

# THE ROLE OF THE ELITE IN BRINGING ABOUT PEACE, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT: TODAY AND TOMORROW IN ETHIOPIA

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## I. Introduction

*Ladies and Gentlemen!*

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Ethiopian Economic Association for inviting me to this forum, tonight, to share my wishes, hopes and anxieties concerning our country's future with regard to the realization of peace, democracy and development.

The timing of this discussion on the given topic coincides with a moment in which preparations are underway for a new round of elections and, also, one believed by me as well as by my fellow Ethiopians to play a crucial role in determining the destiny of our country in the years to come. Such belief, whether entertained by me or other Ethiopians, has its advantages as well as disadvantages with regard to the presentation and the ensuing discussions. The advantages lie in the fact that the topic is directly related to the country's current issues, critical as they are to us all. My apprehension as to the disadvantages concerns the likelihood for each of us to assume partisan positions, which might thus

negatively affect the chances of conducting our discussions in an objective and neutral manner.

Esteemed participants! I am quite aware of the presence in this hall tonight of people who are more knowledgeable than I am when it comes to the issue of "peace, democracy and development," a topic about which my own insight happens to be very much limited. Accordingly, when I present my views or opinions, I am not in any way of the conviction that I would be able to address all the issues either exhaustively or competently. Rather, my presentation, it is hoped, would serve as a launching ground for exchanging ideas and views amongst us.

In order to make my presentation comprehensible, I have chosen to address the issues under the following headings. First, I shall give a brief explanation of what 'peace', 'democracy', 'elite' and 'development' signify in our context and, then, point out some of the conditions that must be met for these four, beneficent elements to be meaningfully concretized in an integrated and unified manner in

our country. Second, I shall attempt, to the best of my understanding, to describe the situation in Ethiopia regarding these four elements. Finally, I shall try to project my vision of where I think and strongly believe Ethiopia would be in 2020, provided that we accomplish the tasks awaiting us at present.

## II. Definitions

It might surprise some of us to find out that some words that we use routinely actually are full of ambiguities. One such word is 'peace'. I believe that the repeated invocation of peace agendas only to disrupt peace indicates how much misunderstood or abused the concept has become. Adolf Hitler had many times made calls for peace. Mohammed Siad Barre had once marched at the head of a peace procession. Uganda's Marshall Idi Amin Dada once considered himself the guardian of peace, for which he had been awarded a medallion. Past Ethiopian governments had always considered themselves guardians of peace, as also recent regimes have done. And yet, the reality was and still is that all these countries have always hungered for peace. For

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some 'peace' represents a situation in which there no longer is an enemy to fight once they have eliminated their opponents, while for still others 'peace' means allowing oneself to rule in fear and silence. To yet others 'peace' means the cultivation of tolerance and understanding. Whichever definition we settle for, 'peace' signifies the sustained absence of disorder and anarchy. For the purpose of my presentation I shall adopt this simple definition of peace as the sustained absence of disorder and anarchy, with the caveat that my focus would be on domestic peace. Although the flourishing of peace at the global level has its own influence on a country's domestic peace, such peace as I have in mind, I believe, is in the main determined by situations on the domestic front.

The other obscure and controversial term is 'democracy'. Most of the countries around the globe characterize themselves as 'democratic'. Countries where elections have never been held are very few indeed. It has now become quite a while since dictatorships have made a fad out of masquerading as democratic, so much so that it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish the actions of the traditional democracies from those of the dictatorial regimes. It could possibly be for these reasons that we hear some intellectuals proclaim; "there is no such thing as democracy in the world today." Some infact go so far as to "pester" us with such questions as: "Does democracy really exist in America?" "Does it actually exist in the UK?" etc. I think that such people arrive at such skeptical conclusions out of the desire, perhaps, to gauge democracy on the basis of its

outcomes. What such people have failed or refused to understand is the fact that democracy is a system of governance. It is the system of governance that is democratic or undemocratic, not the outcomes of the process. It is believed that, compared to other systems of governance, democracy yields better results. But such belief may not always correspond to the truth. If a given system is democratic, it remains democratic, the positive or negative nature of the outcomes notwithstanding.

Democracy is a system of governance wherein power and responsibility belong to the people and whereby citizens exercise their power and responsibility either directly or implement them through their freely elected representatives. Democracy is a manifestation or expression of freedom.

There are several conditions that must be met for a system to be considered democratic, among which the main ones are the following: respect for human rights; the ensuring of majority rule and respect for the rights of minorities; the placing of the armed forces under the command of an elected civilian government; the ensuring of the free organization and operation of political parties; the ensuring of a free and just electoral system in which all parties compete and run for offices; the guaranteeing of a free press and independent mass media; the existence of a government subject to the rule of law; the existence of an executive branch whose powers are limited by law; the existence of an independent judiciary free from political interference on the part of the state.

It is the establishment of these and similar other structures and their subsequent implementation that makes a given system of governance democratic, not the positive nature of the outcomes of such a system. That is why it is inappropriate to put into question the democratic nature of systems of governance even when democratic systems sometimes engage in unjust acts.

'Development', too, is ambiguous, though not to the same extent as 'peace' and 'democracy'. Allow me to relate a joke at this juncture. A group of government economic advisors once went on an excursion only to find themselves lost after wandering about for a while. Seeing the bewilderment of the group, the chief economist asked for the map they had with them and started surveying it carefully to determine their bearing. Then, he shouts rather triumphantly: "I know where exactly we are! Do you see that distant mountain over there? We are exactly on top of it!" This joke is a favorite among African leaders. They constantly tell us about our development and progress; we, for our part, fail to see or understand where the development and progress lie. One shouldn't blame us if at such moments we completely miss the meaning of 'development'. Development is something that can and must be gauged. 'Development' that is not concrete, tangible or smell-able or flavorsome is no development at all, not in my book anyway. While figures could tell us something about development, a careless analysis or interpretation of their significance, which leads to a conclusion that the numbers "indicate our speedy growth and that the growth so computed stands witness to our development," would

put us in exactly the same position as the economist of the joke who trusted the map more than his own senses and asserted that he and his group were on top of the distant mountain that they had yet to get to.

