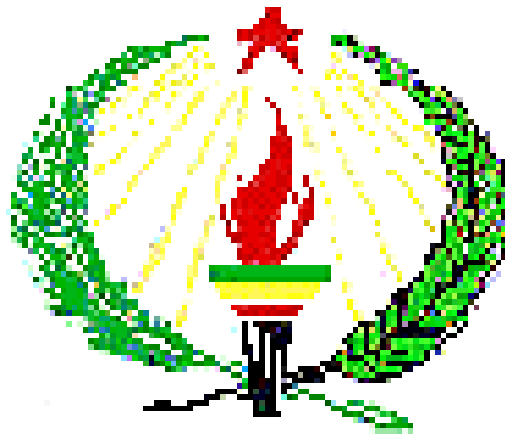


ETHIOPIA

THE DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE (PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS)



BY

THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

(EPRP)

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THE DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE IN ETHIOPIA

PREFACE

On December 1989, a year and half before the downfall of the Mengistu Haile Mariam military dictatorship, the EPRP issued a 23 pages paper on the question of the Democratic Alternative in Ethiopia. At present, such a document is again called for a variety of reasons. First of all: to present the EPRP's vision of a democratic path, of an alternative for Ethiopia. Secondly, quite a few foreign circles seem to be under the conviction that the Ethiopian opposition, including the EPRP, have no vision of the future other than criticising the ruling front. Actually, most opposition organizations have clearly stated political programs and proposals of the future. In this brief paper, the EPRP will present its conception of democracy, the main political basis on which it radically differed and differs from the ruling Tigrean front (TPLF) or EPRDF as it likes to call itself.

The struggle of the Ethiopian people led to the February Revolution of 1974 and to the downfall of the feudal autocracy led by Emperor Haile Sellasie. But, the victory was usurped by the military officers that called themselves the Derg and as the EPRP, the first political party ever in Ethiopia (established April 1972), was not strong enough to assume the required leadership role. The military rule hardened into a pro Soviet totalitarian regime by brutally stamping out popular struggle against its rule (ref. the Red Terror). The EPRP at the time waged a country wide political struggle that mobilized millions and was later forced to take up arms when the Terror and ruthless repression made peaceful political struggle impossibility. This how the EPRP summed it up in December 1989:

"The EPRP has passed through ups and downs. It has gained valuable lessons through the process of the struggle. Our party has further deepened its understanding of democracy in the school of the popular struggle. For us, democracy has substance in so far as it enables the people, "the excluded", to play amore direct and effective role in governing themselves. The sovereignty of the people, in other words. The Ethiopian

people are not obviously preordained (racially or culturally) to live only under dictatorships. But the transition to democracy will not be easy either. Economic backwardness, the tradition of authoritarian rule, the evil legacy of the military rule and the one party system are all serious obstacles. But we contend these are hurdles the Ethiopian people can overcome. They do not want to replace one dictatorship with another and... they have no better choice than to make a democratic Ethiopia a reality".

After 17 years of dictatorial rule by the Meles Zenawi regime, that has made ethnic discrimination and division its political line, the task of assuring a democratic alternative has become even more onerous and complicated. The demagogic minority regime has made dividing the Ethiopian people along ethnic, and religious, line the fulcrum of its politics and ideology while imposing a virtual one party system under the guise of multi partism. Its economic policies have led to bankruptcy, 50% inflation, starvation of millions, and persistent dependence on food and budget aid, wide spread poverty and high unemployment rate. The ruling front lost the May 2005 elections but clung to power by repressing the people (more than 200 were massacred in Addis Ababa alone and some 50,000 rounded up and sent to prison camps) and cancelling the results thereby negating the choice and voice of the people. The absence of good governance in Ethiopia has further destabilized the whole region and the regime's penchant for war (Eritrea, invasion of Somalia) has further aggravated the problem.

In this new and complicated context, the question of a democratic alternative is not one that can be answered easily but let it be said firmly that the EPRP has from the outset made its fundamental political difference with the TPLF clear and proposed alternatives to the dictatorial path pursued by the ruling front. In the coming pages, these views and options will be presented.

THE DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE IN ETHIOPIA

1. WHAT DEMOCRACY?

As we wrote back in December 1989, we do not need to go back to Aristotle and Plato to define and redefine democracy. Let us state from the outset that we do not also accept the ethnic or racial definition of democracy or the contention that for Africans/ Ethiopians democracy can only have a limited scope. Given the fact that almost all forces, including the despots that wreaked and are still bringing havoc to Ethiopia, define their rule as democratic it behoves on us to present briefly what EPRP means by democracy.

