



**Ambassador
Vicki Huddleston
Charge de Affairs of US Embassy, Addis Ababa**

Dear Ambassador Vicki Huddleston,

Almost a year has elapsed since the momentous May 2005 Ethiopian elections. In the weeks leading up to election day, the Ethiopian people were filled with hope and guarded optimism that their free choices and voices will be truly heard for the first time in the country's long history.

The conduct of the abortive election and the tragic events that soon followed are all in the public record and have been extensively examined and discussed by a dizzying array of national and international bodies, albeit with no positive results so far that would even begin to recoup the damage done to the hopes and democratic aspirations of the Ethiopian people. Still, we again wish to highlight the salient issues in the interest of ensuring clarity for the foundations of our intended response to the post election and most recent statements and actions of the US Embassy in Addis Ababa.

There was indeed a stark choice for the Ethiopian people on that fateful day of May 15, 2005.

On one side stood the incumbent with a 14 yrs record laden with: failed policies that did little to meaningfully improve gut wrenching poverty, hunger and preventable disease for tens of millions, totalitarian repression and denial of private property rights to tens of millions, political disenfranchisement of the entire population, official and venomous tribalism nurturing ethnic conflict and weakening the national fabric, extensive and unrelenting human rights abuses including extra judicial disposessions, detentions and yes, murders of real or perceived opposition and civil society members. All this ably supported by the forced absence of a credible opposition voice and the rule of law.

On the other side stood the opposition coalitions, particularly the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) (which we speak of) representing earnest and clearly articulated policy alternatives and a national vision that negates the decades old failed governance of the country and also sets out to build on the few constructive beginnings of the past.

The CUD's core political program and it's campaign was unmistakable in its repeated call for the end of vengeful politics in the country, for national reconciliation and for a body politic in which the victor and the vanquished will be treated with all the respect and legality that is due to them under the constitutional framework. The CUD was also exceedingly scrupulous in ensuring that all its political activities, campaigns, negotiating positions...etc were conducted strictly within its legal rights under the existing constitution and laws of the country.

It is also well known that the CUD and other opposition groups repeatedly implored the incumbent to allow a reconstitution of the election board and the courts in an independent and transparent manner so that the results of the election can be adjudicated justly and righteously. The incumbent emphatically refused to budge on the independence of the election board and the judiciary. This was a clear and ominous sign that the incumbent intended to go along with the elections, but would not relinquish the levers of election-engineering that it planned to use for ensuring that the electoral exercise will be used for the sole purpose of legitimizing its long and continuing stranglehold on political power.

The CUD decided to take part in the election in spite of the incumbent's refusal to level the playing field, with the hope that the persuasiveness of its policy alternatives, the people's free choice and the presence of international observers will in due course put enough pressure on the incumbent to accept the people's verdict. Consideration was also given to the hope that even if the incumbent were to show a degree of intransigence on accepting the people's verdict, an overwhelmingly participatory election would pave the way for a significant enlargement of the democratic space in the country and particularly, provide the opposition with a meaningful voice and influence in parliament.



For all Ethiopians and Ethiopia watchers unburdened with political opportunism and expediency, the election campaigns and the open election debates between the incumbent and the main opposition groups manifestly displayed the ineptness of the incumbent and the massive public enthusiasm around the vision and policy alternatives presented by the CUD.

As is well known, on ballot day, a staggering 90% of eligible voters, all over 25 million people queued for hours on end to make their choices and voices heard and cast their ballots - we believe the majority of them for change. The voter turnout in itself was historic in that it obliterated the notion that most people in Ethiopia were politically apathetic and even more so, the cynical and prejudicial view held by some, that countries like Ethiopia are 'not ready' for democracy.

The tragic events following ballot day, the massive rigging of the people's vote, the utterly pernicious complaints adjudication process, the public anger over the violent robbery of the people's votes, the isolated and spontaneous public demonstrations, the massacre of unarmed civilian demonstrators and passers by in Addis and several towns across the country, the incarceration of tens of thousands of young people and other citizens suspected of supporting the opposition and the many other still unabated massive human rights violations are all in the public record. They will inevitably and indelibly be written in the history of our country.