As I see it, development must change people's present standard of living, or must concretely point to their future hopes and aspirations. It must manifest itself in the improvement of our feeding habits, our health status, our level of education and our system of governance. And development must be measured not just in terms of one's own domestic achievements but also in terms of the progress made by one's neighbors. One needs to pay heed to the psychological trauma experienced by the former Soviet Union and Albania when they realized how far their neighbors had moved while, all along, they were fooling themselves about how fast they had been developing.

The term 'elite' is ambiguous, too. What I call the elite includes those people whose individual decisions can influence the country's political process, precisely because of their ability to exert tremendous influence on spiritual and/or secular organizations and institutions. Put another way, the term refers to those individuals with the power to influence situations—often also holding leadership positions—in the areas of economics, science, research, military affairs, religious issues, and professional associations. Although we can study the nature of the elite by disaggregating the sector into political, economic, military, intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc. elite, we should never

lose sight of the one common denominator that brings them all together as constituting a group: the one common characteristic or attribute they have is, as has been pointed out, their ability, as a result of their individual ideas and decisions, to secure the immediate support of the people and to exert tremendous influence on the overall political process of the country. When compared in size to the rest of the population, the country's elite make up a very small minority.

Let me anticipate myself and forward an argument that could possibly be raised by participants. The argument looks like the following: "politics is a systematized expression of a given group's interests and aspirations. If a given social group has its own interests and aspirations, then a political organization emerges that sees to it that those interests and aspirations have been met and realized. An individual fighter may rise, fall, be replaced, or may die. But as long as those interests and aspirations have not been fulfilled the struggle continues. Consequently, a country's political process is determined by the different social interests and the contradictions existing among them, not by individuals." Let us grant that much. Even then, however, those who, before any one else, realize the "needs and interests of the people," who explain to the same people what those "needs and interests" are and mobilize them for the struggle to fulfill those needs are members of the elite. Since, moreover, it is those same individuals that end up leading the struggle, the above-cited hypothetical argument appears to be nothing more than circuitous, or

saying the same thing I did in a roundabout way.

It is true that the elite speak, negotiate, and enter agreements in the name of the social group they claim to represent and their own organizations. However, it is not necessarily the case that there will be a correspondence between their own organizational interests and the actions they take based on those interests. Although the interests of the forces they lead exert influence on the strategic goals of the elite, unless they have a relative autonomy with respect to conducting their day-to-day activities as they see fit, they will have ceased to be the elite that they are and, consequently, the struggle they wage will weaken and wither out due to lack of leadership.

Foregrounding the role of the political, economic, or military elite may appear to some as an attempt to minimize the role of the people in general. This view does not strike me as correct. Since the elite themselves emerge from the bosom of society, it is inevitable that they should come forward with the psychological needs, dreams and visions of the people as their rallying points. On the other hand, it appears that we tend to forget what it means to say, "the people elect their leaders." As reality has it, it is not people that choose their leaders but the leaders that choose themselves. It is only in democracies that the people elect their leaders. Even in such cases, it should be made clear that the people elect their leaders from among the elite that offer themselves as capable of "leading the people." So, even in democracies, people who don't offer themselves to the people

as leaders cannot be asked to "please lead us" and get elected.

It is true that the elite are not completely free from the influence of their supporters. Those who follow or support individual elites must convince themselves that their potential leaders engage in the struggle in the interest of the people they mean to represent and that they are subject to the interests of the people. The elite, for their part, make the effort to make sure that their actions are not glaringly at odds with the interests of the people if they must win over their confidence and trust. Otherwise, there may arise a situation whereby their followers could come out publicly and condemn them as renegades or double-crossers, at the consequent risk of the emergence of factions within their ranks. And the biggest threat to the elite is the emergence of an opposing elite [group] from among their own followers. Such a faction emerging from the bosom of its own party could very easily win over the hearts of followers. And that is why the conflict and contradictions among political factions become intense. This should remind us of the following words of a female minstrel, loosely translated as follows: ". . . when a person who was once loved becomes despised his stature no longer appears as that of a human being."

My presentation tonight, then, is about these four beneficent elements: namely, *peace, democracy, development and unity of the elite*.

### III. By Way of A Prelude

It is my belief that the Ethiopia of the year 2020 will find itself in a difficult position to achieve peace without democracy and development, or to establish democracy without peace and development, or, yet again, to bring about development without peace and democracy, and in general or to bring about peace, democracy and development without the unification of the elite. It is my conviction that we must seek ways to make all four workable in a concerted manner, however difficult the challenge. That is why I dared to tackle all four concepts in their interconnection.

The one important lesson I have drawn from the first round of Vision 2020 Ethiopia discussions is the reinforcement of my own long-time conviction that "we could find solutions to our problems only if we managed to pare down our differences and act in a concerted fashion with a common national vision."

As has been pointed out time and again during the previous rounds of discussions at these fora, Ethiopian elites tend to waste much time and far too many resources on extending and intensifying their differences instead of attempting to narrow and temper them down.

Our government for its part has been tied down to the same act of extending and intensifying differences. Intellectuals on their part argue, "differences are essential to the development process," but they seem to have accepted the assertion as a dictum without stopping to ask "to what extent?" Employees of the department of the institution where I used to work were used to communicating among themselves and resolving their differences through discussions, so

much so that not a single member of the department was reported to the boss by his/her colleagues for personal or professional reasons. The institution's boss, who was not pleased with the situation, felt the department lacked in differences among its members and decided, by some "cunning," to sow discord among the department's members. Today that department finds itself weakened with all sorts of squabble and dispute, unable to realize its weaknesses and yet claiming to "be faring better than before." When I think of that department today, the picture I draw of it is that of "Ethiopia in a microcosm."