As a social democratic party, the EPRP believes that democracy should embody political ideals and essence. It cannot and should not be reduced to a modality of electing leaders; it cannot be equated with simple elections however free these may be. The fact that every four or six years people come out to go to the ballots does not make that society democratic. The political essence of democracy is important. The people must directly participate in the political affairs of their country, in other words what we call popular sovereignty must be in existence. The people's direct role in decision making requires first and foremost that their basic democratic and human rights be respected. In other words, democratic rights must be guaranteed by law and no restrictions should be imposed on these rights. In the past the rights of the Ethiopian people were curtailed by the ruling powers who invoked be it the dubious phrase "in accordance with the law" (in the Constitution of Emperor Haile Sellasie) or referred to "class divisions" as in the time of the Mengistu pro Soviet dictatorship to exclude the people in the name of an illusory "power of the working class". An ill defined national interest is often invoked in African countries to raise security concerns and curtail rights altogether and that for very many years. In the Ethiopian context, we had to confront those who argued that the "absence of democratic culture and experience" calls for the doling out of rights by doses determined by the elites or those in power.

Democracy can be imagined and re imagined or redefined within the changing historical context we find ourselves in but in Ethiopia, where the very basic human and democratic rights have been denied for ages, it is imperative that we put much emphasis on the respect of rights, the role of the civil society, and the respect of the rule of law. What have been put on paper as rights have hardly ever been respected and thus it would not be entertaining a luxury if we insist on the guaranteeing of full rights. The right to free speech, freedom of the press, the right to dissent, to organize parties and associations and to be members of these, to peacefully demonstrate and strike, to peacefully move from one place/region to another inside the country and to travel abroad, to freely elect and be elected, to live under a rule of law with equal rights, to not be subjected to ethnic, gender and racial discriminations, the right to recall or impeach their elected leaders, etc.... must be guaranteed and respected. The role of the civil society must not be negated or denied by the totalitarian dissolution of civic associations or their cloning by State controlled bodies.

We can generally define democracy as a form of government (by and for the people), with the political and the social integrated. For us, it rests on a form that assures popular participation and power (be it direct or representative), inclusive and not exclusionary, broad and not restricted, political equality, with disadvantaged many having a decisive and effective role. Democracy does presuppose a working society and not anarchy and thus to sustain it there arises the need to give it economic and social dimension too. The right to work, to have shelter, to education, to guarantee minorities full rights are not extras but part and parcel of a democratic society. The people must have the right to choose and not to choose. Democracy in this respect implies the existence of freedom. This assertion does not mean that a society is monolithic but on the contrary affirms the existence of different interests and positions that contend and are settled by the decisions of the people. The interaction within a democratic process will be a guarantee of unity as a people rather than diktat from above and denial of the existence of differences and diversity.

In this respect, the existence of multi-partism becomes essential. In Africa, the one party system was imposed on the grounds that the One Nation One People policy brooked no organization along political interests and positions. The one party system proved

dictatorial and did not achieve the unity desired or the economic progress that was sought. In Ethiopia, political parties were banned (Haile Sellasie's time), the one party system imposed (Mengistu's rule) and presently (under the Tigrean front TPLF) a one party system in reality that conveniently calls itself otherwise by surrounding itself with satellite groups and organizations. Parties do not divide the people but they express the existing diverse interests. An all encompassing Movement or all dominating one party is a recipe for dictatorship and disaster. Though the existence of many parties in a country is not an automatic indication of the existence of broad democracy the imposition of a one party system and the denial of the right to be organized in different political parties is a sign of dictatorship. Democratic rights are universal whatever the specific forms of government may be. The basic rights cannot be restricted on the basis of race or culture and thus the assertion that African countries, given the low level of economic development or lack of long democratic culture, cannot be expected to have the same rights as peoples in the developed countries is very wrong. Hence, the objection to multi partism in Africa by arguing that people will be divided on ethnic lines and fight among themselves while they "should focus on economic development " (a task that these same quarters say needs one strong party as if one party system unites the people) is baseless. The denial of the right to be organized in parties denies the right of choice and goes against the pluralism which is embodied in democracy.

