

**THE POWER OF "NO!"**  
***THE PROSPECT OF POPULAR UPRISING IN ETHIOPIA AND THE HURDLES***

*A personal opinion: By Ayal-Sew Dessye (Part IV, continued from Part III)*

**Part IV, What Could Be Done To Overcome The Possible Hurdles**

Popular uprisings are collective responses to injustices, undemocratic, suppressive and oppressive systems that deny people equal treatment and deprive them of equal opportunities and rulers that fail to be governed even by their own laws, lack human decency and fairness.

Although popular uprisings anywhere could have universal similarities as far as causes and effects are concerned, each country could have different dynamics and unique perspectives. They also have different goals and objectives. For some, it is a call for reform, for others it could be change of leadership (mostly the leader at the top), still for others it can be a call for change of government and for others it could be a demand for a whole new system. Some succeed temporarily as was the case in Ukraine's Orange Revolution (late November 2004 to January 2005), some get mixed bag results that they fall short of their targeted goals but achieve limited reforms whereas others get crushed (as was the case in the 1848 European Revolution) and still others end up being brutally suppressed and face temporary reversals, as in the case of Ethiopia as seen in 1974 and 2005.

Whatever the objective could be, for any popular uprising to succeed, it needs to be sustainable. To make it sustainable it would have to have large support base among the population, particularly the youth. That critical mass cannot be attained unless first and foremost the fear factor is lifted from the people's psyche and that they have a demonstrable determination not to look back. But equally, if not more importantly, unity of the people along with clarity of objectives, sober and determined leadership at the core and support from the armed forces are critical elements for any popular uprising to be sustainable and successful. Additionally, the revolutionaries and those who call for change should show discernible resolve that they are no more afraid of the government and its oppressive machinery, and are psychologically and in every other aspect ready to pay all that it takes for a popular uprising to be successful. Take the case of Egypt, for example; when Mubarak's forces of regression unleashed their murderous thugs and killed dozens to intimidate the revolutionaries and disperse and quell demonstrations, the turnout rather increased dramatically and the more atrocities were committed by agents of destruction that otherwise could put an end to any uprising, the determination, resolve and ferocity of the people increased exponentially instead. When Muslims prayed, their Christian compatriots stood guard to protect them from the regime's thugs. That was a classic example and a textbook case of civil disobedience and popular peaceful struggle, where the collective interest was expressed through the courage and magnificent unity of a people bound by a common desire to be free was clearly demonstrated; and it was bound to succeed.

What has to be clearly understood is that there would not necessarily be a popular uprising in Ethiopia simply because people in other countries have risen or simply because some relentless campaigns by certain groups are being waged from afar, nor should it be expected not to take place because of Meles Zenawi's policies of divisiveness and measures of continued repression, no matter how intense and more vicious they may be. We can only expect that TPLF/EPRDF would embark on a two-track approach to avoid being ousted from power by a popular uprising. First, while preparing for the worst possible scenario of use of lethal force, they would take all intimidating measures that they deem necessary to keep the fear factor in place. In this will be included ethnic and religion-based civic strife and an open war that would be considered an existential threat. As usual, Meles may use some ethic-based political groups (even one or two

"pan-Ethiopian" groups) as monkey wrenches that he could throw at will and calculatedly to create further division and apathy and obstruct any popular uprising that requires unity of the people; as part of his divisive arsenal, he has used them effectively to stop the progress and development of a viable democratic alternative.

Second, they would introduce some nominal reforms, including meaningless measures aimed at controlling price of certain commodities, engaging in dialogue and "negotiations" some in the opposition. Some of the divisive schemes so systematically instituted by the system could be attractive to some groups that some may fall into the trap and be a hindrance to unity and the democratic aspirations of the people. The subtle and not so subtle manipulation of the ruling clique that creates the situation where opposition groups distrust each other and focus on each other much more than they do on the system (the ruling group) that they all swear to do away with, allows the regime to define the agenda of the day and put the opposition on the defensive in continuum. Because of its dismal inability to be a credible national alternative for lack of coherence both in strategy and structure, the opposition, mainly inadvertently, continues to play the role of lending an invaluable support not only to the system but also to secessionist and anti-unity regressive forces.

