

REMARKS ON THE CURRENT ELECTIONS IN ETHIOPIA

By Mathza

In 2005 the former CUD took EPRDF by surprise. They used all kinds of tricks, tactics, deceptions, pretenses, exaggerations, lies, hatemongering, etc. giving the people the impression that they can instantly solve the people's and the country's problems. In addition to the feudal and Derg remnants — of which many urban areas are infested with — innocent people were hoodwinked, and many given cash, to vote for them. The rest is history. Time has exposed them as well as the UEDF what they really are. All they have been preaching were empty rhetoric. They preached democracy when they did not mean and practice it within their parties. They fought one another for leadership and Diaspora funding resulting in splinter groups, showing that it was thirst for power not the concern for the people that they were after. At the end of the day the people, to their regret, found out they were swindled. Because of such realization the people, as would have been expected, voted peacefully and overwhelmingly in favor of EPRDF candidates in the current elections.

Despite oppositions' attempts at discouraging voters' participation, voter turnout was 93% of the 26.3 million registered. EPRDF's spectacular win (increasing its own and its allies parliamentary seats to 408 in the 547-member assembly, 74.6%) shown in the table below indicates support for oppositions has dwindled. Voters had two options: vote or not vote. They came out in droves and voted for EPRDF. Under the prevailing circumstances, adherents of the not vote group, opposition supporters, would have stayed home after the UEDF and OFDM announced their boycotts. From the turn out, it is apparent that at most 7% took the second option. This explains partly the discrepancy between the numbers of those registered and those who cast ballots. The discrepancy gives some idea of the real magnitude of the vote that the former CUD claimed in the 2005 election. In the case of Addis Ababa, the current vote was just the reverse of that of 2005. From this it is obvious that the Addis Ababans have come to realize that they and their city will have a brighter future with EPRDF leadership.

| EPRDF's share of votes in total votes cast | # won/ total # | % won |
|---|-------------------|----------|
| By-election for Federal parliamentary seats | 38/39 | 97.4 |
| By-election for regional state councils seats | 67/69 | 97.1 |
| Number of towns under city administration councils | 101/116 | 87.1 |
| Addis Ababa City Council seats | 137/138 | 99.3 |
| Addis Ababa sub-cities seats | 2,970/ 2,970 | 100.0 |

In their endless efforts to discredit the PM the major oppositions lost credibility. They are now suffering from the consequences of their desperate utterance, actions, intrigues, competitions, exaggerations, lies, denials, etc. Their constituents must have been puzzled and disappointed at the consistent debates and votes of their representatives in the Parliament that deny any development in the country, that support, encourage and defend

Ethiopia's internal and external enemies,* and that blame the incumbent government for their own inadequacies in organizing themselves and in preparing their candidates for election resulting in inexhaustible, repetitive and exaggerated complaints. Furthermore, the dwindling number of supporters and the fact that many of their candidates did not meet conditions for registration were the main reasons why one (UEDF) of the 32 contesting parties declared it was boycotting the 2008 local and national by-elections at the eleventh hour. The OFDM followed suit after the first round.

The lame excuses that the UEDF and OFDM used (no evidences according to NEBE) are probably a few random incidents magnified a thousand times which would not have, in any case, made a difference to the outcome of the elections. Such incidents which by any stretch of imagination are not systematic could have arisen from at least three causes. The first is overzealous individuals who take unfair actions unintentionally or intentionally. The second relates to the deeply rooted Ethiopian traditional backward administration which still lingers with many public servants, particularly at the local level. The third has to do with remnants of the feudal and Derg regimes who could have orchestrated some of the incidents in order to deny the EPRDF of its expected legitimate win. It should be noted here that, unlike in other African countries where the modern system of administration was instituted by the colonialists, the one in Ethiopia is evolving from two diametrically opposed systems of governance: feudalism and communism — providing fertile ground for various interpretations, manipulations, intrigues, sabotages, etc. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to expect conducting elections in a backward society like Ethiopia to be flawless. As we all know democratic developed countries have yet to conduct perfect elections.

True to his characteristic denial Mr. Bulcha Demeksa uttered the familiar denial formula "*There is a very low turnout today, there is no interest...*" He said this after realizing OFDP's failure to win during the first round of the elections and used it as a justification to pull out from the second. How on earth dare he characterize 93% turnout as very low? Does such figure indicate the voters have lost interest in the elections as he claims? How true is it that only 2% of OFDP's candidates participated in the first round? Is this a means to cover up the extent of his party's failure to garner adequate votes to, at least, maintain its current share in parliament?

The UEDF and OFDM knew that the EPRDF has learnt a lesson from the 2005 election. It did its homework and as a result it is better organized. It has a much larger membership and supporters. SEPDM, for instance, raised its supporters 10 fold from 126,000 to 1.2

million. The same goes with the other components of EPRDF. There is no more an element of surprise from the opposition. The UEDF and OFDM leaders realized that hoodwinking the people to vote for them would not work this time. The option left for them was, apparently, not to participate fearing the backlash of the results of the elections. They had reached the end of a closed dark tunnel and were, as usual, crying wolf.

