

Quick Judgements are Easy: why not contribute constructively?

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On October 30, 2016, I had the opportunity to express my genuine views concerning the welcome formation of the “**Ethiopian National Movement (ENM).**” I said at the time that this is a great start with enormous potential to do the right thing. Its potential resides in sending the right signals at the right time. Equally, ENM is embedded in the organizers willingness and readiness to reach out, embrace and empower others to join. It is not an end. It is a beginning. In my estimation, this formation paves the way for an inclusive or All-Stakeholders Conference that Ethiopia desperately needs.

The social and political motive forces that compel such a formation are Ethiopia’s millions, especially youth who have paid and are still paying with the ultimate price of losing their lives. Thousands of Ethiopian youth sacrificed and continue to sacrifice their lives for freedom, justice, the rule of law, genuine equality among Ethiopia’s diverse population and a socioeconomic and political system radically different from the debilitating tribal system imposed on the Ethiopian people by the TPLF.

For a quarter century now, Ethiopians at home and abroad have been clamoring for opposition groups to set aside tactical differences and focus on the bigger, most important and strategic issue of saving Ethiopia from potential fragmentation and its 102 million people from ethnic conflict that could potentially lead to genocide. Sadly, our political history is replete with negatives, innuendos, sweeping generalizations and accusations, “I know it all,” rejections of anything anyone initiates etc. Some of us remember the era of high priests who bestowed on themselves the titles of top-notch “Marxist-Leninist, Maoist and Stalinist,” dismissing the views of others even if they were leftist as irrelevant and reactionary. This tradition of demeaning and undermining others persists. This must stop.

The positive news of leaders of political parties with divergent views of discussing, negotiating and coming together in the form of the “Ethiopian National Movement” has generated interest, some welcoming the formation and others denigrating it. I caution the latter group not to fall into the trap of aiding the very regime they oppose. I do not subscribe to the hurtful and wrongful assertion that the “ENM” mirrors the political ideology of the TPLF. I find no credible evidence to support this subjective assertion. Read and try to understand the notion that the movement embraces Ethiopia as inviolable. This Ethiopia belongs to all ethnic and religious groups. Ethiopia survived because Amhara, Gurage, Somali, Wolayta, Annuak, Oromo, Tigre etc. together owned it and fought for and died for it. Think of the principle that this is a movement and not the Great Wall of China that can’t be crossed. In my mind, this movement has life and is nimble and flexible. This movement invites others. It is not exclusive as some might think. This movement is against the evil and narrow ethnic-supremacy embedded in the TPLF and its cohorts! This movement is against ethnic segregation and ethnic divide.

Major Dawit Woldegiorgis is right when he says that the TPLF “engineered an ideology of hate, the supremacy of few and ethnic segregation. It started off by redefining the boundaries for which millions of Ethiopians have fought and died for, destroyed the unity, the culture, the history and the future of its people particularly that of the youth. People are demanding for a common voice of Ethiopian opposition that can coordinate the struggle and develop a common strategy and guide the uprising towards a peaceful transition.” As far as I know, the ENM did not say that it subscribes to the Apartheid like system.

If we stick together the world will respect us and Ethiopians will own us

The global community will begin to take the opposition seriously if and only if the opposition has the courage and farsightedness to set aside differences and offer a compelling vision and alternative to the Ethiopian people. Ethiopians and only Ethiopians can save the country from destruction. They can save it from destruction by understanding that Ethiopia is home to a diverse population with diverse views. Each one has aspirations and hopes. In this regard, we have a clear choice. Either we become part of the solution or remain and obstacle to dynamic change. It is that simple. I worry that our understanding of the imminent danger the country faces is superficial.

First and foremost, whether as individuals or as groups, we must understand the notion that the country faces an imminent danger of fragmentation.

Second, we must recognize that the struggle is not about us. It is about the country and its 102 million people, especially the young.

Third, we must recognize that focusing on negatives rather than on possibilities is a losing proposition. We do not need more evidence than the formation and collapse of numerous organizations in the past 25 years. Why did they form and fail? Each one had his or her own agenda. The country’s agenda was set aside.

Fourth, at the moment, the EPRDF, especially the TPLF that dominates the ruling party is the most organized and most disciplined. The opposition must come together and try to match and challenge this force until it is dislodged or is willing to negotiate a transition.

Fifth, bilateral and multilateral negotiations that lead to greater solidarity if not unity is vital if we wish to respond to the legitimate demands of the millions of Ethiopians suffering at home. I see the ENM in that spirit. They negotiated and agreed to create a stronger coalition while leaving room for others to join. In fact, I encourage others to do the same.

Sixth, the plethora of discussions, bilateral negotiations and formations towards an All-Stakeholders Conference should ultimately converge. I do not see the ENM as an obstacle but as part of this dynamic process in offering a transition. I say this because I have not heard anyone not welcoming the inclusion of others.

In my estimation, the four constituent parties of the ODF, APP, SPDF and G7-Arbegnoh that make up the ENM are on a potentially transformative path. I said at the conference and they agree that they must be proactive in being not only open and willing; but also in encouraging and welcoming other stakeholders to join. They are. It our moral obligation to encourage others to show a favorable inclination to a compelling trend. I shall do all I can to contribute to this effort. So should you!