

Ethiopia under rulers without mandate: EU-EOM Chief

By Abebe Gelaw

London May 17 (Addisvoice.com) - West London's Porchester Hall may have staged so many great plays and concerts. But for the Ethiopian community in London, the most moving or joyous performances ever staged in that hall were unlikely to leave such an enduring memory as Sunday's first year anniversary of the May 2005 elections which was graced by the presence of larger than life personalities like the Honourable Ana Gomes, Steve Sinnott, Secretary General of the National Union of Teachers and Addis Ferenji, a French human rights campaigner, who have all joined the struggle for freedom, justice and democracy in Ethiopia as they could not ignore the suffering of the people of Ethiopia at the hands of Meles Zenawi and his cronies. For such people of conscience, injustice anywhere, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, is indeed a threat to justice everywhere.



Like a great Western melodrama, the presentations deeply disturbed the audience as speakers took turns to recount the brutalities and atrocities being committed by the Meles regime which has turned a promising national election into one of Africa's most tragic repressions and a poor nation ready for change into a harsh concentration camp. The rivers of tears shed by many in the audience were wiped off with a colourful

performance at the end by a London based artistic troupe that honoured not only those who came to renew their commitment to freedom, justice and democracy but also those defenceless fellow citizens including children and mothers who have been murdered and maimed. Wrapped up with Ethiopia's tricolour, Ana Gomes, Obang Metho, Addis Ferenji and Dr Giday Assefa injected joy and hope in the blood of the audience and revived their spirit.

Member of the European Parliament and Chief of the EU Election Observation Mission to Ethiopia (EU-EOM) lashed out at the Meles regime, which she referred to as rulers without the proper mandate to rule, for betraying the Ethiopian people and shattering their hopes for change.

Addressing the event, she said that she felt very privileged to witness the extraordinary quest of the Ethiopian people for freedom and democracy. "It was not by chance that I was picked up to lead the European election observation mission. One of the criteria was that I had no link whatsoever with your country. I was very fortunate to lead an extraordinary team of around two hundred."



She indicated that the observation team, which was deployed in various parts of the country during the elections, had a much better picture than diplomats and the international community who were mostly confined to Addis Ababa. According to the chief observer, wherever she travelled she was surprised to find out that even peasants in the middle of nowhere who were said to lend massive support to the ruling party were actually resenting its monopoly of land and unfair distribution, supply of fertilizer and for holding them in debt, as well as its oppressive hands in their daily lives.

“The 15th of May was a beautiful day that I will never forget in my life,” she said. Ms Gomes noted that the observation mission was alarmed by the disturbing developments in the aftermath of the elections when demonstrations were banned and the public media controlled by the ruling party started to provocatively sing victory to the incumbents before the vote were properly counted and tallied.

Not only did the EU-EOM witness the historic elections but also the June massacres and gross human rights violations that shocked and moved the observers to date. “I can’t understand to this date how some world leaders can actually rub shoulders and pat the back of those responsible for the massacres,” she said.

“Three weeks after these massacres of June 8, Mr Meles Zenawi was hosted here, wined, dined and had his back patted by Tony Blair and other world leaders.”

She noted that Western leaders lacked the moral authority to talk about human rights and democracy while they turn a blind eye to the suffering of the Ethiopian people. They should prove their sincerity by demanding the rulers of Ethiopia to release all political prisoners stop committing atrocities and gross human rights violations, she said.

“I think by this time, these rulers must know that their usual tactic doesn’t work. They don’t scare the people of Ethiopia anymore. They don’t scare people throughout the world who are peace-loving and want to support democracy in Ethiopia and of course they don’t definitely scare me,” she told the applauding crowd.

No matter how smart Mr Meles tries to appear, the chief observer believes that she can identify his devious methods. “I know that those who are at the wrong side of history will go at some point. Those who are for justice, human rights, the rule of law and democracy will prevail as they have prevailed in the rest of the world including South Africa.”

She underscored that Ethiopia would not get out of abject poverty and underdevelopment unless a democratic system of governance is put in place. The chief observer has expressed her personal commitment to do everything in her power to help the struggle for democracy and for the release of all prisoners of conscience particularly opposition leaders. She stated that she felt responsibility for their suffering as she and her colleagues had made a lot of efforts to persuade opposition leaders not to boycott the elections and to have faith in democracy.

She urged Western governments to stop supporting dictators and stand by the people of Ethiopia and urged Ethiopians to unite and desist from mistrust, division and ethnic hatred, deliberately created by the regime, in their fight for justice, democracy and the rule of law.

Concluding her remark, she emphasized that there must be no illusion that outside support, despite its importance, is enough on its own to gain freedom. “It is ultimately the unity of the people of Ethiopia that make the difference to make the aspirations for democracy fulfilled,” said the eloquent and veritable parliamentarian, who has already won a special place in Ethiopian history and the admiration and reverence of millions of Ethiopians for speaking out the truth loudly, clearly and fearlessly.

