

# **The Macabre Dance over Democracy in the Ethiopian Diaspora**

by Imru Zelleke

16 November 2006

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Sometime ago I had written a small essay on the fate our country entitled “Ethiopia: a saga of missed opportunities”. Somehow the curse that has been dragging our people through one misfortune after another, does not seem to have abated. When the opportunity arose, defying political persecution, tremendous physical and moral discomfort, hunger and thirst, eighty-five percent of the voting population or twenty-six million people came out to vote for democracy, symbolized by Kinijit. Not because they all knew the leaders in person or had read its Manifesto, but because it was a Ray of Hope for freedom, peace and justice. The voting went without a single incident in a most disciplined and dignified manner, which demonstrated an extraordinary show of popular will and determination to gain freedom democratically.

The EPRDF regime, that had no intention whatsoever to relinquish power, allowed the elections as a charade of democratic exercise to please foreign donors and no more. As expected, it shanghaied the results, declared itself the winner, jailed the opposition leaders and thousands of their followers, killed hundreds and maimed thousands. The foreign patrons of democracy and freedom declared these openly illegal acts of criminal violence as part of democratic "development", advised the opposition to accept its ill fate and resign itself to a minority role. Not only that, but trampling over the basic human rights of the Ethiopian people, and turning a blind eye to the criminal acts of the regime, they have declared it a great ally against terrorism, and increased their political support and funding. The lack of a visible (or feasible?) alternative to the woyane regime, amongst the fragmented opposition, might also be the cause of their indifference to the failure of democratic process in our country.

The opposition in the Diaspora runs in circles like a beheaded chicken. The so-called Kinjit leadership in the Diaspora has been high jacked by individuals, which nobody has elected. They claim legitimacy based on so-called appointments by the leadership in prison. At this point in time they have split into two contending factions, K-Denver and K-Atlanta, plus the super supreme K International. Unfortunately, their public quarrels and irresponsible behavior have reduced the image of Kinjit as a great national political party to that of an amateurish free-for-all. Because of all these apolitical and petty squabbles, the very issue of democracy in Ethiopia and liberation of the people from the yoke of a vile regime, have been relegated to the level of individual power struggle amongst people whose qualifications as leaders leave a lot to be desired. Thus, the democratic process that was the axiom of Kinjitâ philosophy and ideals has been sidelined.

There are millions of patriotic people in the Diaspora, representing a tremendous pool of qualified human resources, out of which a highly qualified leadership can emerge. Discouraged by the bickering and backbiting that prevails amongst the political parties, knowledgeable and capable people have kept themselves estranged from politics. By the same token, people in the Diaspora have been disfranchised from any political role, and from their right to elect leaders of their own choice. They are considered as some sort of amorphous entity, good only for providing money and making clamorous protest. While the so-called appointed supreme and not so-supreme leaders are playing havoc with the destiny of the country, the Diaspora is to be the classical sacrificial lamb at the egotistic altar of people it

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does not know, and may have not chosen for leadership to start with. Ultimately, the culprits are ourselves, because of our lack of cohesive and consistent action about the affairs of our country. Thereby, we have allowed these transgressions of our own rights and those of millions of our compatriots.

In the meantime, while our pseudo-politicians are playing at being leaders, in addition to donor countries' domination of our domestic affairs, Chinese, Indians and other foreign interests are buying the country lock, stock and barrel. The famous AFD coalition led by the OLF is trying to negotiate by-proxy a deal with the EPRDF through a Kenyan-South African mediation. Where are all these ins and outs leading to? It is not hard to imagine.

The divided factions of Kinjit are each claiming the support of many chapters, what percentage of the Diaspora population these chapters represent is unknown. Therefore, in terms of the opposition in the Diaspora, it would not be an exaggeration to state that it is dysfunctional, and unable to provide the leadership that can challenge the problems the country faces today. What we see developing is some sort of mob partisanship instigated by personal prejudices rather than political choice.

No one disputes the majority of the Ethiopian peoples' choice of the principles embodied in the Kinijit Manifesto; nor the legitimacy of its duly elected leaders, and the rank and file members that are paying the ultimate sacrifice. The problem for the citizens in the Diaspora, whose role can be vital in getting rid of the woyane dictatorship and establish a real democracy in Ethiopia, is how to render an effective political and material input towards this goal. Throughout the years the community in the Diaspora has contributed financial and material support to many kinds of political parties and liberation fronts. The outcome of all these efforts has been mostly disappointing. The same paradigm of deceit and divisive practice is being observed nowadays.

The Ethiopian Diaspora has an enormous amount of human and material resources. The community's professional and entrepreneurial skills, in a most competitive environment is well established. The transfers of funds to the home country amount to over half billion dollars, and support thousands of families who otherwise would be destitute. The input to the Ethiopian economy represents the most important foreign exchange earning for the country, aside of foreign aid. Contacts and relations with the home country as well as financial investments locally are constant and ever increasing. To exclude the citizens in the Diaspora from expressing their voice and views in the democratic political process in Ethiopia, is ludicrous and unacceptable.

The Ethiopian community in the Diaspora, particularly those men and women endowed with professional skills and experience, owe it to themselves and to the country of their birth, to come forward and assume their responsibilities as citizens and leaders. Between internal and external foes trying to tear her apart, our country today is in a most dangerous situation, in which her very existence is threatened. This is not time for dilettante politicians, we need

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good leaders whose integrity and patriotism are not questionable. I hope that we will rise to the occasion and create a leadership worth the struggle ahead.

MOST AND ABOVE ALL,

I WOULD LIKE TO APPEAL TO THE YOUNG GENERATION, WHO ARE THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW AND WHOSE DESTINY IS AT STAKE, TO TAKE ACTIVE PART IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS AND BUILD A FREE DEMOCRATIC ETHIOPIA.

Imru Zelleke  
(Former Ambassador of Ethiopia, Ret.)

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