

THE RECENT TPLF FUNDRAISING AND THE DIASPORA'S FOUL PLAY OCTOBER 31, 2008

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INTRODUCTION

As the recent write-ups on many Ethiopian related web pages and the daily paltalk shows can attest, there is an uproar regarding the so-called "Millennium Telethon", which was released in a video by the TPLF-controlled Tigray Development Association (TDA). The telethon gamesmanship was conducted on October 4, 2008, at the Addis Ababa Sheraton. We were told that the TPLF was able to "raise" over 146 billion birr just in one day using the same occasion. In the same video, the names and faces of business owners, individuals and CEOs of some government-owned sectors were spelled out showing how many millions of birr they had pledged to funnel to the region of Tigray. Among those who participated included the billionaire Sheikh Al-Amoudi, who on the spot coughed up 10 million birr and promised to pay an additional one million dollar. Similarly, conglomerates which the TPLF controls, such as EFFORT, REST, the highly corrupted Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation and a few others were spelled out as participants of the show. The TDA communiqué which were later released indicated that the "pledged" amount was enough to build at least 1300 schools, a few more roads and other infrastructures. Incredibly enough, the bizarre show was conducted at the Addis Sheraton Hotel, in Addis Ababa, a premise where one can witness thousands of beggars and starving people just a few blocks away, and a city engulfed, according to some reports, with over a million homeless people.

The show seems to have vexed, rightly so, many of the Diaspora community as well as the population inside the country. People who watched the video argue that, if the regime's tug of war with the NGOs and other humanitarian organization so that the true drought affected number of people who need assistance would not be known is not annoying and embarrassing enough, the brutal leaders came with this highly disgusting and vexing show in order to insult us and the entire Ethiopian community. They say that, and rightly so, one would expect the ruling party, if it indeed cares about the people of Ethiopia, to galvanize the rest of the populous as well as the people of the world so that we all could pitch-in to save the lives of the starving people. What is maddening, they complain, is how they did it, which basically could be summed up as: "in your face: we don't care about the millions of starving people for they are not members of our kinship." Indeed, one who has watched the entire video, as I have, cannot escape the thought that not only the EPRDF leaders have increasingly become mean-spirited, but they continue to show the world how inhumane they have become.

Due to the vicious nature of this show, many of the Ethiopian Diaspora community have come to think that such a discourse is *inherent* in those who come from the same region, Tigray. Such utterances of unflattering words against our Tigrain compatriots indicate that some of the members of the Diaspora community have indeed succumbed to the ploy that the TPLF planted for them. One cannot even escape the thought that a minority group could have seized this opportunity to advance their own parochial interests. Some of these folks could be those who want to continue lecturing us that the struggle is between Tigrians and the non-Tigrians. Of course, such a thought is no different from what the Meles gang are doing and intend to do. Some of them may have jumped on the bandwagon of the blame game for they still want us to be with them and continue poking at old wounds. They should know better. Some of them may be using our anger to galvanize support for their parochial interests. They should know that we cannot move our struggle even by an inch forward continuing this way. They should know that they cannot use the same tactics and expect different outcomes! We should learn from our past mistakes and move away from using the same old

tired tactics and design new ones if we want to succeed in removing this cancerous group from power.

To be honest, I prepared this write-up right after I watched the aforementioned video. I hesitated to release it knowing full well that I could be hit from all corners. I also asked and contemplated on the following questions: Why don't the Ethiopian intellectuals, opposition party leaders, our Tigrian compatriots who are not a part of Meles's clique, even civic leaders, and step up and give the proper guidance and leadership on this issue? By allowing such blame-games and name calling to continue, could some of them be using the anger for their own parochial interests, such as galvanizing more support for their organizations?" Some of the intellectual community members could have written on this, but I have not seen any so far. Some of it could be in the works, too, for a deeper analysis takes time. Since I cannot take it anymore, I decided to have the first crack at it and take the hit!

As I alluded above, I would like to state, at the outset, that the Ethiopian people have grounds to complain and be annoyed by the shameful theatre revealed in this video. Having said that, however, even though I understand why the regime seems to be making a mockery of the starving people of Ethiopia, I ask those who are so maddened by this ridiculous gamesmanship to think carefully and watch the words that are coming out of their mouths. First of all, rushing to blame all those who happen to be from the Tigray region as if they all collaborate with the despicable acts and are inherently bad people leads us to commit the mistake known as the *fallacy of composition*. Second, as I argue below, this video was prepared on purpose by the TPLF leaders in order to pre-occupy us so that we would continue playing the cards they themselves dealt us: ethnocentrism and the spread of hatred. Playing the ethnocentric cards that the TPLF deals every now and then, more so often made whenever it believes it is losing its power grip is downright dangerous. It is important to recognize that one cannot fight ethnocentrism using the ethnocentric tactics and be free from being an ethnocentric!

