

ETHIOPIAN REALITY: *QUO VADIS OPPOSITION?**

By Tecola W. Hagos

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ETHIOPIAN REALITY: *QUO VADIS OPPOSITION?**

[ETHIOPIAN REALITY: WHERE TO FROM THIS POINT ON?]

By Tecola W. Hagos

PART ONE:

I. Introduction

A series of Press Releases recently issued by the Executive Committee of the EPRDF, the Office of the Prime Minister, the National Electoral Board et cetera was meant to inform or enlighten Ethiopians on the Election of 2005; however, it failed miserably. For example, the Deputy Prime Minister made a rambling statement on the topic of “democracy” punctuated with threatening accusations against alleged anarchical behavior of the opposition. The Information Minister parroted the same type of threat later. All these discordant statements and near chaotic situation within the government of Meles Zenawi did not help alleviate the political anxiety of Ethiopians. The brutal suppression of the demonstration of Addis Ababa University students, and later in June 6-7 the violence unleashed by fully armed military and police forces on peaceful demonstrators resulting in the murder and wounding of a couple of hundred people, simply increased the fear of wide spread violence and unprecedented level of political turmoil.

So far, the government of Meles Zenawi only succeeded to give us the impression that Ethiopia is still run by individuals who have no sentimental or patriotic connection with

the Ethiopian people. Nowhere did any of the statements coming from the mouthpiece of the EPRDF or the officials of the Government of Meles Zenawi contained anything that reflects, even remotely, the election reality (process) as experienced by the people of Ethiopia for the last five years of grinding systematic emasculation and disfranchisement. It confirms to me the fact that all Ethiopians suffer a common enemy in the person of Meles Zenawi.

Ethiopia's current problem is not with the opposition or with the people of Ethiopia—it is not even with the ghost-like leaders of EPRDF's affiliated political organizations, such as ANDM, OPDO et cetera. Ethiopia's greatest problem and the most serious obstacle to peace is Meles Zenawi. It is Meles Zenawi and his treasonous government that led us to the present political and economic deplorable condition in Ethiopia. I have discussed in detail on Meles Zenawi's treason and criminal activity against the State of Ethiopia and Ethiopians in several lengthy articles and essays posted in this Website and others for the last ten years. If we just concentrate on the election of 2005 for the duration of this article, we can see how such Government sponsored corruption of the election process has led to a dangerous bottleneck at this time.

All the threat of violent crackdown on members of the opposition is a symptom of an unpopular government tittering on its last leg and holding on to dear life before its complete destruction under the popular uprising of the people of Ethiopia. Some of the threat by the government of Meles Zenawi is being carried out, as we speak, against opposition leaders and demonstrators wherein thousands were detained over two hundred Ethiopians killed and wounded since June 6, 2005. It is sad that dictators and their supporters never learn the fact that people, sooner than later, will find a way of destroying such dictatorial governments and the leaders thereof. Ethiopia is no exception to that timeless truism, especially considering the fact that Ethiopians have overthrown several brutal dictators in the past.

The election of 2005 may be a true watershed event and a new beginning in the long political life of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. It seems that we have been a nation of a string of beginnings without successful follow-ups to date, and may be this time we may break that trend. The 2005 Election may as well be considered as the awakening of the democratic and freedom loving spirit of the people of Ethiopia. The election of 2005, for the first time in Ethiopian history, brought together for peaceful political purposes individuals and groups of diverse background, ethnicity, political agenda, government philosophy et cetera voluntarily in an effort to counter and boot out a very unpopular and anti-Ethiopia government. However, before we get to the main purpose of this article, I believe a brief recoup of the leadership of the last one hundred years in Ethiopia may help us put things in some perspective. Without sounding judgmental, if that is possible in a situation of this nature, I must point out our (Ethiopians) tendency of having short memories, and a disconcerting willingness to forgive the violence and abuse of our leaders. In order to have a good understanding of what is taking place at this time in Ethiopia, we need to put the whole event surrounding the 2005 Election in its historical context.

II. Brief Recoup of Three Ethiopian Regimes

Professor Bahru Zewde, the outstanding Ethiopian historian, wrote ten years ago, about our national fixation with categorization of our leaders in terms of a Manichean world-view. He wrote by asking rhetorical questions, “Will we ever see the day when Ethiopian rulers will be viewed as human beings who operated within the context of their times rather than as demy-gods or monsters? Or is the present going to be the perennial millstone of the past? While it is an inescapable fact that history can be written only from the perspective of the present, it need not be the case that it be completely subservient to the needs and requirements of the Present.” [Bahru Zewde, “Hayla-Sellase: From Progressive to Reactionary,” *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.2 No.2 (New Series), 1995, p 100.] At a deeper level, no time sensitive principle can be held as “a principle” normative or otherwise. I, as a person who does not think of time as segmented, consider all references to “a past,” “a present,” or “a future” to be based on illusion. All fundamental values are eternally in “the present” since time itself is a “category” of the mind as Kant put it; therefore, sequencing events in time to give such events privileged consideration does not make much sense.

I am amazed how often Ethiopian leaders have flaunted several promising “beginnings” over the last two hundred years. If we just focus on events after the death of Emperor Menilik II (in 1913), starting with the types of changes that Emperor Haile Selassie I instituted in the 1920s to the election of 2005 under Meles Zenawi, we see numerous opportunities that our leaders have wasted from using effectively to improve our political and economic situation. One excuse, often cited by scholars and lay people alike, for such continuous screw-ups may be our culture—a culture thorn between religious restraints and natural tendencies without the intermediary rationalist development necessary to any political and/or economic development—and the never-ending internal and external conflicts and wars to preserve our identities of plurality and oneness at the same time. However, no matter how grim our political and economic history may have been, as a “People” we have maintained our humanity to an amazing high degree of morality. I know of no other “people” who had such a degree of sense of justice or assumption of individual responsibility for individual actions, and great restraint from punishing innocent people by association.

Successive Ethiopian leaders could have done miraculous things with such highly receptive and cooperative constituents, had they for the briefest of moments faith in the people they governed. Ethiopian leaders mostly failed repeatedly in their responsibilities to bring peace and prosperity to this day, never learning from history or their predecessors’ mistakes. Because of our tendency of having a “*debo*” mentality of being moved by ongoing events in a reactive and emotional manner, I have restated in compact form, as a reminder, the state of leadership in Ethiopia from the 1920s to date.

A. Emperor Haile Selassie I

Emperor Haile Selassie started out as a great reformer as Regent during the reign of Empress Zewditu and continued his reformist policy as the newly crowned Emperor after the death of Zewditu until he was driven away to exile in 1935 by the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. Being the first Ethiopian Emperor ever to have been driven off by an

occupying force must have had a lasting traumatic effect on his personality. After the Italians were kicked out of Ethiopia in 1941, Haile Selassie was restored to his Throne in 1941 after a five-year exile in a foreign and strange country. There was a distinct shift in his behavior after his return to power in 1941. He seems to have lost his way after his restoration as Emperor. Something must have happened to him in his stay as a refugee for almost five years in England in a modest home in Bath, England.

