

# The role of higher education and Ethiopia.

By Yilma Bekele

My beautiful and brilliant niece graduated from college a few days ago. We are all proud and happy with her accomplishment. It gave the whole family an opportunity to get together. Believe me the festival was preserved on video and camera, posted on Facebook, published on Instagram and micro blogged on tumblr. That is how important it was. No question it was a proud moment for her parents and an early Christmas present to the whole clan. We were lucky and our daughter was strong and focused and it all worked out pretty good.

Here in the US Universities, Colleges and institutes of higher education are held in high reverence. The vast majority are public institutions funded by the citizen. There also exists plenty of private non-profit and commercial places of learning. They are all designed with two purposes in mind. Knowledge and Utility.

They are places of socialization where the individual learns the democratic process such as tolerance, respect for others and the value of freedom. It is here where change is the norm innovation, curiosity and looking into the future is encouraged and the human mind is left to soar like an eagle in a storm.

The speeches during the graduation ceremony reflected these learned values. The rainbow nature of the graduating class speaks plenty to the capacity of the US system to absorb the best from the planet and toss it into what they call the melting pot. The graduate school representative's speech was a perfect example of using education as a tool to help create a positive environment where society as a whole thrives.

The graduating class representative from the International Studies program gave a very forceful speech based on his experience as a young man in Tanzania. This is the way he started his long journey '*... my first visit to Africa was five years ago .....i had never been to a developing country before and I went to Tanzania mostly because the idea of travelling outside my comfort zone scared me and I didn't want not to do something potentially meaningful just because it scared me clearly I had brain development issues. I was also eager to make a difference the Africa I thought knew was the Africa of save the children brochures poor and in need of help I was comparatively reach and looking to help surely this will work out.*'

His visit to Africa opened his eyes to the many problems facing mankind. His stay at the University gave him 'some clarity' not only how to view the situation but the knowledge on how to interpret them and be part of the solution. In his own eloquent words this is what he said.

*'USF helps us to fill in those gaps and it also helps us to recognize them understanding what we don't understand made us more likely to question and more likely to dig deeper to find the root of problems.*

*Therein lays the beauty of our education. The world after all does have problems and the problems do have solutions. USF help us to figure out what they might be and what we can do to help. It is inspiring to feel that you've a better understanding of the world than you did just a year ago and you can attribute that improvement to something other than brain development.'*

The President of the University spoke last. He joked about the most expensive Christmas gift they were receiving paid by themselves or their family and went on to remind them of the huge responsibility of living a meaningful life. He used a passage from a book 'Tuesday's with Maury' to drive his point home. He choose a section which he referred to as 'probing even disturbing' where in the book Maury asks his middle aged friend 'have you found someone to share your heart with, are you giving to your community, are you at peace with yourself and are you trying to be as human as can be?'

It is a perfect illustration of how the University was able to nurture and produce young minds skilled both in knowledge and utility. It has fulfilled its promise to society and the tax payer's money and the tuition paid by the students is a worthy investment.

It is with sadness we hear the disturbances at Addis Abeba University the last few days. It would have been understandable if the students were protesting about the quality of education, the lack of freedom, the dismal state the library or internet, the issue of press freedom in the country or the non-existence of opportunity upon graduation. It is none of the above. The Ethiopian institution of higher education is not geared to equip the young minds to ask such probing even dangerous questions. Addis Abeba University is the reflection of the TPLF mentality of dumbing down the population and keeping them at each other's throat.

From what we hear the upheaval was based on ethnic grounds. There is no question like the rest of the country the University is the playground of the TPLF mafia group. The administration and faculty is chosen based on loyalty to the regime and the once proud and independent student union has been demolished to be replaced by 'Teletafi' created in the face of TPLF. From experience we know Woyanes are good at starting conflict whenever they want to divert attention away from their criminal acts. The fact that they were successful in the University is what I find troubling here.

The very same place where students sacrificed asking 'Land to the Tiller', the very hallowed ground where they marched against the illegal regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa, today they are supposedly confronting each other arrayed in their own Kilil. What a shame is an understatement. It points to few facts about our country and the new society the TPLF regime

has been constructing the last twenty years. In the particular case of the University it is obvious it has become a cadre training institute rather than a place of knowledge and utility. It is an absolute failure on both fronts.