REASONS WHY THE TPLF LEADERS PLANTED THE SHOW:

It is important to recognize that the concocted ideas that are put together in this sinister video have every mark on them to indicate to us that it is a well-thought out program prepared by the top party leaders with malice intent. Here are some of the sinister ideas that they calibrated on:

First of all, as we all know, the TPLF has been transferring funds and resources to specific regions in the last 18 years telling us that the transfers were necessary since the regions have been affected by war. Even though the same "war damaged regions" pretext has been in use for the full 18 years since the TPLF came to power, the pretexts put together in this video are similar to the previous ones in that the poison deceptively is covered with the honey. The honey is, of course, the 1300 schools and the other infrastructure projects which are going to be built using the transferred resources. The poison is the ethnocentric venom secreted so that the Ethiopian people could murder each other to satisfy the blood-thirsty thugs who have been in power for too long.

Second, the whole state of affairs is so vicious that one cannot escape the thought that the TPLF leaders prepared the video in order to deflect criticisms from those who are concerned about the corruption scourge that have become both systematic and endemic. Since the transfer of funds is made in the name of building schools and other infrastructure projects, it was intended to deny those of us who venture to criticize this criminal and inhumane act of the TPLF leaders. For example, by covering the poison with honey, they want to accuse those of us who oppose such a transfer of resources to a few regions as people who oppose infrastructure building and "economic development." It would not also be surprising, if they accuse us of being anti Tigrian, as they did it to a few of us in the past.

Third, those who concocted the idea have attempted to deceive the Ethiopian people, as they have done it in the past, that building schools and a few infrastructures in one or a few regions is in the interest of the country, which is not true. The fact of the matter is that, given the meager resources of the country, when a government spends unnecessarily too much in one area, there would be fewer funds available for the projects in the other sectors of the economy. At best, there will be an unbalanced growth. But most importantly, the EPRDF leaders are in it to pillage the country. Ethiopians, who observe almost on a daily basis that nearly all the contracts go to the members of TPLF and party owned businesses, know full well that infrastructure building in that country has been totally a sham.

Fourth, the TPLF leaders seem to have sensed that the rampant corruption that they are deeply involved in has disdained some of their followers. The tensions among the party members that became apparent during the recently held EPRDF party congress and the ongoing chatters in the streets of Addis Ababa and other major cities indicate that the corruption scourge could indeed become the bane for the EPRDF¹. As a result, the TPLF leaders want to revitalize the party and shore up the declining membership using such divisive methods as shown in this video. That is why they have now employed even a very brutal (and illegal) tactic: not allowing any college graduate student to have a job unless he/she becomes a member of the EPRDF! Even though such a terrorizing tactic was being implemented after the regime lost the 2005 election, this brutal tactic is being employed at a heightened level after the party's congress of this year. While employing this tactic, they have been sending the messages that, if anyone wants to advance their careers, they have to be involved with the corruption scourge. In so doing, not only the EPRDF leaders have made the country to be unable to use the resources it has invested on, but they also have held the country as their hostage. There is no economy in the world, let alone a destitute country such as Ethiopia, that will grow which is ruled in such manner.

Fifth, and most importantly, the messages conveyed in the same video indicate that the TPLF leaders want to corner our Tigrian compatriots whom they thought were against and are developing a disdain to their despicable acts. As is customary of the ethnocentric leadership, they want to accuse them as allies of the Amhara naftagnas and ones who betrayed their kinship. Unable to garner unanimity even among its own group, the video is an attempt to placate those who oppose its dangerous and anti-Ethiopian positions.

Last, the regime prepared this reprehensible Telethon and video for political pandering. Ethnocentric people are known to stoop low and exploit the weaknesses of the populous just to stay in power and advance their ethnocentric agendas. By catering to people's lowest tastes, they always try to send a message that there is no alternative other than dividing the country along ethnic lines. We have observed such a pandering when Mr. Meles Zenawi uttered the word "Interahamwe" (related to the militia responsible for the 1994 Rwandan Genocide) during the 2005 election, in which case many Ethiopians believe that the opposition won. No matter how many times they would play the ethnicity card, they would fail in part because most of our Tigrian compatriots have come to realize that they are not the ones who benefit from such malicious and spiteful acts.

