

## PART II

- **The Dubious Path of the Resistance: Can the Ethiopian Diaspora Contribute to Future Political Stability and the Development of Democratic Institutions in Ethiopia?**

By Dr. Maru Gubena

This article is part two of my contribution entitled, **“The Dubious Path of the Resistance: Can the Ethiopian Diaspora Contribute to Future Political Stability and the Development of Democratic Institutions in Ethiopia?”** As you may remember, the first part of this article has already been published on various Ethiopian websites, including other websites engaged with issues of Ethiopia. To have a background on the issues assessed in this article, it is advisable to download and read part one before proceeding with part two of the article.

Further, for a brief but relatively detailed explanation to help clear away the many clouds surrounding what the Ethiopian Diaspora community can and cannot do, I will do my best to return as soon I can with the third and final part of this article, in which I will incorporate the history and role of other Diaspora communities: the White Russian Refugees during the years immediately after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the many failed attempts of Cuban exiles to overthrow Fidel Castro’s leadership, even with huge direct assistance from the United States, and the processes of democratization and change of power in Chile and Argentina, and the role and contributions of their exiles who resided in the United States and other western countries throughout much of the 1970s and the early years of the 1980s.

### **Some remarks related to the appallingly inhumane treatment of innocent Ethiopian elected leaders**

Before attempting to get my thoughts together and embark on an effort to deal with the persistent and worsening crisis within the Ethiopian Diaspora community and its sources, writing in my own fashion, which is usually open minded, innocent, independent, and somehow intellectually provocative, however, let me first make a few key remarks related to the remarkable, historic, and indeed most appallingly inhumane treatment undertaken against the innocent and entirely judicious Ethiopian elected leaders by the unelected, self installed regime of Meles Zenawi – a unique enemy of Ethiopia and its people. Ethiopians of all ages and sexes and from border to border are fully aware of the creatively invented charges that came into being in November 2005 and which coincided with mass arrests of elected Ethiopian leaders, journalists, and other Ethiopian political and human rights activists, and now the imposition of life imprisonment upon the most indispensable Ethiopian assets, the future hope of Ethiopia. These actions are not only intended to intimidate God fearing, peace loving Ethiopians; they are especially meant to give a strong warning, showing a red light to the entire Ethiopian population, politicians and more specifically to Meles Zenawi’s voiceless handpicked stooges, who surround him and are presented as Ethiopian “opposition” leaders and members, though they cannot and should not contemplate demanding any more freedom and democracy from Meles’s regime than what they have been allowed at present to enjoy as opposition parliamentarians – sitting and listening to his hostile, disparaging and divisive speeches and statements directed at the entire Ethiopian population and their forefathers

The prearranged verdict handed down on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, 2007, regarding Ethiopian leaders by judge Adil Ahmed, an appointee of Meles Zenawi himself – especially the intended pardon arrangements that followed the unprecedented conviction, said to be conducive to releasing the victims of the ruthless regime of Meles Zenawi – were a clear and historical humiliation and an incurable pain to Ethiopians

and even to the coming generation. These are undoubtedly the darkest hours and days in the history of our country for all Ethiopians. The deliberately constructed humiliation inflicted upon the entire population of Ethiopia by resentful individuals is a direct consequence of our own weakness, inability to agree and work together. Much to my embarrassment, it appears that Meles Zenawi and those surrounding him understand us better – know much more about us than we ourselves know about ourselves: that we are totally incapable of accepting each other, intolerant of one another, unable to compromise, agree and work progressively hand in glove against the bad side of our culture, against our common enemy. Much to my sadness, it seems they know us much better even than our mothers: that we are so incurably addicted to party politics, sectarianism and parochialism and to engaging in endless conflicts with each other in support of one or more political activists, simply because they belong to our family or come from our home village. Yes, Meles Zenawi and his cadres know very well the so-called “true Ethiopian opposition leaders” and their members who are so good at spending their golden time in feuds and infighting with one another over the most irrelevant issues, such as political power and quota politics – the allocation of certain positions to each party representative – as has been the case for the Kinijit Diaspora. It is indeed embarrassing to observe the relentless and divisive infighting among Diaspora political activists for distant political positions and power, which may never exist in their lifetimes. What tragic and most depressing behaviour and culture!