His long reign from 1941 to 1974 is characterized by cosmetic and imitative changes that did not affect the fundamental flawed relationship that had existed in the archaic traditional political structure, which he inherited along his Crown, as part of Ethiopia's tradition and history. His overemphasis on non-technical and elitist academic learning leading to ever growing bureaucratic white-collar profession marked Ethiopia for failure. His concentration of development in discrete areas mostly in areas close to Addis Ababa, where most of Ethiopia's feudal lords have their estate, devoured almost all of Ethiopia's meager resources. Especially the effort to develop Addis Ababa and the region around that single area had left the rest of Ethiopia with a devastating poverty and underdevelopment. Most importantly, the consequence of such disparity of treatment, of lopsided economic development was the build up of tremendous resentment and ethnic conflict. Several regions such as Gojjam, Gondar, Wollo, and particularly Tygraei were almost entirely left out from much of the national development effort. The underdevelopment of Tygraei, Wollo, and later Gojjam has a particularly insidious personal vendetta type element. [The periphery areas close to international boundaries between Ethiopia and Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan were the least integrated regions of Ethiopia.]

As a matter of fact, the indiscriminate bombing by British war plans during the Woyane uprising devastated the livestock, farmland, and villages to such a degree that Tygraei could not recover from such devastations for decades. Some people even attribute the chronic famine in Tygraei was partially caused in a chain of events, by that bombing in addition to natural disasters. It is a fact that Haile Selassie throughout his long reign neglected Tygraei. The rest of the Ethiopian population did almost nothing to help stop the famine in Tygraei. It is only when the devastation spread into Northern Wollo in 1971-72 that ultimately the revolution that swept away Haile Selassie started.

To this day, one reads articles by chauvinistic individuals from other ethnic groups, full of contemptuous disparagement of Tygreans because of their suffering as victims of famine due to the discriminatory policy of an absolute monarch. It is also true in private homes the contempt for Tygreans is built around the fact that they sought their lively hood in order to survive in other parts of Ethiopia especially in Addis Ababa. It is amazing to see how individuals, who by accident of birth are from the area and who are beneficiaries of the lopsided economic development of Addis Ababa and vicinity where the wealth of the nation is poured into, disparage other Ethiopians unfortunate to have been born elsewhere in Ethiopia. Due to such historic antagonism, the contempt on the chauvinists' side and the resentment of the general population from areas mentioned above remains to this day a polarizing factor in our political and economic lives.

Haile Selassie's other monumental error was his total immersion in international relations in a manner that did not commiserate with the political and economic reality at home. It is another example that had resulted in devastating social, economic, and political disasters. The polarizing effect of the presence of massive international organizations in Addis Ababa is of a magnitude that will continue to affect the well-being of Ethiopia for decades. Failure to reform the land ownership laws and failure to concentrate on rural development were probably the most serious errors of the long reign of Haile Selassie that resulted in massive famine, death, and displacement affecting the lives of millions of Ethiopians.

Haile Selassie minimally prepared the Ethiopian People for political and economic independence. He left a political and economic structure that has no self-sustaining safety structure against military takeover or tyranny. The system collapsed on its own with minimal threat from a single rebellious garrison hundreds of miles far from the Capital City. We read very elaborate stories how Haile Selassie manipulated his way into acquiring political power and ultimately the crown. No matter how interesting such stories are, the one thing that comes across from all of those stories is the fact that Haile Selassie was a superb strategist with extremely well developed self-discipline and great intelligence. His problem was that he did not use all of his talent to improve the political and economic lives of Ethiopians. He left Ethiopia poorer than he started out with at the beginning of his leadership. Despite the fact of what I have stated above, Haile Selassie was a better leader than Mengistu or Meles. Haile Selassie missed a great opportunity to transform Ethiopia into a truly great self-reliant nation. When his end came, it was swift and monumental. He died in the hands of Mengistu Hailemariam, alone old, sick, his family imprisoned, and some scattered in the World.

After 1974, the first true immigration and refugee waves of Ethiopians left Ethiopia and sought refuge in other African nations (the Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, etc.), and European and North American countries. Those refugees were almost all former officials of Haile Selassie and their children mostly from Addis Ababa, Shoa, and are now mostly part of the opposition. They tend to be part of non-ethnic political associations except a few who have formed the core of "Shoa" Amhara associations centered around some of the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches in Washington, DC and in other parts of the United States, Canada, Europe et cetera. By comparison to other groups, their politics is quite sophisticated and their associations and organizations quite exclusive. Some of the leading Ethiopian intellectuals are part of this group. Even though Menilik II is a none negotiable item for them, I tend to have faith in their sense of Ethiopian history, their faith in Ethiopia's destiny, and their Ethiopian nationalism, at times too narrow, than in members of any other group.

B. Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam

With nothing more than street-smart, a former military depot supervisor for a military garrison in Harrar Province, Mengistu Hailemariam, crept into a position of power and stayed in power for seventeen years unleashing one of the most brutal and violent governments in Ethiopian history. The fact that such low-ranking soldier could carry out a military coupe contrasts sharply with other military coupes in Africa where usually

high-ranking officers led such takeovers. It also confirms to us how far Haile Selassie had emasculated the people of Ethiopia from developing institutional political structures to insure and safeguard our human rights, which would have effectively contained any upstart from usurping political power. “Après moi, le déluge.”

Mengistu goaded with radicalized Ethiopian students, both locally and from abroad, transformed himself from a barroom brawler (which he was) to a fire spitting revolutionary. Most Ethiopians were involved in the political orgy that followed in the lawlessness, dehumanization, torturing, and murdering of fellow Ethiopians accused of being members of the aristocracy, feudal landowners, rich merchants, et cetera. The first act of political “development” of Mengistu’s version of revolution was to expropriate the cars of wealthy individuals and drive around at high speed about the city.

The Seventeen years of Mengistu’s violent reign exposed the soft under-belly of the so-called educated revolutionary Ethiopians, often-idolized Ethiopian peasants, workers, urbanites and most every ethnic group. During that period, we witnessed how such individuals were willing to commit atrocities on fellow Ethiopians, where even pregnant women, young children, elderly men etcetera were not spared the brutality and violence of a nation in a bloody political orgy. Those murdered by Mengistu and his thugs of Kebeles in one single program that Mengistu unleashed as the “Red Terror,” supposedly to counter the “White Terror” of opposition groups (mainly EPRP), is numbered conservatively over a hundred thousand in a period of three to four weeks.

The atrocities committed by Mengistu did not even spare our Church Fathers. He murdered the Patriarch and several other high-ranking officials of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. One must not forget the fact that all the atrocities, murders, tortures, mutilations et cetera were not all carried out by Mengistu in person. He had his legal prosecutors investigating possible victims and findings by the same for execution and imprisonment; he had political “experts” and agitators expressing the necessity of the extermination of the members of the old-regime, in their newspapers and magazines. He had diplomats out in the international arena denying if they could and justifying if they must all those atrocities and murders and mynham of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians, and misinforming both the Ethiopian public and the World in general.

Lest we forget that we have lived through (experienced) the most brutal and blood soaked regime in Ethiopia’s long history that led directly to the rebellion of OLF, TPLF and several others, let us recoup the atrocities Mengistu committed in Tygreai and Eritrea, the two northern regions that experienced the long running scourge under military rule. It is the outrageous and brutal violence against the civilian population where tens of thousands lost their lives or were uprooted from their homes into refugee camps in neighboring countries. The atrocities of Mengistu were the triggering causes, in addition to the economic neglect specially suffered by Tygreai for years, which led to the formation of liberation movements in the 1970s including the predecessor of the EDU in the area. There is clear historical context that led to the formation of the TPLF and the other movements elsewhere in Ethiopia.