Emperor Haile Sellasie told journalist Oriana Fallaci "the people are like babies, they do not know what is good for them". This conception was shared by the military regime that followed and waved the Soviet banner to proclaim if the people are given full rights they would be duped by "reactionaries and taken along the path of counter revolution". The despots become the guardians. Actually, the Ethiopian people had time and again shown by their sacrifice their desire to be masters of their own destiny, to have their full rights. The struggle against the autocracy that led to the February Revolution of 1974 demanded sacrifice. The February Revolution was usurped by the military officers (Derg) and the struggle against the usurpation and for rights and democracy cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people (ref the bloody Red Terror and the insurgency wars). In May-June 2005, Ethiopian in their millions gave their votes to opposition parties and ousted the dictatorial regime of Meles Zenawi that clung to power using ruthless repression and foreign backing. All over Africa, the people have shown their

strong desire to have their full rights and have paid in blood to achieve their objectives. Even where apathy may exist that has never meant acquiescence. Moreover, it would be wrong to compare degrees of repression and to conclude people are better off "now than then " because the regime in place is not killing as many per day as the former used to (a curious argument forwarded to defend the Meles regime not on its merits by comparing its dictatorship to the past military one). The stability thus alluded to is illusory for the people concerned, the peace just a facade, the repression and denial of rights persistent and ruthless.

For the EPRP, democracy embodies pluralism precisely because this is one way in which the people can play a direct role in political life. By organizing themselves over and above the civil society associations in political parties, by choosing among parties, by passing through the process of competition and a free and fair election the people take part in decision making, in choosing their representatives, the policies they favour. The right to choose (and to reject) reflects the capacity of the people to decide, to directly take part and to impact on the political choice of their country. The fact that one party may be popular or enjoys stronger mass support does not mean that other parties become superfluous, unnecessary. The argument that one or two parties reflect the "will of the nation" and that multi partism is a "luxury that Africa can ill afford" is a mistaken one. On the contrary: the broader the democracy, the more chances for a durable economic development. Experience has shown that the in the absence of democracy economic growth that benefits the people remains an illusion though regimes often spew out inflated statistics of growth. In Ethiopia, whose illegal regime prattles about 10% economic growth millions are starving and the population below the poverty line is the majority. Democracy and development are thus intertwined.

Where broad democracy and pluralism exist dissent can be entertained and regulated (so as not to lead to extreme positions and bloodshed) in so far as there is the respect of rights, the respect of the right to dissent, the peaceful resolution of differences and contradictions. In the absence of democracy and where dictatorship reigns, political differences lead to conflict and armed struggles and violence become the norm. It is important to emphasize that freedom or democracy have no content and substance if it is not respectful of the freedom to dissent. A country cannot be run on democratic

centralism like a leftist clandestine political party. The tendency to repress differing stands, political positions and ideologies is therefore opposed to democracy. The demand for multi partism is also part of the insistence on the civil society to have its free space, to organize in autonomous associations without State control imposed upon them. The control of civil associations, trade unions, etc by the State is not democratic but totalitarian.

Self administration is another essential part of democracy. The people's participation in decision making is not only through taking part in free elections but in their capacity to administer themselves from the local to the national level. In Ethiopia, where several nationalities exist the diversity can be democratically handled and harnessed towards strengthening national unity by assuring self administration and equality at all levels. The notion of stifling centralism and concentration of all effective power in one place goes against democracy in this respect. Self administration, on the other hand, is the main school of the democratic process for the people and it is an effective means for assuring the direct and effective role of the people in the political life of the country. On another level, it also contributes to the checking of the abuse of power and the disparity (at least politically) between the centre and the periphery.

As part of the whole question, it is possible to situate the problem of nationalities in its basic democratic essence as a question of popular sovereignty. Given a reality of inequality and oppression, it is imperative that the rights of nationalities be respected, equality guaranteed without however equating such rights with automatic separation/secession as some self proclaimed vanguards claimed or still claim. Democracy and ethnic federalism have proved anathema in the Ethiopian experience under the Meles regime (TPLF). Evidently, the question of nationalities is first and foremost a question of democracy and self administration as an option within a democratic and non centralized system is a sure way of avoiding the two extremes of oppression and separation. Democracy includes self administration at all levels, from the factory to the national level. Self administration as part of decentralization and empowerment of the people is thus included in the democracy we envisage for the country. Local democratic formations will replace centralization and thus make devolution of power to the grassroots level a reality.