I also think that our awareness of the market economy is linked to our culture of intensifying differences. It appears that the dictum "competition is the driving force of the economy" is understood as meaning "cooperation is a stumbling block to economic growth and development." That is why, I think, we often fail to address the issue of lack of cooperation when talking about lack of adequate competition. Talking about cooperation in Ethiopia is interpreted as a socialist outlook. It appears that we have been unable to realize that competition and cooperation are mutually supportive of each other.

It is my belief that, when talking about peace and development within the context of our situation, we should focus less on differences and more on cooperation. And what will enable us to do so happen to be you and me as tangibly and concretely palpable citizens, not some "broad masses" that we habitually talk about in abstraction. What ought to be a starting point for any study that we might undertake is not people in general—as a

homogeneous mass—but concrete and identifiable individuals.

The way I view it, individuals have a crucial role to play in determining the fate of any given country. Specifically, I believe that those individuals who have gained reputability and can wield influence as a result of their knowledge, competence, professionalism, social position, respectability, wealth, etc. play a very crucial role in this respect.

#### IV. The Organization Profile of the Elite

In my view, one of the crucial—perhaps even the most important—factors determining the direction of the overall political process of any given country is the extent of the strength or weakness of the relationships among elite groups. I am of the conviction that the organizational profiles of the elite groups of a given country play a crucial role in the attainment of peace, democracy and development for that country. Any given country could be home to elite groups that are either disunified and opposed to each other or, conversely, unified by a common ideology, or that have come close together through compromise and understanding.

##### 4.1 Communities with Disunified and Mutually Opposed National Elite

Because there exists mutual mistrust among opposing elite groups living in such communities, there lacks a willingness to get together at the individual level and iron out differences through discussions. In such communities, politics means deceit, scheming, cunning, tripping others to the ground or pushing them over to their fall. The victory

of one is the other's downfall (a zero-sum game). Not only that, it could also result in a situation in which both contenders end up losing (a negative-sum game). [Skeptical] remarks such as "politics is a dirty game" or "one should keep one's distance from politics and live wire," I believe, are results of disillusion with communities teaming with such elite groups. Because each such elite group believes that "peace can be realized only by completely routing out one's opponent," it wants to make sure that the struggle it conducts to realize peace should involve the destruction of other elite groups. Consequently communities where such elite groups exist will be dominated by instability, armed rebellions and coups d'état. In such communities it is difficult to even dream of democracy; peace will not flourish; and development becomes extremely sluggish. The other unfortunate thing about this kind of situation is that what few, regardful people there may be in such communities, over and above the fact that they have completely removed themselves from political activities of any sort, detest politics, and their criticism of politics and politicians are filled with cynicism. Such a situation constrains the educated sector from making its due contribution to the society as much as it should have. Because of the fact that such conscionable individuals distance themselves from politics, those who win the game of mutual destruction will be the merciless, the shrewd and the spiteful, so that regarding politicians as evilly-disposed, shrewd, and as liars, the few conscionable and well meaning individuals consider politics as a profession not to be desired. Because many of the sub-Saharan

African countries, but especially the countries of the Horn, have been fashioned by such elite, peace, democracy and development have become alien and the countries find themselves at the tail end of the world on all four counts.

##### 4.2 Communities with Ideologically Unified Elite

The elite in any given society could be of the type governed and guided by one world outlook or political ideology. Because such governing ideology is believed to provide unequivocal answers to all questions, the degree of elitism<sup>1</sup> is measured or determined by the degree of the ability or competence of the members of the elite group to understand and implement that ideology. Religions have been playing this ideological role for centuries. In subsequent periods, such governing ideologies as Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, etc. have played similar roles. In our own current situation, 'Revolutionary Democracy' appears to aspire to playing a similar role. The main role of such an ideology ('religion') is to mold a homogeneous community of citizens. In communities where there is an ideologically unified elite, it is necessary to put in place a leading organization that promotes the causes of that ideology. Any other ideology that is different from the officially professed one is not only considered unnecessary but also not allowed to exist. The leaders of such an organization are [considered] well versed in the ideology, as they also are competent in its interpretation. The rest, that is

<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: 'Elitism' is here understood as meaning "a sense of being part of an elite." [Webster's II New College Dictionary.]

the rank and file, have no more role than repeating what the principal elite says and thinks. In such communities, politics means imbibing, proliferating, analyzing the leading ideology and engaging in nitpicking and hairsplitting. In such communities, the politician is considered a crammer, a secretive, and an ostentatious person. In communities where such elite exist, democracy is unthinkable because differences of opinion are not at all entertained. Such communities could be peaceful and may even enjoy some degree of development. But because the development is not accompanied by freedom, it lacks firm foundation. If we have no problem considering the Vatican as a self-contained state, it serves as a good example of such communities. The former Albania and Soviet Union, too, would do as similar examples. And today we can list down North Korea, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Libya, so on and so forth.

### 4.3 Communities with Consensually Unified National Elite

The elite in some countries, rather than going for mutual elimination, opt for narrowing down their differences and coming to the negotiating table where possible, and where they could not settle their differences, take their cases directly to the people.

When the alignment of forces among different factions is balanced and no one faction lacks the moral and/or political preponderance to get rid of the others, the elite prefer to sit at the negotiating table in order to prevent their differences from leading to confrontation. And generally, such negotiations start

out on the level of individuals and are settled at the level of organizations. Gradually, rules and regulations governing the negotiations are laid down and complied with by all or the majority of the elite. They also lay down a mechanism (e.g. taking turns or elections) for some issues not amenable to negotiation (e.g. power-holding). While the elite groups agree to hold referendum on issues about which they could not resolve their differences, and since in such a scenario politics assumes the dual dimension of being both negotiable and competitive, it becomes a vocation that requires in-depth knowledge. In communities with such types of elite, although there always is winning as well as losing in politics, because it will be considered a game in which competing and losing is preferred rather than not competing at all, losing will not be that bitter though, to be sure, one prefers victory.