Let us pause and reflect on the joy expressed by the majority of the residents of Addis Ababa when the EPRDF entered Addis Ababa in 1991. (Of course, members of Mengistu's security forces tried the same strategy Saddam Hussein's thugs are doing in Iraq at this time in 2005, but such effort failed because there was no popular support and due to the cowardice and opportunistic nature of the members of the security forces of Mengistu, wherein some of whom promptly offered their services to the new leaders.) The next important issue is to consider how Meles Zenawi squandered all the good will of the people of Ethiopia in the fourteen years he had been in power. One way of measuring his errors is to study the way he managed the in-fighting within the TPLF and the EPRDF. The other is to study his activities in the larger political arena of the Ethiopian "governmental" activities some of which could pass as a policy but most activities were improvisations and personal manipulations with neither strategic nor tactical value. .

The second wave of Ethiopian refugees with the largest concentration of ex-military personnel left Ethiopia in the year of the defection of Mengistu Hailemariam and the fall of the caretaker government a few months later. Except for a limited number of people, this group of refugees is a typical "mass" with individuals with all kinds of background from Red Terror executioners to high-ranking political functionaries that include Ministers and Ambassadors. The members of this second wave of refugees tend to support CUD and to a lesser extent UEDF. A number of those second-wave refugees and those who were members of the old Workers Party of Ethiopia (WEP) back in Ethiopia are in leadership positions in the Member organizations of CUD. Specially, the former commanders and foot soldiers in Mengistu's military, the officials and organizers of the now defunct Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE), and a large number of its members are part of the most effective campaign structure Ethiopia had ever seen as part of a non-governmental organization. To their great credit, they have effectively routed EPRDF in Election 2005.

C. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi

The reception to the EPRDF coming into Addis Ababa in 1991 contrasts sharply with the one we witnessed in 2005 where nearly two million people residents of Addis Ababa, the same City residents who welcome EPRDF with open arms, came out to show their solidarity with the opposition against the EPRDF and Meles Zenawi. What did Meles Zenawi do that soured the People of Ethiopia so much that in Addis Ababa, Dessie, Gondar, and several areas all over Ethiopia except Tygreai people voted overwhelmingly to oust Meles Zenawi and his party from office?

I am amazed every time I consider the background of Meles Zenawi, how such an individual could end up becoming President then Prime Minister of Ethiopia. His Grandfather and Father were identified by the community where he grew up as Italian Fascist supporters during the occupation of Ethiopia for five years (1935-41), as some of Haile Selassie's high officials were too. Moreover, when he started out in the TPLF, he was a junior to everyone in the leadership of the TPLF. It was only in 1983 that he popped out suddenly as leader of that movement. Over the years I have learned from documents and people who knew him well that he identified with the Eritrean cause for

independence all of his political life including his time as a lowly functionary in the TPLF before he became the leader of the TPLF, more than he did with the welfare of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, as I have written several times before, Meles has shown great skill in manipulating his comrades to get to the top, and also displayed great courage in confronting and taking the initiative to quash extremely adverse challenges to his leadership by very formidable leaders within the TPLF.

There are those who dispute the fact that Meles and his TPLF forces did commit as much atrocities as Mengistu and his forces did. In fact, the comparison may be inappropriate. However, the recent indiscriminate shooting at peaceful demonstrators in Addis Ababa murdering and killing of score of Ethiopians indicates that Meles may be heading in the direction of becoming the worst mass murderer in Ethiopian history. At any rate, it will be a mistake to justify any degree of atrocities by claiming that it is less than some other atrocities. Even a single act of murder by a political group is a serious breach and criminal act against the democratic and human rights of the victim and that of society. Moreover, Meles and his supporters have committed far worse crimes against the State of Ethiopia and Ethiopians than just physical atrocities. By agreeing readily to the independence of “Eritrea,” and by agreeing to the Algiers Agreement of 2000, Meles Zenawi and associates have preemptively left Ethiopia without its historic Afar Coastal Territory and its territorial waters in the Red Sea and also territories in the Northwest and middle North borderlands. They have disfranchised millions of Ethiopians in the above-mentioned areas from their Ethiopian citizenship by such international agreements.

President Carter, probably to clear his conscious, wrote in his recent report on the Ethiopian Election 2005 the following telling characterization of Meles Zenawi as the one person who is responsible for the landlocking of Ethiopia and for “Eritrea’s” independence: “During these months, in 1989 and 1990, I also became acquainted with Meles Zenawi, the leader of Tigraean revolutionaries. He would meet me at airports in Paris, Atlanta, and London when I came into the region, spread his war maps on the floor, and describes his progress against Mengistu's forces. After Meles prevailed in 1991 and despite my concerns about Eritrean leadership, he granted Eritrea complete independence in 1993, cutting Ethiopia off from the Red Sea and making it the most populous landlocked nation in the world.” [Jimmy Carter, *Ethiopia Trip Report: May 11- 17: Ethiopia National Parliamentary and Local Elections*, 19 May 2005] [In a different context dealing with the landlocking of Ethiopia, Herman Cohen, a former State Department official, had written also regretting the role he played undermining Ethiopia’s territorial integrity leading to the independence of Eritrea.] Several Ethiopians including myself have written several articles, held multiple conferences, conducted interviews, wrote petition statements et cetera for almost ten years trying to reverse the betrayal of Ethiopia by its leaders and by supposedly friendly governments of Western nations including the Government of the United States.

Meles Zenawi had one of the best chances (beginnings) to bring about enduring and beneficial political and economic changes in Ethiopia than any other leader since Menilik when the EPRDF overrun the remnants of the Military Regime of Mengistu Hailemariam. He came into absolute power after tremendous manipulation and

elimination of a number of TPLF veteran members since 1991. No leader could ask for a better political asset than such grand entrance. Because of his anti-Ethiopian sentiments and half-baked ideas about state formation and political processes, and due to his appalling disregard of Ethiopia's rich history as a nation built out of several ethnic and religious groups in a process that was centuries old, he led Ethiopia into a disastrous international political bottleneck encumbering us with illegal and treasonous international "agreements." On the national front too, he introduced one of the most hurtful politically divisive ethnic based political structure fragmenting the nation into several mini-states. Such form of "federalism" will continue for a longtime to be the source of our ethnic conflict undermining Ethiopia's long-standing nationalist movement from being an effective building process for unity and solidarity.

The creation of business enterprises as an extension of the TPLF in the guise of non-profit organizations, supposedly aimed to make-up for the neglect of Tygreai by the two successive previous governments of Haile Selassie and Mengistu Hailemariam, was a serious strategic error. The same goal could have been achieved under a national budgetary financing and planning process open to public comment and scrutiny. Even though the people of Tygreai minimally benefited from all the investment and business activities of enterprises spawned by the TPLF, the scheme did backfire against Tygreans leaving most Ethiopians with a sense of being betrayed of their trust by Tygreans in general. The one entity that gulped up all the wealth created by such enterprises is the TPLF and a handful of its high officials and relations and not the simple farmers, traders et cetera of Tygreai. Fair play and justice are values that Ethiopians uphold the most and expect from their leaders throughout Ethiopia's long history. A leader who breached such profoundly Ethiopian sentiment is despised, hated, distrusted and often overthrown. Meles Zenawi and associates did not have the depth of understanding nor the disposition to live by such elevated standard of behavior expected of them by most Ethiopians. Thus, the feeling of a sense of disparity of treatment of Tygreans from the rest of the Ethiopian population resulted in tremendous resentment and hate toward Tygreans in general.

