

Regarding our new Prime Minister. By Yilma Bekele

There is no place on planet earth that begs for change like our country. There is no need to itemize all the areas where we stand at the tail end of human achievement. That is the bad news. The good news is we can't get any lower than where we are at now thus the only way for us is up.

It is obvious that we have all what it takes to improve and make life better for our people. We are blessed with a vibrant and colorful population; we possess a beautiful land with plenty of water and untapped resources waiting to be exploited. The ugly and troubling political situation that has engulfed our ancient land the last forty years has forced us to migrate outwards. It is true it has caused plenty of pain and misery to the vast majority of our people. On the other hand it has created its own dynamic too. Today we have managed to acquire real practical knowledge that can be harvested to help our country transition from agricultural to industrial society within a short period of time.

In short there seems to be no reason why our beautiful nation is known for famine, poverty and always on the verge of civil war. The reason we are stuck in this never ending cycle of non-achievement is lack of a political system that enhances our positive aspect. The political condition is our Achilles heel. Our Political system is what is dragging our country down.

The death of Meles Zenawi has opened a new chapter for our country to move forward. I do not need to itemize the many negative qualities of the late tyrant here. The economic, social and psychological state our country finds itself after twenty years of misrule is proof enough. Our new year has brought us a new Prime Minister.

I, with the vast majority of our people wish nothing more than Ato Hailemariam Desalegn to succeed in his new role. Success means a peaceful, prosperous Ethiopia where the citizen is not afraid of his government and is free to pursue happiness. Success means an Ethiopia where equality of all reigns, Human Right is assured and our children are free to achieve their potential.

Is it possible Hailemariam could be the agent of change we so dream and desire? Is this a realistic dream or some kind of delusion our mind is trying to conjure so as to force current circumstances fit reality. I am aware that it usually is not good to be a naysayer. I also understand blaming the messenger of bad news is a common human condition. Blindly going along to preserve peace when the situation does not warrant is also a disservice even between friends let alone a country.

During the Wild West days of the US economic boom of the 1990's Federal Reserve Chairman Greenspan talked about the dangers of what he called 'irrational exuberance' that was permeating Wall Street. His frank talk was seen as unnecessary caution. His fear was realized in one of the worst economic downturn the US has seen.

Is the current tendency to blindly wish Ato Hailemariam success despite circumstances not under his control a good idea or is it a recipe for failure due to 'irrational exuberance'? Is this business of predicting the future based on the past a reasonable idea? If we believe that is a rational assumption I

believe looking at the individual's practices in the recent past could give us clues to how he will deal with his new position of power and authority.

Ever since his election to the position of Prime Minister we have been able to have a glimpse of his style of work while climbing the ladder of leadership. The fact that he has gained his past positions due to appointment rather than being elected makes it a little difficult to know him close and personal. The fact that he was elected to the Presidency of his Kilil is not an indication of real democracy at work. Elections in Ethiopia are mostly affairs of coronation. It is enough to mention the 99.6 landslide by Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) the dominant party and its affiliates in the 2010 elections to see the farce. He did not have to share his views with the citizen but only satisfy the requirements of those that anointed him making our job a little harder.

He has served as assistant Dean and Dean of Arba Minch Water Technology Institute (Now Arba Minch University) until he became Vice President then President of Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) which was followed by Membership to the House of people's Representatives, advisor to Meles Zenawi and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. From his autobiography I was able to gather he has never worked in the private sector either as wage earner or entrepreneur.

Ato Hailemariam still is Chairman of Southern Ethiopian people's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). It should be noted here that SEPDM like its counter parts such as Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) among others is the creation of TPLF. As a matter of fact the TPLF under Meles Zenawi choose the leaders and run the party's as a wholly owned subsidiary. (Please read Jawar Mohammed's article about the growing pains OPDO has faced since the death of dictator Meles)

Ato Hailemariam came into leadership of SNNPR upon the fall of Ato Abate Kisho that made the mistake of siding with Seye Abreha's splinter group during the TPLF internal struggle. It is fair to conclude that his elevation to the Presidency of SNNPR from 2002-2005 was a show of gratitude by Meles and his TPLF. The following paragraph is taken from Wikipedia entry about our new PM.

