

# **Between 2005 & 2010 Elections**

## **The Rule of Draco & Machiavelli in Ethiopia**

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### **Panicked Government and Harassed Electorate**

Today we are only few days from the national elections in Ethiopia. In the run up to the election, we are witnessing the ruling party/government crying out loud about the possibility of post election crisis (violence). The warning is too deafening. EPRDF is panicked. We cannot be sure of what really caused this panic. The intelligence office and its foreign allies might probably have and shared some disturbing information (evidence) in this regard. But one thing seems to be clear to us at this stage. EPRDF is so resolute and certain that it wins the 2010 election. So what worries them is not winning. That is dead sure, unless miracle occurs. For the past five years, they have been doing everything to make the playing field like a mat for themselves and road of rocks for the opposition, the civil society, the independent media and the Ethiopian people as a whole. They are certain that they win. But they are overwhelmed by a sense of uncertainty about their image and legitimacy after they won the election. This is what caused the panic.

To 'win' the last election, they killed hundreds of people and imprisoned tens of thousands. Now too, they badly want to win. And they will 'win'. But this time they want to do it with lesser number of killings and imprisonments in the time after the election. That is the major difference and interest involved here. This is about image and legitimacy. They want their image to be that of "an elected government". They believe with lesser killings comes better image and chance for legitimizing their power after the election. Their biggest worry is if the international community accepts them as legitimate government. This will also be in the best interest of the latter, for it will serve them as justification to keep doing business as usual with EPRDF as an 'elected government'. So the EPRDF are out now to try to clean up their blood-washed image from the 2005 election. They want to look cleaner during and after the 2010 elections. The problem is they have no way of knowing this for certain at this early stage. This seems what explains their total panic and cry about post election violence and their misbehavior in propagating terror and total fear amongst the public.

### **Intimidating and Harassing the Electorate before the election**

Apart from its secret preparations and arrangements, the government is officially setting up provisional security units inside the people at Kebele, school and work place levels. Ruling party cadres at all levels are spying on residents in their respective localities. They have orders to spy on every house hold. They go house-to-house to:

- Make inquiries about which party house hold members are going to vote for,

- Know and categorize where voters stand from EPRDF's perspective: 'Supporters'; 'Opposition' or 'Neutral'?
- Harass voters even by taking their ballot cards away and returning back after a couple of days. God knows where they take the cards and what they do with them. But one thing is clear. This is intimidation, sowing total fear among the electorate!
- Each cadre 'Persuading' at least 10 people to vote for the ruling party and confirm their pledge vote with their signature in advance.
- On the polling day, these cadres also have orders to escort the same 10 voters to polling stations, stay close with them and supervise them on site while they cast their ballots. Adios the principles of free and fair elections and secret balloting!

These are only few examples of the lessons the tyrants in Ethiopia learned from their 'distant' and 'on-the-book' mentors like the infamous Machiavelli.

### **Ruling Party Members & Stooges as Election Candidates, Campaigners & Neutral 'Observers'**

Theoretically, what we call election observers in the Ethiopian context include: "public observers", "mass organizations" and international observers. The former are said to be freely elected by the local public. But the truth is almost all of these are political appointees in local government offices or ruling party local officials and cadres or their families, friends and other supporters. The truth about "mass organizations" is no different from the "public observers". These are ruling party/government stooges as well.

According to an article in the Charities law, mass organizations include youth and women associations (coalitions and forums), professional associations and trade unions. In Ethiopia freedom of organization is practically prohibited. Most of the independent national civil society organizations (like EHRCO, EWLA, OSJE, ETA, and Bar Association) are either much weakened or diverted their objectives and missions or went out of action. So it would not be difficult to know which and what kind of groups remain now to observe the 2010 election.