It should also be abundantly clear that it is we, Ethiopians of all sexes, both at home and in the Diaspora, who have allowed Meles Zenawi and his associates to urinate and defecate on our faces and backs, or even on the entire body of all Ethiopians. It is certainly true that it is we Ethiopians who opened the door so wide for Meles Zenawi and those around him to come in and engage in games of politics with Ethiopians, without first framing the conditions and without achieving the necessary arrangements. As a result, Meles can simply and easily criminalize, charge, arrest, kill and humiliate those he considers to be “true Ethiopians,” and therefore potential enemies to his ruthless rule. It is indeed a shame! Shame on all of us!

Since the sources of our infighting with each other have become so entangled, and given the extent of humiliation inflicted upon Ethiopians, I actually wonder when and how we will be able to recover, and to be willing to advance our national interest, putting the well-being of all Ethiopians before family, group and party interests and politics. I wonder how that will come about, and when!

Finally, let me use this opportunity to humbly implore my Ethiopian compatriots to stop interfering with whatever arrangements the jailed Ethiopian leaders deem appropriate for Ethiopia’s future and for freeing themselves from the shackles of Ethiopia’s staunch, unique enemy, since we cannot help them when disunity and animosity are so rife among us, and when we are so unable to stage an aggressive collective attack on the enemies who are living so permanently and comfortably with us. Most people, including myself don’t wish to witness any of the jailed Ethiopian leaders following in the footsteps of Professor Asrat Woldeyes – dieing slowly in TPLF’s cruel, primitive confinement.

### **A Reflection on the Ethiopian Diaspora Community and its Views on Diaspora Politics: Does the Ethiopian Community have a Meaningful Role in Ethiopian politics?**

Coming to the main subject matter, let me now do my best to look at the critical issues stated in the title of this article. As is known and can be agreed, it is those Ethiopians who left their country of origin – Ethiopia – for various reasons, including political repression, and who reside throughout the international community, that we refer to as “the Ethiopian Diaspora community.” According to our information randomly collected at various times and in various locations, almost all members of the Ethiopian Diaspora left their country of origin with a bag of goals and in fact had plans to return home for good within a few years – say after three to five years in the country of asylum or immigration. Also, as is true for every community or society, the Ethiopian Diaspora consists of individuals with different educational and economic backgrounds. The same is also true concerning the period of arrival of each specific member of the Ethiopian Diaspora in his or her specific country of asylum or immigration. A few among the Ethiopian Diaspora community had been and are still living in their country of asylum or immigration, since before the years of the 1974 bloody Ethiopian revolution – a revolution characterized

by numerous authors and experts on Ethiopian politics as the beginning of the darkest years in the history of Ethiopia and its people (see also “**The Future of the Maturing African Diaspora**”).

As political repression reached its intolerable climax and as internal strife among individuals and groups seeking power continued and became a permanent source of political instability and a bottleneck to the formation and development of democratic institutions and civil societies – known to be the backbone of every society and a storehouse of visions of leadership and the rule of law, including the processes of democratization – the fragile economy continued to deteriorate; the number of Ethiopians suffering from poverty and disease increased substantially, and the Ethiopian Diaspora grew to a remarkable level. It has grown not just in numbers but also in socio-economic potential and influence, extending to both national and international bodies.

The May 1991 change of power marked the end of the ruthless, undesired regime of the Dergue and the arrival of another repressive regime, the ethnic based TPLF leadership, which imposed a system of “divide and rule” upon the entire population of my country. This has been and continues to be a force driving a considerable number of a new generation of Ethiopian asylum seekers and immigrants out of their country of origin and into different parts of the international community in search of protection and a future life. In turn, the influx of an increasing number of the new Ethiopian compatriots into wealthy nations with relative political stability, and children born into the Diaspora community, have continued to contribute to the significant growth of the Ethiopian Diaspora. Despite the existing age gaps and differences in living conditions, and differences in education and life experiences, knowledge and involvement in Ethiopia’s socio-economic and political issues, it is strongly believed that most, if not all, Ethiopian Diaspora community members live with a strong feeling of belonging and attachment to the land of Ethiopia and its people. It has even been stated by many Diaspora compatriots, saying that “my body has been here – in a foreign country – for long years, but my spirit lives so quietly and comfortably with my family, my people and my country.”

