

DEMOCRACY NOT ONLY TO BE PREACHED BUT REALIZED

By Afework Wondimu

The current regime in Ethiopia, with Meles Zenawi as its head, claims to have a constitution and a democratic system of governance. M. Zenawi even told the world that Ethiopia is developing at a steady growth rate and would be grain exporter in the year 2000. He also told us unashamedly that his regime has the best human rights record in the world. How far is this claim true? Should one be contented with clamour of the government or look into the hard realities on the ground to come up with a fair, if not correct assessment of what this government is up to? Although the Ethiopian people evidently very well know the torturous life they are forced to endure under this regime, some members of the international community, however, seemed to have lost sight of the nature of the regime and its rocky relations with the people that was supposed to govern constitutionally and peacefully. These communities are, least to say confused and in a way, prolonging the life of the dictatorial regime by providing diplomatic and material aid.

Having said these, we need to ponder on the actual problem in order to arrive at the right solution without wasting time and energy while leading a miserable life. We Ethiopians have suffered a lot; bear a lot throughout and now. If I limit myself to observing governance, a lot could be said and nothing is gratifying. Any person with a healthy mind can observe that instead of making a move forward, the country is deteriorating more and more each day and at an ever-increasing pace than in the previous regimes.

The country in itself has no faults and blemish of any wrong. It is rich in minerals and water resources, even sustaining the agricultural life of its neighbour, Sudan, Egypt and Somalia. But it has lacked visionary leaderships on the land who are committed to pulling out the nation from the vagaries of starvation, drought, poverty and war.

On top of these predicaments, when we see our monster leaders on a ravaging cycle of killing every political opponent and individuals with differing views, our hearts bleed, and our feelings hurt to a great deal towards the victimised people we have much love of their people and the country we adore. Consequentially, it is simply because of the current Dictator Meles Zenawi's regime that millions of Ethiopians have been reduced to fugitive figures and forced to live far away from the home they love. Of course, in many countries there are many types of political crisis, some of them are violent, but our country's case seems quite different and the worst of all.

Our ancestors and relatives have sacrificed their bloods and souls for the sake of the land and equal rights of the Ethiopians. This is the true history we are proud of, but the current regime, the ruling party EPRDF, has been working to this day to destroy this image.

Although the EPRDF is a conglomeration of three like-minded ethnic groups, no other political ethnic group has the right to exercise its constitutional prerogatives. Power is the monopoly of the EPRDF. At least, the so-called legal ethnic political parties must have been allowed to participate in all political arenas freely or to have equal opportunity to every regions of the country in which they can operate with out fear of the government intimidation and persecution.

But when we come to the factual state of affairs, in a country where one-man rule has been established to dictate the terms and conditions, all Ethiopians are forced to be passive spectators of their own cause and future. Thousands of citizens are under arrest, thousands of people have been killed, opposition party members are harassed, detained, hundreds suspected of supporting opposition parties are fired from their jobs, journalists from the free press and opposition party members are chased a way from Ethiopia. These who attempt to challenge this regime had to suffer a lot in prisons and detention camps and many had lost their lives because of the tortures inflicted upon them. Under the current regime of M. Zenawi, where human rights abuses is intensified to an unimaginable level our people are found in total hopelessness.

The government human right record remained not only very poor but also disgusting; security forces of the ruling regime committed a number of extrajudicial killings. Arbitrary arrest and detention and prolonged pre-trial detention remained problem. The government continued to detain innocent persons suspected of sympathizing with or being involved in opposition parties.

Because of interference of the government in communities' private affairs, discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities continued. Due to weak administration system ethnic clashes resulted in a number of deaths. The Easter Wollega tragic incident was a testimony. Police killed and injured numerous persons while forcibly dispersing demonstrations, every year. The killing of students in Addis Ababa University and the Tepi massacre are typical examples. The judiciary is very weak; war; mass killing and arrests have been the every day life of Ethiopians. No constitutional rights of the citizens are respectd. The beating and the killing of these innocent high school students, university students, farmers, members of the political opposition and journalists etc. were absolutely a gross violation of human rights.

Human rights violation, bribes, corruptions including embezzlements, promotion in government posts by blood relation or political affiliation, and as whole totalitarianism has become normal routine duty and identification of M. Zenawi's regime. The ruling party leaders have consider themselves and in fact are above the low while the media and the police specially the intelligence security forces are the main instruments that serve the leaders to abuse the power. As far as the demagogue, known to be M. Zenawi is concerned, the least one can say is that he doesn't belong fully in heart and soul with the Ethiopian people's aspirations and determinations and is only bent on maintaining his grip of power to amass the country's wealth for himself, his family and cronies.

The tragedy of every Ethiopians day-to-day life will continue with unabated tempo as far as Meles and his regime are allowed to ravage on the Ethiopian landscape; they will arrest and kill many Ethiopians until they themselves are put under control.

The ordinary people have gained neither the freedom nor the economic growth, which could have changed the miserable lifelong predicament imposed upon them. Thus, it is time for Ethiopians of whatever conviction should join hands, not only to reveal the human right abuses, but also NOT to let the dictator with his reckless aims to destroy our country and people. So we should not wait passively for the government to initiate reconciliation and fairness which it does not believe in. We can start from and around our communities to organise so that all Ethiopians would come together as one family against this dictator regime.

All parties need to build confidence and the habit of open and constructive debates and struggling to promote genuine and healthy democratic principles with out fear. After all, each individual person must respect others' opinions and the right of individuals as much as the rights he/she envies. M. Zenawi may preach human and democratic rights, the point, however, is to realise them and no one can do it, but we Ethiopians. We should hope the international community to co-operate with this genuine and principled endeavour but we should not sit and wait for some one to do our job. It is we who are the actors of our future.

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