Other than spying and latter on shadowing voters all the way to the polling stations, the so called "mass organizations" and kebele administration offices are busy campaigning for the ruling party publicly. EPRDF posters are everywhere in- and out-side kebele buildings, gates and fences. Members of women or youth forums of this and that sub city are all out on the streets and roads of Ethiopian towns and villages to campaign for the EPRDF. They hired mini buses or ISUZU trucks and cover them with EPRDF banners, posters and Meles' photos. On the vehicles, you see local bands, all members of the forums, singing for and praising Meles and his party. Mind you, the kebele /sub city administrations and the "mass organizations" were all supposed to remain neutral in the election. We know Kebele / sub city administrations are government (not party) structures. Ethiopia's National Election

Board (NEB) has officially recognized these “mass organizations” (Women and Youth coalitions or forums) as ‘neutral’ election observers. Yet nobody cares and dares to stop them from their partisan acts.

### **Independent Civil Society Groups and the Free Press - “Missing in Action”**

But where is the place and role of independent local observers (Civil Society Groups) and the free press in this election? In 2005 this time, the CSOs and the free press, individually and / or in groups, had already wound up their voter education programs. They had been educating and training millions of voters throughout the nation and boosting up their morale for the elections. They did this for some three months time before the polling day. And on the polling day, they have been in many of the polling stations and bravely observed the entire process including vote counting during night time. They could have accomplished much more than they did, if it were not for the sabotage that was well designed and orchestrated by the NEB. This was in 2005. ‘Thanks’ to those Draconian CSO and press laws, there is no one by the side of the Ethiopian people in the 2010 election.

Instead, watch carefully what the NEB appointed local election officials, kebele administrations, ‘mass organizations’ (GONGOs), “public observers” and government media are doing today and will do on the polling day. Today, they are intimidating the electorate and campaigning for the ruling party as only partisans do. On the polling day, they will change hats (and roles); they will ‘observe’ and ‘report’ the polling and counting of votes as neutrals do. But we all know they will be there only to ensure, fully endorse and quickly declare EPRDF’s ‘victory’. What a pity and shameful thing for a country that claims to have thousands of years of history as a nation state!

### **International Observers – Good for Nothing!**

Now comes into the same picture here, the good European Election ‘Observers’ Mission. Surely they will carefully choose few sample polling stations in the country and visit them during the polling day. But this is Ethiopia. Ethiopia’s population size, total area and political climate are all too large and complex to determine elections credibility using data obtained from few sample polling stations during polling days only.

We know well that elections are not only about what happens during polling days and stations. They are like packages integrating events and programs that cover much wider ranges of times and places. Elections are about what take place all around and well before, during and after polling days. So, whichever stations the EU Mission choose to appear, Addis or Adwa or Temben, the election processes and outcomes in such handful places don’t matter much. Whatever they find out during the polling day, can never represent and show the whole picture of the election. This is to say that they can’t prevent the ruling party from stealing and ‘winning’. EPRDF has been preparing for this all the last five years.

Who and what else can stop the tyrants from stealing if not democracy and rule of law themselves? Democracy and Rule of Law were supposed to be preconditions for free and fair elections. But they are not yet in place in Ethiopia. To saw them on the Ethiopian soil, it takes much more than how we are fighting our fight today.

### **What Would these Observers Tell the World?**

We can have two scenarios here. The first and the most likely one goes like this: at the end of the day, the 'international observers' sit and write their preliminary report; here they will tell the world: "except for minor irregularities, the Ethiopian elections went largely fair and right". Next the EU will endorse its mission's final report and then refer the 2010 Ethiopian elections file to archives if not closing it at all. What follows is 'business as usual'. They continue doing business with 'Ethiopia's elected government' as before. Given what we know about them at least in the past two decades, what else could we expect?

By the way where is the good Anna Gomez today? As a true friend of Ethiopia, no doubt that human rights and democracy will be unfinished jobs for her too. One can foresee her dismay and frantic anger when she learns that her successors in the EU's observers' mission betrayed Ethiopia and the Ethiopian people and the higher causes of human rights and democracy too? Any ways, It feels good, at least morally (if not politically), to always have someone, who shares your pain and airs your voice during your tough times. It's just that.

