

## FROM THE FIRE TO FRYING PAN

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First of all I ask your permission to state that I am extremely grateful .for being invited by the leaders of TAND to address and share my views with my fellow Ethiopians.I would like people to know that I am not a member of this political organization or any other organizations,for that matter. I am not here representing the interest of any ethnic group, political party, or anyone else. I represent only myself. And even that is an open question if considered from a philosophical point of view because it brings into focus the age-old dispute between dualism and monism. Let me just say that I am happy to be here among you.

### I.INTRODUCTION

As you may have noticed there is a play of words in the title I gave my presentation. I am not sure whether I should start out by tampering with an old proverb that has weathered the ravages of time. Of course, the correct proverb reads," From the frying pan to the fire." this old proverb tells us about the human condition that is getting painfully worse. I believe the statement describes the present development of the unfolding drama of the end of the TPLF succinctly. We are witnessing the catastrophic end of a liberation front that has caused so much pain and suffering on countless Ethiopians, and which has become the symbol of ethnic violence, abuse of power, corruption, war, oppression et cetera. For most Ethiopians whether they are standing in the fire itself or on a frying pan, they are scorched in either case.

What is tragic in this Ethiopian political drama is the fact that the TPLF as an organization had the best opportunity to bring about peace and prosperity, democracy and civic responsibility, and great economic and social revival to a battered people when it came into town in 1991 on the crest of a wave of great expectation and popular welcome.Personally, I am very angry at the leaders of TPLF that they could veer so far from the idealism of the thousands of humble fighters,who sacrificed their youth,their future,and their lives believing they were doing the thing for all Ethiopians.Now, after ten torturous,horrible,and most destructive years,we are witnessing the collapse of the TPLF and its satellite pseudo organizations.However,we must remind ourselves that we are also witnessing the birth of a new and hopeful Ethiopia with some of the the most courageous individuals taking up a monumental stand against a rabid leadership of the TPLF that has lost its direction and that is lashing out in all direction in its frenzy.

It is inconceivable to any decent human being that a seventy-one year old sage, a person who spent his entire adult life in the service of Ethiopia teaching and bringing light to so many young men and women, could end up in detention for discussing human rights. I

am talking about the recent imprisonment of professor Mesfin Woldemariam, and also the imprisonment of thousands others including professor Berhanu Nega and hundreds of members of several political organizations such as EDP and AAPO. My fellow Ethiopians, I need not remind you the fact that the present Government of Meles Zenawi is on equal footing with the brutal government of Mengistu Hailemariam for massive abuse of human rights, violence, and red-terror practice. What else has Mengistu done that Meles has not? At this point in time, after the split of the TPLF central Committee and the removal of the 'dissident' groups, the government of Meles Zenawi is in the process of becoming a full fledged tyranny with a fascistic ideology unless something drastic is done to halt this form of dictatorship.

## II. GOVERNMENT FORMATION 1991-1992

First and foremost we must accept the fact that we all are a product of Ethiopian's history, culture, politics, education system et cetera warts and all. And to a great extent the influence of other Ethiopians weighs down on each one of us like a millstone. In that sense neither Mengistu nor Meles are alien monsters from outer space - they are the product of the same social milieu that produced great heroes too. Mengistu and Meles simply happened to be the worst aspect of a culture that otherwise is capable of greatness. It would be a fallacious dichotomy if we create categories of saints and sinners delaminated from each other with no common ground. This is one troubling mistake I see us making over and over. No one can claim any degree of Ethiopianess by standing outside of Ethiopian history, culture, community etcetera. It is impossible to be outside of Ethiopian history or social evolution and be observer unaffected by what is happening in Ethiopia.

The year 1991 was the most dramatic moment in my life. After seventeen years in exile, I was back in Ethiopia, I was full of great hope and very anxious to see the birth of a new Ethiopia. I believed that finally we were going to have a truly new beginning. It was also a special personal moment for me: getting together with my younger brothers, cousins, and their comrades, young idealists, decent, courageous, and courteous fighters after years in the bush; sadly, most of whom have died since then, I believe of disease contracted in the wilderness and/or of broken heart because of what transpired latter under the leadership of Meles Zenawi.

As the saying goes, hindsight is 20/20. Thus, what I am writing to some degree is not a fair assessment of some people who were caught in the problem of the period. I now have the advantage that comes out of sober reflection as opposed to thinking on the run. I do not want any one to think that I was in any form an important person in the structure of the TPLF or EPRDF. My role was an evolving one, I was a kind of Robinson Crusoe's man " Friday", suggesting political and administrative structures for the government and carrying out specific assignments dealing with legal matters et cetera. However, what is important to me is what I witnessed in my close observation of the activities of the leadership of the TPLF and the resulting sever problems that took us all several decades backward.

