

"We must learn to Live together as brothers or perish together as fools"

Dr Martin Luther King

## **February 19 – Could it be a day of a new beginning?** **By Girma Kassa (Chicago)**

As the Somali crisis is unraveling, fearing the worst but hoping and praying for the best, I would like to bring the focus and attention to the main issue that is in the minds of the majority of Ethiopians: the democratization, stability of Ethiopia and the unconditional release of leaders in Kaliti.

Poverty is directly related to democratization and the rule of law. Without good, accountable and transparent administration there can never be development and progress but cronyism and corruption.

During his first speech to parliament in 2007, the prime minister of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi said:

***"Our next focus will be the return of our forces and strengthening our on-going struggle against poverty." [1]***

Though I applaud the emphasis of the Prime Minister on the fight against poverty, I could not comprehend how he would be able to achieve the noble objective he set by undermining the basic foundations that are necessary for the anti-poverty campaign. How could incarcerating anti poverty advocates like Daniel Bekele help the war against poverty? [2]

The main tools to fight poverty are:

- making sure democratic cultures are genuinely established and guaranteed
- the unconditional respect of human rights of all citizens
- creation of a sense of peace and stability by avoiding violence and armed resistances with the politics of accommodation, dialog and reconciliation from the part of the government
- respect of the rule of law

In my September 8 2006 letter to the Prime Minister [3] I wrote:

***"Though the TPLF seems to be the winner for now it will be the ultimate and permanent loser at the end unless it takes some concrete, positive and reconciliatory steps as soon as possible"***

I then called for a new beginning in a new year of 1999 Ethiopian Calendar. I called for the unconditional release of political prisoners. I warned peace cannot be imposed by force and the only solution for our country is forgiveness, love and reconciliation.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a possibly devastating war between the great Emperor Atse Yohanes IV and Atse Minilik II, the then King of Shewa, was averted because our spiritual fathers from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church interfered and pleaded the two leaders to make peace in the name of God. Had the war not been averted, most likely, Ethiopians would have been weakened so much that Italy could have easily colonized Ethiopia in its entirety at a later time. Instead of saying, "akam bulte", "Kemey Keniha" or "Tena Yistelegn" we would have been saying "bonjourno" or "Bona Serra". Dialog, peace and reconciliation between the heroic and legendary leaders back then made Ethiopia stronger and united.

"The Sun Has Risen to Ethiopia. Darkness Is No More!"

Judge Birtukan Mideksa

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Ethiopia is again at a cross road. Though we are **deeply saddened, embarrassed and disgusted by the silence of today's spiritual fathers** (i.e. the Patriarch, Abunes, Etchege, Bishops, Pastors, Imams), who could not even make peace among themselves, non traditional peacemakers have come out from no where to make peace in our country. Professor Ephraim Isaac and the great athlete Haile Gebreselassie have been tirelessly trying to bring the ruling party and Kinijit leaders in Kaliti together. "Blessed be the peace makers for they shall be called the children of God" says the Bible. May God bless both of these two honorable true children of Ethiopia for facilitating dialog between Kinijit and the EPRDF.

EthioZagol, the blogger par excellence, from Addis Ababa gave us the long awaited news that we all felt was the answer to our prayers- the start of dialogue between Arat Kilo and Kaliti [4]. We had all hoped that maybe this would be "*the year of Ethiopia*" the year that we do not hear gun fires in our street, the year we would embrace one another despite our political differences, the year we would fight together our common enemies, poverty and disease, the year we would spend our money and energy in building schools and clinics in Yirgacheffe, Lebassit, Caramara, Dembidollo, Debre Berhan or any other town in Ethiopia, the year Engineer Hailu Shawel, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ato Fassika Belete, Dr Merrara Gudina, Ato Daoud Ibssa... would sit together around a table and work amicably for a ONE, united and democratic Ethiopia.