The most criminal act Meles Zenawi committed, even before he became a national leader as President of the Ethiopian Transition Government and Prime Minister, against the State of Ethiopia and Ethiopians was his full scale participation and conspiracy with the EPLF leadership to help "Eritrea" achieve its independence and to cede legitimate Ethiopian Afar Territories to an Eritrea yet to be a nation. In furthering his mission to support and strengthen Eritrea, he signed the treasonous Algiers Agreement of 2000 preempting the historically supported legitimate sovereign rights of Ethiopia over territories much of what is now claimed by "Eritrea," Ethiopian Afar Coastal Territory, and the territorial waters on the Red Sea. Contrary to international law and practices and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, the Algiers Agreement revived long dead international agreements from the Colonial era, agreements supposedly signed between Emperor Menilik II or his representative with the Italian Government in 1900, 1902, and 1908.

The moral of the story, at this point in our history, is a warning to all political parties that direct involvement in investments and enterprises by political parties through surrogates

is a divisive and destructive scheme that will accelerate the breakup of the nation on ethnic lines. Meles Zenawi and associates are responsible for the current resentment directed against Tygreans and the economic polarization and monopolistic economic system prevalent in Ethiopia. If there is resentment against Tygreans at this point, it is due to the fact of Meles Zenawi, with the TPLF, identifying and projecting himself as “conquerors” and “Tygreans” and not as Ethiopians, and the direct involvement of Meles Zenawi in the loss of Ethiopian territory, disfranchisement of Ethiopians on the basis of their ethnic identity, lopsided economic development concentrated in Tygreai, and the political empowerment of individuals whose loyalty to Ethiopia is questionable.

Members of the TPLF and the umbrella organization, EPRDF, can salvage the situation by ejecting Meles Zenawi and appointing someone else to lead the TPLF and the EPRDF. They must take the initiative to mend or build new bridges of connections with the opposition groups in order to establish either a government by the Opposition after proper accounting of vote tampering and corruption has been cleared, or to form a new transitional or caretaker government, which will be responsible to draft a new constitution and to hold free election in two years. To wait for two years is nothing if the ultimate result will be setting us in the right direction.

PART TWO:

III. Bad Habits Die Hard, But They Do Die

I have been reading several well thought out and constructive articles and open letters by concerned Ethiopians, such as articles by Abegaz Belette, Bereket Kiros, Fekade Shewakena, et cetera in different Ethiopian websites expressing views that may help us build understanding and cross-ethnic communication in order to maintain our national independence, our unity, and national identity without quashing our cultural diversity in the process. I was particularly impressed how well Fekade Shewakena has understood the problem of being identified with a hated ruling party through ethnicity rather than ideology. That was the subtle theme underlying his reasoning in his “Open Letter” article. The “Open Letter” is a masterly defense and promotion of democratic pluralism and the democratic process written with the right degree of parody. The following is a quotation from the “Open Letter” that best illustrates my point:

“All patterns of the results so far show that the people have chosen your [referring to Meles] opposition. We may differ on the detailed interpretations of the results of this election even at this preliminary stage, but we can agree on one thing. The Ethiopian people have just said that the status quo as represented by your leadership and the EPRDF is unacceptable. They can't say this any louder. The complete wipe out of your party from Addis Ababa, which is the microcosm of the country, speaks volumes if you listen carefully. Add to this the humiliating defeat of all your important ministers. For anybody with little common sense the fact that the people have rejected your party is clear. It is hard to imagine that you can sit in the middle of a sea of people that rejected you with such overwhelming vote and rule the country in peace. The right thing for you to do now is to congratulate the winners, the Ethiopian people and, of course, the opposition that found their voices and be a part of the celebration. The people just made a referendum on the fourteen years of your rule. It is too late to make any corrections now.

You must be familiar with a famous saying in Ethiopia, *birilie keneqa ayhonim iqa.*”
[Emphasis added]

Of course, in the background of all these transformative hope, we still have the cacophony of hate filled voices of individuals throwing barbed darts of hate and goading people trying to incite ethnic conflict, and some even going to the extent of calling for ethnic warfare to expel or exterminate Ethiopians with certain ethnic background. One individual has even the gull of reposting the Fascistic hate filled article/interview of Tilahun Yilma from a few years back. [For all I know, Tilahun Yilma may have reconsidered his ideas and may be thinking as an Ethiopian in a holistic manner rather than as a victim of ethnicity advocating for tiny ephemeral solutions.] I understand that some of the statements one reads in Ethioindex and other Ethiopian chat websites may be the works of agents of foreign governments trying to create an atmosphere of confusion and distrust among Ethiopians that may lead to civil war and atrocities in Ethiopia like events that took place in Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi. If such individuals are writing such outrageous and criminal instigations for genocide, the very least they could do is to write their moronic ideas in correct grammar and in proper sentence structure.

I have also read few individuals’ writings still simmering on my criticism of Emperors Tewodros and Menilik II of almost a year ago, as if such writers (contemporaries) were attacked personally by my critical articles. I stand by my criticism of both individual Emperors and the feudal tradition of Ethiopia. I make my stand firmly because it is simply a matter of history and its interpretation and not any personal biases or narrow ethnicism on my part. I never criticized any Ethiopian leader whether it is Emperor Menilik or Emperor Tewodros based on their ethnic identity. Conversely, I have never praised any Emperor either based on his ethnic identity. My effort in setting “historical” records straight, which I find distorted by court-historians and repeated thereafter uncritically in popular stories, has nothing to do with my family background, relationship with my contemporaries, or my biased love and admiration of Ethiopians and Ethiopia.

My critical writing is simply part of my struggles for a better future for all Ethiopians, and an effort to introduce critical thinking and reevaluation of some of our most “sacred” assumptions and distortions of real events in our past relationship with each other. I even received one of the most insidious letters ever written to me, by none other than by a very close friend of over thirty years because I pointed out the violence of Tewodros and how he committed atrocities against innocent Ethiopians in his reign of terror. In that letter, I was threatened with blackmail, with exposure of my past youthful “misdeeds,” insulted in guttural language et cetera. No matter what I may have done in my own personal life, in no way would have aggravated or diminished the brutality and treasonous activities of some of Ethiopia’s Emperors and leaders I wrote about—irrespective of the fact of my criticism, their misdeeds and brutality stands as a monument to our failure and not as a trophy to our success.

Let me put it bluntly, in plain words, that a living breathing Ethiopian is far more important and precious to me than all the Emperors and Kings (includes Empresses and Queens) from our history combined. If one cannot care about real people with real pain

and suffering, disfranchised and under the yoke of relentless tyranny in the here-and-now, such a person's indignation about my criticism of long-dead emperors and kings is hollow and hypocritical. My criticism of past leaders is based on historical facts and not something I made up. At any rate, what is the connection between the lives and activities of our past Emperors and my contemporary Ethiopians? If we are interested in hero-worship, there are other Emperors of great achievement and moral standing for us to admire without going into a swoon over Tewodros and Menilik, such as Emperors like Zera Yacob, Fasiledas, Iyasu the Great, Haile Selassie et cetera. And who would not admire the aesthetic and artistic impact of my favorite Salessawi Dawit of Gondar, otherwise known as Emperor Dawit III. I have repeatedly pointed out in a number of articles and essays about the virtue and greatness of some of our past leaders. The history of our Emperors and Kings is valuable to the extent that we learn about our tradition and ourselves, but not to be consumed by such history to the extent of viciously hurting friends and family members who happen to differ on the evaluation of such leaders. If individuals have a personal dislike to my person or my personal activities, there is no need to connect their personal dislikes of me to my writing that ought to be evaluated on its own merit.