In other words, politics is a positive-sum game. In a situation like this, a politician must be one who is able to increase the gains and minimize the losses of his/her group at every negotiation and debate, one who can present his/her ideas in as simple a language as possible to the majority of the people in a convincing manner and one who is able to address issues articulately. Because of this and other reasons, politics is a respectable vocation that requires patience and tact and which children aspire to when they grow up. Those who emerge winners in such competitions will be those individuals with vision, those who are perspicacious, patient and articulate. For such communities peace represents the outcome of

negotiation and tolerance. It can, then, be said that communities of this type find themselves in a situation conducive to the institution of peace. And because the opportunity for the free exchange of ideas is far and wide, the situation is favorable to development.

A community in which there is a consensually unified elite finds itself midway between the other two extreme communities in which, on the one hand, there are disunified elite and, on the other, ideologically unified elite. For this reason it is a community that combines a dose of attributes taken from both, much like coffee with cream [or *machiatto*]. As there is light *machiatto*, medium-light *machiatto* and dark *machiatto*, competitors can sometimes appear as sworn-enemies and negotiations between them become very difficult (e.g. Italy, Spain and Israel). At other times and in other places the competing elite groups are so close in ideas and thinking that it is difficult to identify their differences (e.g. USA, UK).

The existence of a consensually unified elite is necessary, though not sufficient in itself, for the co-existence of peace, democracy and development. I say "not sufficient" because democracy requires the structural conditions I mentioned earlier and similar others that I have not mentioned. What I would like to stress at this point is, even if we have a good constitution, a good electoral law, and transparent and impartial elections, etc., democracy cannot be realized unless the different elite groups are ready to settle their differences at the negotiating table.

## V. How Is It Possible To Build A Society That Has A Consensually Unified Elite?

Is it possible to consciously and deliberately fashion a society in which there are elite groups ready to make bargains and compete in a peaceful way? And if such a society evolves by itself how could it do so? Where are such elite groups to be found? Most above all, how is it possible to make a transition from a society in which there are elite groups with opposing interests to that with groups embracing the idea of negotiating their differences? These are all fundamental questions. Although the possibility of deliberately creating any community is debatable, what the elite actually do, whether knowingly or not, is precisely that. As some scholars (e.g. Higley, Gunther, Burton and Wesolowski) suggest, a society in which elite groups with opposing interests could make a transition to one in which the groups could temper their contradictions through negotiation and healthy competition is in one of the following ways.

### 5.1 External Pressure

If a country is pressured through invasion by external forces, the country's elite—at least the prevailing majority—will normally put aside their differences and show tolerance towards each other in order to fight the enemy in unison. Such scenarios had been clearly witnessed during the colonial period. Although this kind of mutual tolerance mostly flounders after victory over the enemy has been achieved, there could be

instances when it could continue after that, thereby creating favorable conditions for further negotiation among the contenders. The national elite and the democracies that followed in America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, India, etc. developed in this manner.

### 5.2 A Gradual Meeting-Half-Way of Elite Groups

Unless they achieve quick victory over the enemy, the extremism of both left and right radicals who are intent upon doing away with the existing system and replacing it with another tends to gradually abate. Extremism is attractive in the short term, particularly to the younger generation. However, because supporters of extremist radicals will inevitably realize that one extremist group is none the better than the other, and also because repeated defeat proves to be too costly to sustain, both left and right extremists would prefer to meet half-way and opt for debating the issue of establishing a left-oriented or right-oriented government. It has now been quite sometime since extremist Danish, Norwegian, Italian, French, Japanese communists and fascists tempered their extremist stances and held key positions in their respective parliaments and governments, with the view to tipping the balance of power each to its own side. And some have met with success through such tactics.

### 5.3 Give-and-Take

Although less frequent, there are moments when, in order to avoid additional cost, elite groups in power have been known to either hand over governments to their

contenders through negotiation or agree to share power with them, their differences notwithstanding. Such a change of social systems has been negotiated in UK in 1688-89, and in Sweden in 1809, between the bourgeoisie and the aristocrats with no need for the kind of radical bourgeois revolution that took place in France [in 1879].

The elite group that was in power in Venezuela in 1958 negotiated with its opponents and agreed to hand over half the positions of power it had been holding and, in so doing, avoided the blood-letting that would have otherwise followed, and laid the foundation for democracy. In 1989 the communist elite that was in power in Poland came together to the negotiating table with the opposing Solidarity group and signed an agreement to completely hand over state power to the latter. The Polish round-table negotiation was of special interest [for the following reasons]. The communists that were in power in 1989 had strong enough armed forces that would have more or less enabled them not to relinquish their power. The military leadership was under the control of the communist party. Solidarity had no armed forces. Even if the communists had not wanted to use military force, or could not have done so, they could have stayed "to lead the transition" and, also, claimed that they would change in the process and, consequently, prolonged their tenure, much the same way the Communist Party of the Soviet Union did. So, by peacefully handing over power to Solidarity instead, the Polish Communist Party spared the country the danger that would have otherwise followed, keeping its dignity and honor in the

bargain. Currently the same communist elite has revised its former ideological position, mellowed down its political stand and presented itself as a social-democratic group, participating in democratic elections and regaining several seats in the power structure.

In the South Africa of 1994, the then leader of the country's racist, apartheid government, De Klerk, and the freedom fighter Nelson Mandela shook hands on the historic occasion of the transfer of power to the latter and they both ended up sharing the Nobel Prize for Peace. Because the long-time conflict was resolved in the manner it did, it has served to pre-empt possible acts of vengeance that could have been resorted to by South African Blacks against the Whites. That peaceful measure has also spared South Africa the tremendous loss that would have followed had South African Blacks decided to chase their White counterparts out of the country. That truly was what is known as "Give-and-Take"!