It is probably due to this feeling of belonging and being an inseparable part of that culture and society that quite often leads us to spring up and react so flatly, suddenly and emotionally whenever we learn that our people at home are suffering due to a sudden natural events, such as a flood, or to an anticipated drought and famine; or to political measures and events undertaken by successive regimes, such as the memorable 15 May 2005 parliamentary election and its subsequent turmoil saw the killing of many of our young and innocent compatriots and the jailing of elected Ethiopian political leaders, intellectuals, journalists and other political and human rights activists. During these sudden events and their unbearable repercussions we tended to make all sorts of multiple – but empty – promises to the people of Ethiopia, saying we would do everything in our capacity, would sacrifice our energy, time, money to help them alleviate their immediate sufferings and to defend them from a repressive regime that persistently affects their day-to-day existence and violates their human rights. Yes, countless statements and promises have been made, but without first creating the conditions for unity – a durable and immovable peace among ourselves – and without a collective determination to fashion, or at least to explore, appropriate mechanisms that could embrace all (or the majority) of the Diaspora community, and help to reach the intended target groups and realize our short and long term goals.

Instead, since the closing years of the 1980s, we have been able to observe and experience a phenomenon that is probably also an expression of concern for such extremely pressing issues – including the persistent deterioration in the living conditions of our people at home and the increasing political repression and instability, which have now reached frightening proportions: quickly undertaken decisions by certain amateurish individuals, who have established dubious political organizations – which have then soon disappeared from the socio-political map of the Ethiopian Diaspora community, though the founders never discuss this or make an official announcement to let us know that their organizations have ceased to function. Those individual compatriots who establish such dubious political organizations do not address the issue of unity that I have outlined in the preceding paragraph. Instead they are amateurish, irresponsible and unconcerned with democratic norms, values and principles in that they show little or no interest at all in carrying out the necessary consultations and discussions and engaging creatively with the community, in carrying out simple but relatively representative surveys, or in investigating the living conditions, views and interests of the intended

target group or groups who are expected to become members of the political party that they want to establish. Therefore, prior to establishing their desired organizations they do not know much about the need for this organization within the Diaspora community or what extent of support, either financial and morale, it can expect. The founders of such organizations are amateurish because they are not trained and are not professional political leaders; they never or scarcely attend the practical organizational, management and communication courses and trainings that would be required for the tasks they want to take on. They are scarcely open with the target groups who are supposed to be the backbone or the prime movers of the organization; they also don't provide weekly or monthly dissemination of relevant information on the activities of their organizations to others. For example, one never sees them at major Ethiopian festivals with bags of informative folders and fliers to distribute, unless they have been specifically invited by the organizers of the event to address the gathering. The founders of these dubious political groupings are also themselves undemocratic; they never attempt to carry out even a few of the most essential democratic principles: for example, being able to see every member of the nation state or community with one and the same eyes; and giving equal love and respect all of those who belong to the community or society. Most of all, however, the undemocratic nature of those who establish these dubious Diaspora or exile political organizations is seen in their short and long term goals of ruling each and every member of the society or community

As is known, in relatively democratic nations, we often see founders or leaders of every small or large political organization interacting and periodically working closely, not only with those who belong to and support their own ideology and political party or parties, but also with those who oppose them, even those who belong to and support other political organizations with differing ideologies, political and economic programmes and policies. As can be observed, those leaders are often enthusiastic and happy to give historical and socio-political analysis, speeches and interviews related to the many issues of the their country to magazine and newspaper publishers, and to various radio television channels, even though their employees are members and supporters of, or associated with, other political parties.

