

# **Ethiopia: - The Country without Leaders, But with Peoples of Great Characters!**

**By Kambata Xoola, August 14, 2006**

**‘We know that healing the wounds of the past will be a long and demanding task. Reconciliation doesn’t mean forgetting or trying to bury the pain of conflict. Reconciliation means, working together to correct the legacy of past injustice. ‘Nelson Mandela’**

## **I. Ethiopia, from Where to Where?**

I am not discussing theory or myth. But, I am re-addressing the fact that prevails in the contemporary and past century Ethiopia based on personal experiences, empirical evidences, observations and anecdotes narrated by my ancestors. Ethiopian nation’ as a whole have got distinct values and vibrant cultures with their richness and diversities that further gives them individual identity as the country is named a museum of nations.

I do not also dare to dictate that their distinctiveness is responsible for ongoing problems. Neither am I condoning the legacy of past and present injustice that entire Ethiopian nationalities are receiving in general, some nationalities in particular. I am re-emphasising that Ethiopia as a country didn’t have leaders in the history from points of various nationalities of Ethiopia, although the plausibility of this argument remains. Because one third of Ethiopians believe that the country had great leaders until as recently as early 1970s.

The theme of my argument therefore is that, identifying the underlying causes for the lack of genuine leaders and its concomitant effect that resulted in relentless conflicts and cruel treatment of subjugated citizens by the successive regimes to leave the country hopeless and an example of ultra-poverty in historical context. The second part this wee article deals with Ethiopian leaders’ failure to bring the diverging ideologies of the country nationalities to some negotiable level to bring about measurable progress in terms of human rights as well as economic achievements. The final part shall deal with the way forward.

## **II. Historical Fact about the tyrannical Dictatorships**

If we remember about the events of the last decade of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 1<sup>st</sup> half decade of 19<sup>th</sup> century when Ethiopia is brought to the today’s geographical shape under the conquest of Minellik II, other nationalities had their ways of governance based on their traditions. However, after the amalgamation of Ethiopian nationalities into forced unity assimilationist ideology of ‘one Ethiopia’, nationalities have received brutalities of all kinds with various forms and intensities. They were treated inhumanely under the pretext of ‘One Ethiopia’. Under the same slogan, they were seen as commodities given to the rulers’ by almighty God as a present to keep them all together with brutal and degrading treatment disregarding their humanity. The rulers’ deliberately discriminated any person

they don't like where as appointing the other if they wish for their mere interests without recognising the interests of other nations.

In materialising the policies of dehumanising others nationalities; the key payers were and are groups of Amhara and Tigray elites who interchangeably ruled peoples of the Empire. Their brutally cruel treatment against the basic rights of nationalities such as Sidama, Wolayita, Gedeo, Oromo, Ogaden Sumali and others varies in its forms and natures. In general, the most victims of such cruel system were entirely enslaved by the rulers'. As their European counterparts did on native Africans; Ethiopian successive rulers' played similar music with slightly different tunes by masking their ugly faces of brutality and pretending to be examples of anti-colonial power movement leaders whereas they were brutalising and enslaving fellow black people's. Rastafarians' faith can justify how people were misled to believe Ethiopian Emperor Haile Silassie; as liberator of black races. Paradoxically, the Emperor was brutalising the citizens until he was forcibly thrown off from his throne.

In particular, in the South and west of Ethiopia, the slave trade lingered up to the end of Haile Silaasie's regime who claimed to be the leader of anti-European colonial powers while he was promoting slave trades in his own country. During these eras, the rulers infused into the psyche of other nationalities the idea that they (Amharas and Tigreans) are the only ones' anointed to rule other Ethiopian nationalities forever. This perception lingers to date in the minds of ruling class that furthers endless discontents and violence of all kinds that causes ultra poverty.

Any one who raised and raises human rights issues was and is being targeted or killed by the rulers on constant bases simply because of his or her views. People who were made to obey the orders of 'the colonisers' didn't have opportunity to protect their rights although their resistance continued to this date. Mengistu and Garmamie Neway's anti-Haile Silassie's regime movement and their subsequent death penalty substantiate this argument. For instance, Mengistu Hailemariam's regime beheaded hundreds of Sidama liberation fighters and other Sidamas with strong national feelings during his reign until early 1990s. Addis Ababa University students movements against the same regime also received harsh punishment although it doesn't tantamount with today's Meles's regime brutality of 21st century.

In various regions, native peoples are emphatically resisting such brutal treatments of the brutal rulers and waging different forms of liberation struggles. In the end, such brutal acts of Emperor's regime towards fellow citizens caused major debacle to his rule and being replaced by another dictator Mengistu Haile/Mariam whose regime virtually turned Ethiopian into the form of human butchery. Mengistu's regime again being replaced by globally approved smart authoritarian Dictator Meles Zenawi's regime. The later is causing stylish 21<sup>st</sup> century suppression and strategically supported brutality on the citizens. With his regimes' unquenchable taste of human blood, Meles's security forces slaughtered many thousands of innocent and armless civilians in most regions including in Sidama, Oromia, Ogaden, Gambela and Amhara to mention some. His regime is changing the country into a form of human tragedy. The dictators don't learn from their

past mistakes. They deliberately repeat the same grave mistakes against the citizens that make them languish eternally.