While individual rights are important and should be safeguarded, the democracy we envisage puts more emphasis on economic, social and political rights. That is to say, social democracy. Effective participation of the people in politics requires first of all their well being and capacity to do so. Hence, the right to education, adequate health care, to work, etc become crucial. The recognition and weight of collective rights would also have to be manifested practically, in parliament for instance, in political and economic participation. The federal structure proposed by the EPRP with the parliament having two chambers is a case in point. The respect of the rights of the civil society and the free functioning of the associations should also be manifested at all levels, from parent and student bodies in schools to higher levels in which women, workers, the youth, etc can take part as groups. The recognition of such rights and of nationalities for example would militate against exclusion and extreme tendencies of separation or ethnic conflict. In 2005, Ethiopians were forced to vote in an election conducted under an electoral law that favours the ruling front and an electoral commission totally made up of its loyalists and appointees. This has to be changed so that the electoral process becomes democratized and assures the full and free participation of the people.

As we wrote back in 1989, the democratic system is not like take away food: unwrap it or declare it and presto it functions, you can have it. Our people have necessarily to pass through the process to learn, to accumulate experience. Mistakes will for sure be plenty, elections could be rigged, votes could be bought, demagogues could carry the day and citizens may not even use their rights. These and other problems will appear and it is normal that they should do so. These and other failings can only be avoided through the crucible of experience, by instituting checks and balances, by raising consciousness of the people through their own direct experience. It in this respect that for us democracy also assumes an economic aspect which means the adoption of economic policies geared to improving the lot of the people, policies which will drastically reduce the gap between the majority have-nots and the few haves so that the majority can have the material means to exercise their political rights effectively. For us then, neither the man eats man blueprint nor the sweeping centralization/collectivization or State control that the past and present regimes effectively practiced or have in place. A democratic system with economic welfare and social justice is thus our basic objective. It is in such a way, through an approach which takes Ethiopia's political and economic conditions into

account and avoids leaping into an ideological or model imitating void that we can assure Ethiopia a democratic future.

Democracy for the majority. Broad democracy. No dictatorship and State control of people's lives and activities. The rule of law. Free and fair elections. Equality before the law. Self administration. Full respect for human rights. Social democracy is the democracy the EPRP considers appropriate and feasible for Ethiopia.

2. THE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Ethiopia had the chance to secure a working transition towards democracy but these opportunities were shortcut by armed elements who wanted to impose their own dictatorships.

The February 1974 Revolution saw the majority of Ethiopians rising against the feudal autocracy and clamouring for democratic change. But the call for democracy and "people's power" was hijacked by armed military officers who carried out their own coup and set up a provisional military government that conveniently forgot the provisional part of its name. The EPRP and other popular forces called for the establishment of a provisional people's government to be made up of all political organizations and including civic society associations and groups. This was a good chance for a democratic transition that would have opened the path for peaceful and democratic change but this was opposed by the armed officers determined to impose their own military dictatorship. They were politically challenged by EPRP organized protests and, as expected, they unleashed the infamous Red Terror to cling to their power.

In the late eighties, as the military regime started to wobble, the EPRP called for a broad based transitional government to replace it. This was how the EPRP presented the question in its Democratic Alternative pamphlet in 1989:

" A provisional government, as a transitional step, is one which continues to be posed at the present time. It is our belief that such a transitional body cannot be formed by one or two organizations but should encompass all or almost all the political groups and

representatives of unions, associations, etc. Such a government will have the task of laying the ground work for democratic election and the modalities of such an election.

During the transitional period, the provisional government acts as the government and will take decisions in this line in a democratic way by majority vote. It is not the task of the provisional government to draft a Constitution. However it should

- assure the release of all political prisoners;
- take concrete measures concerning the rules and technicalities of the election;
- ensure the means of disarming all armed groups and find ways of rearranging the whole military apparatus/structure prior to the election.

It is not the task of the provisional government to carry out referendums or take decisions affecting Ethiopia's territory or sovereignty.....Assuring the democratic rights of the people is a sine qua non or precondition for the success of the task of the provisional government."

The EPRP made it clear then that the military junta and the Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF) posed the main obstacle to such an evolution. As feared, the Tigray front manoeuvred with Washington and London to undertake a transition conference that excluded genuine Ethiopian forces like the EPRP and the Meles Zenawi regime was established to impose its ethnic chauvinist dictatorship on Ethiopia. This was yet another missed opportunity. Unfettered and unhindered by the intransigence of the TPLF in power, the EPRP and other democratic forces called for Peace and Reconciliation conferences that were ignored and mocked at by the TPLF regime. IN December 1993, opposition forces tried to hold such a conference in Addis Ababa but their delegates were imprisoned (one delegate is still in prison) and the conference more or less sabotaged. In May 2005, opposition forces went into a general election in a situation that militated against free and fair elections as both the electoral laws and electoral commission favored the ruling front or were under its control. Yet, the opposition clearly won the election and the regime imposed martial law, cancelled the results of the election and rigged itself back to power after killing more than 200 protesters in Addis Ababa alone and after jailing thousands of people all over the country. The chance of a transition, of the peaceful road that made the ballot the main

source of political power and legitimacy was smashed by the guns and violence of the ruling Front.