The possible hurdles to the prospect of popular uprising in our country, as mention in the preceding pages, are several; the state of the democratic opposition and possible undesired and short-sighted measures by some, lack of a unified and unifying national force, absence of national (countrywide) civic society and democratic institutions, lack of full confidence in the support and doubts about the allegiance of the Armed Forces, presence of anti-unity and secessionist armed groups, etc. Although it could be argued that, as recent experiences in the Middle-East and North Africa have shown, popular uprisings may not necessarily need the leadership of political organization to play the vanguard role, the unique situation Ethiopia now finds itself in (as discussed earlier), however, demands the prevalence of a unified and unifying body a must have. That would be the biggest hurdle of all that we ought to overcome. And we can and we have wherewithal, if we make the necessary paradigmatic shift in our overall strategy and allow our political narrative to reflect the values and strength of unity.

First and foremost, it should be clear that the Ethiopian people want and deserve and are ready for change. But whatever shapes a popular uprising in Ethiopia takes, existing political organizations, both inside and outside the country, would have no direct or determinant role. There are two reasons for that. The first one is that no single organization has either the influence or the credibility to muster a convincing following on a national level that people would listen to, follow its directives and die for. Second, the irony that whilst the ruling party is unable to win the hearts and minds of the Ethiopian people and is being rather more hated and resented, the opposition - incapacitated by its lack of unity and clarity of purpose - is unable to instill hope, garner demonstrable support and earn the trust and confidence of the people to be in a position of giving decisive and credible leadership that would be critically important in a popular uprising. Because of experiences of the recent past, the people, particularly the youths, could be ambivalent about and wary of the ability of the divided opposition to stand with them all the way through. It may be particularly true at this time where the opposition by-and-large finds itself possibly at its lowest ebb. Sadly, it is for that reason that a coherent and decisive leadership role is not expected to come from existing opposition groups at this time. And it would be best if the masses led by the youth can be given a chance to mature without direct meddling by the fragmented opposition. However, there are two humongous tasks that fall within the purview of the opposition, particularly democratic unity forces; preparing the groundwork for mounting a coordinated diplomatic campaign to expose the expected brutal reaction of the regime, coordinate efforts to avoid or at least minimize ensuing chaos and prevent possible vacuum - the specter of which,

unfortunately, is real – and make thorough preparations to assure unity and take necessary steps to guide the country into a new direction of credible and peaceful transition.

The strategic decisions and alignment of forces of opposition organizations, vis-à-vis the long-term interests of the country as regards to its unity, and the way and manner in which they comport themselves will determine their role in any popular uprising or what comes next in its wake. But, for now the least democratic unity forces could do is to avoid playing the role of being obstructionists. For those based inside the country, that could come in the form of being involved in the regime's fruitless schemes of behind closed doors "negotiations", trying to play the role of appeaser to "calm down" the legitimate anger of the people, etc.; and for those mainly based outside the country, that could involve hasty and impetuous decisions including premature and unplanned calls for popular uprising, forming unholy alliances with anti-unity and secessionist forces, etc.

Meanwhile, I believe that measures like forming Councils of Elders, women's groups, youth groups, etc. in each Woreda, if possible in each Kebele, reviving national institutions like Ethiopian Teachers Association, veterans groups for example, and establishing networks within the bureaucracy, learning institutions, religious institutions different fields of profession (doctors, nurses, engineers, farmers) and many in the business sector, etc. could be a good start to smoothen the ground work for a sustainable popular uprising and make it a countrywide effort to effectively coordinate efforts and assuage the fear of sectarian societal strife. Similar efforts should be carried on to organize Ethiopians outside the country. I cannot stress enough the need and importance of having different lines of communication, both direct and indirect, with the Armed Forces as an institution and different segments of it. This may be one of the most difficult but vital sectors without which a sustainable and eventually a successful popular uprising that guarantees the unity of the country could be achieved or even contemplated. And that is one of the main reasons why no Ethiopian organization should ally itself or cooperate with known anti-Ethiopian and secessionist forces, because it would automatically alienate those in uniform as it is anathema for anyone in uniform to knowingly ally with or give support to such forces that are mortal enemies of the nation that they have sworn to defend. That is why I continue to argue that secessionist groups have a marked advantage and benefit greatly from any tactical alliance or cooperation with any political opposition that does not have any discernible influence on the country's armed forces or has a credible alternative.

As discussed previously, it is a fact that currently much (almost all) of the higher echelon and key positions in most of the special and specialized units of the country's Armed Forces are manned by TPLF members. However, distinction ought to be made between the Armed Forces as an institution and the commanders at the top. (I'll return to this point some other time).