'After his tenure as President of the SNNPR, Hailemariam worked in the [Prime Minister's Office](#) as the advisor on Social Affairs and Civic Organizations and Partnerships for two years. He led the team that drafted the Charities and Societies Proclamation law (CSO law) that limits the interference of international NGO's in local political activities. The law was adopted by Ethiopian Parliament in 2009. He is also credited in pushing EPRDF re-organize its structure after 2005 elections in '1-to-5' model (one member recruits five new people - አንድ ለአምስት አደረጃጀት) that boosted the number of party membership from 400,000 to 5 million by 2010 elections.' [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hailemariam\\_Desalegn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hailemariam_Desalegn)

Please note this law that went into effect in 2009 was denounced by Amnesty International, CIVICUS, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project and Human Rights Watch as 'stifling human rights work' in Ethiopia. Thanks to the work of Ato Hailemariam the courts were able to freeze bank assets of Human Rights Council (HRCO) the oldest human rights organization in the country and had crippling effect on such organizations as Ethiopian women Lawyers Association (EWLA) including Save the Children Sweden among many others. It is safe to conclude he has served TPLF admirably.

It is fair to say Ato Hailemariam Desalegn was again elected into the current position he holds by TPLF and its affiliates. It is also fair to say none of the leaders of these parties or organization were elected by the Ethiopian people in a fair and open contest. Regardless of this irrefutable fact in front of us the reality of the matter is we are stuck with him at his point in our history.

There are discussions on how to deal with this new reality in front of us. There are some that are advocating giving the new PM 'time'. Some are saying what is there to expect from someone that came to power not by the will of the people? Quite a few are convinced what we are witnessing is reshuffle not change- it is expressed in Amharic as 'Gulitcha bilewawetu' situation. As usual our country has entered a very confusing and uncertain future. Accepting something knowing the chances it will succeed to be nil is cowardice while pointing out the futility of the situation and trying to change it is seen as being a naysayer even narrow.

To those who say 'let us give him time' the simple question would be to do what? If he was willing to serve a leader (Meles) and a party (TPLF) that ruled with an iron hand, if he was willing to be used as a tool in the degradation of his own southern region and people, and if he was willing and enthusiastic in formulating such a draconian policy (Charities law among others) that restricted independent Human Rights work, why in the world do we hold any hope that he will change his tune once in position of authority?

Furthermore there is this little issue of who actually is in charge here? Chairman Mao said 'power comes from the barrel of the gun.' George Washington, Nelson Mandela, Jomo Kenyatta among others that gained their freedom by the barrel all agree with this proposition. It seems like the saying is still valid today. In our country the TPLF party is in charge of the military, state security service, the Federal Police, the Bank, major business entities, all media including television, radio, newspaper, Internet, telecommunications and Foreign affairs. What in the world can a Prime Minister do without the control of these key organizations even if he wanted to?

As I wrote earlier the past is a powerful tool to look at the future. It looks like Prime Minister's Hailemariam resume does not bode well for our country. We are hoping he will change his mode of operation even though we have no data to indicate that to be possible. On the other hand his meek service the last fifteen years to those that held power in complete disregard to the wishes of our people shows the individual to lack independent initiative and a tendency to be used against his people's interest.

I realize this to be un-pleasant conclusion that has a disturbing effect on our morale. I also believe one should follow the facts where ever that might lead to. It was not long ago when a rag tag army deposed of a hated military regime and we all cheered. We all wanted change and ascribed our wishes and dreams on the new leaders. "Give them time" was the cry of the many. Time proved us all wrong. We paid a heavy price. After twenty long years we find ourselves where we started. My simple question is shouldn't we learn from the past and prescribe a new medicine this time around? As Lincoln said "you can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.

