

Mr Zenawi's Regime's Continued Killings of the Innocents and his Politicians Inhumane acts to Stifle Democratic Rights; The Case of Sidama

By Kambata Xoola, October 30, 2005

'The Commission for Africa finds the Conditions of the Lives of the Majority of Africans to be Intolerable and an affront to the dignity of all mankind. We insist upon an Alteration of these Conditions through a change of policy in Favour of the Weak'.

(The Commission for Africa, an Argument, 2005).

I. General Background

Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi is a part and parcel of Tony Blair's 'Commission for Africa'. Yet he is ordering the killings and illegal arrest of many thousands innocent civilians of various nations and nationalities. The very essence of Mr Blair's Commission for Africa, according to him is, supporting Africans to realise their dreams through good governance and leadership that strives to distribute available resources to entire nations of the country and respects basic human rights that maximises people's potential to bring about measurable outcomes.

That is what has been reflected in their meeting of March 11, 2005 in Addis Ababa where Meles Zenawi was praised for his rhetoric. Meles Zenawi is deceiving the west including Mr Blair telling them that he is a champion of 'Democracy and Good Governance' with beautiful lip-services whereas many millions are suffering deliberate man made and naturally caused calamities under his rule. His ill-conceived policies, in particular towards those who are made weak due to strategic marginalisation are intolerable. Such inhumane acts usually take place under the pretext of democracy and regional nation's representation.

The Irony regarding Tony Blair's 'Commission for Africa' is that the presence of Mr Zenawi who has good records of brutalising civilians and suppressing any dissents between such groups of African representatives and others who are ready to make tangible difference on the lives of poor Africans. Controversially, it is not clear whether Mr Blair, a man of courage, conviction, principle and staunch ally of democratic leaders elected this silent killer for this blessed mission between genuine groups of peoples. Personally, I don't believe that Mr Blair is deliberately supporting Ethiopian PM to brutalise voiceless peoples of Ethiopia under his dictatorial rule unless he become a victim of his deceit and pretence.

Nevertheless, many argue that this remains controversial as Mr Blair was the only leader that congratulated Mr Zenawi's win over rigged election in the past 2-3 weeks. Many thousands remain in prison due to May's election and the number is increasing on daily bases. The EU election observer 'Ana Gomes' disqualified the election result and witnessed profound irregularities and rampant human rights abuses. Meles's regime as a result became furious and labelled Ana a member of one of Ethiopian opposition party. This is incredibly ludicrous!! Contrarily, Mr Zenawi was regarded an angel by the west for the past 14 years while he is committing acts of barbarism. This is the first official report against Meles's regime that was huge blow and obliged him to regard the report as 'garbage'. As to me, establishing alliance with Meles's regime in the lights of such barbarism will be morally stinging and tantamount conspiracy.

In reality, the May 15, 2005 election and its aftermaths confirmed how this dictator is capable of taking such brutal and deceitful action against any peaceful resistance of unarmed civilians who come out carrying flags as a sign of peace to protest the vote rigging by Meles's regime. Unarmed civilians were responded with live ammunition that left at least 42 dead and wounding others in June 2005. Although this was a new and shocking event for Europeans and other international election observers; in practice such act of killing is day to day fate of entire Ethiopian nations and nationalities for the past 14 years. To mention some:-

- In April 2001, the killings of 43 peaceful and unarmed Addis Ababa University students while they were peacefully demonstrating; branded looters
- In May 24, 2002, the massacre of at least 69 Sidama peaceful and unarmed demonstrators who were claiming their regional autonomy in Awassa city.
- The Killings of at least 300 Keficho Shekicho in April 2002 in Tepi town of southern Ethiopia
- The massacre of between 2500-3000 innocent Gambella people's from December 2003
- June 2005's Addis Ababa post May 15, 2005's elections massacre of 42 unarmed and peaceful demonstrators who were claiming their constitutional rights are some of the others.

The scale of catastrophe that surrounds Ethiopian nations and nationalities entire lives is beyond imagination. They all suffer in a variety of ways. One is ecologically related problems that made most Ethiopian nations and nationalities vulnerable to recurrent drought and subsequent lingering famine where corrupt politicians are working hard to remain on power than sustainable development and lasting solution. The other is that politically motivated, deliberate subjugation of nations and nationalities of some regions taming them to lingering slavery. Such groups of peoples such as the Sidamas don't have any rights to decide on their issues. The so called the Sidama politicians (PDO's, 'people's Democratic Organisations') who don't represent the interest of the Sidama are accountable to federal regime by crushing the rights of the Sidama people. Therefore, the time for development issues remain non-existent.

In addition to the killings of civilians by Ethiopian security forces, hundreds of thousands were indiscriminately imprisoned and tortured without legal representations. Many thousands made to disappear forever. In particular in Oromia, Ogden Sumali and Sidama regions hundreds of thousands remain in prison without justice for over a decade. In Amhara region, in particular after the May 15, 2005's election, daily arrestment became routine. The killers and saviours are authorities those stretch from federal level through regional, Zone and districts that go up to farmers associations to strategically intimidate and silence any would be resistance. Authorities are organised to spy on one another, not to harness development.

II. The Peculiarity of the Sidama's Sufferings.

The Sidama people being the third populous nation in Ethiopia, they are regarded by the ruler's an 'ethnic minority' whereas less than half a million populated nations are granted regional autonomy. The incumbent's nation itself is less than 4 million. Thus, the Sidama are obliged to live under strategic marginalisation of politico-economic and socio-cultural live.