Peaceful popular struggle has been the consistent theme of the overall strategy of Ethiopian democratic unity forces like UEDF. As events unfolding in our region for the last few months have attested, their unflinching and principled method of struggle is proven to be the right course to follow. I believe that our assessment of the prospect of any popular uprising in Ethiopia should be examined from the perspective of our struggle for justice, equality and unity. What makes our (Ethiopians') case different from the rest of the unfolding mass movements in the region is that our struggle is also for maintaining our unity that, unlike in other countries, is being seriously challenged from many directions. Moreover, the Ethiopian people have doubts about the allegiance of the country's armed forces. In our quest for change, these two factors, more than any other, are at the very core of the major hurdles that need to be carefully examined and properly addressed in tandem if not prior to any talk of popular uprising.

Therefore, if Ethiopians want a successful popular uprising or if a peaceful popular struggle is to bear fruit, or if we mean real change that would usher in justice for all and safeguard our unity, the **primary objective should be to reclaim our unity.** In order to achieve that, we need to shred the regime-induced pervasive fear of one another and one we have allowed to dominate our lives;

the source of which happens to be polarized and polarizing ethnic politics. We should deny the rulers and the ethno-elite the one vital weapon they cannot survive without; the fear of one another that resulted from divisive ethnic politics. We can only do that if we have the courage to tear down the walls of separation, especially ethnic walls that have divided us and think and act as A PEOPLE, and not as ethnic groups and separate entities.

It is critically important to realize that the removal of the regime of Meles Zenawi alone will not be sufficient to assure our unity unless we show the utmost resolve to do away with backward ethnic politics in all its divisive form first. That requires a definitive departure from existing practices and a paradigmatic shift is needed if we want to see positive change in our country that not only removes the regime but also the system and ideology of politicized ethnicity altogether. That is the only way our struggle for justice, equality and unity could succeed. And for that, prevailing attitudes and modus operandi of the Democratic Alternative ought to drastically change. A whole new narrative shift is required. By taking past experiences into account, the first critical measure this body would have to take, if it wants to play a relevant, constructive and positive role in the political life of Ethiopians, is to redefine itself. Second, in view of achieving an immediate goal of being a formidable National Alternative, it should redefine its purpose, responsibilities and goals. Third, it should restructure itself to reflect its purpose and to enable it to effectively and practically discharge its responsibilities as a National Democratic Alternative. Of course, the biggest hurdle of all is the ability to change oneself. This requires an extraordinary courage as it demands in each of us to be willing and determined to put COUNTRY AND PEOPLE FIRST AND SEEING OURSELVES AS ETHIOPIANS. To achieve that, each one of us should be able to think and act outside the box that we have willingly put ourselves in and we must demolish the walls of separation we have built around us. Those visible and not so visible walls of separation that inculcated in each of our minds the destructive "us against them" ideas and thoughts have prevented us from seeing in each other a compatriot whose destiny is inseparable linked with one another. There can be no unity of purpose unless we are cognizant of and are ready to boldly address the unnecessary antagonisms among organizations and groups that emanate from the unwarranted and overblown suspicions we have of one another. This destructive attitude can only be addressed if we have the courage to be forward-looking and are able to put our people and country first. Some of us may assume that only 'us' and 'our organizations' are always right. Therefore, attitudinal change in each individual person and a major paradigm shift that demands a new political narrative that focuses on pan-Ethiopian ideals ought to replace the "me and my organization or my ethnic group-first" attitudes and beliefs that have so far prevented us from standing together and fight together as a society for the collective good.

I am not naive and know that it is very difficult to take these stapes, and as we are accustomed to being too much attached to our respective organizations, and particularly in the last two decades to ethnic affiliations, there could be a quiver of fear that we may lose "ours" if we focused on the whole rather than each component pieces which each organization or ethnic group is. Some may wrongly consider such approaches as an affront on their identity. The fact, though, is that no one, no power, will ever be able to deny a T'grian, his/her T'grianness, to an Oromo his/her Oromoness, to the Amara his/her Amaranes, etc. But, we all can very easily lose our Ethiopianess that multitudes sacrificed for if we continue to relegate it to our ethnic identities. Ethiopianess does not replace our ethnic identity, it is a source of strength as it unites us and gives us pride for its unity depends on all of us, and strengthens, solidifies and nourishes our ethnicity because our diversity is collectively honored and celebrated. Moreover, no matter what organization or ethnic group we belong to, we are only one small part of one big whole, and seeing things from that perspective is important for our collective good.