Although the saying: that "a ruling party that is in power never relinquishes its power of its own free will" has proven correct for the most part, what has been said above is a good illustration of the fact that the saying never holds true all times and for all places. I have tried to show—using the concrete examples cited above—that there are instances in which elite groups in power can either share power with their opponents, or even completely hand it over peacefully and genuinely, instead of eliminating their opponents whenever they could, or if that is not possible, unleashing mutual destruction as

has been sadly witnessed in Somalia and Rwanda, or simply pretending and making a "make-believe peace call" to their opponents. Such occurrences are extremely rare and far and between, to be sure. And each and every negotiation in such instances is intricately woven with many global and national situations and with the culture profile of each country. However, the fulfillment of one or some of the following conditions is believed to prepare the way for such types of negotiation:

1. When all parties in a given conflict begin to realize that, if conflicts arise, there would be no such thing as a one-sided total victory, that, instead, the loss would be total and affect all sides; in other words, when the alignment of forces is the same for all parties;
2. When each party coming to the negotiating table is in a position to ensure its survival and has guarantee that it would have a share in the power structure;
3. When the people's "revolutionary" fervor slackens and they gradually lose their sense of patriotism as a result of protracted wars;
4. When, as a result of their accumulated experience in their struggle, their matured leadership ability, or their legendary heroism, the elite gain the confidence and respect of their followers and, consequently, feel or realize that their willingness or readiness to negotiate with their enemies or opponents, rather than being an act of apostasy, is a sign of sound judgment;
5. Although one party in the conflict momentarily feels superior to its adversary, when that party begins

to believe or realize that if the war continued, it would lose something else that it attaches high value to; when it believes that it would retain the same thing it attaches high value to if it went to the negotiating table from a position of strength; for example, the rights of full citizenship accorded to South African Whites, the respect due to the English Crown, the respect and positions the Polish communists command until now, Ethiopia's sovereignty (the treaty signed between Emperor Menelik and the Italians in the aftermath of the Battle of Adowa), all are values achieved and sustained as results of such negotiations.

On the other hand, however, the role played by external pressure or interference in the creation of opportunities for these types of negotiation is minimal. The elite groups that could not conclude any significant agreements among themselves, even in spite of all the protracted global pressure exerted upon them, are numerous. The one fact that we grasp from all this is that, all those soul-stirring peace talks that we hear at international and national conferences, peace parades, demonstrations, songs, posters, etc., etc., hardly have any significant, practical value by way of bringing conflicting parties to the negotiating table, other than the long-term and circuitous influence they might have in terms of depriving conflicting elites of their supporters, or creating the opportunity for the emergence of a third party, yet again, in the name of peace. The response to this kind of appeal by the people is that each of the conflicting elite groups presents itself as the only peace-loving side

and that, because its opponent would not agree to negotiation, it was forced, for lack of alternatives, to engage in fighting, all along spicing the response with simulated regret and sadness to boot. The occasions during which conflicting parties themselves sang the song of peace with the very people appealing to them are tiresomely too numerous to count. Not only that. Because elite groups constitute what is known as the cream of the crop, they suffer from a sense of know-it-all, as a result of which they would not seriously heed the intellectual and parental advices of neutral elites and elderly citizens.

The kinds of rare and singular negotiations that I mentioned above have two extraordinary attributes. First, the first rounds of negotiations were characterized by the fact that they were carried out by very few elites (many times, in fact, by the two main, contending individuals) in secret or semi-secret meetings. It is only after the first, secretly held *tête-à-tête* rounds that the main and mediated and arduous negotiations took place. The first rounds were fast and brief, the latter rather drawn out.

The other extraordinary thing was the fact that conflicting elite groups with different ideological leanings exhibited a more positive tendency to come to the negotiating tables than those with the same ideological leaning. As difficult to believe as this might be for many, the truth is that it is a fact. Minor differences get more easily intensified or heated than major differences.

## VI. Why Is Democracy Considered the Better

### Alternative for Bringing About Sustainable Peace and Development?

Unless there is a system of governance in which peace has prevailed and public goods are sufficiently available, society cannot adequately accomplish its tasks. Victims of unrest and plundering do not only lose the wealth they have produced through hard work but they also are robbed of the interest and will to produce wealth in the future. Consequently, anarchy or disorder is no candidate as a condition for development. It is, however, naïve to believe that, simply because it would benefit all members of society, a peaceful system of governance would come into being through the common agreement of peoples. Peace requires very high expenditure and a lot of sacrifice, while the outcome is for the benefit of all. While everyone is a beneficiary of peace, it is at the individual level that the price is paid. Consequently, while each "wily" person waits for others to make the sacrifice and bring about the desired peace, in the process minimizing the cost incurred on his/her part, the peace desired by all will remain a mere craving or mirage. It suffices to observe our reluctance to spend just a couple of hours of our time to go to elections to prove our cost-minimizing tendency.

If it were the case that sustainable peace and development would be determined by people's collective decisions and desire, there would have been neither peace nor development on our globe. As things stand now, however, both exist in our world, though not to the

desired extent. This has happened to be the case because there is a body for which the benefits reaped from peace have been very much greater than the cost incurred individually. The reputed economist Mancure Olson<sup>2</sup> illustrated this with a pleasurable, tale-like metaphor. Roving bandits rob people and make their escape; nobody knows when they will attempt their next act. Every time these bandits rob and disappear, the society's desire to produce wealth gradually diminishes, with the result that the bandits will end up with less and less to rob. After some time the bandits will realize that their hit-and-run tactic actually hurts them, and so, they transform themselves from roving bandits to stationary ones. They systematize their robbery and they give it the name "tax." They, then, protect the society as well as themselves from other roving bandits. Because this system is much better than anarchy, and the amount to be paid is foreknown, since, also, some benefits (peace and other public goods) accrue to the society, though not commensurate with what the people pay, production will increase, with development following in its footsteps.

Be that as it may, however, to the same extent that dictators consolidate their hold on power, their consumption inevitably increases. To the same extent that the expenditure for the armed forces, the palaces, the religious institutions, training, erecting monuments, building meeting halls, adornments for holidays, "contingency" savings in foreign banks (Mobutu is said to have stashed away 8 billion USD),

<sup>2</sup> Olson, Mancure. "Dictatorship, Democracy and Development." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3, pp. 567-576

the purchase of ceremonial clothes and jewelry for the dictators and their families (Imelda Marcos had 3000 pairs of shoes), etc. increases, the people will be forced to pay more either through taxation or by other means, the people's incentive to work, which had come with the order that prevailed with the coming of the new system, will once again plummet. It will be impossible to satisfy the craving of the dictators for more wealth, comfort and pageantry.