Missed opportunities have led Ethiopia down the dark path of dictatorship. The ruling front pays lip service to human rights and democratic governance while it has established an ethnic based dictatorship.

3. THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

The problems are legion, the possibility of a democratic alternative murky. Here is how out it back in 1989 before the present front came to power:

"The democratic alternative in Ethiopia is not a given, it is not a foregone conclusion however much our people desire it. There is the totalitarian junta, whose lust for power, is destroying the country piecemeal. There are also armed movements who, deluded by military strength and afflicted by lack of political foresight, are posing a serious problem to such an alternative by forwarding another version of the same totalitarian disaster. Will these, mainly and exclusively the TPLF at present , see the errors of their positions and correct their line? A big doubt lingers." (emphasis added here)

The doubt unfortunately turned into a bad certainty. By 1991 the TPLF took power and went ahead to establish its own ethnic based dictatorship. And things got complicated even further. To begin with the minority group divided Ethiopia into nine Kilils (regions or pseudo Bantustans) and boasted ethnic federalism is in place while its main concern lay elsewhere. The existing division has not ushered any self determination or democracy other than dividing the people and making economic development and integrated action an impossibility with power still centralized in the hands of the ruling clique. What has transpired is the fanning of ethnic conflict, the dissipation of the national energy into inter ethnic rivalry and the supremacy of one Kilil (of course the Tigray of the ruling Front TPLF) over all the others. Ethiopia is more divided than ever

before and this fact has negative bearing on the possibilities of effective democratic transition.

Seventeen years of harsh rule by the ruling front has proved beyond a doubt that the regime brooks no opposition other than a loyal and subservient one like the ones in its rubber stamp parliament. Opposition leaders and members have been killed, jailed tortured, hounded and forced to flee. The independent press has been muzzled and a harsher Press Law has now been legislated while a repressive law that is aimed at ending any activity in support of human rights (the so called Charities and Societies Law) is about to be proclaimed. Thousands of political prisoners languish in known and underground prisons while torture has become routine. The army, the police, the bureaucracy are all dominated by one ethnic group. The Stalinist TPLF has stayed loyal to its basic dictatorial political choice while playing the free market and pluralism game as a joke to dupe or please Western powers that need its services in the so called war against terrorism in the Horn. In May 2005, the ruling Front lost a general election but stayed in power by unleashing violence against the Opposition forces and the people at large. It suffered little or no sanction from those who bankroll it or pay two thirds of its annual budget. The path of peaceful political struggle/competition is more or less closed as the ruling clique does not want to respect the voice and decision of the people and relies on its might to perpetuate itself in power. The recent election proved once again that the TPLF will continue to rig elections to continue the charade.

Tolerance of dissent, a basic tenet of a democratic regime, is an abomination to the TPLF. Like most African dictators, Meles Zenawi considers dissent a crime to be punished with ruthlessness. The atrocities of the regime in the Ogaden, the massacres in Gambella, Gondar, Areka, etc are not anomalies but true to character. It is a violent regime that is adept at the ploys and demagoguery needed to sweeten the words for the ears of the donor countries. The democratic transition is thus compounded now by the fact that the regime is pushing more and more people and organizations to armed struggle or resistance. Power is held by a few people in a very centralized organization surrounded by satellite groups. The perennial dictator is in place in the person of Meles Zenawi who, even if he leaves, will be replaced by a clone though the survival of the regimented front may be in question. The regime has invaded Somalia and has done that to fulfil the

wishes of Washington and for this the regime is enjoying political and economic support of the West. This makes the popular struggle for democracy even more difficult. The regional situation and Ethiopia's critical place in the area of geo political importance is another point to be factored in as we consider the problems of a democratic transition in Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia, at present, more and more forces are resorting to armed struggle. There are still ethnic organizations calling for secession at all costs. Multi ethnic political parties are neither armed nor strong because of the savage repression they had been subjected to by the TPLF. The EPRP and other organizations are still deemed illegal. Legal but patriotic organizations are hounded and harassed by the regime. The space for legal, political and peaceful struggle has been restricted by the TPLF itself. What then is the prospect for a democratic transition?