Regrettably, however, due to our rigid cultural orientation, which is partly or fully responsible for molding our attitudes, socio-cultural, political and undemocratic behaviours, the case of the Ethiopian political leadership in the Diaspora does not fit this description. It is different in ways that are most unpalatable and unacceptable to politically conscious, actively involved Ethiopians. The committee members or leaders of these dubious political parties consider individuals with critical view not as contributing inspiration and enrichment but rather, as attackers and provokers on a personal level, and therefore, as their staunch enemies. It is additionally true, as we all have observed, that our so called leaders of these dubiously established dysfunctional organizations are almost never willing to participate in public gatherings organized by those who support other political groupings, if they have opposing political programmes and policies. They are also never willing to participate in panel discussions or to give interviews to Ethiopian Diaspora media outlets that are said to be supporters of or are associated with other opposition groups. Instead they communicate only with the media outlets that support their own views and their dysfunctional organizations. Isn't this entirely tragic and so depressing?

Consequently and most unfortunately, the dubious Diaspora political organizations that have come and gone, and those that are said to be still breathing, continue to lack the political and organizational forces and tools that are indispensable to reaching even their few potential members and financial contributors. Finally, such political organizations are also dubious because their founders are not concerned or involved with, and have no interest in knowing the history, methods and strategies that are vitally important to responsible founders and leaders of socio-political organizations in determining whether to ago ahead, delay or give up the establishment of a potential organization, and which are also essential for any organization to be operational, influential, successful and productive.

It is certainly true that despite the wide-ranging gaps and differences described above within the Ethiopian Diaspora in areas of life experiences, educational backgrounds and involvement in the complex political and other related issues facing our country, the entire community of the Ethiopian Diaspora, of all sexes and ages and with no desire for future political interests or positions for themselves, would be willing and happy to be organized under a single organizational umbrella of Ethiopianess, and would sacrifice their money, time and energy in an effort to free Ethiopia from the shackles of successive and repressive regimes. The past fifteen or more years experience has, however,

shown that the Ethiopian Diaspora has little or no appetite for association with and support of dubiously established and dysfunctional Diaspora political organizations.

These hastily and dubiously established political organizations thus remain dysfunctional, and don't receive the attention and material assistance they require. A good number of Ethiopians see them not only as a considerable source of frustration, feuds and divisions among the Ethiopian Diaspora community, but also a direct impediment to the creation of a single united organization that would embrace Ethiopians of all ages and sexes without involving a party or group interest, and without trying to build support for a future political position. Such an organization should have the simple initial objective of creating a professionally structured, functional Diaspora institution that has available wisely crafted tools that are capable of making the Ethiopian Diaspora community economically strong and socially harmonious, without being associated with any of our homegrown political organizations. After creating a collective voice the Ethiopian Diaspora will be able to be heard, listened to and respected; it can become effective and influential in a relentless and peaceful resistance, with the single objective of freeing Ethiopia and its people from the shackles of successive repressive regimes, helping to move our country from a culture of war to a culture of peace. This is, in my view, what we can do – what we are capable of realizing – as the Ethiopian Diaspora community and as an inseparable part of Ethiopian society.

Again, for a brief but relatively detailed explanation to help clear away the many clouds surrounding what the Ethiopian Diaspora community can and cannot do, I will do my best to return as soon I can with the second and final part of this article, in which I will incorporate the history and role of other Diaspora communities: the White Russian Refugees during the years immediately after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the many failed attempts of Cuban exiles – even with huge direct assistance from the United States – to overthrow Fidel Castro's leadership, and the processes of democratization and change of power in Chile and Argentina, and the role and contributions of their exiles who resided in the United States and other western countries throughout much of the 1970s and the early years of the 1980s.

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- **This article was written on the 19th of July 2007, a day before we learned the joyful news of the liberation of the elected Ethiopian leaders from the shackles of Meles Zenawi's disease infected and most primitive confinement. Although an enormous amount of work and responsibilities are waiting for them and for the entire population of Ethiopia in order to strategically and wisely lead the country from the current political quagmires and a culture of war towards relative political freedom and a culture of peace, Ethiopians both at home and in the Diaspora deserve to rejoice in this remarkable and joyful day. It is indeed a delightful day for all Ethiopians who have been tirelessly making all possible efforts in our capacity towards seeing this day, when the freeing of those great Ethiopian leaders has become a reality. What a jubilant and unforgettable day!**