Stationary bandits also have problems other than the escalation, beyond capacity, of their consumption. One such problem is the issue of succession. Because there will be no clear-cut rules and regulations as to who should succeed the supreme elite when he/she becomes weak or old, there will be disorder and instability during the transition from one dictatorship to another. Consequently, it is highly doubtful that the peace brought about in this manner would last for more than the tenure of one individual ruler. This doubt itself proves to be a stumbling block to long-term investment.

Monarchies, too, are not fully free from this problem of succession. The consumption needs of the emperors [and queens] are beyond the means available to the countries they rule, just like those of dictators. It suffices to simply note that all the grand palaces and places of worship were built by emperors [and queens].

The rights to private property cannot be respected without the presence of a government. If there is no justice, contracts cannot be entered into, pacts will not be respected, and there will be no trust

between people and institutions. All these stunt development.

It is unthinkable for dictators to respect human rights, to provide full guarantee for the right to private property, and to establish an impartial justice system. And in the absence of these there will be no free flow of trade and capital. People want their property and contracts protected not just from the strong that have not yet come to power but also from those that are in power, that is, from the existing government as well. In fact, the most feared power is that of the government.

The condition for the prevailing of a speedy development and democracy is simply one: a government that is capable of ensuring freedom and peace, protecting contracts and keeping itself in check. In order to be able to create conditions favorable to a speedy development, there needs to be a mechanism by which to monitor the activities of the government. And this mechanism is nothing other than democracy. It is democracy that will make the legislative, the executive, the judiciary, and the free press each do their respective tasks, mutually supporting, monitoring and censuring each other.

That is why capital (that is, finance, skilled manpower, etc.) migrates from countries ruled by dictators to those where democracy has prevailed. In fact, dictators themselves prefer democratic countries, for the purpose of safekeeping their wealth, to their own countries or those countries ruled by dictators like themselves. It is the cumulative effect of all these that has made the direction of the

flow of capital from the poor countries to the wealthy ones.

## VII. At What Point are Ethiopia's Elite Now and Whither are They Headed?

Ladies and Gentlemen! What I have stressed so far is the fact that, although the existence of a good constitution, good laws and governmental structures is extremely useful, their presence alone is no guarantee that peace, democracy and development will prevail. We can borrow or learn about constitutions, federal administrative arrangements, and presidential or parliamentary systems of government from other countries. What is impossible for us to do is borrow or bring citizens from them.

Towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, we have witnessed the elite of Eastern European countries repeatedly questioning and criticizing themselves thus: "We have copied constitutions; we have structured our governments in accordance with universally acknowledged democratic criteria. What of us, the people, have we become for the constitutions?"

The storms of change started to blow over Ethiopia and Eastern Europe in a similar moment. But alas! How far apart from each other we are today! The Ethiopian elite are just beginning to interrogate themselves. Many still appear to be attached to the old habit of lauding themselves as 'erudite', 'sophisticated', etc. It is true, however, that there are some encouraging beginnings.

Some years ago Kiflu Taddesse provided us with some insight into the dreams and fate of our Ethiopian "Bolshevik" elite in successive volumes of his book *The Generation*.

As for the history of the military elite who, without intending it or preparing for it, bumped into power by some happy chance, and brought all that visitation upon our country as well as upon themselves, Dawit Wolde Giorgis and Zenebe Felleke have given us more than a glimpse in their books *Red Tears* and *Nebber*,<sup>3</sup> respectively.

For his 1997 Ethiopian New Year's present to us, Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam has enabled us to see through the many years of the concerted plots of a certain elite via his *Yekihidet Qulqulet*.<sup>4</sup>

At a point where I was just about to complete the draft of this presentation, *Netsannetin yemmayaweq 'netsa awechi': silit't'ane, dimokrasi inna biltsiginna: yepoletika lihiqan mina bezemenawit Ityop'ya*,<sup>5</sup> a book by Andargachew Tsige, found its way into my hands. I did not have the time to read the book to the end, but the browsing I did with the little time I had has helped me some (including borrowing the Amharic equivalent of 'elite'). If I had had the time to read the book from beginning to end, I have no doubt

that it would have helped better develop this presentation of mine.

Although these and similar other works that I have not mentioned here constitute good beginnings, they certainly cannot be considered sufficient. Our knowledge of Ethiopia's elite is extremely limited. I do not think much research work has as yet steered itself in this direction.

I think giving consideration to the following points would come in handy when attempting to study the state of Ethiopia's elite:

1. As if the fragmentation or disunity of Ethiopia's elite were not enough, the fact that the different groups are up armed to the teeth with mutual hatred to wipe each other off the face of the earth seems to me the one factor responsible for the tragic predicament our country Ethiopia finds itself in today. This act of mutual annihilation, while at its pinnacle during the *Dergue* regime, still continues in different forms and guises up to the present moment. I do not think that this politics of mutual hatred and annihilation could be brought to an easy end unless Ethiopia's elite groups arrive at some kind of consensus on the country's national issues.
2. The fact that Ethiopia's elite groups are ideologically unified within themselves appears to me another characteristic common to all of them. Each group has an ideology by which it believes it is guided and which it considers peculiarly all its own. Our elite groups consider their respective ideologies complete and faultless, so that they believe, rather

adamantly, just like a stubborn *debtera*,<sup>6</sup> that none whatsoever comes anywhere close to them by way of erudition. One result of such self-serving attitude as theirs is that it has blocked the way for the proper entertainment and deliberation of those differences existing within and among groups that would have contributed to the country's development. Because minor differences are used to categorize people as enemies, voicing one's opposition openly has given way to expressing views circuitously, through innuendoes, or ridicule, thereby contributing to the proliferation of the culture of secrecy and stealth. The speeches and pronouncements made by the current power elite are pervaded with sarcasm, so much so that the reason they act, while even still in power, as if they were still operating clandestinely, is probably this culture. So I think, at any rate. (The fact is that almost half of the members of the TPLF's politburo were not officially known to the people as well as the media until the rift within the organization surfaced. Neither was the authorship of the various policy-like documents known to the public.) Over and above the fact that Ethiopia's elite are disunited, that they are also fenced off from each other within the closed space of their respective ideologies has hurt both themselves and our country. Their ideologies have blocked their eyes and ears too much for them to even make the effort to understand what the rest think.

