

# **Democracy Should Be Protected Well From Those Who Try to Employ It as a Means to Destroy Itself**

By Harego Bensa

In remote parts of Africa, when a man wants to have an axe as a household implement for cutting firewood, the first thing he has to do is to visit a nearby blacksmith and select one which he believes the best to meet his purpose. Once he bought the axe, he goes back to his village and looks for a small tree or a well-matured branch that can easily fit into the axe and make a good handle to it. At this stage, it will not be difficult for the man to chop the small tree that is supposed to make a handle for the axe. Since the tree is small he can use his newly bought sharp metal (without handle) for cutting it. The wood cut in that way would steadily be smoothed by the same shrapnel until it perfectly fits into the hole in the axe and makes one of the most important hand tools of the forest man. Since then onwards, regrettably, the wooden-handle-fit axe will turn itself into one of the worst enemies of all the trees in the area!

The trees that were silently watching half of the process would find it sooner or later that their own partner has been used as a means to destroy their generation. Their grudge is insurmountable as they understand that it is in deed the wooden handle that has given the axe the massive energy (fulcrum) it needs to essentially work against the interests of the plants.

This is a similitude to what some people in the oppositions in Ethiopia are trying to gamble this time around when the nation is preparing for its fourth national elections. What a shame on those who try to employ democracy as a means to destroy itself?

Their whole activities which we have kept watching now a day remind us one truth, a truth that has been made clear over time. It was in 1991 that we Ethiopians have for the first time witnessed the emergence of democratic system in the country. It was a little later that we saw the emergence of a bunch of politicians committed to nip the emerging democracy in the bud. What we have been watching ever since, particularly at the height of election fevers, these very few die-hard individuals, infamous for subversive objective, have kept controlling and maneuvering some of the opposition network towards their own end of destroying the existing democratic system.

We know that the most notorious among them had been serving the governments of the former dictatorial regimes prior to the advent of the democratic system. While the destructive activities of these people are as old as the democratic system in the country, their influence appeared to have been persistent all the time in shaping the thinking and performance of some of the oppositions. That is why, some of the peoples who are leading the opposition political parties, both old and new, have still been entangled with an ever complex conspiratorial cob-web. Due to that fact, the potential role that the oppositions can play for the common good of Ethiopia has still been at stake even at this time of preparation for the up-coming national elections.

From their age-old inherent undemocratic nature and more importantly from what they are currently doing, it is really difficult to assume that some of the oppositions will peacefully engage themselves in the coming elections.

In fact, what the oppositions are doing at this moment, appear to have made their bases on their wicked electoral strategy and policy that had led to a bloody violence in the aftermath of the Third National Elections in 2005. We know that the strategy and policy was worked out by their chief architects who have already sanctioned unconstitutional power struggle. So, the question is how can a political party registered in Ethiopia as legal and peaceful align itself to others who have already authorized the use of violence as a vital means to overthrow the entire political system? Those legally registered political parties have to make their stands very clear. They have to choose either the peaceful means or the non-peaceful means.

On the contrary, some of the so-called legal and peaceful political opposition parties, like in the past, are trying to embrace both the peaceful and non-peaceful means towards the same end: destroying the prevailing democratic political system in the country. No matter how they tried to disguise themselves, their actions speak louder than their words and prove that they have aligned themselves to the worst enemies of democracy to say the least.

As has been said earlier, this is not the first time when the so-called oppositions tried to destroy democracy in this country. They have been trying all their best to derail the country from the course of democracy since 1991, i.e., when democracy was first instituted in the country. Their persistent efforts were all in vein and are unlikely to bear fruit in the future.

That is because; the prevailing democratic situation has been discouraging to people who prefer to resort to violence in order to attain one's goal. The time for such undertakings has been over once and for all with the burial of the last dictatorial regime in 1991 and its subsequent replacement with the democratic system.

Had it not been for the compelling nature of the prevailing democratic environment, those hardliners in the oppositions would have completely turned their faces towards the non-peaceful means. That is why they are trying every time to manipulate the peaceful means towards meeting their unconstructive end. At the same time, their inherent undemocratic nature is still forcing them not to abandon violence as an alternative means to gain power. So, one can say that their participation in the democratic process is resulted from the compelling nature of the prevailing democratic conditions in the country.

Thanks, none of their covert and overt activities have so far bear fruits and derailed the country from its democratization process. The process is rather gaining momentum every time against the will of the enemies of democracy. Under such irreversible advance, the maximum hurt these people have made so far or could make in the future to the nation is defiling its good image. There is no doubt, they have already launched a smear campaign with an offensive of baseless accusations one after the other in a desperate move to paint

the coming election as sham and unfair. In fact, one of the oppositions has recently told the British Ambassador in Addis Ababa that his party might pull out of the coming elections. Look, his statements came just a year from the elections.