I am writing all this side issues in order to remind how deep our hate for each other can turn friends to mortal enemies that it can override friendship, family relationship, even national interest. I hope the examples I gave above would help us to go beyond our petty differences as individuals and focus on the current real-life problems facing us all. As the saying goes, even fingers on ones own hands are not of the same size. No one should expect us all to fall into one single mold of Ethiopianness; in our unique ways we are singularly Ethiopians. Our cultural, linguistic, social differences should be a source for the beauty of our diversity like in a mosaic work enriching as all in the final masterwork of life's tapestry. Rather than brood on our diversity, let us instead focus on the singular immediate danger facing us all in the person of Meles Zenawi and his murderous group of associates. No need to remind my fellow Ethiopians that Meles Zenawi is in command of a military and security force fully armed and ready to commit carnage for political and economic power in order to promote his selfish interest and those of foreign governments at an exorbitant cost to our nation.

I do regret the fact that the current opposition politics is a reactive one. It is tragic that the opposition in Ethiopia is an opposition of protest because it is an opposition created out of the experiences of persecuted and violently abused Ethiopians whose experience or contact with Ethiopian leaders of the last fifty years is negative. The opposition is made up all kinds of people that includes individuals who have personal grudge against the EPRDF, such as former officials and soldiers of Mengistu. Others are in the opposition because they hate Tygreans and cannot bear having a Tyrolean as a leader of Ethiopia; however, the majority of individuals are in the opposition because they love their country and want to save Ethiopia from further destruction in the hands of Meles Zenawi and his foreign masters. Unemployment and the daily grinding of poverty is another motivation for opposing Meles and his Party. Still others are in the opposition because they believe they can provide a better leadership than Meles and his associates have provided so far.

What ever the motivation for opposing Meles, such purpose is acceptable to me. I find Meles Zenawi to be our common and most dangerous and most powerful enemy.

Putting the “mass” characteristics of the opposition in mind, I want to make it clear that one has to work with ones contemporaries no matter how flawed they maybe. Life is not a TV set where you could change channels if you do not like the one you happen to be watching. It is not either a game where you could call “time-out” and change players. We have to work with our contemporaries the best we could. I realize that the opposition groups are not the ideal opposition I would have loved to follow, but they have proven to be extremely courageous and up to the task of leading Ethiopia to far more equitable democratic governance where the individual Ethiopian’s fundamental rights will be respected under a political structure that will be inclusive of all Ethiopians. Even though the opposition is made up of groups with diverse political outlooks and programs, I believe the leadership of such groups will settle on fundamental principles of political and democratic rights as well as human rights that will be the basis for all future relationships of the diverse people of Ethiopia.

IV. Election 2005: Protest Voting v. Participatory Voting

An opportune moment in history unless ceased at the very instance it shows up, one may lose such a chance forever. Political opportunity is ephemeral, fragile to the touch, and simply dissipates out of existence if one hesitates to use it at the right time. Election 2005 seems to have moved Ethiopians to a higher form of existence. Even the fact that so many Ethiopians, by some estimate over 75% of the legible voters, showed up to vote, at times enduring for hours the heat and the elements not to mention the harassment by the Government cadres, is a great testimonial as to the commitment by Ethiopians to the democratic process. Ethiopians are very intelligent and sophisticated people who have a one of the oldest record of continuous national government on Earth having lived within a national governmental structure for thousands of years. The 2005 Election simply brought out the courage of Ethiopians against extreme form of oppression, even though the Government has done everything it could to corrupt the election process.

The 2005 Election process itself was marred with numerous violations by the Government of Meles Zenawi with a willing participation of the National Electoral Board (NEB), supposedly an independent organ from the Government, but in reality very much part of it. There was lip service arrangement to convince the world that the election of 2005 was fair and democratic by inviting international monitors mostly from European Union and the United States and Canada. Over three hundred international monitors were concentrated in a couple of hundred polling stations mainly in Addis Ababa and few other urban centers out of thirty six thousand polling stations. Even in the best of circumstances, no one could be able to reach a generalized conclusion from such limited number of observations to declare a fair and democratic election. As we found out later, the monitoring device was simply part of the scheme to blind us all from the manipulation and fraud perpetuated against the people of Ethiopia by the Government.

To begin with, the monitors were not allowed free movement to visit any polling station as they please in the country, by the Ethiopian Government; moreover, they were also

limited by their own inadequacy. They had no way of accessing and monitoring the day to day intimidation, undue influence, violent ejection and harassment of the rural population as part of the campaign of the ruling party in rural Ethiopia away from the prying eyes of western journalists or local ones as well. EPRDF members or individuals with close affiliation with the EPRDF administer most of the rural area in Ethiopia. Under such monolithic structure of Government and rigged election, EPRDF's boastfulness on how successfully it conducted a democratic election is a hollow triumph. As evidence of the democratic nature of the election, EPRDF cites the assessment of international monitors involved in assessing the election process. Who are the monitors any way? They are international human rights NGOs whose governmental affiliation is by far too subtle to detect even by the monitors themselves.

Former President Jimmy Carter in his Report of 19 May 2005 plainly put the problem as follows:

“The most highly publicized event was the expulsion of observer teams from the National Democratic Institute, International Republican Institute, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Although I appealed personally to the Prime Minister, he refused to reverse the decision. This left our Center (50 persons), the European Union (160 persons), African Union (31 persons), and several others as international observers, a total of about 330. All of us had unimpeded access to opposition leaders, polling sites, and other aspects of the electoral process.

”Ethiopia is a large nation, with a population of more than 70 million, 30 million of whom are eligible to vote, with 25.6 million registered to cast ballots in 36,000 polling stations. Thirty-seven political parties have qualified candidates to seek the 547 parliamentary seats plus local community posts. Meles's ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) now holds 481 of the seats, and there are two significant coalitions among the opposition: Union of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) with 12 parties and a better organized Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) with four parties.” [Jimmy Carter, *Ethiopia Trip Report: May 11- 17: Ethiopia National Parliamentary and Local Elections*, 19 May 2005]

I am not going to argue the corruption of the Ethiopian election process by showing how non-Ethiopian non-profit organizations “promoting” democracy all over the world are corrupt. I just simply want to point out how humanly impossible it is for any group of people being stationed at very limited polling stations and with limited access to events prior to the election to make any kind of assessment on the general election process that took place all over Ethiopia, an area consisting of 90% of the voting population. It is our responsibility to bring about democratic governance to our country. The dice is cast, and it has come up with winning numbers—the opposition's numbers. We already have proven capable leadership in the opposition. We have long sought good leaders, and here they are now at last. Would it not be logical to support and help them bring about political and economic sobriety to the drunken stupor of the last fourteen years of Meles Zenawi?

From World history and political science theories we learn that governments established pursuant to protest-votes are rarely successful. Usually such governments end up being booted out even before completing their first terms of offices. A great example for such thesis may be found in the political turmoil that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1980s. Protest-votes are votes against an existing government and its policies, but technically votes for the opposition to that government. It is in the nature of such protest-vote that once such unpopular government is thrown out of office that the problem of direction, the formulation of economic policy, political appointment et cetera would become an overwhelming challenge to the new government. Since people were focusing on voting against the unpopular government and its leaders, they were not internalizing and digesting the political program(s) of the opposition group they end up supporting into office. Once the unpopular government is out of office, the many defects of the opposition, now in power, start to emerge with startling clarity to the voters or the general population that succeeded in throwing out the unpopular government. In order to overcome such weakness in the connection between voters and the opposition group, and in order to build solid bridges to counter such defects, the current Ethiopian political bottleneck situation must be considered and solved in a creative manner.