<sup>3</sup> More or less freely translated, it means "So it was" [trans.]

<sup>4</sup> Literally, "the downward slope of betrayal" ; "cascading down the slope of betrayal" [trans.]

<sup>5</sup> The title could be rendered in English as follows: "A 'liberator' who does not know what freedom is: modernity, democracy and development: the role of the political elite in present-day Ethiopia" [trans.]

<sup>6</sup> The word refers to the traditional church elite, who are supposed to be highly educated, but who are also considered arrogant in quite a few instances [trans.]

This has, in turn, paved the way for the mistrust and the politics of hatred existing among them to take deep root.

3. Ethiopia's elite (one can dare say without exception) have as their other hallmark considering themselves as egalitarians promoting the causes of equality and justice. Until only recently, liberalism was being deprecated as a manifestation of some sinister idea. Because the people on the lowest economic stratum, on whose behalf the elite claim they are struggling, and whom they say they are representing, do not understand their 'abracadabra'-like pulpity, have been turned into diligent parishioners obeying orders to build the future promised land in which honey and milk flow in abundance. Except perhaps the elite representing the Ethiopian Democratic Union, all are proponents of leftist politics and devotees of communism. As I have pointed out earlier, the contradictions between those elite groups promoting similar convictions are more intensified than those between groups with different ideological affiliations. The concepts of nationality, nation, people, peoples, etc., or what Ato Andargachew Tsigie has called *zwidegninet*,<sup>7</sup> which have close affinity with ethnicity, have been, and still are, controversial, and the clash in meaning they have with such concepts as Ethiopianness, continentalism, and internationalism has created altercation among the different elite groups, sending them all at loggerheads with each other.

<sup>7</sup> Ethnicism [trans].

What is surprising in all of this is the fact that these ethnocentric elites pass themselves for "internationalists."

4. The "Eritrean question is another issue over which the Ethiopian elite have been bickering for a long time now. The Ethiopian elite simply could not dislodge the Eritrean question from their heads, now—after its recognition as a sovereign state—as before, when it was part of Ethiopia.

I have already pointed out that the Ethiopian elite groups are disunited and opposed to one another, while within their own ranks they form a homogeneous entity. As has been witnessed in other countries, such disunited and mutually opposed elite groups would come to an understanding when there appears on the political scene a common national enemy, or when the repeated defeat of extremists forces each of them to meet the other half-way toward collaboration, or through negotiations.

It is almost proverbial that the Ethiopian elite set aside their differences and rise up in unison when an invading force appears on the scene. This has been witnessed during the recent Eritrean invasion of Ethiopia. What is sad, however, is the fact that such accord always dissipates into thin air after victory has been achieved. We really have to go deep to look into the reasons for such behavior. Poverty and hunger should have served, much as a common enemy does, to bring us together in a common cause; unfortunately, that has not happened. Why? The reason eludes me! But it is something in need of investigation.

Speaking of the different elite groups meeting each other halfway to come to a common understanding, the problem is that it is difficult to identify who stands on the extreme poles and who occupies the center. In the first place, because most of our elite groups embrace a left-oriented politics, the political orientation of the country still tilts towards the left. On the other hand, leftist politics has not been able to recover from the fracture it has suffered. That is why Francis Fukuyama declared that we lived at a time when history has come to its end.<sup>8</sup> It is true, however, that left wing politics does not die as easily as all that; it will put up a fight even while writhing with convulsion. In Russia Mikhail Gorbachev had concocted a rejuvenation drug known as *perestroika*, but to no avail. In our country, too, a drug known as 'revolutionary democracy' has been concocted for our own version of left politics. Even then, it couldn't salvage left wing politics, nor could it have, except maybe serving as some kind of local anesthesia to numb the pain. Considered from the perspective of the current global politics, left wing politics finds itself in a complete fiasco. Ethiopia cannot isolate itself from the existing global politics, which, therefore means that the Ethiopian elite must familiarize themselves with liberalism, even if it is not to their liking. It is indeed a very difficult challenge to abandon

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting *The End of History* in which Fukuyama wrote: If the philosophical doctrine of Hegel/Marx (a doctrine that Lenin, Mao and our own elite later propagated) to the effect that "the history of mankind has always been the history of class struggles" still holds, because liberalism has won the class struggle, history has ended. One should keep in mind that to argue that "history has neither ended nor will it end" is going against the grain of the Hegelian/Marxist doctrine.

something that one has applied oneself to and believed in for a long time. When I see the rather comical strivings of inveterate Leninists and Maoists to make liberals out of themselves, I am reminded of the following words attributed to someone whose name has escaped me at the moment: "Unlearning is more difficult than learning," the aptness of which I really appreciate.

As has been witnessed in different parts of the world, in Ethiopia, too, with the failure of ideological politics to prove itself workable, racialism and extremism have started proliferating rapidly throughout the Ethiopian polity. And this type of politics is much more devastating than the ideological brand. Ethiopia is in danger of finding itself in what Samuel Huntington calls 'civilizational clashes'<sup>9</sup> and embracing the kind of politics based on ethnicity and religion. The damage ensuing when we align ourselves on the basis of ethnic and religious<sup>10</sup> groupings, it would make one wish for the good old spar between "proletarians" and "working class."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting what Samuel Huntington, in what appears to be a response to what Fukuyama said [see footnote 6 above—trans.], said: when the ideological struggle comes to its end, it will lead us into more perilous civilization clashes, that is, racial, religious and cultural conflicts. When we see the outcomes of the cold war, we are not at that point where we can say with certainty who is the more correct of Huntington and Fukuyama.