It is unfortunate that, because of foolish rhetoric and actions of the former CUD, UEDF and OFDM, including supporting and encouraging Ethiopia's enemies, the momentum of rapid process of democratization had momentarily decelerated. These parties have deprived the people of faster progress in the process of democratization. They have thwarted government efforts in development and therefore in alleviating the miseries of the people. In other words, they do not care about the welfare of Ethiopia and its people. Had it not been for their thirst for power the country would have registered more than the outstanding progress achieved in all sectors. It is hoped that they have also learnt their lessons. The people expect them to mature and do the right thing — think and act in ways that would benefit the people, not their egos and seizure of power.

Having crossed the red line and tried all tricks, gimmicks, conspiracies, treasons, exaggerations, lies, fabrications, siding with the countries enemies, etc. with disastrous consequences, it is hoped that they will eventually come to their senses. It is only then that they will be able to behave and act as genuine oppositions. Genuine opposition means conducting constructive criticism. Constructive criticism is admitting and supporting the good and criticizing the bad policies, activities and work of the incumbent government and providing remedial measures and alternative solutions.

Opposing for the sake of opposing and purely exposing the inadequacies of the incumbent government will not, as has been proven, get them anywhere. Supporting enemies and depriving the people receiving aid to improve their wretched living conditions will not help them win more supporters. On the contrary, they will likely continue to loss many more of their disillusioned supporters. They dread to read and hear and the Ethiopian people to know about positive changes, any accomplishments and the government receiving considerably increasing assistance as well as compliments by independent observers and development partners.** Their strategies to frustrate the government from implementing its policies, plans, programs and projects have not worked and will not work. They should learn from EPRDF to conduct a 'tehadso', a renewal process, and to contribute to nation building rather than derailing progress.

The purposely orchestrated exaggerated surreal claim of winning during the 2005 election lead the then CUD to its demise. For Engineer Hailu Shawul, wining and becoming the prime minister was 'now or never' objective because of his age and fragile health. As it became clear with defunct CUD officials' confession of guilt followed by happenings in the last few months that frustrated its supporters, he manipulated the CUD to have his own way, not in the interest of the CUD. This was the root cause of all the unrest that eventually led to the disintegration of the CUD. Had he been realistic, less ambitious and avoided some of the gross and reckless follies he committed, CUD, by

now, would have, probably, been a tough competitor to the ruling party. His competitor, Dr. Berhanu Nega, has completed his mission at Mount Sinai and come down carrying his own Tablets. The main item on the Tablets is removal of the incumbent government by any means, including force. To this end, he announced having formed a new party (with unnamed executives), Ginbot 7: Movement for Justice Freedom and Democracy, the fourth and latest fragment of CUD. Such is the pathetic situation of the main oppositions, including UEDF which had previously splintered into two. No wonder they were so utterly divided and disorganized that they could not contest during the recent elections. Not only that but their disintegration has, apparently, immobilized follow up by the Ethiopian National Coalition of Elders.

* In its special commentary of May 27, 2008 “Meles, out of Somalia” supporting and encouraging the terrorists in Somalia, the liar and anti-Ethiopia Ethiomedia publisher, one of the mouthpieces of the opposition, quoted CNN as saying “*Ethiopia's government buys all crops from farmers at fixed low prices.*” He disingenuously used a false statement by CNN as fact to prove his point. This is the latest misinformation the opposition spreads on a daily basis.

** Some of the very recent acknowledgements and support by the international community:

- While announcing the launching of a new Country Assistance Strategy for Ethiopia covering the period July 2008-June 2011 “*to help Ethiopia sustain its strong performance in economic growth and basic service delivery in recent years*” the World Bank declared “*Ethiopia has entered the stage of a ‘dual-takeoff’ in the provision of public services and economic growth. Over the past decade, its efforts to improve basic services have shown impressive results.*”
- Paul Ackroyd, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), said “*Ethiopia has seen economic progress since 2000*” and announced 2.5 billion Bir aid for this year, almost equal to that provided over the past two years.
- Gunther Slevewagen, Belgium Ambassador to Ethiopia said “*Ethiopia is able to register remarkable and rapid economic development as well as desirable changes in various sectors that indicate the ‘promising future’ of the nation.*” Comparing Ethiopia of 20 years ago when he was Charge d’ Affaires of his Government, he “*was stunned to witness the changes the country has registered during last few years.*” He added “*I’m satisfied with free economic policy and with the existing mass media operating freely and openly. Ethiopia is a country starting everything afresh.*”
- The 9th session of the Pan African Parliament “*applauded the development endeavors of Ethiopia and the country’s wide ranging efforts to reduce poverty ... welcomed Ethiopia’s endeavor in democratization process.*”
- Mr. Robert Corker, leader of the International Monetary Fund mission team (to Ethiopia), said “*Ethiopian has recorded impressive growth during the past few years which is the fastest for non oil exporting countries in the Sub- Sahara Africa... we think Ethiopia is a deserving case given track record of implementing good policies addressing the poverty issues...* ”
- According to Mr. John Nyakahuma, ACCA's head of corporate development for Eastern Africa of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) Ethiopia would become one of its strongest operations in Africa showing phenomenal growth.

