

# Uncommon valor, the life of Kedir Mohammed

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On May 8, 2008 the man who devoted his life to the service of his country as a soldier for the aggrieved and the downtrodden finally gave up his valiant battle with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a scourge that kept him bedridden for a couple of years. Kedir Mohammed's death ended his unyielding pursuit and the selfless commitment that he made as freshman at Haile Sellassie I University in the early nineteen sixties.

Kedir was born in 1953 in a place called Mekere at the district of Silti from his father Mr. Edris Abdulwahib and his mother, Mrs. Marima Ahmed. Kedir's father died when he was very young and he was raised by his uncle Hajji Mohammed Ahmed, a business man who lived at Wolkitie. Kedir's primary school education was at Wolkitie where he completed 6th grade and moved to Wolliso. After he completed 9th grade, his sister, Rewda Idris took him to Addis Ababa and enrolled him at Kotebe High School. At 11th grade Kedir passed an entrance examination to Beide Mariam, a prestigious School for seniors inside Haile Selassie I University (now Addis Ababa University) at Sidist Kilo. The proximity of Baide Mariam to the University gave Kedir an opportunity to live his dream of joining the progressive forces that challenged the monarchy and the feudal system that dispossessed and abused the Ethiopian peasant.

After Tilahun Gizaw, the iconic student leader and president of the University Students Union of Addis Ababa was gunned down in 1969, Kedir with five of his fellow students escaped to Sudan to avoid persecution by the government. The monarchy accused Kedir and his friends of crime and attempted to get extradition from Sudan. The students were however granted a refugee status with the aid of UNCHR and Sudanese students. Kedir lived in Sudan for 8 years as a teacher until the monarchy was overthrown in 1974.

Even as a refugee, Kedir never ended his activism and the struggle for justice, human rights and equality of citizens of his country. He joined a budding organization that was cultivated by the Ethiopian students' movement that culminated in the formation of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). It is said that Kedir was one of the delegates that participated in the 1972 founding congress of the EPRP.

The Dergue that deposed the monarchy in 1974 offered amnesty to those who took refuge from the government of Haile Selassie and Kedir took the opportunity to return and continue his activism as an employee of "የግጥም ጽ/ቤት", a state agency that dealt with land tenure. EPRP at this time has openly declared its existence by clandestinely distributing its political program and Kedir as a senior member of this organization was involved in implementing the Party's program. Working at "የግጥም ጽ/ቤት" opened many opportunities to Kedir who was a fervent fighter for Tilahun Gizaw's and the Ethiopian student's motto – "land to the tiller".

It granted him unfettered access to the very people he adored and fought for- the rural subsistent farmer that constituted about 90% of the Ethiopian population.

EPRP made an advance of historical proportion by reaching all sectors of the Ethiopian population in very short time. Unfortunately, in due time, the EPRP was weakened by the assault of the military regime in the urban areas and by TPLF and EPLF in the North where its military wing had encamped.

The Party also split due to an internal factional fighting, and this exposed influential leaders and party activists that were covertly functioning. Kedir at this time decided to disguise himself and hide in the Northern part of Ethiopia leaving Addis Ababa. Since he remained in the Party's structure, Kedir was delegated the task of facilitating the departure of EPRP members who were being pursued by the junta to join the military wing of the party. In 1977, a cadre that lived in Kedir's neighborhood in Addis while visiting the area where Kedir was hiding recognized him and informed the agents of the military government and Kedir was apprehended. He was taken to Addis Ababa and was imprisoned in the Fourth Army Division Headquarters in Addis Ababa and the main prison where he spent five years. Kedir was released from prison in 1982 when the military regime granted a pardon.

Kedir was unemployed for many years after his release from prison because the regime through an internal communiqué had banned the bureaucracy from hiring political detainees after their release. Kedir was however employed in 1985 by the Ethiopian standards (ጠቅላይ ስራ) and then at the internal revenue office of excise and Taxes. When TPLF/EPRDF took power in 1991, Kedir was promoted to a position of branch manager at office of excise and Taxes. He fell abruptly out of the TPLF/EPRDF grace when the group within the Southern Ethiopian political block participated in the first Paris Conference that was attended by many exiled organizations. Kedir's organization, the Guraghe People's Democratic front (ግራጎሮ) and other organizations that constituted the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) were members of the transitional government at that time. However, SEPDC chose to withdraw from government when the party in power demanded the denouncement of the resolution of the Paris conference that criticized the party that usurped power from Mengistu. At this time TPLF/EPRDF falsely accused Kedir of corruption and imprisoned him.

The courts however affirmed his innocence and set him free, but Kedir lost his employment.

In 1994 Kedir as SEPDC delegate participated in a meeting sponsored by the Carter Center and returned to Ethiopia. After he returned Kedir was harassed and ill-treated by the agents of the ruling party. His organization (SEPDC) at this time decided to send him outside of the country as the organization's foreign representative. Kedir had served at this capacity until his illness. Kedir was an ardent voice of Ethiopian unity and an advocate for a united front of Ethiopian opposition against the TPLF/EPRDF regime. He played a selfless role in the realization of the Rockville meeting that formed the Unity of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF).

A representative of an organization that worked with Kedir for a year in organizing the Rockville conference gave the following testimonial: "I have known Kedir since 2001. He was a true Ethiopian and I have observed him exerting untiring effort by sacrificing his resource, time and energy for the unity and prosperity of Ethiopia and Ethiopians. Kedir was truly very instrumental in bringing together about 15 Ethiopian opposition political parties to a table for a conference in Rockville, MD, USA". Another veteran of the Ethiopian student movement and a member of UEDF stated that "Kedir was a man who lived to struggle for the cause of all Ethiopians whole-heartedly. We have lost a life-long fighter for equality and a democratic system. We miss him a lot."

Another person who has spent time with Kedir in prison from 1977 to 1982, and later worked with him as SEPDC representative gave the following testimony:

Kedir was respectful and loyal to his comrades. His most visible qualities that are in short supply among members of today's generation are commitment to peoples' cause and willingness to help others. Kedir celebrated successes of others as if they were his own and his heart rejoiced when good things happen to others. His world has always been that of collaboration rather than competition and his

friends have always been from the ranks of the ordinary people. He provided service to his people at no cost to them and he taught his friends through his modest life style and giving heart. Kedir lived and died loved, respected and honored. May his soul rest in peace!

Kedir was a man who had a strong spirit and vibrant personality that was never diminished by complaint or negative attitude. Those of us who knew him as a friend and colleague will not forget him. We will celebrate his life and will continue to demonstrate gratitude for his service. He will be sorely missed by a host of friends, family, and those who fought and suffered with him to bring good governance and justice for the Ethiopian masses.

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