Another less likely scenario could go like this: suppose the observers' mission dares to tell the world that the balloting process in the majority of the sample polling stations did not meet international standards. Then they say that it would be hard for them to accept it as genuine and fair election at all. From moral point of view, it may be too right for them to tell the truth. But from practical point of view they will find themselves at the losers end. They can't get away with this. EPRDF will definitely question their methodology and ridicule them for the very obvious spatial and temporal limitations they have had during their observations. (One British retired Colonel strongly advised the tyrants in Ethiopia, of course for a big professional fee, that they should always fight back criticisms from any direction (HRW or US Department of State) by 'exposing errors in methodology'). So ultimately the second scenario is very unlikely for it won't be in the best interest of the EU. Anticipate it or not before, or see it or not latter on, the EU definitely put themselves into such a trap by deciding to send an observer mission to Ethiopia.

### **Short-Sighted Choices**

What remains for the EU then is to make a forced choice between 'losers' and 'winners' – the Ethiopian people and the tyrants that continue to rule the country. It doesn't take much thinking to tell which party they choose to stand by. Understandably, the choice would not

be too easy for them. But ultimately, who cares and dares to stand by losers' side? What would 'losers' have to immediately hand over to foreign players in return for the pounds, dollars, and Euros the latter are supposed to pour on? Experience tells that these foreign players are not able to see their strategic interests with growing democracies and economies, with free people as masters of their sovereign states. But it is still difficult to explain how these powers ignore the very fact that they are benefiting from their relations with the free people and state of South Africa, of course with mutual arrangements.

### **Who is in Power in Ethiopia Today?**

What happens in Ethiopia today and as long as tyranny prevails is only what a 'police state' does to 'its' people. Of course Ethiopians have survived Mengistu's tyranny, where millions of innocent people killed, imprisoned, displaced and exiled. The trauma is still there.

And people's suffering and plight continue still. Only the name and mask changes now: 'Democracy' (for Revolutionary Democracy & Dictatorship?), 'Good governance' (for Rule of Men or a Developmental State?), 'Self Administration' (for Dismembering a nation, Anarchy and Divide & Conquer?) what have you? Now after two solid decades again, it's pity to find oneself and one's compatriots helpless and hopeless too. The state of the political climate in Ethiopia today is pretty bad. And the EPRDF will remain in power after the 2010 election. We can't doubt that the condition will deteriorate from bad to worse and even to worst.

### **“The Government that People Get is all What they Deserve”**

Is that saying working on us here? : “The government that people get is all what they deserve”. But by what measure could we possibly deserve a police state and tyranny? May be for not raising and fighting with arms? May be not necessarily so. Of course most of the Ethiopian Opposition groups have thus far opted for not going in that direction. They are still in the general frame work of a non violent struggle. But the question here is: Have they fought or are they fighting that peaceful battle too well, courageously, exhaustively and in unison?

What happened in Ethiopia this same week five years ago, just a week before the 2005 election (8-15, May), is still fresh in our memory. Millions of citizens in Addis Ababa and other big and small towns took to the streets. That was a very huge, quite peaceful and most civilized demonstration ever seen in the Ethiopian soil. The people sent very clear message to the whole world that they want regime change; that they deserve popularly elected government; that they deserve and ready too, to exercise and enjoy democracy as fellow human beings in the developed world. Undoubtedly, that was a remarkable and historical effort and result too. But let's face the facts. It was proved, now more than ever before, that the effort and the results achieved were never enough to put an end to tyranny in Ethiopia! Are the opposition, the people and the popular struggle in their best shape today? So the police state we have in power in Ethiopia today is all what we deserve.

This is very saddening. We should be collectively ashamed of our actions or reactions or in actions as well. These include: our political culture; some groups' unchecked lust for power; a never-ending quest for special privileges; lack of focus, commitment, knowledge and skills to assess situations critically and objectively and to organize and join forces to find lasting solutions.

