

TRUE DISCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY SHALL BE FREE

By Aie Zi Guo, December 2006

Once upon a time Ethiopians heard some scanty news about the Wild West. In school they read about Mark Twain and Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet. In colleges they were taught by scholars from Europe and North America whose professional commitment and humanitarian gestures were exemplary. These professors were friendly and unsophisticated. They intermingled with Ethiopians with adventurism and courage.

Inspired by these foreigners, many students of wisdom and knowledge read novels and political writings of the West. With all naiveties many wanted to travel to America and England to learn more about the socio-economic developments of these countries. Thousands were interested to understand the essence of the Statue of Liberty and the freedoms of Trafalgar Square. Ignoring their sinister and condescending behaviour, the innocent believed that the west was destined to spread democracy in Ethiopia. So, graduates from US, Ethiopian and UK universities made unprecedented effort to copycat the ideals of Georg Washington, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King and Woodrow Wilson. Mesmerized by the eagerness of these disciples of democracy, US and its allies supported the elite to change the political establishments in Ethiopia. Westerners covertly and overtly used student and trade unions, and the Ethiopian Army to stage coup d'etat. In spite of that neither a bourgeoisie revolution nor a democratic evolution was achieved.

In the end socialist revolution took the lives of Ethiopians and military dictatorship was installed in 1974. As the power of the gun roared on the streets of Addis Ababa, print and electronic media controlled, and civic organisations dismantled, freedom of speech curtailed and individual and collective freedom abused to an unimaginable proportion, thousands stood against the revolution. Yet still in the midst of brutal repression and when the world was divided between East and West, Ethiopians adhered to the doctrines of democracy.

In order to forestall the spread of communism in East Africa, western powers supported antigovernment forces to unseat the military regime in Ethiopia. Even the so called humanitarian organizations like OXFAM, Care and World vision advocated for a change of governance. Assuming that US and Britain would not be interested in replacing one dictator by another, everyone Ethiopians become joeys with the demise of Mengistu's communism in 1991. Precisely this is the reason that Ethiopians gave the benefit of the doubt to the new TPLF rulers in Addis Ababa. And indeed the struggle to create a free society continued unabated.

Many hoped that with the help of western nations a true democratic society with a government by the people for the people would be formed. Unfortunately, soon after the end of communism, western nations stopped far short from supporting democratic transition in Ethiopia. Instead of building democracy they built great walls on ethnic lines and worked towards the dismemberment of a nation in existence since biblical times.

Nevertheless, the good disciples of democracy including Hailu Shawel, Birhanu Nega, Birtukan Mideksa, Yakob Hailemariam, Dr. Befekadu Degefe, Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, Muluneh Eyuel, Debebe Eshetu, Kifle Tigene, Serkalem Fasil, Eskinder Negga, Sisay Agena, Kassahun Kebede, Danile Bekele, Netsanet Demessie and dozens of the gallant sons and daughters who are in and outside the country continued their struggle to bring democracy to Ethiopia. These individual who are now prisoners of consciences were encouraged by the tacit support they received from some western nations to advance the cause of freedom. Up until they were betrayed by western teachers of democracy, they tried to bring change often in difficult circumstance peacefully and constitutionally. Sadly their peaceful struggle was countered by brute force and these courageous disciples are locked up in one of Africa's most dilapidated prison cells.

Bereft of everything, in the crowded prison cells of Kaliti the prisoners of conscience shine in the hearts and minds of 70 million Ethiopians. Out of their prison cells they continue to give us the true account of the peaceful democratic struggle they waged in Ethiopia in 2005. By all standards their courage, wisdom and

commitment is exemplary. The selflessness of Prof. Mesfin and Eng. Hailu at old age and, Judge Bertukan Mideksa who is separated from her two year old daughter invigorates the dreams for a democratic Ethiopia. Special salutation goes to Dr. Birhanu Nega who through his book the Dawn of freedom articulates his team's advocacy to democracy and peaceful struggle to change a fear society to a free society. This book written from Kaliti unmasks the truth between democracy and dictatorship, nationalism and sectarianism, honesty and betrayals, diplomacy and tact, political dodgers and honest brokers, success and setbacks. What was fundamental was his thesis and anti-thesis on individual freedom and collective freedom. He goes on to say that men are born free and they should be free to think and choose what they think is write for them. His eloquent description manifests that the assurance of individual freedom and liberty is the fundamentals of a true and sustainable democracy. The absence of it leads to the creation of fear societies.

Berhanu and his team in prison remained steadfast in their peaceful resolve to bring democracy to Ethiopia. They remained good disciples of Martin Luther King, Windrow Wilson, Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Winston Churchill, and Mahtem Gandhi. True those western powers lead by Bush and Tony Blair who promised to give their support to these disciples have failed them in the woolie hours of need. Nevertheless out of your prison cells you ought to be encouraged by the support you garnered from the peoples of Ethiopia, US and Europe. Members of Congress and European parliamentarians have continued their support and advocacy to your noble cause of spreading freedom to Ethiopia. A case in point is HR-5680 the Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights Advancement Act of 2006. Rest assured that honest representatives of the people of the US Senators Rep. Chris Smith, Rep. Donald Payne, Rep. Mike Honda and others are working hard to get HR-5680 is passed in the house of congress. In Europe Anna Gomes and the European parliamentarians are working tirelessly to advance your cause of democracy in Ethiopia. Rest assured that you have more voices than those who betrayed your struggle. For example, the unfailing and determined members of the Ethiopian Diaspora around the world have intensified the struggle to ensure your unconditional release and immediate achievement of democracy in Ethiopia for the same cause that you and your loved ones are paying untold personal and collective sacrifices.

More than ever the Ethiopian people the true owners of your struggle in your country are united behind your cause and dreams. They are showing their civic disobedience to Zenawi's regime with utmost decency and resilience. This regime which you have asked for national reconciliation is wounded in all fields of governance. Its inquiry commission and Kangaroo courts are getting tired and frustrated of lying. Witnesses that were summoned by Meles are testifying against Meles and his judges. It is a system which is terminally ill that is in the process of full-scale disintegration. Members of the commission and senior judges have fled their country to tell the international community the true nature of Zenawi's leadership. In the process frustration brings new conditions of deception and coercion, for which Ethiopians must be prepared.

Rumor has it that Meles Zenawi has the intention of releasing CUD leaders from Kaliti prison should they abandon politics. Please rest assured that friends and guardians of democracy i.e. HR-5680, EU Parliamentarians and the Ethiopian people jointly will secure your freedom. Abandoning your belief by conditions set by a dictator is equal to depriving the freedom of choice and interest. Ethiopians know pretty well that you are not afraid to conditional treats of dictators.

Truth and dawn are thin. However thin they may be they will shine by the hour, by the day and by the year. Since you are the true disciples of democracy, you shall be free to lead Ethiopians create a fearless society in the land of Christianity and Islam. There will be a day without Birr Sheleko, Didesa, Zewai, and Kaliti mass detention camps. As the Chinese changed the guns into plow shears in 1949, Ethiopians will turn these places to production sites of bread and butter. In admiration to all of you at Kaliti, there is no doubt that you shall free your people from fear. No doubt the Statue of Liberty and Trafalgar Square will learn honest democracy from Kaliti. The struggle goes on. Keep hope alive. You will triumph.

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