Our political discourse has revolved around ethnicity for far too long and I believe that it has to go beyond platitudes. As Ethiopians living in a country with many, many languages and

several belief systems coexisting for millennia, focusing on political ethnicity at this point in time is backwardly, regressive and destructive. Only rulers that depend on an age-old system of divide-and-rule, and to some extent the ethno-elite, benefit from politicized ethnicity. As far as the democratic and unity forces section of the opposition is concerned, there are concrete measures that it should take so that it, whether directly or indirectly, calculatedly or inadvertently, avoids being seen as a hurdle to a possible popular uprising and be a contributing factor to the continuation of the status quo, or worse be an aider and abettor of anti-unity and undemocratic forces and the regime in power. This question, in fact, goes far beyond the prospect of a popular uprising. Whatever the democratic unity forces part of the opposition does should be seen in the general context of its fight for the ultimate goal of establishing a constitutional democratic system in the country that assures its unity.

Ethiopian democrats and patriots have sacrificed greatly and millions continue to fight for justice equality and unity. Their collective fight that transcends ethnicity, region or religion has kept Ethiopian independence and has so far guaranteed its unity, and nothing less is expected of them now or in the future.

It is my firm belief that our struggle for a democratic constitutional order would not and could not bear fruit unless we have the courage to shift the whole political narrative to reflect and be consistent with the unity of our country and its people. Ethiopian unity, equality of all citizens, respect of human rights and the rule of law cannot be compromised in any manner and one cannot be separated from the other.

For far too long, the correlation between 'unity' in the context of equality of citizens, rule of law and justice and 'group rights' presented in the form of 'nationality rights' has been blurred and confused. At times, talking of unity was misconstrued for being a chauvinistic and hegemonic idea that has developed into a situation where political ethnicity is allowed to overshadow and cripple the common cause for which unity and democratic forces stand. In an apparent fear of being labeled as chauvinistic, Ethiopian organizations that, by definition are countrywide ("multi-national") and draw their memberships from all sectors of society, had been too timid to challenge ethnic-based groups on the merit of their stated objectives that are in sharp contrast and contradictory to what they stand (claim to stand) for. Because of that lack of clarity and self-imposed acquiescence, the democratic opposition has been held hostage by sectarian ethnic politics that incapacitated itself and contributed to its dismal failing and inability to chart a winning strategy of its own.

For any Ethiopian political organization worth the name that decides to ally itself with known and avowed secessionist groups, for whatever very limited and fuzzy tactical reasons, would not be simply a futile exercise but also a counterproductive one that compromises the struggle for justice, equality and unity for all. Some may believe that they can influence these groups only if they remain engaged. My contention is that alliances and cooperation with known anti-unity and secessionist groups, especially armed ones, for a false sense of appeasement, is a dangerous adventure that compromises the democratic struggle in the context of pan-Ethiopian ideals. It would also be a foolish idea that did not draw any lesson from the history of TPLF vis-à-vis EPRP and EDU. Besides, these groups have a better strategic ally in TPLF/EPRDF and its system than any in the democratic unity movement. That is why this unholy alliance makes no sense. It would be impossible to convince an armed secessionist movement to abandon what it stands for unless faced with a stark reality of annihilation or is sure to get what it set out to fight for. Alliances and any cooperation among organizations should be based on the commonality of strategic objectives and issues deemed vital to the nation and not on how each sees the government of the day. Some may argue that collaborating and allying with secessionist and anti-unity ethno-centric groups is a good policy that reflects tolerance. What they do not understand, it seems to me, is that tolerance does not apply to anybody or group that does not recognize your right to exist or that has declared a war on your being. A stated objective of secession by any

group is a declaration of war on the whole. (I've stated the reasons why there is a need for a new alignment of forces on pan-Ethiopian principles and ideals in the "EPRDF, Democratic Alternative Forces And The Ethiopian People: What Next?" Amargna series).

