

OROMO LIBERATION FRONT (OLF) AND OTHER PROMINENT OPPOSITION POLITICAL GROUPS AND SOME CIVIC SOCIETIES OF ETHIOPIA HELD A CONFERENCE IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

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On 23 of April 2015, a high level conference entitled **‘Cartoon Democracy – Authoritarian Rule and Elections in Ethiopia’** was held in European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium. The conference was organised by some members of European Parliament from different Party Groups and member states and UNPO. The conference was unique in a sense it is standing against the established mind set-ups and traditional working system of politics in the Ethiopia Empire. It managed to assemble a diversified gathering that includes various opposition leaders, journalists, international experts, politicians and human rights advocates. The conference was aimed at consulting and coordinating various voices on the ever worsening political landscape in Ethiopia.



US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman spoke in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on April 16. Sherman praised Ethiopian 'democracy' despite US assessments of the oppressive government.

This Conference which was held a week after the US official Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs **Wendy Sherman** praised Ethiopia as a democracy, suggesting Ethiopia made great strides toward an open and inclusive electoral process. Despite the US official already endorsed the outcome of Ethiopia's traditional National election, on the other side the Atlantic Ocean, the Europeans are showing a firm stand against endorsing Sham and ceremonial election. The keynote speaker of the conference clearly indicated that assisting Authoritarian one party rule might lead the country to formidable civil conflict. The current prevalent inter- and intra-regional armed conflict, popular uprising, desperate repressive acts of the regime against civilians, rampant corruption, mismanagement, Hunger, population growth, Environmental degradation, displacement of peoples as a result of land grabbing, high rate of the expansion of pandemic diseases, government-instigated ethnic conflicts as an instrument of divide-and-rule, etc. are all indicative for Ethiopian regime's authoritarian nature and lack of democracy in the country.



The political Organisations participated on this conference were Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), Sidama Liberation Front (SLF) and Patriotic Ginbot 7 Movement. From Civic Organizations such as Anywaa Survival, the Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA), Reprieve, Oromia Support Group, Ogaden Youth and Women Association, African Rights Monitor and Creat Trust. Individual activists, Freelance journalists and Ex-member of Ethiopian Parliament and the Executive member of the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement Dr. Getachew Jiggi gave a witness on Pre-election, during and after election process in Ethiopia taking as an example the 2005 national election.

As far as the Oromo issues concerned OLF was presented by Dr. Shigut Geleta, Dr. Baro Keno presented on Addis Ababa Master Plan and Land Grabbing issue, Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa from Charles University presented on the Human rights Consequences of conflict Between the Ethiopian State and the Oromo People and of course Dr. Getachew's presentation was also based on his constituency, the Oromo people. Dr. Trevor Trueman dealt with the refugee issues of Ethiopia in general.



I have extracted here below some from Dr. Shigut's speech on various issues. He was very articulated in defending OLF and Oromo Liberation Movement in general, exposing the atrocities committed against Oromo people and outlining the general challenges of the empire so as to attract international community. He won the attention of his audiences. Nowadays when most of Oromo politicians and elites engaged on internal matters Shigut has proved consistently and persistently by being the instrument bringing the Oromo issue on the international forums. Some extracts from his speech are:-

On the violations of Human rights:

".....Since EPRDF came to power its conducts regarding human rights violations is characterized by mass massacre, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, displacement and forced conscription of the productive forces to non-ending wars on political opponents. Wanton killings of Oromos, Gambellas, Ogadeni, Sidama, Shaka-Menzengir, Omo and killings of Oromo students at various occasions are a few out of many atrocities to be mentioned.

To mention some, the March 1992 massacre of oromos along the streets of Water town Harrarge region, the February 1994 Massacre Ogadeni in Wardheer, the Massacre of oromos at Babo Gambel village West Wollega in April 1995, the Massacre of oromos at Sigo and Gattira Districts in March 1995, the Massacre of Shako and Majenger people

on 11 March 2002, The Locke, Sidama, Massacre of May 2002, the December 2003 mass killings of Anuaks, the Massacre after turmoil of 2005 National election in Addis Ababa, the Massacre of Oromos Gara Sufi in February 2007, the 2009 mass murder of Ogadeni in Kabiribayah Ogaden, the massacre of members of the Suri tribe(Omo) of December 2012, the Massacre of Muslim protestors April and August 2013 in Asasa and Kofele Oromia and the Massacre by special (Liyu) Police 2013/2014 on Ogadeni and Oromos are some of the living testimonies of the state terrorist act of the TPLF regime and are true historical records. The scale of records of Human rights violations have been reported by various human rights organizations. The TPLF regime has never put into practice the recommendations given to it during periodic reviews of UN Treaty bodies such as Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and charter based covenants.....”