Some may call me a dreamer living in a fantasyland for persistently calling for the rapprochement of Kinijit and EPRDF. Some may have lost hope. Some may not see a bright future in Ethiopia at all. Many may have given up on dialog and reconciliation. More and more may have decided to resort to non-peaceful means to address their concerns. They may mention the latest unfortunate news from seminawork [4] that the negotiation between Meles and Kinijit leaders are broken down as a proof that we cannot negotiate with the ruling party at all. However, though there is always a setback in any negotiation we must never close door for peace and dialog. Good elements in the EPRDF might prevail.

The EPRDF leaders may feel emboldened by the victory in Somalia. They may be deceiving themselves by thinking that they can get away by locking up Kinijit leaders for years and suppressing the people by force. They may have been filled with a false sense of security because they got some fleeting praises from the Americans. They may simply assume they are invincible.

By incarcerating the true Kinijit leaders for years they might think Kinijit has lost forever. However, their sense of security is false. The defeat of Kinijit is only temporary and cosmetic. As Dr Martin Luther King said:

***"unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. The temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant."***

**The EPRDF officials must know that, unless they unconditionally release political prisoners the alternative may be very ugly. Their inaction now may lead us to an irreversible chaos in Ethiopia that will surely consume all of us like wild fire, including rulers in Arat kilo themselves (wherever they may be), their children, their relatives and all their friends. Unless we come together and reconcile our differences today no one will be safe tomorrow.** As Frederick Douglas stated :

***"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."***

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Hence failure to release the political prisoners will be a monumental political blunder that no Ethiopian will look at it lightly. It will definitively lead us to a point of no return.

The EPRDF officials have a choice to make. They can either build up on some of their visible accomplishments they had and make peace with the people, or they can decide to continue being on the opposite side of the majority. They can either be part of the solution or they can be officially be considered as the "enemy" of Peace and Democracy that need to be fought with all necessary means. They can either earn an honorable place in history or they can be despised and vilified for generations.

Therefore, I respectfully call again the EPRDF officials to make the right and godly choices and:

- **Unconditionally release all political prisoners.(Kinijit leaders, prisoners from ONC, reporters, human right activists, former TPLF members like Siye Abraham ...)**
- **Form a negotiation team that immediately starts a dialog for a political solution with Kinijit and other political forces.**

Let our voices for peace and reconciliation be amplified and propagated like a stormy windy waves, penetrates the walls of Arat Kilo palace and be heard like music in the ears of the EPRDF officials. It is my hope and prayer that the leadership of the EPRDF will look beyond the horizon and above their individual prides, and take historic steps at this historic moment in this historic country of ours. It is my hope and prayer that Kaliti prisoners will dine together with their families and the "Robyn Island" of Ethiopia be emptied. It is my hope armed groups will renounce violence, lay down their arms and come to the peaceful table. It is my hope that all parties will come to the recognition that the culture of violence does not work in Ethiopia anymore. We are tired of an Ethiopian killing another Ethiopian. We are tired of seeing the blood of our brothers and sisters shed in vain. We are tired of hearing gun fires. We are tired of smelling powders from explosives. We are tired of spending billions of dollars on weapons. We are tired of living in tyranny and fear.

Let us choose hope over despair, peace over war, love over hate, dialogue over confrontation to live with dignity in that great land of ours, ETHIOPIA.

Let February 19 not be the day we slam the door for peace and stability!

Let February 19 be "deliverance Day", the day of reckoning and a day of a new beginning!

With hope and Prayer,

Girma Kassa (Chicago) - muziky68@yahoo.com

[1] - [http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press\\_Section/publication.php?Main\\_Page\\_Number=3311](http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/publication.php?Main_Page_Number=3311)

[2] - [http://www.actionaid.org/index.asp?page\\_id=1079](http://www.actionaid.org/index.asp?page_id=1079)

[3] - [http://www.ethiomeia.com/carepress/meles\\_miracle.html](http://www.ethiomeia.com/carepress/meles_miracle.html)

[4] - <http://www.ethioforum.org/News/article/sid=2107.html>

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