The most serious causes of our current political and economic problems may be traced back to the following events or activities:

- a) the retention of Mengistu's high officials in the Ethiopian government,
- b) the 1991 peace and Reconciliation Conference and the system of selection of participants,
- c) the charter of the Transitional Government (TGE), except for the part incorporating the Universal declaration of human Rights,
- d) the election of Meles Zenawi as president of the TGE,
- e) the creation of satellite organization and the EPRDF program of devolution of power,
- f) the creation of language based ethnic " federal structure" and
- g) the unstructured relationship that existed between the TPLF (TGE) with the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) prior to the conflict, and the premature consent to delineate boundaries.

Although there are numerous additional activities (and dereliction of duties) by the leadership of the TGE and that of the present Ethiopian government that have caused such tremendous suffering and destruction of the people of Ethiopia, it would be impractical even to try to list all of them let alone discuss so many root causes of our problems within the confine of a short presentation. However, I will try to discuss some of the more pressing problems that have brought about the calamity we are faced with at the present time. The most important is the current premature ongoing negotiation about international boundary between Isayas's and Meles's governments Leaving Ethiopia without access to the sea is the single most disaster Meles's government has inflicted on Ethiopia. For that alone Meles and his entire government leadership conceptually could be tried for treason against the integrity and security of the sovereign nation of Ethiopia. Specially Meles, whose sworn duty is to uphold the interest and integrity of Ethiopia, has been acting more of a defender of the interest of Isayas's government on questions of Ethiopia's rightful sovereignty over coastal territories and access to the Red Sea than as the leader and defender of Ethiopia's interest. This is an extremely serious act of compromise by a leader because of the permanent nature of the crystallization of the status quo that would end bottling up over seventy million people from having coastal territories and access to the natural resources of the Red Sea. There is no principle of international law that could authorize or sustain such draconian agreement that denies a historic access to the sea between a predecessor nation and a seceding new state.

It was obvious that the group dominated by the left leaning individuals such as Tewolde, Meles et cetera as a block (and not necessarily on their individual strength) had the upper hand on certain issues; on the other hand, individuals like Sebhat Nega, Seye Abraha et cetera were, to some extent, pushed to the margins and assigned to deal with localized politics in Tigray. This will not be an accurate depiction of the situation either for there are matters where the minority group had tremendous influence. As it was later manifested certain dormant or recessive patriotic nationalist sentiment in some of the members of the central committee of the TPLF was triggered by the conflict with Isayas Afewerki's government. The conflict with Isayas's government drastically realigned the political forces within the TPLF leadership.

Thus, most of the individuals who were pushed out of the central committee turned out to be, after all, closet nationalists, who have profound sense of their Ethiopian identity and patriotic zeal no different than their forefathers who fought for their freedom and in defense of Ethiopia's sovereignty even if badly armed, poorly fed, nevertheless, with unmatched enthusiasm and bravery. Irrespective of their current political beliefs and positions, the fact remains that they are collectively responsible for a number of policies and programs that have affected the lives of millions of Ethiopians. They are responsible, along with the who are still in power, for the devastation and harm visited upon the people of Ethiopia throughout the ten year period the TPLF/EPRDF political organization assumed political and economic responsibility for the state of Ethiopia.

### III. THE FALLACY OF SELF-DETERMINATION:

The principle of self-determination is the most misunderstood, abused, deformed, and corrupted concept in international law and relations. It is specially so in the hands of liberation fronts and movements in Africa and Asia. No one can claim that the issue of self-determination to be a simple issue. It is quite complex and often leading into recrimination and heated dispute even between international legal experts. However, for any one interested in honest scholarship it does not require much acrobatic reading to realize that the concept could be clarified with modest effort.

The concept itself had a forked start and development -one coming out of the Marxist/Leninist thinking and experience, and the other developed from events surrounding the first world war along with the creation of the league of nations and later the united nations. Lenin perceived self-determination as the main struggle of capitalism (bourgeoisie) against a feudal traditional structure trying to promote a nation-state as distinguished from the interest of the proletariat that subordinate such demand of self-determination, simple as an aspect of the overall class struggle. The idea of secession is the corollary of self-determination, and is meant to insure that the exercise of self-determination results in removing all "inequality, all privileges, and all exclusiveness." [See Lenin COLLECTED WORKS, vol.20, 396-413] In other words, there is nothing mystical about self-determination; it is simply a feature of a stage in economic development where the interest of the proletariat is the only overriding interest to be taken in to account, but not ethnicity nor the nationalism of the bourgeoisie. Thus, in Marxist/Leninist thought, there is no room to justify self-determination on the basis of some psychological profiling of a population nor on the basis of a simplistic aggregation of mass interest through a referendum or plebiscite. What is determinative in Lenin's view of the principle of self-determination is the possibility or the certainty of the establishment of the proletariat or Socialist State. This Marxist-Leninist principle of self-determination is not meant for the creation of dictatorships by élites or capitalist (national bourgeoisie).