Equally in the public record is the CUD's principled stand and scrupulously peaceful effort to bring about a peaceful and amicable resolution to the impasse created by the massive abuses of the incumbent. Failing all avenues (and notwithstanding the people's continuous and righteous anger over the denial of their votes), the Kinijit for Unity and Democracy Party (Kinijit) finally and with all the legal rights accorded to it under the constitution, put forth eight clear, principled demands (nearly all of which were subsequently included in a unanimously passed resolution by the EU parliament and also formed parts of the stances taken by many international bodies and the US state department) that would pave the way for the participation of its elected legislators in the 'new' parliament and regional assemblies including the Addis Ababa administration.

All eight conditions were strictly and unambiguously aimed at starting to clear the hurdles for the rule of law, a democratic order, and meaningful participation of the opposition in legislative bodies and the prevention of massive electoral malpractice in future. Yes, after the open intransigence of the incumbent on this bare-minimum framework, the Kinijit righteously called for peaceful and legal civil disobedience that was to be rolled out if the incumbent continued with its rejection of the process for addressing the eight legitimate conditions supported by the people.

Subsequent to the massacre of civilian demonstrators in June 2005 and again in November of the same year, and on the heels of the Kinijit's final legal and rightful demands for redress, the incumbent summarily arrested all the top Kinijit leaders, free journalists and key members of civil society. After several weeks of illegal custody without charge, the incumbent came out with ludicrous charges of treason and attempted genocide. Officially, the 'treason' charge was laid for 'inciting' public demonstrations that resulted in the murders of unarmed civilians (by the incumbent's own special security forces). Even more egregious is the charge of 'genocide' purportedly for creating conditions that would threaten the minority 'Tigray' ethnic group loosely and erroneously considered as the power base of this flagrantly tribal and stalinisque regime.

The entire country and members of the international community know that the charges are politically motivated, have no legal merit and are preposterous and stalinisque in that:

- The demonstrations, which resulted in the massacre of unarmed civilians by security forces, were totally spontaneous and largely peaceful; and it was the government's special security forces that used violence and murder in their attempt to disrupt the demonstrations and terrorize the population into submission.
- The CUDP is undoubtedly a very scrupulous and doggedly pan-Ethiopian group and very averse to the tribal preoccupation and brazen bantustanization policy of the ruling party. It is also publicly committed solely to peaceful and legal opposition, in words and in deed.



- There were no public pronouncements by any member of the Kinijit neither singling out the Tigray ethnic group nor calling for any type of violence against them or any other group or individual in society in any shape or form. The government media however has been openly and extensively spouting ethnic venom including references to 'Rwandan type genocide' in a futile effort to frighten and divide the public and attempting a self-fulfilling prophesy.
- Ethiopia has always been a mosaic of linguistic groups but it has no history of internecine conflict on the basis of ethnicity until the arrival of PM Meles and his party in 1991; who to the horror of many, and for the first time in the country's long history imposed virulent ethno-centric policies including a wide ranging bantustanization of the country along ethnic lines aimed more at manipulation of differences rather than the promotion of ethnic equality.
- The core group in PM Meles' government, which has been in power for 15 years through outright repression of dissenting groups, does hail from the minority Tigray region of Ethiopia. However, it has always been clear that their virulent ethno-centrism is a ploy to govern through divide and rule to prevent an active pan Ethiopian opposition to their minority rule.
- People in the Tigray region have long been known as only forced 'supporters' of the regime whose cadres and security forces have muzzled the population with a combination of a police state administration and promises of partisan budget allocations over the past 15 years. In fact, the election records show that Tigray people living outside of the specific Tigray region itself, notably in the capital Addis Ababa voted en masse for the Kinijit.
- Everyone close to the politics of Ethiopia knows that the only crime committed by the Kinijit was to dare dream of winning the election, actually garner vast numbers of votes across the country that may have enabled it to win, and daring to challenge the regime with stealing the election through electoral malpractice. Everyone also knows that the regime is using these sham charges in an effort to completely stamp out strong opposition along with the free press, which has been banned ever since the election.
- The leaders of the Kinijit who are now languishing in jail charged with these ridiculous accusations are academics, engineers, lawyers, judges, human rights activists and leaders of professional associations and trade unions. They also hail from a healthy mix of all the major linguistic groups in the country if evidence were needed of their pan-Ethiopian character.
- Many of these individuals have no past political baggage and got involved in active politics for the first time in their lives due to the hopes ignited by the promises of free elections. Moreover, they had also pinned their hopes on the promises of envoys of the international community in Addis Ababa that had for months urged them to take part in elections, with near guarantees of recourse if things were to turn sour due to infringements by the ruling regime. All of which has come to pass.

