegedly smuggled to them from the prisoners, has been public knowledge for a while. In actual fact the former Kinijit that was a single united party, has been deconstructed by the "new Kinijits" and the leadership has been supplanted by a self-appointed group from the three main parties of the CUD, namely AEUP, Kestedamena and EDPA/Medhin. What has been kept is the just name of Kinijit.

Even this bizarre and conspiratorial creation of a new leadership could have been acceptable, had it confined itself to coordinating Kinijit activities and raising funds for the party, which was its original mission. However, when this group enters into negotiating matters that concern Ethiopia's political future and its unity, and asking foreign powers to intervene in such internal matters, we say "NO WAY" in Amharic we say "AHUN GENA BE-AYNE METAH". And we hope the US and other powers, will not give weight to this seditious travesty, which is counter-productive for peace and orderly democratic development.

We reckon that we have diverse ethnic groups within our country, millions of us, most likely more than half of the population, are of mixed ethnic background. We also recognize that the major causes of the country's problems are not of ethnic nature, but the lack of democratic governance, the absence of the rule of law and the over-all poverty and underdevelopment.. What we are all seeking is to build a free and peaceful society, in which we live together with respect, equality and harmony with each other. Thus, it is imperative that we must dialogue with each other, in order to find solutions to our common problems.

Evidently, this cannot be achieved by dissolving, however imperfect, the national unity that has endured centuries of sacrifice to build up. We have wasted more than thirty years following political party leaders that were supposed to lead us to the end of the rainbow. Our people have paid a very heavy price throughout this painful period. They have lost their self-respect and become a nation of mendicants. Incompetent and irresponsible individuals have abducted the direction of our politics, and are conducting us further into the pitfalls of ethnic politics, from which a few ruthless, unscrupulous and power hungry individuals will benefit at the expense of the people. Enough is enough, we must not allow this to happen again.

In spite the deliberate denial of many, the decentralization of the central government is not a new notion in Ethiopia. Self-government at Awraja level was already legislated into law during final days of the Monarchy. More administrative restructuring was also made during the Derg. Therefore, we have the knowledge and the experience that allow us to devise an appropriate system of governance, whereby the needs and aspirations of every community in

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Ethiopia can be met satisfactorily. All we need is to put our hearts and minds together and make it happen.

We are living in the 21st Century, where our survival depends on our ability to provide our people the skills and means that will allow them to lead a decent life. In this modern globalized world there is no room for bygone motifs, still anchored on the mystifications of defunct historical events. If 1.5 billion Chinese, 1 billion plus Indians, with as many diversities that can be imagined, do live in harmony and make such extraordinary progress, why not Ethiopians?

As far as the AFD is concerned we believe that it should be rejected by the Kinijit membership, both for its contents and because it has been entered illegally without the wish nor the approval of the Ethiopian people. If a Conference is to be held to discuss the future of the country, it should be within a free environment with the full participation of all concerned political and civic organizations, and definitely without any preconditions by Liberation Fronts, and without the patronage of foreign powers.

In conclusion, there is no word as abused as "andinet" or "unity" in our political lexicon. The trouble is that what unity means for one party does not mean the same to the other. It is time that we put an end to this dichotomy. If we mean the national unity, one people, one country with all our diversity, let's say so! Our diversity is our heritage and our wealth, and the emblem of our civilization, of which we are all proud. Our people deserve more than being cataloged and divided into some human sub-species that can be pieced or assembled at will by political factions. We suggest therefore:

- a) The rejection of the Alliance for Democracy.
- b) An all-inclusive Conference to be called by Civic Organization in which all civic organization and political parties will be invited to discuss all issues regarding Ethiopia.
- c) To establish an ad-hoc committee of civic leaders to organize such conference.

Please let us remember that while we are sitting here playing politics from afar and marketing their rights, it is all the people of Ethiopia who are paying the price, and bearing the pain and burden of a miserable and hopeless existence.

We invite all those who share the above views and are cognizant of the clear danger for the unity of Ethiopia, to express their rejection and indignation over this consequential conspiracy against Ethiopia's national unity and freedom.

LONG LIVE ETHIOPIA!

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