We have suggested several solutions here below. The issue of “votes” for either the EPRDF or the Opposition Group should be seen having basic structural flaws. In case of EPRDF, it is corruption and coercion; in case of the Opposition, it is protest voting. The remedial action would take into account the best possible arrangement that will lay out solid foundation for future democratic structure, which will be immune to corruption, manipulation, and polarizing effect of ethnic politics, and most importantly a vote for a particular political party supporting or approving the economic and political programs of such a party.

V. Solutions: The New leadership of the Opposition

Now that the *genie* is out of its confining bottle, no one can put it back, not even “*Suleiman*.” What we are witnessing happening in Ethiopia in 2005 may be the beginning of Ethiopia’s salvation, and the dawn of new form of leadership and political democratic processes. However, even though I am very much encouraged by the types of sober, intelligent, and lawful steps taken by the leadership of the opposition on one side, I have been receiving also alarming reports from reliable sources from inside Ethiopia about the development within the opposition of utterly irresponsible tiny group of individuals who want to turn this wonderful tide of change and unity into an ethnic cleansing orgy of murder and torture and uprooting of Tygreans. The influence of such group at this point on the larger membership of the opposition is very limited. The leadership of the opposition must take visible steps to nib in the bud such divisive schemes of very few individuals. It must do more by way of public statements to contain and ostracize such individuals with such moronic ideas.

I see several encouraging actions being taken by the leadership of the opposition. The recent decision to go to court for an injunction to stop the National Electoral Board from declaring the result of the election while there are still hundreds of contested results in several election districts (polling stations) is a good indicator of the type of sophisticated

leadership evolving right in front of our eyes. Giving law a place in ones politics is a great contribution to the ongoing political development in Ethiopia. Of course, we all know the courts in Ethiopia are staffed with judges appointed by the ruling party, but I also believe individuals when called upon on major national issues will also transcend their particular individual interest and make decisions in the best interest of the nation. The legal course of action ultimately will fail because it will be like trying to stop a lick in a dam by patching it up with some plaster. Even though there is much to be said about using existing structures, in as far as they are useful in promoting democratic systems of conflict resolution, there are limits how far such structures could be of use in times of great social upheavals where the very foundation of an existing political and economic structure is being shaken. It may even be necessary in time of shortfalls one may have the right to go beyond the limitations set by democratic purposes on such institutions.

We all must understand that the leadership of the opposition is faced not only with the responsibility of promoting the political programs of individual political parties that constitute the “opposition” but also must struggle to cut a new path of democratic methodology and ways and means to move Ethiopia in the direction of democratic governance. The task is overwhelming. The responsibility to carry out such lofty goals puts on the shoulders of every leader great weight of self-sacrifice and discipline. I have faith that this time around the leaders of the opposition will meet the challenge headlong and do the right thing.

By way of a reminder to those who are in the forefront laying the foundation of a democratic Ethiopia, I have outlined herein some of the pitfalls they may come across in their important undertaking to restore Ethiopia to her rightful place as a democratic, wealthy, and powerful nation. The most subversive pitfalls facing the opposition are the following:

- a) the possibility of vicious infighting among the leaders of the opposition for power;
- b) the polarization and corruption of the process of political change that is underway due to the participation of Mengistu’s lieutenants and supporters;
- c) the infiltration of Mengistu in the opposition and his participation in the future of Ethiopia;
- d) the acceptance of the demands of foreign nations without due consideration of the interest of Ethiopia;
- e) the continued presence in large numbers of international organizations and international personnel in Ethiopia;
- f) the financing of programs that grossly benefit a limited number of Ethiopians in a limited area such as urban centers;
- g) problems of ethnic based political organizations;
- h) the persecution of people on the basis of their ethnic identities;
- i) the continuation of the degradation and abuse of Ethiopian young females in Ethiopia and in Arab nations;
- j) the recapitulation or compromising of Ethiopia’s right to its Afar Coastal territories and the Territorial Waters on the Red Sea.

V1. Is it Possible to Overcome the Current Political Bottleneck ?

A. Model One: Accept Election Result - Ethiopia in Grave Future

The simple solution is to accept the announcement of the National Electoral Board and live with Meles Zenawi for the next five years and watch the slow destruction of Ethiopia. Such simple solution is very attractive only to Meles Zenawi. To the opposition and to most Ethiopians such prospect is most traumatizing—and rightly so. It is also a form of defeatist solution. May be if we look at solving political problems as long-term processes, we may not be discouraged by such prospect. My personal choice is never to accept any government that has Meles Zenawi as a leader or in some other political position. For example, the thirty-eight representatives from Tygreai were all from TPLF, there were almost no contenders from any other group except a couple independent candidates. The major opposition parties have issued statements deploring the violence and intimidation directed at their candidates. The first step, to be taken in order bring some semblance of legitimacy to the Election of 2005 and adopt this Model One, all representatives elected from Tygreai should be vacated and the election nullified. And a new election will be held for representatives later under the set-up by the new government with the supervision of international observers.

If we look at the political and economic program of the dominant opposition group that of CUD and to a limited extent that of UEDF, we can see immediately points of irreconcilable differences between what EPRDF has followed as its political and economic program for the last ten years with that of the Opposition. The first and foremost is the question on how to resolve the border conflict with Eritrea. The Opposition group will certainly would want to reexamine all treaties and agreement signed by Meles Zenawi with political content dealing with national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national resources, international rivers, et cetera. The Opposition will find a number of such agreements unacceptable and some downright illegal or unconstitutional. Meles will refuse access to such documentation, and will not allow its executives (Ministers, and other political appointees) from cooperating with the Opposition in that form of parliamentary investigation. Such conflict could easily be turned into a national crises leading into violence and detention and a breakdown to the parliamentary system.

The same types of conflict between the Opposition in parliament and the Executive on issues dealing with education, commerce, land ownership, media and information, rural development, urban development, funding, international loans, the budget of the nation, security issues et cetera would be a constant and paralyzing items of conflict. There are also extremely serious and immediate problems of massive unemployment, pestilence, AIDS health issues, or famine on biblical proportion to deal with. The question is how a house divided so drastically within itself could cop with such national problems. Added to these insurmountable problems, we have the constant controversy between what is political and public with what is economic and private involving the non-profit role of the hundreds of organizations in some way or other connected with or controlled by political organizations. The Opposition members may want to abolish all such organizations or they may want to create their own. To date, such organizations have been politicized to a

great degree by the TPLF that they seem to form part of the political arm of the Government of Meles Zenawi. Non-profit organizations controlled by political parties have tremendous power to influence the local population for political purposes.

The opposition group by accepting the result of the Election of 2005 could use effectively the Ethiopian parliament as a forum to expose the many weaknesses, corruption, betrayal, treason et cetera of Meles Zenawi and his political Party. That, in itself would be a great service to Ethiopia. However, we must not undermine the destructive power, and craftiness of Meles Zenawi and his group of associates. The power of the opposition is also in another area where its impact may be felt almost instantly. It has a great capacity to reach the Ethiopian urban population in a short period. It has also the network to reach the world through various websites around the world. These are all very powerful tools to impede further erosion of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia in the hands of Meles Zenawi.