We in the Kinijit, millions of our people and honest members of the international community unencumbered by political expediency hold the issues and events as described in the above narrative as incontestable facts.

The Kinijit has been forcibly pushed out of the official political process as of November of 2005. Most of its top leaders are languishing in jail, its offices around the country have been looted and closed, its members and supporters are subjected to endless harassment and intimidation, some of its parliamentarians have been forced by political pressure and individual circumstance to sit motionless and voiceless in the sham parliament, others are being harassed daily to join in the appeasement process, a very small number are now actively engaged in a misguided effort to create a surrogate Kinijit in direct negation of the will of millions who gave the party their vote in May 2005 and the permission of the elected leaders of the organization who are now in prison.

However, Kinijit executive council members that are not in jail, principled legislative elects and most importantly the fervent will and hopes of millions of our countrymen who gave CUD their unreserved support



at the ballot box last May are keeping the party very much alive. Our millions of citizens did not vote for a surrogate Kinijit, millions of Addis' residents who demonstrated their enthusiastic support for CUD on May 8 of last year did not vote for a crippled take over of the city administration by a surrogate CUDP with the duly elected Mayor and many council members languishing in jail.

The Kinijit still stands firm and is certain of the support of the Ethiopian people on it's three main agendas as the only avenues for political reconciliation and moving the democratization process forward: 1) The unconditional release of the unjustly imprisoned Kinijit leaders and associated civil society members 2) The ceasing of the nationwide harassment, intimidations, detention and murders of Kinijit members and supporters and the reopening of its offices including the return of illegally seized properties 3) Earnest trilateral negotiations on the eight cardinal confidence building measures the Kinijit submitted to the negotiating table in October 2005.

Few have any doubt that the incarceration of Kinijit leaders and other members of civil society is nothing but pure and simple criminalization of dissent. In fact, even though political hyperbole is not our choice for discourse, it will be remiss of us to not state that charging the Kinijit leaders with treason and genocide is tantamount to Hitler charging the Jews with the holocaust. The incumbent PM who never shies away from totalitarian statements and actions has time and again in his public statements tried, convicted and sentenced our leaders. We dare anyone who speaks of 'just and speedy trials' to look into the 15 years records of the justice system in our country and find a single occasion in which the PM and his henchmen and their handpicked judges delivered justice in a political trial.

We again emphatically state that we have no confidence whatsoever that the current court system can deliver justice. We can not, and will not expect justice from a court system completely strangled by a totalitarian political establishment. The Ethiopian people have seen and lived the tyrannical system and its flagrant mockery of justice for 15 long years.

Madame Ambassador,

The Kinijit continues to acknowledge the importance of the active role the international community including the US Embassy in Addis to help break the massive political impasse in the country. We have also been consistently, genuinely and publicly appreciative of the efforts in this regard up until the events of November 2005 that dealt a violent blow to the reconciliation process. We also continue to be encouraged by the continuing positive engagements of the EU Parliament, the US Congressional committee that recently approved bill HR4423 and many other members of the international community who continue to stand on the side of justice and refuse to endlessly appease, reward and embolden tyranny.