This is made obvious by the recent report that stated the abysmal state of Medical school graduates from the so called medical schools. According to the newly minted proud TPLF windbag Dr. Tedros Adhanom *'This year, for the first time, we enrolled 3,100 medical students, which is almost tenfold compared to what we used to enroll five, six years ago.'* Dear reader, this is a typical TPLF statement void of value and substance.

The report by PRI based on site interviews with teachers, students and aid workers makes it clear that the so called medical schools lack such rudimentary accessories as skilled teachers, half way equipped laboratories and decent libraries. Our brave Foreign Minister's take on the dismal situation is *'I don't think we will change this country by waiting until we get something perfect to start to start something...it cannot be perfect. We have to start with what we have.'*

On the surface one might be sympathetic to such talk. You would think a poor country doing its best to relieve a major problem by using its meager resources. But that is not a true statement. The actual situation is a country with plenty of human and material resources hell bent on mismanaging its god given asset. The TPLF regime sole interest is holding onto power regardless of the consequences.

The regime is interested in inflating the numbers for propaganda purpose rather than being concerned with quality. Like every one of their pie in the sky schemes they use numbers to show how much more they are achieving. The economy is showing double digit growth but the number of those starving is in the millions, the Federal system is working wonders but there is conflict in every region, the number of Doctors is increasing by tenfold except they are not real and according to foreign observers *'they could do more harm than good.'*

I would like to see Dr. Tedros and Dr. Debretsion take one of their medical school graduates as their family doctor. Would they take prescription drugs from those clinics and would they allow one of the surgeons to operate on their son or daughter? I doubt that. Medical practice is not an experimental science. Good enough does not work when it comes to human life.

Training excellent doctors, having great centers of education is not an out of reach dream for our country. It is a question of resources management and defining priorities. The regime spends millions on Chinese technology to jam and block Internet and other media to keep information from our people. Do you think that money could be used for education? The regime employees millions to spy on their family and neighbors can that budget be allocated for good purpose? The regime has one of the highest numbers of troops in Africa, is that necessary? It is all about priorities isn't it?

Education is not taken seriously in today's Ethiopia. The regime is not interested in producing an educated and motivated generation. They cannot afford a smart and questioning youth. There are not enough trained teachers, the class rooms are crowded, books and supplies are non-existent and the facilities are mostly from the Imperial era somehow still standing by the grace of God. Why do you think this is so?

The TPLF regime is not into education. Let alone as a national policy the regime does not even allow private individuals to donate books, computers and other learning tools without their permission. One has to get a written stamped document from the zone, Kilil, Ministry, Foreign office just to bring a computer. Internet is a government monopoly and communication is a regulated enterprise. Why do you think they do this?

Control is the key word here. The TPLF regime must control all aspects of the individual's existence. They control where you live, what you own, where you work, what you read, what you watch and if possible what you think. They instill fear, they trade with fear, and they are peddlers of fear. You the reader of this article are terrified of the TPLF machine even from thousands of miles away. You wouldn't dare criticize the regime without looking around you. You would not sign a petition afraid who might see it. You dare not go out on protest afraid of cameras. Fear is engrained into our very existence.

Have you heard the saying 'I'm like a mushroom, keep me in the dark and feed me bullshit.' They falsify statistics and claim double digit growth, they graduate a bunch of dressers and call them doctors, they open high schools and call them colleges and universities and we go along with that. Because the TPLF leaders are not educated they show absolute disdain to the expert or the educated. Being a medical doctor is not a simple matter. The title is conferred upon someone after a rigorous training and it carries a lot of both privilege and responsibility. Being a university or college professor is achieved after a lengthy process of learning and publishing and peer review.

When our TPLF bosses play around with such titles it is not a simple matter. It demeans the professions and the efforts of the people that sacrifice to achieve such noble goals. This is another continuation of their cynical view of our country our people and our future. The late criminal Meles used to reveal in insulting our past and mocking our achievement. His children are continuing the legacy of making our country and people not worthy of any pride. Even becoming a doctor has become a joke. I do not mean to disrespect my brothers and sisters working hard to learn under the difficult condition imposed by the regime. I share their frustration when asked to do the impossible without adequate training and necessary tools. My sincere apology since we are both victims of a nefarious system. We shall overcome.