4. What is the Way Out?

There are many pitfalls for those who dare to see the future, to define it and go after it. Ethiopian political organizations of all hues and ideologies have presented their programs and "visions" though foreign circles often proclaim that these organizations "only criticize without presenting their alternatives". The EPRP for one has persistently presented its alternative and what it considered as a way out be it as a member of the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces or as an active member of the Union of Ethiopian Democratic Forces or by itself as the EPRP. The January 2002 EPRP pamphlet (" EPRP Policy on Transitional Arrangement in Ethiopia ") is an example. The scenarios in place are quite a few:

- the ruling front can implode from within given its internal squabbles and the acute problem within the armed forces;
- armed group could gain strength and topple it though they are not united up to now and their coordinated action seems improbable;
- some naive souls dream that they should form an exile government and Washington will carry them to power;
- The opposition organizations will deal with their handicaps and come together to struggle effectively to form a provisional/transitional government.

Is there still any possibility for the ruling front to be included in any option for a transition? As the situation stands there is little or no possibility to envisage the regime as a partner in any transition and thus its removal, as is, is a necessity. In other words, the opposition organizations must struggle to assure the removal of this regime and to replace it by a democratic one. That this may necessitate the adoption of all forms of struggle is a choice imposed by the intransigent regime and it should be undertaken in earnest to assure the interest of the Ethiopian people. Given the national interest of foreign powers, it is clear that the Ethiopian people will have to rely on themselves to assure their own future in all aspects.

The democratic alternative can be a reality on a new foundation for a democratic Ethiopia as we tried to express in our treatment of our conception of democracy.

- All political forces must be included in the transition process;
- the full respect of human rights, the rule of law and social democracy must be the foundation for the new Ethiopia without this option being exclusionary or restrictive in any way;
- self administration and the political empowerment of the people should be assured;
- rights should not only be political but economic and social too;
- the sovereignty of Ethiopia should be respected/protected;
- free and fair elections should be the means of determining who comes to power;

The experiences of coalitions and united front have not been very encouraging for sure and it is understandable that today many people consider the unity of opposition forces impossible. Yet, the democratic transition calls for a certain degree of understanding and cooperation between the various forces so that they can come together to assure a transition that will give the space and opportunity to compete democratically. This does not exclude their struggle as it is being waged now. But the exigencies of the transition demand imperatively that the opposition forces come together for a common effort and goal.

What is the way out?

There is no full proof panacea. Yet, there is always a way out as long as a people struggling for their inalienable rights will, in the end, realize their objectives. But time is not generous at all. The very survival of Ethiopia is at stake. Long experience shows without ambiguity that the future of Ethiopia should be without the TPLF. Any option that takes the ruling front as part of the solution is doomed from the start. This is a result of properly assessing the past 17 years of experience. 17 years of a brutal dictatorship, bloody, ruthless, no tolerance for even the milder dissent. The mask is no longer covering the mess that the Meles dictatorship is wallowing in.

The way out or the democratic alternative for Ethiopia has necessarily to base itself on an end of the rule by the Meles regime. The Stalinist and authoritarian regime has to go. There is no other way. It is beyond repair as it is now; it has rejected all overtures for reconciliation and reform. Those who still dream of reforming this Stalinist group are day dreaming and inadvertently causing harm to the interest of the people of Ethiopia. The EPRP has presented its alternative to the existing malaise, to the repressive and anti people Meles regime. It proposes:

- **a federal democratic republic through the free and fair election of the people, a republic in which the rule of law and the democratic rights of the people shall be respected and the unity of the people and the country maintained on the basis of equality;**
- **and for the transitional period "to establish a transitional government composed of the representatives of the political parties, civic society, unions, elders, etc and to prepare the way for the government to be set up by the country wide free and fair election of the people.**

The full respect of democratic rights, the respect of the rights of nationalities, secular republic, the rule of law, a national economy, the safeguarding of the rights and interests of the majority working people, protection of the environment, the establishment of a professional armed forces, to assure gender quality, to institute an educational system favoring national development and progress, to have a health and medical care system

benefitting the people, to follow a foreign policy of neutrality and peaceful co existence, etc.: the EPRP has presented thus its programmatic alternative. Other organizations have also their own visions and choices. This requires that the proposals find a common meeting ground at least to have a common transitional conception and to let the people decide what shall be their preference. it is imperative that all forces uphold the fact the people are sovereign and that their freely expressed decision and choice shall determine the future of Ethiopia. The EPRP is ready to accept and respect the decision of the people.