EPRDF POLICES WORKING AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF TIGRAI

It is also important to understand for those of us who don't belong to the Tigray region that most of our Tigrian compatriots have also suffered from the oppression of the mafia type clique. One who looks at the Tigray regions of Agamie, qilte-awlalo, Temben and the Dalol areas would recognize that the people of these regions are also suffering from drought and starvation. As the TPLF leaders used to say just before they took power, the droughts and starvation are partly man-made and they are byproducts of the agricultural and economic policies of the EPRDF. These shortages of basic food supplies and the skyrocketing prices accompanying them within the state of Tigray clearly show that our Tigrian compatriots also suffer from the TPLF's bad policies.

The political suppression put on the people of Tigray by TPLF is clear enough to see by looking at the Front's organizational tentacles that have been put in that region for many years. In fact, one could convincingly argue that the level of political oppression that has been practiced on our Tigrian compatriots is as severe, (if not more) as the one that is being practiced within the rest of the country. The TPLF's security apparatus is so deeply rooted and so penetrating in the state of Tigray that the spying has reached even the individual household level. Previous writers have shown that the oppressive methods of the TPLF on the Tigrian people have created the same situations as in the rest of the country, such as the constant state of fear of being spied upon, kicked out of a job, and thrown to jail and even being killed.

Since the split of the TPLF right after the Ethiop-Eritrean war, the Meles group has been terrorizing those who did not go along with his ethnocentric agendas and his desire to destroy Ethiopia. Meles did not care whether they came from Tigray. He put the leaders of other group in jail for many years using trumped-up charges. He did this despite the fact that they were right and he was wrong. He punished them despite the fact that they spoke on behalf of the majority of the Tigrian people. In fact, it has been and still is increasingly difficult for those who objected Meles's rule, especially after the split of the TPLF into two camps, to find jobs since that split. At the same time, all those available jobs in the region are favorably secured to those who supported Meles, the group whom Meles and Co. call them as members of the *tehadiso*. This illegal activity, of course, is the same one that is now being practiced in the other regions of the country. Not only is the EPRDF giving jobs only to those who join the party, but it is also punishing those Ethiopians who voted for the opposition parties during the 2005 election.

As the people of Tigray who live near the borders of the Sudan can attest, nearly all of the trade and contraband businesses are now being dominated by the EPRDF troops who are stationed at the borders (the so-called *teref tebaqiwoch*). The anecdotal human reports coming out the border areas indicate that the deep involvement of the patrol paramilitary members in the retail trade and contraband activities has put most of those civilian (of Tigray origin) businessmen out of business. As well all know, this is exactly what is happening inside the rest of the country, too. Individual reports which are being sent to this writer, both from those who reside inside and outside of the country indicate that many merchants have become extremely disenchanted with and angry at the EPRDF favoritism practices. For example, in addition to being forced to pay higher taxes, many merchants have been unable to buy goods and services from the EPRDF controlled conglomerates which control the import/export sector of the economy. They are becoming increasingly frustrated that the EPRDF-controlled wholesale conglomerates could only sale the imported goods to the merchants who either have the proper connections with or are members of the EPRDF. In fact, this disenchantment and anger is so deep that, the favoritism tactics of the TPLF has even angered some of its allies, such as those business people who come from fringe minority groups. While the shops owned by the EPRDF supporters are full of goodies, they complain, the shops owned by those who want to play by the rules are empty. And this discrimination is also affecting our Tigrian compatriots who are not members of the so-called *Tehadiso*.

Reports from the Tigray region also indicate that the income discrepancy between the super-rich and the dirt-poor is so stark that this income discrepancy is creating a social and political havoc in some cities such as the regional city of Mekele, where the TPLF's headquarter is located. Many people attribute the increasing murder rate in the city of Mekele to this discrepancy and destituteness of people within the same region. Anecdotal reports indicate that the increasing mafia type gangster activities, the same ones that have become ubiquitous in the rest of the country, are also being observed inside Tigray. The over six hundred thousand Tigrians who are facing food shortages and the increasing number of them who are currently seeking new shelters not only indicate that most of our Tigrian compatriots do not benefit from the corruption scourge, but they are actually negatively affected by the policies of this dictatorial regime. This increasing migration of people from the

Tigrai regions, *EPRDF's own backyards*, speaks volumes about the EPRDF's agricultural policies. If all the people of Tigrai were benefiting from Meles and Co. being in power, why would anyone see a number of our Tigrian compatriots roaming the cities of Addis Ababa, Dessie, Combolcha, and other cities begging for food?

It is, therefore, foolhardy to think that all Tigrrians are part of the mafia and pillage the country just because a select group of Tigrrians happen to do so. It is totally absurd to think that all Tigrrians benefit at the expense of the rest of the population just because we happen to see a minority portion of that kinship to have gotten to be super-rich almost overnight. Such a thought magnifies the seeds of hatred which were, and still are, being sowed by the ethnocentric gangs. This thought of lumping together all Tigrrians and calling them names must stop! It is both tactically and strategically wrong to fight hatred with hatred and ethnocentrism with ethnocentrism. Let's not succumb to the ethnocentric disease that the regime is trying to spread to us. Let's not play the cards they dealt us. Instead, it is time for all Ethiopians, our Tigrian compatriots included, to come together, ASAP, and get rid of this cancerous regime!