The Sidama region is potentially rich if there is good political will and encouraging economic and social policies that involve main stakeholders. In practice the Sidama people are not allowed to decide on their lives and futurity. They are strangers in their land whereas the settlers are deciding on their issues. They impose their policies that don't address the problem of the Sidama people through their PDO's who are accountable to the federal regime. Philosophically, individuals as well as groups of peoples need to have encouraging atmosphere with good leadership to be able to fully explore their potential to maximise their capacity that harness development. This is not the case in Sidama region due to a number of reasons.

Primarily, from entire Ethiopian nations and nationalities the Sidama people are the only one's with that size of population to be forcibly obliged to live without regional autonomy. They were raising this issue relentlessly. For this quest, the Sidama people have sacrificed their lives on various occasions and many thousands have been arrested; others made to disappear. Others live under surveillances of security forces since 1992. The May 24, 2002's 69 Sidama unarmed demonstrators' massacre in Awassa city was a part of such historic peaceful resistance movement claiming their basic and constitutional rights. The massacre, however, is ongoing phenomenon against the Sidama people by successive northerners since the era of King Menelik II's colonial expansion in late 1890s. Their successor Meles Zenawi as did Mengistu and Emperor Haile Silassie, is repeating the same history. They all deliberately incapacitate socio-economic and politico-cultural lives of the Sidama people to abolish their very identify.

Secondly, as the Sidama land is potentially productive and any business is lucrative, they don't let the Sidamas to administer their issues. The Sidama coffee is one of the best coffees in the world with its distinctive floral aroma. It accounts about 50-60% washed exportable coffee that is Ethiopian economy blood line in addition to the aid infusion of the west. The Sidama land and the weather are also favourable for business that attracts ruling classes. In their land the Sidamas are considered alien; intimidated and inhumanly treated. Their culture and the way of lives considered back warded and the settlers imposed their culture by strategically abolishing the Sidamas.

Thirdly, the regional president for southern Ethiopia is putting the lives of the Sidama people at hitherto unknown sufferings. Mr Haile Mariam Desalegn who is re-appointed by Meles's regime as a president of regional puppet government is distributing Sidama land in their capital Awassa and around Lake Bilate for his Ethnic Wolaita people to saw hatred and incurable malignancy between two deprived sister nations. Mr Desalegn is uprooting the Sidamas from their capital under the pretext of structural adjustment programs by substituting his ethnic Wolaita peoples in Sidama capital, Awassa.

Another person who is appointed as deputy regional president, Mr Shferaw Shugute, who conspired and ordered the May 24, 2002's Sidama peaceful demonstrators massacre with Mr Desalegn is also playing anti Sidama regional quest's role and he is purposely appointed for this mission. Mr Shugute emphatically resisted on regional government's establishment conference three weeks ago that 'he is only accountable to the federal regime that appointed him not to the Sidama people' answering one question rose about the Sidama people's regional quest. At the moment Mr Shugute with other anti Sidama elements is campaigning on behalf of central government to implement Mr Zenawi's and Mr Desalegn's anti Sidama policy. This inhuman, pathetic and heinous act of such scale is not in the agendas of theoretically democracy galvanised Meles's regime.

III. Volatile Situation Related with Sidamas Quest for Regional Autonomy

Just three weeks ago since Meles's regional governments are established to increase the agony of the Sidama people. The PDO's who are responsible for the killings of the May 24, 2002's Sidama demonstrator's once again are preparing to impose intolerable burden on Sidama people in a number of ways; the primary one being stifling the movements of Sidamas' quest for regional autonomy. At the moment the federal and regional government are working hard to jail any Sidama that raises the issues of regional autonomy and intimidating by their security forces entire Sidamas since October 24, 2005 in all districts. For this purpose, Mr Shugute is said to be main instrumental.

Four weeks ago about 23 innocent Sidama people have been arrested in Arbegona district as a part of this campaign. A precondition is in place to jail any Sidamas who are thought to be vocals. It's increasingly becoming inconceivable the way Meles's regime is behaving towards Sidamas' quest for regional autonomy. Other nations and nationalities are clearly noticing that how the Sidama people are suffering in addition to inhuman acts other nations of Ethiopia are sharing. As the sufferings of the Sidama people without any ones' representation continues, so does the resistance movement that is an out come of such hideous acts against the very rights of the Sidama people.

Ironically, if this is a type of Tony Blair wants of Meles's regime, then we need to re-write the meaning of democracy and human rights. The Sidamas as other nations of Ethiopia need to have regional autonomy for which many have sacrificed their precious lives on various occasions claiming these basic and constitutional rights. Why Sidama people are suppressed and obliged to make their lives sacrifice on constant basis for this mission? What does make the Sidamas' peculiar from other nations of Ethiopia in this regard? Many Sidamas agree that they don't have any one that represents their interest at any level other than those who are loyalist to the federal regime to fumigate them eternally by exposing to lingering poverty.

IV. Recommendations

I think people of principle don't perceive such thing to happen to any nation in a particular way. Their quest is responded with bullet and imprisonment accompanied with brutal torture. The Sidamas are lamenting for international support during this turbulent time in their history. The danger is looming to repeat the same massacre that the Sidama people have suffered during various occasions since 1890s. If international community allow such inhuman acts to happen to the marginalised and helpless, it will be morally unacceptable and intellectually suicidal. Thus, the need for urgent action will be grave concern.

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