For quite a long time, the question of group rights (ethnic rights) has been dominating the whole political narrative. It was the mantra and the proud legacy of Ethiopia progressives that sought and fought for the abolishment of the archaic feudal land tenure system and for equality of individual citizens and ethnic groups. Initially most had legitimate reasons that led to and warranted the formation of ethnic-based movements. But, because of the elastic nature of the question, some deviated from being a movement for genuine equality and justice and evolved into espousing secession. It is true that both the progressive sector whose objectives were equality and justice for all citizens and the ethno-elite that aimed at secession as an objective were there from the outset of the Student Movement era and grew in tandem; they naturally took different directions. While the latter stayed the course and remains on its agenda of seeing itself as distinct and having nothing to do with the collective struggle for democracy, the rule of law, human rights, etc. of all Ethiopians, the former continues to placate the latter as part of the whole. While the ethno-elite of the sectarian and secessionist groups continue to take advantage of and benefit greatly from not only the policies of the current regime but also from the ambiguities of the progressive and the democratic unity forces, they are not reciprocated; simply because they cannot as the two have differing and irreconcilable political philosophies and end games. No one in the right mind that wishes to be free would condone any injustice or inequality, deprivation, oppression, etc of any individual or group. That is what the progressive and democratic unity forces fought and continue to fight for. But, in sharp contrast to progressive and democratic unity forces, sectarian secessionist movements, especially armed ones, have not shifted to the middle; they have gone farther away and rather radicalized, and the prevailing ethnocentric political atmosphere incentivizes them to stay that course.

We may not be able to quantify, but can qualify, what the magnitude and effects of polarizing politicized ethnicity has been on the collective struggle for justice, equality and unity of society in general. Continuing to adhere to the same corrosive ethnocentric political philosophy simply because some believe it to be a "reality on the ground" only creates an enabling environment for the ruling clique and its ideological allies to manipulate the direction of the struggle to remain in a polarized state and further deepen division; thus derailing the democratic aspirations of the Ethiopian people. Both sides, the democratic unity and sectarian groups, sticking to their disparate political views cannot be expected to forge a coherent strategy and formulate a lasting solution benefiting all sides. It is, therefore incumbent upon democratic unity forces and patriotic Ethiopians to take a new look at themselves and chart a new future with a pan-Ethiopian movement with clearly defined ideals and values.

Forced to live under it, Ethiopians have firsthand and real-life experience of political ethnicity instituted and imposed by the current rulers as a system of governance, and know what ethnocracy got them; and, obviously, they do not like it; do not and should not expect anything different from the continuation of that same system, albeit with different players.

## CONCLUSION:

People in North Africa and the Middle-East are making history by not only changing their governments but also by doing away with dictatorships and creating an enabling environment to empower themselves and establish a democratic constitutional order. Although there could be some rough roads ahead for some of them, the unfolding wave of continuous popular uprisings across the Middle-East and North Africa have already accomplished much more than anyone could have thought possible only a few months ago. It took over a trillion

US Dollars, the lives of thousands of Americans and other countries comprising "the coalition of the willing", hundreds of thousands of Iraqi lives, etc. to topple one dictator named Saddam Hussein. That war fractured Iraqi society and wrecked the country, caused untold suffering to its people and festered a high degree of widespread discontent and anti-west (especially the US) sentiments across the Islamic world that gave rise to radical elements in many parts of the world and emboldened and gave a temporary boost to already existing one. In stark contrast to that, despite some possible hurdles, this on-going historic Popular Revolution that is being indigenously led by the Arab youth was able to topple long time dictators and dictatorships one after the other with minimal sacrifices, with exemplar dignity and crushing some taboos and cementing solidarity of the common man and woman. Above all, more than any military adventure, intimidation, imposition of sanctions or hollow calls for vaguely defined reforms and empty rhetoric about the value of democracy and human rights, this people power movement is inspiring all those multitudes who suffer under the yolk of archaic and oppressive systems, most of whom are supported by Western democracies for political expediency and economic reasons.

What we have going for the Ethiopian people is that the global attitude towards dictators in general has changed and no dictator is immune to charges that would force them to face the International Criminal Court (ICC) to face charges for crimes against humanity. The precedent-setting resolution of the UN Security Council to freeze the assets of Colonel Gaddafi, his family and associates is a clear message to all who have been looting their countries. Now, more than anytime before, the struggle of people everywhere to free themselves from the clutches of ruthless dictators will not be ignored by major powers. The world seems to be on the right track to gain its moral bearing.

The ruling clique now knows clearly that neither use of lethal force against the Ethiopian people nor the idea of flight to foreign lands to live in peace and enjoy their loot amassed over the years could not be a given and with impunity. It is also worth noting here that any evil designs by the rulers to create havoc and immerse the populace into interminable chaos would not be ignored. As street smart as Meles is with a survivalist mentality, he is able to see the writings on the wall and understand that neither any amount of intimidation, machination and use of brute force, nor any evil designs he may have to create havoc and embroil the nation in interminable chaos with the potential to disintegrate the country would not prolong his stay in power. He may, instead be forced to adopt a "soft" approach of refining his divisive policies; introducing some meaningless reforms and engaging some among the divided opposition to win them over to his side and save him the day and give him time to recalibrate his next strategy.