The second development of self-determination is an extension from the process of the creation of nation-states of the 17th and 18th centuries. The industrialization of the 19th century brought about the great upsurge of colonial expansion and the subsequent internal conflict within communities with heightened struggle between the traditional power

structure of the land based aristocracy and the capital (money) based bourgeoisie, which planted the seeds for future colonial liberation struggles down the line. In fact, some scholars suggest that the treaty of Westphalia of the 17th century is the source for the modern nation-states based on concepts of national sovereignty, non-interference, and territorial integrity.

However, for the purpose of our concern on modernist question of self-determination we need not go far back in time. The involvement of the United States in the first world war, and President Wilson's famous "fourteen points" are our foundational source. As a counter measure to Lenin's challenge on the rights of self-determination of people to independence, in 1918 President Wilson proposed his famous "Fourteen points." The first five points dealt with general principles of a new international order, the next eight points dealt with the redrawing of new ethnic nationality based boundaries for the Balkans newly created states, and for dismantling and reconstituting new states out of the remains of the Ottoman Empire and its conquered people along lines of nationalities with historic ethnic identities. That process may be considered as key event in the development of the principle of self-determination. The formation of the League of Nations in 1925 and its collapse fifteen years later brought into focus the issue of self-determination in its modern context.

As a matter of classical international law principle, the territorial integrity of states is of paramount importance. In fact, only states were the subject of international law before 1945. With the signing of the Charter of the United Nations in 1945 the concept of the interest of people as distinct interest of self-determination was formally introduced in the lexicon of international law even though no one seemed to be willing to give a formal definition what exactly was meant by such words.

This may come as a surprise to most of you that there is no "recognition of a unilateral right to secede based on a majority vote of the population of a sub-division or territory, whether or not that population constitutes one or more 'peoples' in the ordinary sense of the word. In international law, self-determination for peoples or groups within an independent state is achieved by participation in the political system of the state, on the basis of respect for its territorial integrity." [See Crawford, REPORT TO GOVERNMENT OF CANADA CONCERNING UNILATERAL SECESSION BY QUIBEC, 19 February 1997.] In other words dissenters need to participate in the political process within an existing state to effect change that would enhance their political, economic, and human rights. This means declaration of self-determination to secede by all kinds of political movements or fronts will not be a defensible position under international law and practice.

Because of the fact that international law is very much in favor of keeping the territorial integrity of existing states, it is the main reason why we see some liberation movements distorting history, manufacturing 'history' and events, and indoctrinating people to adopt new identities in order to claim and construct a fictitious colonial relationship with a parent state. Prior to 1945 there was no customary or formalistic international practice of self-determination in any form. It the charter of the United Nations of 1945 that

introduced a narrow exception to that principle and practice in international law. The charter in chapter XI and XII created classes of colonial territories and dependant territories entitled to independence. There is no mention in any of the articles of those chapters the concept of self-determination. It is resolution 1514(XV), the declaration on the Granting of Independence to colonial countries and peoples, of the general Assembly that clearly articulated the right to independence of peoples from colonial rule and the principle of self-determination. Even then the resolution did not support unilateral rights of secession by liberation fronts in either external (colonial) or internal conflicts.

At any rate, in cases of internal self-determination, it seems that without the consent of a parent state it is impossible to have a formal recognition and acceptance in to the United Nations of any political entity that seceded unilaterally by force. I am going to great length here in order to point out to leaders of movements with an eye to secede from the parent state of Ethiopia that the process is not an easy matter. The case of Eritrea is not a precedent setting situation; at best it is a fluke. Eritrea would not have succeeded in its bid for membership in the United Nations without the consent and assistance of Meles Zenawi led Ethiopian government. A case in point, as an illustration of the current international law and practice in regard to the reluctance of the world community to accept acts of secession through self-determination, is the belligerent government of Somaliland-Hargesa, as well as several others, that has been waiting on the side for over ten years hoping for recognition and admission to the United Nations. [See Carrol and Rajagopal, "The case for the independent statehood of Somaliland," AMERICAN UNIVERSITY JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW & POLITICS, vol.8: 653, 1993.] "Since 1945 no state which has been created by unilateral secession has been admitted to the United Nations against the declared wishes of the government of the Predecessor State." [See Crawford, Report, 9]

#### IV. WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

There is always hope for a great future for Ethiopians because Ethiopians have something profound and special: faith and optimism. There is no possibility of disintegration in to oblivion of a people who have a sense of history and a civilized culture of thousands of years. Ethiopians are like the legendary sphinx that rises renewed from its ashes. I know of no people in whose future success I would wager my life than Ethiopians . And I will not lose.

However, before things get any better, there is going to be some of the worst form of violence perpetrated by the present government. The best defense against the violence and destructive domestic as well as foreign policy of the present Ethiopian government is unity and organization. There are steps that need to be taken in order to form strong unity.

#### V. WINNERS AND LOSERS

Short term winners and losers

long term winners and losers