<sup>10</sup> I do not think 'racial politics' needs any further elaboration. If there are people who doubt the intensification of religious extremism [fundamentalism], I invite them to listen to and to read what Protestants say and write about Orthodox Christians and what the Orthodox Christians say and write about the Protestants and the Catholics. At this point, I would like to remind readers that fundamentalism is not linked to Islam alone.

<sup>11</sup> The allusion is to the 'quarrel', which later proved to be deadly, between the two major parties—MEISON and EPRP—about whether the 'right' word for the Ethiopian

While, on the one hand, I personally take pleasure in the inevitability of steering ourselves towards liberalism as a result of the bankruptcy suffered by left-wing politics, which has been the cause for our mutual strife, on the other hand, however, I find myself filled with anxiety when I think of the possibility of racial politics and fundamentalist religions taking over in the interim.

At the same time, however, there are some encouraging signs. One such sign is the general bankruptcy suffered by the kind of left-wing politics I mentioned above, which has opened up new vistas for the flourishing of liberal thinking. There are currently social democratic parties emerging on the political scene. I am hoping that, somewhere down the line, proponents of right wing politics will appear on the scene, steer Ethiopian politics toward the right and help the centrist view win the day. The other promising scenario concerns the recent tendency of the numerous elite groups to align themselves into three major groups. This tendency has started manifesting itself not only in the coalition of parties, but also in the concurrence of their political programs. For example, the main

working class should be *lab adder* (literally one who lives by the sweat of his/her brows, preferred by the EPRP) and *wez adder*, whose core meaning is the same as the above, but has the connotation of having a glossy complexion, implying a well-nourished person, which the EPRP finds not only wrong, but unethical, since the laboring 'masses' led, if anything a life of misery; so whence the fat (butter, oil, meat, etc.) to give them such a shining countenance. Deadly because whoever, even inadvertently, was heard using the word *lab adder* was identified as a member of the EPRP and sent to jail, not seldom being shot as reactionary [trans].

contenders in the coming May elections are going to be only three. It would have been better if election-time coalitions were limited to two groups, but even three is a big improvement over what used to be before this moment. The other alternative for the Ethiopian elite groups to come to a common understanding is the kind of negotiation that I labeled "give-and-take." Is the elite group currently in power willing to relinquish or share its power? What does it expect to gain from such possible negotiation? What is it that it lacks at present? It is very difficult for me to answer these questions in any adequate manner, but let me put down my conjectures.

The elite currently in power finds itself in a crisis of legitimacy. It is my opinion that the current ruling party's problem is that the democracy that it says it has built is "pouring at its doorsteps" a wave of close to a hundred per cent support [and this is not a good sign]. After the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, a hundred per cent support from voters has become an embarrassment, not something to bask in with confidence. Even ninety, eighty and seventy-five-per cent support is not considered good. I think the party currently in power would like to see the support it gets during the coming elections come down to seventy per cent, thereby giving it the image of a government chosen through free and fair elections. And in order to realize this wish, I think it would be willing to relinquish some seats [in the House of Peoples' Representatives]. The question that is difficult to answer, I think, is: How many seats would it be willing to relinquish?

I hope you will not retort: "The question of "how many seats" is going to be determined by the voters." Because it is clear from the outset that the ruling party will be the one to devise the election-monitoring mechanisms. Consequently, the question is not "who will the people elect?" but "how many seats, and in which areas, will the ruling party relinquish to be filled by the opposition parties?" This question, I believe, comes closer to the existing, concrete realities. The people have not completely taken into their hands their right to determine their leaders through elections. Moreover, the voters, the candidates and those who coordinate and oversee the elections are not yet ready to be guided and ruled by electoral discipline. That is why I estimate that the outcome of the coming elections will be largely determined by the interests and willingness of the ruling party currently in power.

However, as it has been witnessed throughout history, when suppression slackens for a while, unexpected results emerge. Therefore, if the upcoming elections are carried through peacefully, they might deprive the ruling party of about one third of the seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives and a majority of the seats in the Addis Ababa Council.

This conjecture of mine is a wish on my part as well. If this conjecture and wish of mine is realized, the country's elite groups will be filled with contrition and think: "If we had concentrated our energy and made a concerted effort, we could have changed regimes through elections," as a result of which realization they will begin to make extensive preparations in advance for the 2002 [E.C.] elections. And the people will have more trust in elections and the antipathy they have towards politics will diminish.

For this altruistic wish to be realized the following conditions must be fulfilled:

1. Human and democratic rights must be respected;
2. The culture of mutual understanding, tolerance and diplomacy must be developed;
3. Voters, candidates and electoral commissions must submit to the disciplinary ethics of election;
4. The current ruling elite must put the country's interests ahead of everything;
5. Our elite groups must realize that democracy does not mean extremism, inveteracy, pedantry and ethnicism, and narrow down their differences, learn to work together for the common good and enable the centrist position win the day.

If all of the above are concretely realized, they will make each of the

succeeding elections of 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017 more democratic and participatory than the preceding ones.

If this is concretely realized and sustained, the issues of famine, nationality, borders, seaports will never figure as agenda for debate in the 2017 elections. The issues at that time would be how far the powers of the Federal Government of the Horn of Africa and Africa Union should go and issues connected with globalization and information and communication technology. Consequently, the Ethiopia of 2020 will be one in which peace and democracy will have prevailed, development will have been speeded up, where its elite will resolve their differences through dialogue and diplomacy and where a balance will have been struck between collaboration and competition.

If, however, my estimates fail and the upcoming May elections miscarry, because it is too repugnant to even think of the adversity Ethiopia would face as a result, I would rather refrain from saying anything on this score.

I thank you all for your attention!

*Third Round Next  
"Vision 2020 Ethiopia" Schedule*

Ato Bekele Bayissa -  
March 25, 2005

Weiz. Zeritu Neda/  
ato endashaw alemayehu -  
April 28, 2005

Prof. Seyoum Tefera -  
May 27, 2005

Ato Neway Gebre Ab -  
June 24, 2005