B. Model Two: Reject the Election Result, Prepare for Long Costly Struggle

It is impossible to form a government that will protect the interest of Ethiopia with Meles Zenawi as Prime Minister or in any position of political power. Meles is in a mission to fulfill the destruction of traditional Ethiopia and to create a State of Tygreai, and Eritrea as his primary goal, and that of Oromia, Somalia et cetera as part of a grand scheme conceived by Ethiopia's historic enemies in the area and in the West. Because of his anti-Ethiopia goals, he had already committed numerous treasonous crimes against the State of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. If he is allowed to form a government, there will follow a disastrous relationship with the opposition, especially an opposition that will be commanding tremendous voice and support from the Ethiopian people. Any such government will result in prolonged uncertainty, civil unrest, demonstrations, murders and detentions. Meles and group most certainly will try to use the maneuver they used to get rid of OLF, which will not work this time with the opposition for a number of obvious reasons.

Unlike the OLF, the opposition movement is a grassroots tsunami type movement, and nothing Meles Zenawi may do will be sufficient to stop the political upturn. Meles by his continued political presence and maneuver, will simply aggravate the situation. As he has already started committing murdering of demonstrators, he will be escalating his violence. He may imprison and even murder the opposition leaders, by so doing he will only succeed in irrevocably alienating Tygreans from the rest of Ethiopia who then will be attacked in a situation reminiscent of the Red Terror of Mengistu. Of course, Ethiopia is not going to be like Rwanda or Serbia, but it sure will be like Somalia with ethnic groups organized in much more structured system of ethnicism and nationalities rather than clans. We are heading to the period of *Zemene Mesafint*.

The question that everyone, including the leaders of the United States, Canada, England et cetera, should be asking is whether Meles Zenawi is worth that much that leaders of the Western world, and Ethiopians within the EPRDF would allow so much bloodshed, carnage, and chaos in Ethiopia in order to maintain in power such a treasonous leader. A leader who had unabashedly served the interest of foreign governments above the interest

of his own people? If the opposition chooses not join the new government with Meles Zenawi as Prime Minister for the next five years, it must ready itself for a long, vicious, and extremely violent struggle. In the finally analysis, I have no doubt in my mind that Meles will be driven out of office, arrested, or resign. I do not see any peaceful future for a third term in office.

I realize the question of the convoluted relationship of Meles Zenawi with the people of Tygreai is a mind-boggling one to unravel even for sophisticated thinkers and “Webmasters.” We see the wait-and-see attitude with some of the Websites, which attitude seems to be also the attitude of a number of “Tygreans.” One should not have any hesitation about Meles Zenawi and his treasonous activities. At the same time, one must not be coerced or scared into acting irrationally anticipating the worst would happen to Tygreans if Meles loses power. The point is that Tygreans as a population lost power a long time ago before 1991. The fact that Meles is now masking himself in Tyrolean identity should not confuse us from holding him responsible for several crimes including treason undermining Tygreans and the Ethiopian nation as a whole. Meles’s attempted effort to project himself as Tyrolean is simply a political game, in fact, a form of blackmail; he is holding Tygreans as hostages by stating in speeches and through his network of cadres that if he loses power, Tygreans will be massacred as in Rwanda.

It is also asserted by some observers of the current political situation in Ethiopia that the Minister of Information has been distributing pamphlets as if written by opposition groups threatening Tygreans. It is up to the leadership of the opposition to counter such divisive propaganda by issuing repeatedly to all people that no such ethnic “cleansing” will ever occur under their watch. Tygreans should be calm and not jump with alarm every time they hear such propaganda. We all must have faith in our ethical culture and humane relations of centuries of living together as one people that such things will never happen in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, vigilant caution is necessary not only in the way ethnic identification is used against Tygreans but also against other ethnic groups.

Ethiopians are very much worried how things are unfolding because they/we are witnessing an election process fast becoming worse day by day into an Ethiopian nightmare. The recent murder of demonstrators by police and military forces in Addis Ababa is only the beginning of violence and detentions if Meles Zenawi continues to be in power. The struggle by Meles Zenawi and his supporters in an effort to stay in power will be the fiercest Ethiopia had ever seen. Meles and company have much to lose in addition to political power: they will lose control of hundreds of enterprises that has been generating hundreds of millions of dollars or equivalent. Most importantly, Meles will lose the forum from which to serve and safeguard the interest of Eritrea. Furthermore, Meles and his associates will be vulnerable to criminal prosecution for all kinds of crimes they committed while in office if they lose power and control of the government of Ethiopia.

There is much to be done by the people of the many regions who have voted for Meles Zenawi and other members of the TPLF in Tygreai even if it is generally acknowledged their vote was won under a situation of tremendous coercion and intimidation. It is clear

from the very start in 1991 that TPLF had a vise-like grip on the people of Tygreai. It is a mistake for the rest of the population of Ethiopia to think of Tygreans as “willing” participants in the treasonous government of Meles Zenawi. Please, put in mind the fact that the EPRDF is made up of organizations representing diverse ethnic groups from all over the country, individuals representing disfranchised and marginalized people during the long reign of Haile Selassie and also persecuted with violence for seventeen years under the government of Mengistu. There are several unresolved grievances of millions of people represented by the members of the EPRDF.

It is also clear that Meles Zenawi and his Party, the TPLF, will not hesitate in attempting to create a strong hold in Tygreai as an independent nation and seek recognition from the rest of the world if Meles Zenawi loses power. One must not make the mistake of attributing the desire of a mad dictator to that of his victims the Tygraeian people. Tygraeians overwhelmingly will oppose such move by Meles, for Tygraeians, there is only one Ethiopia and that Ethiopia includes all of the diverse people of Ethiopia including Tygraeians. The improvement of infrastructure although long overdue to the region, may have the unintended effect of creating a sense of less dependence on the rest of Ethiopia for power and economic developments. The huge hydroelectric dam and the Technology Institute, et cetera may be seen as preparation for such eventuality. On the other hand, the announcement of OPDO of last week that it will move its “Capital” for Oromo “administrative region/State” to Addis Ababa is a sort of stakeout of claim of territory if there is to be such breakup of the nation with “Oromia” as one of the fragments of future independent nations. Of course, such a move may be a simple political game to counter the full control of Addis Ababa by the opposition. We can see now that organizing the internal political structure with “States” as governmental units was a grave mistake and a dangerous structure that weakens and finally breaks up Ethiopia into several mini-states.

For the people of Tygraei, Meles Zenawi is not a savior but someone whose leadership is disastrous not only to Tygreans but to Ethiopians in general. Ethiopians must fight against such fragmentation. However, the first initiative against such move to break Tygraei from the rest of Ethiopia in any form must come from the people themselves. We have been reading for sometime now about “putting fence” or carrying out the stated goals of Tilahun Yilma also a defeatist solution. He wrote “So we must ask what benefit for Ethiopia exists in the uneasy association with Tigray/Eritrea. They have brought only poverty, war, misery, and the cultural poisoning of the Ethiopian people by waging ethnic conflict. They are like a malignant cancer that has been eating away at our vital parts. If we don't excise this cancer promptly, Ethiopia will cease to be a nation. Tygraeians/Eritreans have drafted into the so-called New Ethiopian Constitution articles allowing secession and requiring restriction of ethnic groups to their tribal regions or “kilils.” We now should demand that they be the primary beneficiaries of their own laws: they should be deported to their own kilil, and Ethiopia as a nation should secede from the Tigrigna-speaking regions of the Provinces of Tigray and Mereb Melash.” [Interview of November 1996, *Ethiopian Review Magazine*] With that type of rhetoric and folly, no less from a distinguished microbiologist, we sure would have been in dire circumstances. However, the people of Ethiopia, being far more intelligent than the folly of some of their children, will only laugh at such effort.