### **The Ghosts of 'Draco' and 'Machiavelli' Rule Here**

Could it be that not wanting to resort to violence and armed struggle, a fault and crime for the Ethiopian people? Europeans and North Americans fought such battles 200-300 years ago. Mind you we are now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet we have in power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Ethiopia, political disciples of 'Draco' of Classical Athens and 'Machiavelli' of Medieval Italy. Draco and Machiavelli rule here! How? We can find the answer in those Draconian Laws that have been imposed on Ethiopians between the 2005 and 2010 national elections. The major ones include: The revised criminal code, the media law, the charities and societies' law, the antiterrorism law and the Proclamation to Amend the Electoral Law of Ethiopia.

But why these laws after the last election? Were they mere coincidence or deliberate response? The answer is simple. The losers (EPRDF) had to revenge and punish all those who worked hard to help the people victorious in the 2005 elections. And why these laws well before the 2010 elections? The answer is again simple but more strategic than the first one. The losers had to make sure that these groups are checked effectively well before they are out again to help heal people's wounds and scars from the 2005 elections and eventually boost peoples' morale for the elections to be held in 2010. It didn't take much time and effort for the ruling party to realize that the independent media and Civil Society Organizations contributed much for its defeat in the 2005 elections. It is needless to mention that the people themselves played the front line role here together with the opposition parties that appeared more united than they were in previous elections. So, all of those who had their hands in the defeat of the EPRDF in 2005, had to pay for what they did.. And more importantly, the EPRDF had to see to it that this will not happen again in the coming election. In a word all the laws are primarily meant to put any and all restrictions possible on any one, individual or group that is capable of bringing real threat to the continuation of EPRDF rule for the coming 20 to 30 years. It is 'Draco' that controls the political climate before, during and immediately after the 2010 elections. Unless checked at some point, this will keep going God knows until when.

On the other hand, many scholars agree that Machiavelli's work - "The Prince" is still considered as a 'hand book for rulers' (dictators). In this work Machiavelli, a councilor of not only kings of Medieval Europe but also mentor of all dictators of all times, teaches all the evil and cruel strategies and tactics available for power mongers to come to power and also maintain their rule over the people. Take EPRDF's ethnic politics and all the other strategies and tactics they use to divide the Ethiopian public along all possible lines and ensure their conquest. Look at what they are doing to the people and the opposition with all

their military, security, legal, propaganda, endowment, bureaucratic and several other machines. This was what was happening since the EPRDF came to power. This was what happened mainly between the 2005 and 2010 elections. This is what is going to happen after the EPRDF win the fake election now in 2010. That's why we say the two evils, Draco and Machiavelli, shaped and still control our rulers' values, mind set, and ways of thinking and action.

## **What Next?**

To conclude, if we want to avoid any more disappointment and frustration, then let's not expect any good out of this election as it is only carefully designed for a long time to keep EPRDF in power. Given the reality now and in the foreseeable future after the election, I think this is what we need to consider now and here: we *must* engage ourselves in thinking seriously, communicating widely, organizing and uniting early on about what to do / not to do and on how to go / not to go about things after all the hodgepodge around the election is over.

Condemning and pulling one another on sheer grounds of fighting tactics, organization fashions and past affiliations and mistakes are all useless now as they were before. Given what we have gone through, fighting over these issues will only be a luxury to all of us. Too much clarity on ultimate cause(s), focus and seriousness of purpose on common goals, selflessness and courage, unity in thinking, planning and acting are among the qualities and values we need to resort to, develop and demonstrate most.

Of course, as the saying goes, things are easier said than done. But actions and desired results have always preliminary phases: Understanding and analyzing situations and goals, refining and organizing thoughts and then communicating, digesting, further refining and internalizing strategies. So we need to work hard and dwell on common and bigger concerns; on much broader national intentions and directions. We need to refine our thinking and actions in manners that could well address the best interests of Ethiopians as one people and Ethiopia as a nation.

**Freedom Will Surely Come!**

**God Bless Ethiopia and Our Popular Struggle!**