We have also time and again called upon some of Ethiopia's international partners to not digress from their officially held principled stance against tyranny. This has been necessary as it has been evident that some of our partners for democracy including the US State department and its embassy in Addis, have in their pursuit of short sighted 'political settlement at any cost' leaned too heavily on short term expediency, which will only embolden tyranny and suffocate the Ethiopian people's enduring aspirations for liberty, democracy and development.

Indeed we firmly believe that such behavior directly negates the US government's very public policy which in the words of President Bush "...it is the policy of the United States, to support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world...".

We also recognize that Ethiopia currently is and must continue to be a pivotal ally to the international effort to combat terrorism in all its forms. In this connection, we ardently remind the US State department and the embassy in Addis that any action that isolates the population from the political process, will only serve to sow serious doubts amongst the impacted populace about the sincerity of the engagement. Such actions will also surely be a free gift to the forces of evil who can only flourish amongst a disenfranchised and desperate population.



We say again, we stand behind the correct and just fight against terrorism in all its forms. We also say that US policy should not allow tyrants to hide behind clever speeches and deceptive maneuvers in the name of being allies in anti terrorism while continuing to deny liberty and democracy to their people. The people are the true allies of the US in this fight and the US must stand on their side. We believe that in the free society that we will continue to strive for; the US will find a true ally that has no axe to grind nor employs opportunistic political maneuvering, but a committed partner in the local and international effort for peace, liberty and democracy.

The vast majority of the Ethiopian people; who aspire greatly to live in a free society that US policy attempts to help expand around the world, who have struggled for so long and so hard in pursuit of liberty and democracy, who have indeed suffered greatly and died in great numbers for this cause are bewildered by actions that seek to endlessly appease tyranny and perpetuate their suffering.

We in the Kinijit have a clear and unambiguous obligation to the Ethiopian people, to clearly point out the unhelpful and indeed very damaging statements and actions of all those involved, including the US State department and the US embassy in Addis. We do indeed fervently call upon the individuals and groups who are wantonly or naively engaged in thwarting our rightful and determinedly peaceful struggle for democracy by appeasing the tyrant at every turn and continuing to demand unjust humiliation and meaningless acquiescence by the forces of democracy, to cease their hurtful enterprise.

Madame Ambassador,

We submit to you that the current effort by the US Embassy in Addis under your very public leadership and activist intervention in support of the deplorable effort to near-forcibly create a surrogate CUDP squarely is an extremely damaging process, stands in contrast to the dreams and hopes of our people and their sacrifice for liberty and will only embolden tyranny whose legitimacy has been inexorably waning locally and internationally.

You have also made public statements to the Ethiopian people invoking the bible and the experiences of Nelson Mandela. We submit to you that, yes it is "the time for engagement and change, the time to move the political framework forward". We equally submit to you that Nelson Mandela did not engage and change by pleading guilty to crimes he did not commit or by betraying his compatriots languishing in jail. Neither did he move the political framework forward by agreeing to the creation of a surrogate ANC to appease the outlaw regime he was heroically struggling against. He stood his just ground to the end and triumphed.

We do not doubt your sincerity, but we say you are on a wrong path. We urge you to firmly stand on the side of peace, justice, and democracy in the best traditions of your country. These universal values have never been brought about by an endless appeasement of tyranny, but by a balanced, firm and non partisan stance on the side of liberty.

We have no enemies in this struggle; just the Ethiopian people and a regime that has for long been and still is on the wrong path. We set out to correct that path peacefully and with the consent of our people. Where we depart is, the EPRDF insist on imposing their vision, whilst our struggle is to create a level playing field where everyone's voice is heard and the collective vision that comes out of that is one shared by all. That is what the Ethiopian people hoped for in May 2005. That is what our leaders are in jail for. That is what our compatriots have paid the ultimate sacrifice for. That is what we will continue to struggle towards, for as long as it takes.

Madame Ambassador, we in the Kinijit and indeed the Ethiopian people ask for the support of the office that you hold and all the friends of Ethiopia, in our journey towards true liberty.

Sincerely,

Kinijit, April 19, 2006

Addis Ababa,