On the Role of International community:-

...”TPLF had conducted election in June 1992 and 1994, May 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010. By doing so, it claimed that it has transformed the Ethiopian state from authoritarian, one nation dominated empire and command economy to democratic federal society and free market economy. To the contrary, the EPRDF dominated empire is controlling the political and economic life of the peoples of Ethiopia. In 1992 EPRDF claimed to have won 96.6 % of the vote that aimed for establishing elected local and regional Administrations. Eighteen years later, in the 2010 National Election, TPLF led EPRDF claimed another landslide victory with 99.6 %. There wasn't time where the election was free and fair. Moreover, Oromo and Ogaden people, among other nations and nationalities of Ethiopia, are targeted with extra-judicial killings, torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances.

The 2005 parliamentary elections in Ethiopia were monitored by a large observation mission deployed by the EU and led by the socialist Member of European Parliament (MEP) Ana-Maria Gomes. The overall report was without doubt the most critical of all. International observer missions, concluding that “the elections fell short of international principles for genuine democratic elections” (EU Election Observation Mission 2005). The 2008 local elections were perceived to be uncompetitive due to strong pressure by the ruling party to vote for or join the ruling party. International observers were not allowed during these elections and the international community remained silent about the conduct and results of the poll. Although the 2010 parliamentary elections did not bring about the same kind of violence as in 2005, the EU concluded that the electoral process “fell short of international commitments for elections, notably regarding the transparency of the process and the lack of level playing field for all contesting parties”.

The partnership between Ethiopia and the EU is based on the African-EU strategic partnership which gives emphasis to Peace and security and good governance and human rights. Regarding the governance and human rights under the strategic priority (b) it says, “the promotion of democratic governance and human rights constitutes a central feature of the Africa-EU dialog and partnership”. Moreover, the Cotonou agreement defines relations between the EU and ACP countries. Despite the fact that all of Ethiopia’s elections were flawed and severe deterioration of human rights the EU did not invoke Article 96. Ethiopia represents the fourth largest recipient of EU aid finance in the world and the EU is currently the country’s single largest trade partner.

The European Union is one of the five major donor partners of Ethiopia. EU institution contributes for about €230 million a year, representing 10% of the total Official Development Aid received by Ethiopia. Together with the EU Member States support, the European Union makes available around 34% of the total aid assistance to Ethiopia. Consequently, the EU has significant leveraged over the regime, which in turn represents an opportunity and responsibility to encourage the Government to be more accountable, show readiness to resolve outstanding political problems, promote freedom of speech, and develop democratic institutions and respect human and peoples’ rights and the rule of law. On June 19, 2014 in Nairobi EU and Ethiopia signed European Union aid in favour of Ethiopia in an amount of 745.2 million Euros to be made available to Ethiopia for the period 2014-2020.

By providing help to the dictatorial regime in Ethiopia, the EU has breached:

1. The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, a joint Africa-EU strategy policy adopted in Lisbon in 2007/ Lisbon, 9 December 2007 16344/07.

2. EU International Cooperation and Development policy which is primarily based on good governance and respect for human rights, their national country’s laws and international human rights standards,

Currently we learned that EU is not sending observers team this time for May 2015 election despite the outcome seems highly unlikely. Unanswered question is what will be the next strategy of EU?”



On difficulties of Alliance and Coalitions:

“.....Experience told us the stumbling block lies on the question and respect to the rights of nations and nationalities.

On the one hand, the policy that TPLF pursues in this regard is unfortunately the policy that was based closely on Stalin’s theory of nationalities, applied in the Soviet Union under which each nationality would have only a nominal right to internal self-government, with secession as an ultimate resort. In fact the policy has a dangerous mismatch between the development of social and political forces on the one hand, and the opportunities for these to be incorporated into the political structure on the other.