These people should come to their minds if they really have a vision for the benefit of the nation as they often claim. They have to strive to win the coming electoral contest through democratic means and not otherwise. They have to be ready to honorably accept the outcomes of the ballot boxes. First and foremost, however, they have to reset their goal towards a positive end. They have to prefer democratic goal and discard once and for all the undemocratic one. Otherwise they should have to know that whether the electoral process is democratic or undemocratic will be meaningless for them as long as their goal is undemocratic by virtue. They should also be clear that securing state power through undemocratic means is the inherent characteristic of a non-democratic society.

In a democratic system, democratic elections are the only way to ensure that peoples govern themselves. They are the only means to maintain power in the hands of the peoples. Democracy is a system in which all contending political parties freely and peacefully operate and provide the public with ample choices to make and let the peoples decide which and whom to empower. Thus the ultimate move of the contending political parties is naturally to promote their independent views within the set of rule of law under the democratic system. And that is how they can win the votes of the electorate. They have to know that there will ultimately be losers as there will be winners in the game. But in a democracy, losing in election doesn't mean being out of the political game altogether. As is the case in multi-party system, one of the contending parties that won the majority vote takes power, the losers constitute the oppositions. The loser rather strives to meet the aspirations of those elected to it and more importantly play a positive role in shaping the functioning of the winning party.

Oppositions in other countries with multi-party system are functional every time and actually play a decisive role in the overall polity. Preparation for election is just one job out of several others.

It is also obvious that in any democratic system the government is open to criticism. Under a democratic system, every party has an inherent, legitimate and democratic right to criticize the incumbent government. The system itself encourages opposition parties to engage in constructive criticisms. Because constructive criticism enables the democratic system blossom and consolidate. In other words, constructive criticism is appreciated and widely sought after in a democratic state. That doesn't mean, however, the thinking and performance of the government is usually wrong. Well, there might be cases when the government in power makes some errors in its effort to execute ambitious plans for the public good. The degree of such errors might be insignificant or high.

No matter how small or big the error is, constructive criticism is based on hard facts. They are usually research-based and made with systematic analysis. The conclusions made in such a way become the basis for formulating alternative policies and strategies. That is why, we often hear such criticisms in democratic states as "the government has

done little or nothing in this or that regard”, “what the government has done is inadequate”. More often, the oppositions criticize the implementation of policies and strategies than the policies and strategies themselves. “Good ideas badly executed”, they often say when their criticisms focus on implementation of policies and strategies.

All in all, the oppositions first and foremost have to be fully convinced that they have an important role to play in the democratic system. They can publicly speak about the alternatives they have produced. No doubt, their views are likely to draw the support of some sections of the society as long as their approaches are genuine. That way, their ideas sooner or later reach the wider public and draw appreciation and support provided that what they say is true. The incumbent government is also likely to consider its own views and measures for its and the country’s advantage, if and only if what have been tabled by the oppositions are not blind criticisms.

In view of such democratic customs, what is coming out of some opposition members in our country right now is not encouraging ones and overwhelmingly destructive by virtue as was the case in the past. Take the example of the recent draft anti-terrorism law. Almost all of them opposed the law as much as other people dislike terrorism. Even they went on to deny the fact that Ethiopia has been the primary target of terrorism.

Criticisms made by our oppositions are usually not based on hard facts. Rather they are characterized by gross fabrications, exaggerations, denials as well as distortion of truth for their own advantage. Worst of all, the oppositions abuse their freedom of speech and organization to incite violence and conflict. As their typical characteristics, they try to agitate innocent people that the unity of their country has been put at stake by the policies of the government while they know it very well that they are the ones who are threatening the survival of the nation. As long as these people think that it would serve their end, they would not hesitate to employ every means including violence. They will employ the tree to axe it down itself. Their thinking some times reminds one what a donkey is said to have said, according to Ethiopians’ folklore, “If I’m gonna die, let there be no grass growing in this world.” What a crooked idea? That is why these people to our dismay align themselves even to the external enemies of the country. Their typical behavior is suitable for anarchism. And they are not ready for civilized and democratic order. With their current characteristics, they are unlikely to become a democratic and peaceful force in the future. All their games tend to end up in what we call zero sum game. Thus, let me wind up this article with my favorite poem:

“Not in the clamor of the crowded street,  
Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,  
But in our selves, are the triumph and defeat!”

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