An apparently irate reader of the many websites with a spectrum of extreme views responded in one of the Websites by stating, “The Ethiopian Opposition has been inciting violence and ethnic hatred since the beginning of the election campaigns saying “Tigrians go home” as if the Tigrians are not Ethiopians. Who are more Ethiopians than whom? Are not the Tigrians the very people who created Ethiopia and formed the first Ethiopian government? Who are Birhanu Nega and Hailu Shawl to tell the Tigrians to go home? What kind of Ethiopia do they have in mind without Tigray?” [Atnaf Segued, “We are Watching You CUD and UEDF,” *Dekialula*, June 10, 2005] it is quite irresponsible of some of the leaders in the opposition to use terms in interviews that could be easily interpreted as a call for ethnic war against Tygreans.

I am quoting the above statements by Tilahun Yilma as an example of how far people can deteriorate or become defensive in their thinking if pressed down under tremendous pressure of the feeling of being unable to improve a particularly difficult situation. For example, it is quite insane for any one to think in such stark manner of ethnic cleansing as suggested by Tilahun Yilma. If that happens Tilahun Yilma and his likes may find themselves in the unexpected situation of being deported to “Antarctica.” In short, this is not the way to build a nation by alienating individuals with the idea of “them” and “us” and by creating dividing lines that should not be there. Ethnicity is a cultural phenomenon and should not be the basis for political institutions and structures.

VII. Recommended Steps to Save Ethiopia: Caretaker Government

Meles Zenawi is the single most polarizing individual in Ethiopia whose continued presence continues to be the source of all disagreements and conflicts in Ethiopia. The TPLF with the other members of the EPRDF must decide whether a single individual is worth murdering tens of thousands of Ethiopians and driving the nation into civil war. I am sure the day Meles Zenawi is out of Ethiopian politics, peace and brotherly understanding and good will among the people of Ethiopia will descend on all.

This is a very significant time for the leadership of OPDO, ANDM, et cetera to reconsider their political options. No one disputes the fact that there are Ethiopian voters who support the EPRDF and its members. The number of representatives announced by the National Electoral Board is an announcement about representatives elected through illegal means. However, it does not rule out completely the fact that those political organizations as part of the EPRDF do have millions of supporters too. It is simply a matter of holding free election under the administration of a neutral body to insure that all representatives are elected freely under a fair process. These means that EPRDF and its member organizations have a future to participate as political parties in the reconstituted revitalized Ethiopia as long as they are willing to remove Meles Zenawi from political power and stop him from manipulating the situation to serve his own self-interest.

If the situation was reversed and if it were Meles Zenawi who had a chance to continue as a political leader working with the opposition in a revitalized Ethiopia, he would not have hesitated a second to abandon the leaders of ANDM, OPDO et cetera to their fate as he had done with his own party die-hard supporters and others. Just look at his record of

discarded colleagues, such as Tamrat Lyne, Seye Abraha, the Twelve Dissenters of TPLF's Central Committee, and several others.

The following are steps and cursory sketch of compromise between the Opposition leaders and the leaders of the EPRDF that would save Ethiopia from descending into utter chaos. This is an alternative to having the rigged voting as final and participating as a minority opposition in a government setup that will have Meles Zenawi as its Prime Minister or some one controlled by Meles Zenawi. At any rate, I believe the Opposition has won, and EPRDF has lost the 2005 Election. However, through fraud and corruption the National Electoral Board has unofficially given out numbers crowning EPRDF with victory. It is quite tricky to solve this political bottleneck without resorting to violence. This is the reason why I am suggesting a creative solution to the crisis by stepping away from strictly enforcing the election results fraud and all by forming a compromise caretaker government.

1. The first and most important step is for members of the EPRDF to remove Meles Zenawi from playing any political role in Ethiopia, by replacing him with a less polarizing individual from that organization.
2. The opposition Group and the EPRDF members must negotiate and agree on a caretaker government to be headed by a neutral body of administrators agreed upon by the two groups.
3. The caretaker government will be responsible for the administration of the country for two years while organizing the nation for free election according to the electoral districts devised according to the current 1995 Constitution for the limited purpose of organizing election districts without the "State" implication. .
4. The elected Representatives will revise the 1995 Constitution or write a new one and prepare the necessary documents for a referendum.
5. The Military forces will be under the command of the neutral caretaker government. The police force will be under the elected representatives.

During such period, Ethiopia will be administered as a nation in a transition period with limits as to the scope of the activities of such transient government would have on international relations, structuring of local governments/administrations, and long-term policies.

VIII. Conclusion

I have a good feeling about the direction the struggle of the last fifteen years is taking by gauging the process by recent events. This is simply a matter of intuition. On the other hand, when I look at the facts and the creeping changes taking place in the last fourteen years objectively with cold-blooded rationality, there is not much hope for Ethiopia in terms of economic development in the near future; however, the story is quite different when it comes to political matters. No matter how we may disagree on issues dealing

with political and economic programs, or how we look at the characteristics and lives of our previous Emperors and leaders, or any number of social issues, there is one item we must all agree on—the point that Meles Zenawi is the most dangerous enemy of the people of Ethiopia. Everything he has done since 1991 is aimed at the complete destruction of Ethiopia.

In order to build the Ethiopia of our future, we need to be cognizant of our past and current history in order to learn to avoid similar mistakes of our predecessors. We need to use history in a creative manner to solve future problems. We should not be held hostages by our history or put in a straightjacket of history. We should be able to communicate with each other in a non-confrontational manner to resolve political and economic problems. Our national security depends on how well we work with each other. This seems to be a new beginning for all of us. Some of us have hurt Ethiopia much more than others; nevertheless, there need be a change of attitude from feelings of being victim to feelings of empowerment. For whatever has happened in our past, in some way, we all are collectively responsible. My advice for caution does not me building barbed wire around our ideal Ethiopia, but exposing all of us to Ethiopia's potential for greatness as much as possible. We are going to be a great people and a great nation with our humanity intact and our prosperity assured. **End.**

[**Note to all my Readers:** I have no affiliation whatsoever with any of the members of the Opposition. I have no affiliation with any other political group; however, I am with a small group of dedicated Ethiopians loosely organized to promote and defend the interest of Ethiopia and all Ethiopians at all cost. For those of you who may question my support of the change underway in Ethiopia, I urge you to read my past writings including books and short studies. My only interest is to see Ethiopia and Ethiopians as a prosperous, democratic, and powerful people and nation. I will die a happy man if I have just a glimpse of the bright future of Ethiopia.]

Tecola W. Hagos
June 12, 2005

[* *Quo Vadis* Latin word meaning “where to,” a phrase taken from what St. Peter said, fleeing Nero's persecution in Rome, when he encountered Christ and asked Him: “Domine quo vadis?” (Whither goest Thou, Lord?) Christ replied: “I go to Rome to be crucified again.” Ashamed of his fear, Peter turned back to Rome where he was crucified.]