The failure of Ethiopian current politicians to understand that they can not continue brutalising nationalities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the level of consciousness of the society is remarkably increased and the people are made aware of the globalised world issues for ever is their established ideas of brutality. It becomes difficult for the successive rulers to change their established ideas and mentality. Thus, Ethiopian brutes repeatedly failed to respect the rights of the peoples. The hallmark of multi-culturalism is that people have a right to be proud of and to assert it, that the successive regimes failed to address in Ethiopia.

### **III. What went wrong and who is responsible for these unfolding tragedies?**

As I have briefly discussed above, Ethiopia as the country has got tremendous potential and richness with spicy of diversity and distinctiveness. If these diversities have been used in a sensible and democratic manner, it would have been a spicy of life to all nationalities of Ethiopia. The fact tells us otherwise. Ongoing discontents about the underlying causes of Ethiopia's failure, according to those who haven't been on power for about a century lies on the successive rulers' failure to allow Ethiopian nationalities to take active and measurable roles in administration of the country in general and their regions in particular.

No one from subjugated regions allowed to decide on their issues for the past century unless some one makes his conscious subservient to the ruling class; re-constructing his identity to brutalise their brothers and sister. Today's regional cadres who are promoting inhuman acts against their people are good examples. Many claim that this as a primarily causes for Ethiopia's failure to achieve its socio-economic goals and respect for basic rights of its citizens.

Let's have a look this in context. In Sidama region for instance (which is true in most regions), no one is practically allowed to decide on any issues that affects their socio-economic and politico-cultural futurity unless they are dictated by the cadres of the regime. No one can raise the question why and how. If the Sidama people are forcibly told that they can't decide on their issues and by who to be governed; how people can think about their futurity? If Oromo people are being told that they are not allowed to say any thing about their affairs and being told to obey their rulers' orders; who will stand for their rights? If Gambella, Gedeo, Wolayita, Hadiya and Kambata... are being told the same order; who will be responsible for the failure of the system? If Sidama, Oromo, Wolayita, ... people are not allowed to be proud of their identity, and by doing so if they don't voluntarily decide to build a strong Ethiopia based on the agreements of entire Ethiopian nationalities; who will condemn these nationalities other than emphatically condemning elites who were and are the architects of the tyranny in the successive regimes? Who were and are the architects of the ruling class from the past century to this date?

If the rulers are the ones to recruit the cadres in all regions, under the pretext of representation, who can with genuine mind judge others nationalities for the all round failure of the country? If one genuinely answers these questions, then there is no reason to blame others who are neither given rights to be parts of real national issues nor allowed to decide on their regional affairs.

In practical term, let alone deciding on the national agendas, people's identity has been replaced by the name of the country 'Ethiopia' without justifying why they are Ethiopians without deciding on Ethiopian issues. Nationalities that are not lucky enough to decide on their issues are obliged to receive the identity of the rulers'. They are obliged to re-construct the essences of their identity if they wish to survive. Their language, culture and their ways of lives regarded as uncivilised and back-warded and directly obliged to accept the ruler's culture, language and ways of lives. Peoples were regarded uncivilised if they don't change their native names to the names of the rulers. So, who do you think is responsible for the failure?

#### **IV. The Way Forward,**

There is no way other than respecting basic rights of the peoples of Ethiopia regardless of their national backgrounds. There have to be boundaries for the successive rulers. They have to know that they have to acknowledge the legacy of past and present injustice and work hard to correct them. And they need to make sure that not to repeat such ugly game to bring about measurable and lasting solution. They have to change their perceptions that embodied in their psyches. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the world is changing the work of human being by Robots, still we are not able to recognise the basic rights of individuals and groups of people's. Literally, the successive rulers are utterly back-warded!!

The current leaders and those who are striving to re-claim their lost throne under the cover of Ethiopian peoples need to revolutionise their thoughts and perceptions. They have to be baptised by the international conventions for basic respect for human rights and have to truly change their mentality to save the country from looming danger and endless conflicts. All of them are struggling for their political hegemony. All their frictions are to further their rules over the ruled ones'. None of them are truly fighting for justices, equality, respect for basic rights, freedom of expression, for the rights for majority's decision. To bring an end for ongoing Ethiopian politico-economic and socio-cultural saga, the only way forward is one: - an establishment of democratic civil society system that gives rights for the peoples to decide on the issues that affects their lives and their futurity. Until that materialises, the game continues!!

**Kambata Xoola, August 14, 2006**