On the other, the opposition political forces that see themselves as Pan-Ethiopians still remained in their traditional juxtaposition of individual versus collective rights in which

case they uphold the first while reject the latter. This means they fail to appreciate what has been achieved even on paper as far as the right of nations and nationalities is concerned. For this position of theirs they often refer to the authority of liberal conception of democracy in which the individual is considered to be the only real agent of society and hence bearer of rights. Be the liberal theory as it may be, in reality there is no an individual without certain basic social traits such as language, social habit, custom and ways of life, to say the least.

This means by virtue of the fact that a human individual is brought up by a certain family under a given social structure in a certain way; he is already a social animal. Individuality is inseparable from that social environment in which he/she is brought up. Had it not been the case, there would not be Ethiopianness “Ethiopiawinet” for this Ethiopiawinet is anchored in a certain collective identity. As much as Ethiopiawinet is the social source of nourishment for the individual, the individuals are the perpetrators or the agents of Ethiopiawinet. So there is no way to mutually separate the individual from the social and vice versa.

It is precisely because of this conceptual impasse, that modern liberals came to recognize the dialectical dimension of democracy as to be anchored both in the agency of the individual and the contextual significance of the collective identity. According to some contemporary liberals such as Kymlicka (2002) collective rights are consistent with liberal pluralism if they meet two conditions: they protect freedom of individuals within the group and they promote relations of equality (non-dominance) between groups.

This comprehensive political view could be the stumbling block to forge a very meaningful alliance between the Pan-Ethiopian and various nationalist forces. It is not the ideological difference like that being of Conservatism, Liberalism or Social democrat for the main difference of Political forces operating in and out of Ethiopia but the issue is how we interpret past; understand the ongoing conflict and anticipating the future in nation building....”



On the way forward for co-operation:

“...Our recommendation to this concern and change the extreme asymmetry of power between the ruling party and opposition movements in order to attain the long lasting peace can only be achieved by genuine collaboration of opposition political forces in forging common understanding on the right of nations and nationalities. OLF believes that cultivating democratic culture of working together closely, without interfering the internal matter of the other. In the course of this collaboration process not only alignment of political forces but also the similar democratic traditions of some of the peoples of Ethiopia have to be explored and geared in the way they have served for centuries for peaceful coexistence of these nations...”



On the independence of OLF, orchestrating Oromo question by creation of Oromo named satellite organisation one bullet for all stake holders:-

“...Any attempt of stakeholders, be it international community or/and Political forces of Ethiopian empire, to weaken the Oromo liberation struggle by isolation, marginalization and splitting of OLF will never bring the aspired peace, democracy and development. Either the TPLF as it is now or opposition’s attempt to create Oromo named “Comprachicos” will never help in solving the problem of Oromo’s vis-a-vis Ethiopia’s. To attain stability and peace in Ethiopia, the Oromo demand for freedom, equality and democracy must be met. The Oromo are not only the largest group in Ethiopia but they are also the most centrally placed with whom the unity of the country would be under question...”

On the importance and sensitivity Oromo liberation issue:

“....This simple fact lends the Oromo issue a peculiar sensitivity. Without sustainable peace in Ethiopia, regional peace is inconceivable. Therefore, to bring genuine peace and stability to the Horn, the starting point is to deal with the dynamic situation in Ethiopia by resolving peoples’ demand for the right to self-determination. As long as this is ignored or orchestrated, sustainable peace in Ethiopia and the region will continue to be very elusive. .”



On the issue of demography, resources and dilemma of the western countries:-

The Oromo liberation struggle is not directed against the masses of a particular nation or nationality, nor against individuals, but rather against oppressive system of successive Ethiopian regimes. Oromo's quest is the quest for freedom, democracy, justice and peace as the case with most colonized and oppressed peoples. ***I loudly say that empowering of Oromo people for fulfilment of their aspiration is support for justice but suppressing the will and quest of Oromo people because of fear for their demography and natural resource is a fear of democracy and justice. Assisting of minority regime for the sake of this fear is a paradoxical and it is negating the very basic democratic values on which western countries are founded. Regulating minority rights, collective rights and individual rights of human kind are the main objectives of international bills upheld by democratic governments.*** Therefore, if principles are our guidance I don't see any obstacle in our own way not to stand united against the TPLF/EPRDF brutal and undemocratic regime.

Observer