The venom spat off in this video indicate that their immediate objective is to instigate hatred against our Tigrai compatriots. And, once they caught us making mistakes, as for example, when they catch us uttering "all Tigrrians are the same blah, blah..." they want jump on those words and use them to garner the support they lost. They want to mislead some of their gullible followers telling them: "You see: these Amhara naftagnas, these terrorists, these Oromos, these sellout Tigrrians, these..., are coming after you! And thus, all those who belong to the Tigrian nation should and must unite and fight them!..." Their ultimate goal: massacre each other! They, of course, will use the feud they concocted as their fodder, and also divert our attention from observing of what is really going on in the country: the pillaging of our country by top EPRDF officials. Fellow Ethiopians and all of you who care about those poor people and country: we should leave no stones unturned to expose both their intentions and misdeeds! Most importantly, let's not succumb to this mafia's intentions of *preoccupying us* with its ethnocentric agendas.

A closer look of the video indicates that those who are behind the gamesmanship are the grubby party officials, the kleptomaniac politicians, and the cunning and philistine businessmen who have long been a part of the corruption process. They are the same sycophants and foot-soldiers of the ruling clique who have made the corruption scourge their gold mine. They are the same sell-outs who were the foot soldiers of both Meles Zenawi and Issayas Afewerqi who advocated for the session of Eritrea. The announcer himself, Ato Iyasu Berhe is a known Banda who roamed the capitals of the Western counties carrying the Eritrean flag, advocating for its secession, calling us names and at the same time extolling the bravery of the Afewerqi and Co. group. These are the same wicked people who camouflaged themselves as the true Tigrrians while in fact leading the people they purport to serve to a full-fledged ethnic war. It should be known that no Tigrian, other than the instigators would benefit from an all intensified ethnic war. They are the same ones who have worked against the interest of Tigrrians and their country Ethiopia who openly exploited the Derg's misdeeds against the people of Tigrai in their favor. They are the ones who speak on both sides of their mouths- telling our Tigrian compatriots that they serve their interests while in fact they work, day and night, to dismember their country. They are the same people who are participating in capital flights- the capital flight coming out of Ethiopia reported to be exceeding that of Nigeria. The fact of the matter is that the \$14 million or so "raised" on that occasion is a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of money that is being sent overseas by the same corrupt TPLF officials. From now on, we (our Tigrian compatriots included) reject their blood-thirsty tactics and tell them: "No: you cannot dismember and commit treason against my country, amass enormous wealth for yourselves using your mafia type corrupt practices, send the pillaged resources overseas, be so ruthlessly uncaring about starving people and at the same time be a true Tigrian/Ethiopian!"

I, therefore, also ask all Ethiopians, our Tigrian compatriots included, to stop putting all of those who happen to come from one ethnic group in one basket and attack them just because a few of their members to have committed crimes and mistakes. In fact, the time has come for all of us to come together and fight the evil doers. We cannot continue deploying the same failed tactics and expect different outcomes. We should recognize the fact that, especially now, more than ever, the stupidest thing to do is committing the same mistakes which we committed before- playing the ethnocentric card and deploying the same some old tactics and expecting different results. In fact, I deeply believe that the time has come for us be bold and begin using new tactics, one of them being the setting aside of our minor differences and creating a *new solidarity*. That is why I am a big supporter and proponent of Obang Metho's vision of the New Solidarity for Ethiopia.

It is about time for **EACH OF US** to begin demanding from opposition party/civic leaders so that they would begin delivering the goodies- one of the goodies being creating a strong coalition. It is about time for **YOU AND I** to stop playing the politics of division which have blindfolded us to see the big picture for too long. Let me now resort to using of some powerful Amharic words that I heard some of you using: let's go beyond ye -menaqor, kurfia, metteratter, elih, qimbeqeal, tenkol-polika! This must be one of the new paradigms of doing politics from now on.

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TDA Conducts a Successful and Sounding Telethon." To be found at:
<http://www.tdaint.org/Home/tabid/37/ctl/Details/mid/416/ItemID/54/Default.aspx>

ⁱ The abrupt decision to maintain the "status quo" is also a manifestation of the same tensions existing within the party members. The street chatters indicate that some of the EPRDF members did not like the rampant corruption and hence wanted to make some cosmetic changes. The adoption of the "status quo ante" that was announced by Mr. Meles indicates that those who are deeply involved in the corruption scourge had the upper hand.