What makes this People Power Revolution particularly sweet to Africans is the fact that the dictators that are being removed had been some of the staunchest supporters and financiers of other African bloody dictators. With the inevitable and certain downfall of Muammar Gaddafi, the dean of dictators, African bloody dictators like Isaias Afewerki would be much weaker than they already are, making their tenure ever tenuous and much more vulnerable. This gives an enviable opportunity, especially to Eritreans and Ethiopians to coordinate their movements towards their march for freedom and democracy. Although the dictator in Asmara could not stand a democratic Ethiopia and the one in Addis may clearly understand the ramifications of a democratic Eritrea, the people on both sides, especially the youth and the professional sectors should start to form joint committees. No doubt, the biggest threat to the fulfillment of the democratic aspirations of people on both sides of Mereb comes from these two dictators and other forces of division and regression. The fate of both dictators is in the balance now more than ever. What may prolong each dictator's hold on power, which directly translates into the continuation of the suffering of the people, is the foolish idea of certain elements in the opposition on both sides that aims at "using" each dictator to "get" help to topple the other. Ethiopians and Eritreans

do not only share past history, but, whether one likes it or not, our destiny is inseparably tied together. Now is the opportunity for democrats on both sides to coordinate our efforts and work together to remove both dictators and their divisive and subversive systems. That is the only sure way each can be truly free and for the region to be stable. If and when that is achieved, Somali democrats would be in a better shape to get not arms and incitements but only needed support from their brethren in Ethiopia and Eritrea to have the chance to reconcile their internal differences. Needless to say that this will be one of the hurdles the democratic opposition would be facing

The question should never be whether or if the people of Ethiopia want and are ready for change. They have been longing for change and have shown their readiness and determination in many ways. The critical question is whether political organizations are able and ready to shoulder the responsibility of playing the role of leadership so that the causes our people are asked and expected to sacrifice for would materialize and would not be in vain. And that would only be possible if the democratic opposition is able to deny the ruling clique or others groups any chance to reverse their hard-won victory. As discussed earlier, it is expected that the ruling clique would do everything under the sky to foil any attempt at popular uprising and to take any measure imaginable to crush it, and finally it could even embark on sinister and reckless measures that would be detrimental to the country's unity. Similarly, secessionist and anti-unity forces, with direct and indirect assistance from enemies of the state, would do all they could to create and exploit any disorder. It is, therefore, incumbent on the democratic unity forces that such a fateful situation is avoided or at least they are ready to assume a stabilizing role. At any rate, not collaborating with or directly or indirectly be instrumental to anti-unity and secessionist forces is the least they could and should do.

Despite the regime's and the ethno-elites' relentless efforts at keeping our people divided on ethnic lines, I know the Ethiopian people have the wisdom and the will to stand together and fight in unison and the youths of today have, in the best tradition of their predecessors, the courage and foresight to smash the walls of separation and fight for the common good as Ethiopians.

The struggle of the democratic unity forces should be compatible and commensurate with our long term strategic goals and principles. Whether there is popular uprising or not, the political narrative has to shift to reflect a needed fundamental change; change of the existing divisive ethnocentric ideology and the time for embracing a progressive and democratic pan-Ethiopian movement that only requires a modicum of trust in each other, commitment to democratic ideals, justice and equality for all and pride in being Ethiopian is now. If we mean real stability, meaningful peace, justice, equality, democracy and unity, we can and should be able to deny both the current rulers and groups with similar political philosophy the chance to continue with their divisive policies that we have so far allowed them to aptly use to divide us. If we stand as Ethiopians, as one people, we can overcome any obstacle and whatever sinister motives and divisive schemes they have in store for us, including the invocation of "Article 39" and any other devilish plans aimed at instigating and fomenting ethnic and religion-based strife.

Let us not limit ourselves to how we see Meles and his regime alone to be what unites us, but what we want our country to be, despite and beyond him; let the unconditional love we have for Ethiopia and her people be the collective expression that unites us all.

Unity is a potent symbol that frightens divisive groups and tyrannical rulers who bank upon division of society on different pretexts (region, religion, race, color, ethnicity, etc.) to sustain their existence. Unfortunately, the proponents seem to understand its value and importance less than the protagonists.

Long live Ethiopia and Ethiopiawinet!!