Ato Andargechew Tsigie of the CUDP promised earlier that every effort would be made to unify Ethiopians and intensify the struggle for freedom, justice, rule of law and democracy. Having analysed the current situation in Ethiopia, he disclosed that his party was charting strategies to provide a unified leadership in and outside of Ethiopia.

General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, Mr Steve Sinnott, said he was deeply disturbed by the level of repressions being perpetrated by the ruling party. He said that the repressions following May 15 were immensely disappointing. Mr Sinnott indicated that all the positive hopes for peace, development and democracy that many had cherished proved naïve.



“Those of us who believed those things can happen things can be accused today of being naïve because those hopes, at least for the moment, have been dashed by the killings particularly by the killings of children at schools.”

He said that the idea that Ato Kassahun Kebede of the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association is in prison accused of genocide and treason was impossible to believe. “The accusation against decent human beings and decent trade unions is outrageous.” Mr Sinnott concluded by echoing some of the slogans of protesters on May 8, Ethiopian martyrs’ day. “I couldn’t join the chanting because I would have wept out of emotion and my feelings to the people who were being remembered.”

Fighting back tears, he repeated some of the slogans the protesters were chanting outside the Ethiopian embassy in London: “The Ethiopian people struggle shall triumph! Our martyrs are immortal! Victory to the Ethiopian people!”

The next speaker Dr Giday Assefa of the International Tigrean Democratic Association, made another hard-hitting speech and appealed to all Ethiopians throughout the world not to fall prey to TPLF’s divisive hate campaigns.

“Since the elections day they have intensified their efforts to sow ethnic hatred. They are particularly driving wedge between Tigreans and Amharas. The international community must take notice and oppose this sinister act of Meles and his cohorts that can lead to another gross human tragedy in Ethiopia.”



Dr Giday accused Meles Zenawi and his close associates of betraying the national interests of Ethiopia on so many occasions and made so

many personal decisions such as the one that made the country of 70 million people totally landlocked.

He went on to note that institutionalized corruption being committed by Meles and his followers is a crime being perpetrated against the interests of our poor country. “Corruption under the dictatorship of Meles is a family affair like that of the Mafia. Meles Zenawi and Sibhat Nega, their relatives and political supporters own many factories, banks, insurance and transport companies in the name of the people of Tigray. But the fact is the leaders of the TPLF have the lion’s share in the open robbery of the resources of our poor country,” Dr Giday alleged.

According to Dr Giday, it is a historic irony that the true patriots and democrats are accused of crimes they never committed. “Meles Zenawi is the very person who should have been charged with treason and crimes against humanity and for betraying the interests of Ethiopia and committing genocide against the Anuak people and many other Ethiopians.”

Regarding the conduct of the elections, he said they were marred with wrongs from the very beginning. “The May 15th election was a choice between criminals, who should have been charged with treason, mass murder and corruption, on the one hand and opposition candidates who stand for justice, democracy, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia on the other hand,”

He also discredited the current federal system as “undemocratic and a weapon of divide and rule” that has endangered the country’s unity and territorial integrity.

Dr Giday concluded his speech, much of which was punctuated with applause from start to finish, by calling on the Ethiopian people to stand in unison for the struggle to liberate Ethiopia from the tyrannical rule of Meles Zenawi.

Obang Metho of the Anuak Justice Council spoke at length about the genocide perpetrated in Gambella and the need to strengthen solidarity amongst the peoples of Ethiopia as a multi-ethnic nation. He said that unless Ethiopians are able to forge a united front against tyranny there is little chance of restoring freedom, justice and democracy. He brought to the attention of the audience that undermining each other should be a thing of the past as democracy cannot be achieved by repeating the grave mistakes of the Meles regime which makes profits from its divide and rule strategy.



The courageous human rights activist Nathalie Margiotta, aka Addis Ferenji, who made a great deal of contributions to inform Ethiopian’s on current developments after the June massacre with her blog on Nazret.com, recounted to the audience what she witnessed in Ethiopia until she was forced to leave. She asserted that the current rulers are corrupt and only interested in themselves. The audience erupted with laughter when she declared, with a sweet Amharic accent, “*Weyane leba new*. That is what they are!” which literally means TPLF is a thief. Out of anger and



frustration, she wanted to throw stones at those who were out to kill innocent civilians.

Addis Ferenji expressed her sadness that the Ethiopian people have been robbed of their votes in full view of the international community. After recounting the level of repressions against ordinary citizens including children and women, which she was able to witness first hand, she rapped up her speech with a wish. “I want to see Meles Zenawi at The Hague” and flashed the V sign.

The event was another confirmation that adversity has always united Ethiopians regardless of their ethnic, political, religious or language differences. The call for a legitimate government that serves the poor people of Ethiopia seems to have been gathering momentum across the world as the repressive regime is being exposed at every venue.

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