

# **The Oppositions' Worst Business: Violence**

*by Harego Bensa*

People in Sierra Leon say, “No matter how long a stone stays in a sea, it will never swim like a fish.” In order for a stone to swim, it has to turn itself into a fish or any other aquatic creature. But that is against the law of nature. Or else, the stone has to take all the pains to learn and master the art of swimming. But, that is again impossible for a stone is not like a human being capable of learning. With such improbabilities, the only choice for the stone to have is to stay beneath the sea for ever and stay out of the course of the swimming creatures.

But that is not the case in human beings. A human being, who is the most superior of all the creatures on our planet, is capable of learning anything. But once a human being masters a certain art, he or she has to use that skill properly and rightfully and help others learn the skill. And by no means obstruct others from learning or using that skill.

The same is true with politics. It is barely a couple of decades since we Ethiopians have been introduced to the essence of democracy. The country that had never seen democratic system in its entire history has set in the new course in 1991 when the EPRDF led armed struggle brought about the end of the last dictatorial regime of Mengistu H/Mariam. The nation building efforts were started no sooner than the victory. That was when the triumphant EPRDF called for all political parties that were operating inside and out side of the country to join hands. The democratization process was really started when a total of 24 political organizations convened in Addis Ababa in 1991 and crafted the future of the nation. That bold initiative of EPRDF was actually the one that has won it massive recognition from the international community.

The democratization process thus started has been consolidating in the country and democratic culture has well been flourishing ever since. That is why the country has conducted so far three successful national elections and now preparing to conduct the fourth one.

Democracy is a political system in which the people rule themselves with the government they establish themselves. People establish their own government through democratic elections, which is a constitutional order that enables peaceful transfer of power. Thus, a democratic election is part and parcel of the democratic system where political parties with different agendas compete freely and peacefully to win the votes of the electorate. The party favored by the majority of the electorate assumes

power. The basic thing in a democratic system is that political power emanates only and only from the ballot box and state power is transferred peacefully and not in otherwise.

It is with such cardinals that Ethiopia has carried out the last three democratic elections and is now preparing to hold the fourth one.

The problem is that the positions taken by most of the oppositions are contrary to these principles. In fact they are operating against the democratic system itself. Some of the hardliners, who were officials during the oppressive regime of the military, openly announce that their vested interest is not to change the state but the whole system. Others who unfortunately became their henchmen appear to have been totally obsessed with taking power by all means but again their ultimate aim is to destroy the democratic system. All in all what we have at present in the opposition camp is a group of people bent on destroying the prevailing democratic system, a system that has made even their political activities possible. And this is no secret as it has explicitly been declared in their strategy published some years ago.

With such perverted objective, they usually kick off their political campaign with a series of false accusations of the incumbent government and the functioning democratic institutions. Their accusations are either made with sheer fabrications or exaggerations. For instance, when one of the parties functioning in Addis Ababa was recently ordered to replace an illegal flag it had hung over its office with the legitimate one, the party immediately took the floor to announce that its office has been closed down.

Such intensive smear campaigns are always followed by the formation of a short-lived alliance. The mediation is usually made by the same few individuals infamous for their unwavering stand to destroy the existing political system. These people, after a few shuttles, claim triumphant whenever they assume that they have forged an alliance out of the oppositions no matter how deep is the political differences among them. That is because these people believe that the alliance would serve their over-riding objective best. They don't give a damn whether the new alliance has a meaningful program to lead a country.

What the alliance does at the end of the day is nothing but intensive smear campaigns. That is a strategy employed on the one hand to draw a large number of sympathizers and on the other to blackmail the ruling party or the government to come to their perverted conditions or else threaten to walk out of the elections. Thus, the alliance creates a good forum to promote hatred politics and incite violence, thinking that is the only way for them to take power.

As their distinctive feature, the oppositions combine both the peaceful and non-peaceful means to secure power. Employing both side by side they try to test which of the ways serve their interest best. For instance, one of the big wigs inside the inner circle recently announced that his group would employ every means, violent means not excluded, to change the existing political system. In fact, some of his operatives whose trial is pending were arrested and subsequently prosecuted for attempting to sabotage and attack soft targets in the country. In the mean time, the rest colleagues disguised as peaceful political parties operating in Ethiopia keep working around the clock to incite violence. It is really sad those people assume that human rights activists are always on their side and make every effort to provoke the government any time they prefer to trigger legal actions against them.

All of their subversive actions emanate not only from the critical deficiency of well-designed programs required in any civilized political contest. It is rather out of a clear-cut stand of attaining undemocratic goal. In stead of winning the hearts and minds of the public with viable alternative ideas and draw as much as supporters as possible, all of their efforts are geared towards drawing a few sympathizers who fell prey to their dirty tricks but dangerous to ignite violence.

Though these people have some years of experience in the political spectrum of Ethiopia, it appears that they have learned nothing or very little. Or more precisely, they are not willing to act in a more civilized fashion. And, from their recent activities, it is hardly possible to assume that they would make any progress for the up-coming elections. In fact with all their age-old stubbornness, they are likely to end up in choosing violence as a means to take power, repeating the same mistake they had made four years ago.

The question is how often we Ethiopians and other advocates of democracy let those people try to ruin the existing political system in our own eyes.

Be that as it may, I am pretty much sure that the public would not become their sacrificial lambs any more. In case there are any, I advise them to refrain from taking any hard line proposed by the opposition leaders. I also advise them to disclose any of the unlawful activities of the group. First and foremost, however, they have to try their level best to influence the political leaders to come to genuine politics.

In the mean time I suggest that the government should vigilantly watch their move inch by inch and take all the precautions to foil any of their detrimental activities before it goes off.

To my knowledge, the international community can play a constructive role if they really want democratic culture blossom in this country. They can independently follow up activities of the group and influence them to fit into civilized democratic politics. They can discourage them from taking any hard line, or violence as a means to take power. They can inform them that is not the case in their countries or in any civilized society of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. And in stead of sympathizing with them taking what they say all the time for granted, they better check their activities and employ the carrot and stick method to force them come to the tenets of democracy. First and foremost, however, the international community must make sure that any of its supports to them should by no means embolden the die-hards to take the violent means as an option.

My advice to the opposition members is very simple; unless they respect the rule of the game, they better stop playing any role in the most sophisticated career of all the time. If they are not able to swim properly in the peaceful ocean of civilized politics, they better give up their swimming and give way to others that can properly swim and positively contribute for building democracy. Otherwise they better understand that their illegal activities would hasten the end of their political career once and for all. Because, it is unlikely they will deserve another pardon here after.

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